

Commonwealth Consortium for Education
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Education for Resilience and the Future of Commonwealth Co-operation

Memorandum to Commonwealth Heads of Government, meeting in Perth, Australia, October 2011

1. The Commonwealth Consortium for Education is a grouping with a current membership of 20 pan-Commonwealth voluntary and professional bodies active in the areas of education, culture and youth.
2. This Heads of Government Meeting, like the CHOGM held in Australia ten years ago (Colum, March 2002) is being held at a moment of crisis affecting the Commonwealth collectively and its individual member countries. Then it was a crisis of Terrorism: this time the crisis is multidimensional reflecting a very uncertain outlook for the world economy; depletion of natural resources, degradation of environments and climate change; political and economic insecurity; poverty and rising inequality.
3. Successful responses by individuals and states require versatility and an ability to adapt and change. This makes the CHOGM theme *Building national resilience, building global resilience* most apt.
4. Education has to be a central component of any strategy to endow our countries and citizens with the capacity for resilience in the face of change, imbuing learners with a readiness to adopt new patterns of behaviour, to understand and respond to the increasing interconnectedness of issues and communities. Greater investment in education is an imperative if our world is to become safer and more prosperous.
5. Progress in education is also key to achievement of all of the Millennium Development Goals, the Commonwealth's collective priority. In the case of the two educational MDGs, while useful progress has been made towards their achievement, many Commonwealth countries seem destined to fall short of the 2015 targets. We therefore call on the Commonwealth to make renewed efforts to reach universal completion of primary school and gender equality in education.
6. Education itself is changing as it responds to demands for mass provision of educational opportunity not just at primary school level, but increasingly at secondary and at tertiary level too. Education is also being changed by the impact and power of new information and communication technologies.
7. Commonwealth countries have been leaders in developing and exploiting new ways of extending educational opportunity through distance learning and establishment of open universities, colleges and schools. Over 20 years ago the Commonwealth far-sightedly created the Commonwealth of Learning to support member countries' efforts to exploit the potential of the new technologies for education in the service of development. It has an excellent track record in exploring and promoting the use of distance and open learning for the public good, and in helping countries to protect their legitimate public-interest concerns when working with powerful commercial suppliers of services and equipment.
8. Commonwealth leaders' next meeting in 2013 will coincide with the Centenary of the Association of Commonwealth Universities. It will also be 25 years since the Memorandum of Understanding establishing the Commonwealth of Learning was signed in September 1988 and over 50 years since an education secretariat for the Commonwealth was first established at Marlborough House in 1960.
9. Since those landmark developments Commonwealth co-operation in education has flourished in official programmes like the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP), through the establishment and growth of professional associations and voluntary agencies dedicated to education development in Commonwealth countries, in a huge expansion of Commonwealth student mobility, in proliferation of educational exchanges and links, and in international trade in educational books and materials, examinations and other services.
10. The time is ripe to take stock of the many facets of Commonwealth co-operation in education and its future potential. We ask Heads of Government to establish a high-level group to review this area of the Commonwealth's work and to make proposals regarding desirable directions for future development.