Foreword

By W.H. Cockcroft

G.F. Grant, Professor of Mathematics, University of Hull,
and Chairman of the Conference

It is a pleasure to commend this report to all who are concerned with mathematical education. Two weeks is all too short a period of time for delegates from a variety of countries to be able to lift their eyes from their own pressing problems, to look at those of their fellow delegates, and then to come together in an understanding of common aims and objectives in their various educational programmes. It is a tribute to the educational ties which bind us in the Commonwealth, and to all the individual delegates, that in two weeks not only was there felt to be a common purpose in the work of the Conference, but also that the groundwork of this report could be laid so firmly.

Naturally most common ground was found in practice at the base of our educational pyramid, in primary education. This is reflected in the depth to which the Conference was able to go in considering work at this level. Secondary modes of education differ markedly from one part of the Commonwealth to another, but as the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat has remarked elsewhere, the Commonwealth is not concentric, but polycentric; as the chapter on Commonwealth Co-operation in this report shows, we can draw strength from our wealth of differing patterns at secondary level rather than seeing weakening divisions in them.

It was not the purpose of the Conference to go beyond a setting out of basic principles: the prescription of administrative action was not in its brief. It was concerned to produce, just as other conferences of this kind have produced, a guide to action under the very different conditions which exist in our various countries. If the reader ever thinks the Conference was unaware of the hard facts of life in developing countries he should read the background papers submitted to the Conference by Governments. Delegates were only too well aware of the practical problems involved, in any country, if their suggested principles were to be acted on.

Not the least of the scarce resources, exacerbating the problems which exist in all our educational programmes, is the human one, the trained competent teacher. The need to help present and future teachers in today's climate of curriculum renewal and development was a matter of deep concern to delegates. This concern was reflected in their practical suggestions for the development of the principle of joint effort in introducing new material into the classroom, so that individual teachers can rely on the support and help of their peers in centres set aside for this purpose.

Such thinking reflected the conviction of all delegates that education is above all a practical human activity involving men and women, and children who rightly come into our schools in larger and larger numbers, in all their shapes and sizes, with their advantages and limitations, with both hopes and fears. If in dealing with mathematical educational principles this report reflects this broader conviction, then delegates will be well satisfied.

It was the hope of the Conference that the report would help those concerned to further mathematical education, at all levels, in all our countries. The efforts of the Conference were directed wholly towards that end. I know that delegates, authors and editors would wish the report to be judged by its influence in practice as much as, if not more than, for its intrinsic merit as a document about mathematical education.