

Commonwealth Consortium for Education

EDUCATION - A COMMONWEALTH PRIORITY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Representatives of a number of Commonwealth non-government organisations active in education, together with others committed to education development in the Commonwealth, met during the Commonwealth People's Festival in Brisbane. The postponement of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting came as a disappointment to us and our Australian friends and hosts, but represented only a small token of the anxieties and pre-occupations of the global community.

The challenge

The recent terrorist attacks in the United States of America have destroyed many lives and have disrupted the patterns of normal living of people all round the globe. Such events, together with the ongoing scourges of poverty and HIV/AIDS and the bitter conflicts that affect so many countries and peoples at the present time, present important challenges to systems of formal education and informal learning. Education must inculcate in young and old the key values and principles on which the Commonwealth is built, including tolerance, respect for others, learning to live with people of different cultures and beliefs, and a sense of solidarity with the deprived, disadvantaged and dispossessed. Learning to resolve conflicts by peaceful means and to build national and global societies that offer pathways out of despair is especially important. More than ever there is a need to reach out to others, to celebrate and enjoy diversity, and to promote interchange of people and ideas. Education about the Commonwealth and the values it represents should be part of the curriculum of schools. We urge individual Governments to take the necessary action and Commonwealth leaders collectively to implement the recommendations of the Commission on Commonwealth Studies (Symons Report) and the Ingram report on promoting the image of the Commonwealth.

Commonwealth Ministers of Education meeting in Canada emphasised in their Halifax Statement in November 2000 that education has an important role to play in strengthening world order through the powerful contribution it can make to social and economic development, to the reduction of world poverty and disease and to protection of the environment. Investment in people is investment in a more secure and prosperous future; yet, as Ministers reminded us in that Statement, some Commonwealth countries lag far behind in offering Education for All to their young people and adults.

Responding to the Challenge: the Commonwealth's Potential

In addressing these various educational needs, the Commonwealth is fortunate to have a well-established collective infrastructure represented by, for example, the Secretariat and Foundation, the Commonwealth of Learning, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, and the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. There are also such well-established educational NGOs as the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the Commonwealth Institute. All these can assist in co-operative efforts to promote achievement of the Commonwealth's education and related objectives. These institutions, and the linkages they promote through sharing knowledge and the exchange of students and teachers, are the bedrock of Commonwealth relationships and understanding, but they need to be nurtured and resourced appropriately if they are to play their intended role.

We urge the members of the High-Level Group reviewing the future of the Commonwealth, and the Heads of Government to whom they will report, to re-affirm the strong commitment Commonwealth Governments gave to education in their Halifax Statement and to give effect to the proposals contained in it. We call on them to strengthen and develop the infrastructure for Commonwealth education co-operation that has been built up in the last half century. We see great potential for using this infrastructure to further the purposes of the Commonwealth Youth Initiative, which we understand governments to have under active consideration.

Meeting the Challenge: Civil Society's Response

Many governments are turning increasingly to civil society for assistance with the delivery of programmes. Commonwealth professional associations and voluntary bodies can play a more effective role in supporting the efforts of governments and peoples, in co-operation with the Commonwealth's other collective institutions. They can pool resources and ideas with their official partners in assisting to implement the practical programmes advanced by Ministers in the Halifax Statement and the other education objectives of the Commonwealth. They can mobilise their members, including individuals, schools, colleges and other educational authorities and bodies, to engage in co-operative partnerships across the Commonwealth, and to promote through education the fundamental values and principles for which the Commonwealth is so widely respected. It is important that Commonwealth NGOs make known to others their capacity, and that they work together among themselves, with the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Foundation and Commonwealth of Learning, and with other relevant bodies, even more effectively than at present.

With this in mind, and to strengthen the potential contribution of The People's Commonwealth in the education sphere, a number of organisations have formed the Commonwealth Consortium for Education to pursue their joint aims and to support education co-operation in the Commonwealth. While maintaining their own identity, Consortium members will seek to work together through the new grouping in pursuit of common aims and, by co-ordinating their activities more closely, to achieve synergy and greater focus in their contribution to education development throughout the Commonwealth. They have invited other pan-Commonwealth organisations active in the areas of education, youth and culture to join them as full or associate members of the group.

March 2002

Commonwealth Consortium for Education

Purposes of the Consortium

1. To promote education as an effective means of achieving personal, social and economic development throughout the Commonwealth by:

- Mobilising the contribution of education-based NGOs
- Generating support for Commonwealth institutions and programmes in education
- Assisting Commonwealth inter-governmental agencies to draw on NGO resources and expertise
- Contributing views and insights to the formulation of policies on Commonwealth educational co-operation
- Developing and disseminating models of good practice in education
- Encouraging education professionals to become engaged with the challenges of Commonwealth educational development
- Monitoring and publishing information about the implementation of Commonwealth education policy.

2. To constitute a forum which will promote co-operation by members:

- Better articulation of the interests and views of Commonwealth NGOs working in the education sector
- Co-operative activities by members on behalf of educational development in the Commonwealth
- Exchange of information and experience between members
- Sharing of representation, services and facilities at Commonwealth and other relevant events.

Activities

These will include:

a). Development action

Promoting the exchange of information on members' existing programmes and the development of new joint projects by Consortium members

In partnership with inter-governmental organisations, developing programmes and project proposals, based on the priorities identified in the Halifax statement.

Maximising awareness of, and support for, Commonwealth education development programmes executed by

- inter-governmental agencies including
 - the Commonwealth Secretariat
 - the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation
 - The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan
 - The Commonwealth of Learning
 - the Commonwealth Foundation, and
- a wide range of non-government organisations with activities to assist educational development throughout the Commonwealth.

b). Advocacy

Advocacy with Commonwealth Heads of Government, Ministers of Education, parliamentarians and other policy-makers in the Commonwealth, with the aim of maintaining education and training as Commonwealth policy priorities.

The preparation of joint submissions in advance of CCEMs, CHOGMs and other relevant high-level meetings.

Explaining and promoting the crucial contribution of education to personal, social and economic development in the Commonwealth through

- poverty reduction
- strengthening civil society and capacity building
- developing the role of women within society
- democracy, good governance and the promotion of human rights.

c). Information

Preparation and distribution of briefings and information sheets on Commonwealth programmes.

d). Research and development of policy

Convening of working groups and commissioning of reports on key issues in Commonwealth educational co-operation, for example

- the opportunities for exchange of students and teachers
- the opportunities and challenges posed by borderless learning
- sustaining access to knowledge in the face of the assertion of intellectual property rights
- capacity-building in the face of a brain drain
- developing the Commonwealth infrastructure for South-South co-operation in education.
- education and bridging the digital divide.

Membership

It is intended that membership should be open to any non-governmental organisation or association working in the education, youth and cultural sectors and having a major focus in its work on the advancement of education and skill development in the Commonwealth or on education about the Commonwealth. Associate membership will be an option.

A small annual subscription will be payable by member and associate member organisations.

Further information obtainable from any of the member organisations or the Commonwealth Consortium for Education, 7 Lion Yard, Tremadoc Rd., London SW4 7NQ, United Kingdom.

Commonwealth People's Centre, Brisbane, October 5 2001.

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The challenge

The recent terrorist attacks in the United States of America have destroyed many lives and have disrupted the patterns of normal living of people all round the globe. Such events, together with the ongoing scourges of poverty and HIV/AIDS and the bitter conflicts that affect so many countries and peoples at the present time, present important challenges to systems of formal education and informal learning. Education must inculcate in young and old the key values and principles on which the Commonwealth is built, including tolerance, respect for others, learning to live with people of different cultures and beliefs, and a sense of solidarity with the deprived, disadvantaged and dispossessed. Learning to resolve conflicts by peaceful means and to build national and global societies that offer pathways out of despair is especially important. More than ever there is a need to reach out to others, to celebrate and enjoy diversity, and to promote interchange of people and ideas. Education about the Commonwealth and the values it represents should be part of the curriculum of schools. We urge individual Governments to take the necessary action and Commonwealth leaders collectively to implement the recommendations of the Commission on Commonwealth Studies (Symons Report) and the Ingram report on promoting the image of the Commonwealth.

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A revised Commonwealth role

In addressing these various educational needs, the Commonwealth is fortunate to have a well-established collective infrastructure represented by, for example, the Secretariat and Foundation, the Commonwealth of Learning, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, and the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. There are also such well-established educational NGOs as the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the Commonwealth Institute. All these can assist in co-operative efforts to promote achievement of the Commonwealth's education and related objectives. These institutions, and the linkages they promote through sharing knowledge and the exchange of students and teachers, are the bedrock of Commonwealth relationships and understanding, but they need to be nurtured and resourced appropriately if they are to play their intended role.

We urge the members of the High-Level Group reviewing the future of the Commonwealth, and the Heads of Government to whom they will report, to re-affirm the strong commitment Commonwealth Governments gave to education in their Halifax Statement and to give effect to the proposals contained in it. We call on them to strengthen and develop the infrastructure for Commonwealth education co-operation that has been built up in the last half century. We see great potential for using this infrastructure to further the purposes of the Commonwealth Youth Initiative, which we understand governments to have under active consideration.

A revised NGO role

Many governments are turning increasingly to civil society for assistance with the delivery of programmes. Commonwealth professional associations and other non-government organisations can play a more effective role in supporting the efforts of governments and peoples, in co-operation with the Commonwealth's other collective institutions. They can pool resources and ideas with their official partners in assisting to implement the practical programmes advanced by Ministers in the Halifax Statement and the other education objectives of the Commonwealth. They can mobilise their members, including individuals, schools, colleges and other educational authorities and bodies, to engage in co-operative partnerships across the Commonwealth, and to promote through education the fundamental values and principles for which the Commonwealth is so widely respected. It is important that Commonwealth NGOs make known to others their capacity, and that they work together among themselves, with the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Foundation and Commonwealth of Learning, and with other relevant bodies, even more effectively than at present.

With this in mind, and to strengthen the potential contribution of The People's Commonwealth in the education sphere, a number of organisations have today resolved to form a collective grouping of Commonwealth education bodies to pursue their joint aims and to support education co-operation in the Commonwealth. While maintaining their own identity, these organisations will seek to work together through the new grouping in pursuit of common aims and, by co-ordinating their activities more closely, to achieve synergy and greater focus in their contribution to education development throughout the Commonwealth. They have invited other pan-Commonwealth organisations active in the areas of education, youth and culture to join them as full or associate members of the group.

Brisbane, 05 October 2001

Commonwealth Non-Government Education Group

Purposes of the Group

1. To promote education as an effective means of achieving personal, social and economic development throughout the Commonwealth by:

- Mobilising the contribution of education-based NGOs
- Generating support for Commonwealth institutions and programmes in education
- Assisting Commonwealth inter-governmental agencies to draw on NGO resources and expertise
- Contributing views and insights to the formulation of policies on Commonwealth educational co-operation
- Developing and disseminating models of good practice in education
- Encouraging education professionals to become engaged with the challenges of Commonwealth educational development
- Monitoring and publishing information about the implementation of Commonwealth education policy.

2. To constitute a forum which will promote co-operation by members:

- Better articulation of the interests and views of Commonwealth NGOs working in the education sector
- Co-operative activities by members on behalf of educational development in the Commonwealth
- Exchange of information and experience between members
- Sharing of representation, services and facilities at Commonwealth and other relevant events.

Activities

These will include:

a). Development action

Promoting the exchange of information on members' existing programmes and the development of new joint projects by Association members

In partnership with inter-governmental organisations, developing programmes and project proposals, based on the priorities identified in the Halifax statement.

Maximising awareness of, and support for, Commonwealth education development programmes executed by

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