

INTRODUCTION

During the past fifteen years or so Centres for Teachers have been established in many countries of the world. These Centres have been given differing names - Resource Centre, Pedagogic Centre, Teachers' Centre etc. but, whatever their name, they have usually set out to meet a similar need, namely, support for teachers. In the UK., where the idea of a grassroot orientated Teachers' Centre was born in the mid 60's, they have given teachers a place to meet together as equals to exchange ideas and expertise. The emphasis here was on the teacher-professional who had a contribution to make which goes beyond teaching in the classroom. The very name was intended to emphasise that the Centre is primarily the teachers'. In other countries, Centres began as Resource Centres where teachers could turn for back-up materials and equipment for use in the classroom. Particularly with the geometric growth of technology and the use of sophisticated equipment - from early beginnings with slides and filmstrips, through colour films and television, to the current introduction of micro-computer - schools have relied on a central institution which could supply them with the hardware they could not afford or justify purchasing for just one school. This included so called "reprographic" facilities which enabled the teacher to photocopy, duplicate and/or print, photograph, film and record on magnetic tape materials for use in the classroom.

The differences between the types of Centres rapidly becomes blurred as teachers using them demand an expansion of their functions. The Resource Centre soon finds that it is running workshop courses to show teachers how to use its equipment and before long this expands to the creative uses of the equipment. The Teachers' Centre is called on to provide back-up facilities to workshops and working parties to enable them to record their activities, print curriculum materials they have created and to provide courses to teach them how to operate newly purchased items of equipment.

This Handbook on Teachers' Resource Centres is an attempt to bring together the different strands and to provide a clear picture of the current state of the art. Its primary aim is to give those charged with setting up new Centres and those already engaged in running existing Centres a practical guide which will help them in their work. By its very nature this means that the Handbook is a comprehensive one, but it is hoped that its all-inclusiveness will not frighten away the potential user. Throughout the Handbook it is stressed again and again that it is not anticipated that any one Centre should carry out all the functions described nor meet all the aims and objectives listed. On the contrary, it is preferable to start small and build up as demand shows in which directions local teachers require the Centre to develop. This too is emphasised in the Handbook.

One of the main features of existing Centres and one which it is thought has led to their success, is their localised nature. They cater for the particular needs of the teachers in their area. This has given existing Centres a degree of uniqueness while still reflecting a common ethos. Readers are recommended to concentrate on what it is practical to achieve in their own particular area given available human and physical resources, and the needs of the teachers and of the educational system. It is, therefore, anti-

pated that readers will dip into the Handbook using it as a reference book rather than seeing it as a description of utopia.

One phenomenon which has marked those who have been called upon to lead and work in Centres has been their willingness and even eagerness to share their knowledge and experience with their colleagues working in other Centres in their area, their country and in other countries. While it is hoped that what is written in this Handbook about Centres will assist those starting out to set up Centres or already working in them, it is also hoped that it will lead them to contact their colleagues in areas where Centres might be more firmly established who would normally be happy to share their firsthand experience with them. The Commonwealth Secretariat is available as a "Clearing House" to put leaders in touch with each other to their mutual benefit. In this way it is hoped that different patterns of Teachers' Resource Centres will continue to develop thereby assisting teachers to improve classroom practice and the education we provide in all parts of the Commonwealth as we enter the 21st century.