

Educational cooperation at various levels

EDUCATIONAL co-operation, consultation and links at various levels have been among the most enduring of Commonwealth ties—the first Commonwealth Education Conference was held almost 32 years ago in 1959. At their Eleventh Conference in Barbados in October 1990, Commonwealth Education Ministers reaffirmed the special value their governments placed on continuing educational co-operation. Priorities for education have included support for basic and higher education, continued discussions on student mobility within the Commonwealth, developing entrepreneurial skills in technical and vocational institutions, the promotion of science and technology education, and special support for education development in small states.

In the past three decades, very many more young people in the Commonwealth, as elsewhere, have received formal education, but there remain deep concerns about its quality. These anxieties were expressed at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand. The Secretariat was represented on the International Steering Committee of this conference. Against the background of the Jomtien discussions, Commonwealth Ministers of Education unanimously selected Improving the Quality of Basic Education as the main theme for its own conference in 1990. In preparation, the Secretariat's Education Programme reviewed Commonwealth experience of measures to raise quality through a meeting of a pan-Commonwealth consultative group of educators in London, and commissioned background papers. It has in preparation a resource book, The Way to Better Schools, which will provide guidelines for practising educators.

At their conference, the Education Ministers agreed that the Secretariat should concentrate on support for teachers, in relation both to their training and management. The Programme has now begun working with ministries of education in South Asia on alternative approaches to the initial training of teachers. It has also been able to build on previous work in education management with a number of Commonwealth African countries where the rate of increase in the numbers of teachers has outstripped personnel procedures and records-keeping capabilities. In the past five years the Secretariat's Human Resource Development Group, led by the Edu-

cation Programme, has worked with Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe in their efforts to improve their systems of teacher management, to reform registry facilities, and to set up basic management information systems for education.

Drawing on this project, a handbook, Teacher Management and Records in the National Education System, was produced. In the next phase, the project will be extended to West Africa.

Concern for quality in basic education also extends to adult education. In June 1990, a pan-Commonwealth meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, reviewed non-traditional approaches, including use of the mass media, for non-formal education. It identified a programme of possible activity for the Secretariat and other agencies to raise the effectiveness of mass-media projects for adult education which will be incorporated into the Secretariat's Programme of work on basic education. The Secretariat was also asked to review Commonwealth experience of the effects of economic structural adjustment programmes on education. The aim is to inform and improve dialogue between education and finance ministries, and internationally, between ministries of education and major funding agencies, including the World Bank and possibly the IMF, in order to achieve better informed judgements about the use of educational resources. The Programme has begun discussions with other international agencies and some member countries to learn from their experiences. Findings are being shared with a parallel study undertaken by the Secretariat's Economic Affairs Division.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Throughout the last decade, the Commonwealth has concentrated on the need for a collective effort to strengthen and support the growth of universities and colleges in developing countries. In June 1989, the Standing Committee on Student Mobility and Higher Education Co-operation developed proposals for a Commonwealth Higher Education Support Scheme (CHESS). The Secretary-General convened an Expert Group in June 1990, comprising representatives from principal donor agencies, Commonwealth governments and participants from higher education institutions and representative associations, to study these proposals in greater detail.

In its report, CHESS: Strengthening Capacity for Sustainable Development, the Expert Group agreed that support should be concentrated in the three areas identified by the Standing Committee as being central to the improvement of higher education quality: books, materials and libraries; improved systems of resource management in institutions of higher learning, and staff development programmes. The Group suggested a new approach to higher education development combining bilateral and multilateral assistance through a framework of common purposes, collective commitments and, where appropriate, joint programmes. In each of the three priority areas, pilot projects were identified. Ministers endorsed the report and a second CHESS planning meeting was held in mid-1991.

Books, Journals and Materials Supply: An inventory has been compiled of available resources from donor agencies of books, journals, training equipment and other facilities. This will be widely distributed so that developing country institutions will be better aware of what is available from donors. A study on ways to make journals or journal articles more accessible to developing country institutions on a complimentary, cost-sharing, marginal cost or cost-price basis has also been undertaken.

Educational Management: Consultants from Australia and Britain are assisting the Education Programme to develop plans for a Commonwealth Higher Education Management Development Service. At the second plenary meeting on CHESS, in June 1991, a recommendation was made to start an operation to be known as CHESS Management Services.

This service would provide specialist advice on technical aspects of higher education management, such as its organisation, and finance; promote the provision of high-quality management training; make available information on higher education management services and resources in the Commonwealth; and develop materials of practical use to those engaged in the planning and management of higher education.

Staff Development: A directory of staff development programmes is being commissioned, and the possibility of the Secretariat and other development agencies jointly setting up a staff development network in West Africa is

being investigated. Training for senior women managers and administrators also has priority. A workshop was held in Malaysia in May 1991 where the possibility of forming a network of agencies operating in co-ordinated programmes was explored. The scope for developing and strengthening networks for training in the maintenance and repair of scientific equipment is also being explored.

PRACTICAL HELP

A large number of tertiary education institutions are assisted in their course programme development and in the teaching of undergraduates by the CFTC's General Technical Assistance (GTA) programme. In Malaysia, Ghana and Sierra Leone, professors have been provided to strengthen medical schools. The increasing demand for computer skills has led to the filling of lecturers' posts at the University of the South Pacific, the Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics at Makerere University, Uganda, the Institute of Public Administration and Management in Sierra Leone, and the Eastern and Southern African Management Institute (ESAM).

Other lecturers provided by GTA teach statistics, economics, mineral prospecting and hydrogeology. At other institutions, they cover such topics as journalism, transport management, development administration, law and civil engineering.

The GTA programme also assists tertiary institutions in curriculum development. An adviser in curriculum and staff development helped the Western Samoa Technical Institute. At the College of Arts, Science and Technology in Jamaica, two advisers are developing curricula in commerce and mechanical engineering, while at the University of Guyana another adviser is working on curriculum for the Education Department. Advisers and experts are also helping at the Trinidad campus of the University of the West Indies and at the Ministry of Education in The Gambia.

In 1991, GTA has also provided support for reviews of the University of Guyana and the University of the South Pacific, with a view to helping them meet demands for tertiary education in the future. In newly-independent Namibia, it has co-funded the Higher Education Commission.

SCHOLARSHIP

The year 1990 marked 30 years of awards under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan



SFP). Since 1960, when the first awards were taken up, some 15,000 scholars have benefited from awards from the professional and academic relationships forged during their years in other Commonwealth coun-

In 1989/90, there were 1,542 scholarships and 111 fellowships held by students from 150 countries. Although the total of 1,653 awards exceeded the target of 1,500 established by Education Ministers in Cyprus in 1984, the figure, in fact, represents a decline from 1,730 in 1988/89 and 1,730 in 1986. The number of women scholars, however, has slightly increased from 392 in 1988/89 to 408 in 1990. CSFP administrators met in Barbados in October 1990 to discuss matters related to the Plan and agreed on ways of increasing efficiency through better communication between agencies. They asked the Secretariat to revise the Desk Manual for Administrators' Handbook.

It is expected that a third ten-year review of the Plan will take place in 1992.

WORK

In 1987, Education Ministers asked the Secretariat to develop curricula designed to endow school-leavers with entrepreneurial skills. The Education Programme, having surveyed existing programmes in Commonwealth institutions, produced the publication Designing Entrepreneurs: Skills Development Programme: Resource Book for Technical and Vocational Institution. The materials prepared with the assistance of consultants from India and Sierra Leone were field-tested in various technical and vocational training institutions throughout the Commonwealth. Based on these materials, a document entitled Entrepreneurial Development in Fifteen Commonwealth Countries was produced.

Parallel to this exercise was the

development of an informal network of institutions, policy makers and trainers which the Programme continues to support in various ways.

Building on the momentum initiated by the project on curriculum guidelines, 1990/91 saw the focus move to the issue of linkages between training institutions and other support agencies established to keep a new entrepreneur in business. An initial planning meeting was hosted by the New Zealand Government's Department of Employment in Wellington in July 1990. Countries participating in the project are Australia, Bangladesh, Britain, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea. Support schemes operating in member countries provide the focus for the publication Pathways to Enterprise: Lessons from Commonwealth Experience.

The Programme has continued, whenever possible, to support the

work of member countries on the transition from school to work. The CFTC's Fellowships and Training Programme (FTP) funded attendance by two staff members of Commonwealth training institutions at a Unesco training course in Thailand on education, employment and human resource development.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Science and technology play a crucial role in the development process yet in some regions of the Commonwealth the proportion of scientific, technical and professional positions filled by expatriates remains substantial. Although the immediate basis for professional training programmes in science and technology is mathematics and science education in secondary schools, the roots of the problem are to be found at primary level where many schools are understaffed, and their teachers under-