



## ***Commonwealth Consortium for Education***

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### ***Education – the Beating Heart of the Commonwealth***

#### **Memorandum to Commonwealth Education Ministers at 18CCEM in Mauritius, 29-31 August 2012**

1. Members of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCfE) are united in believing that the most positive outcome of the 18CCEM will be an unequivocal affirmation by Education Ministers that they wish to see the Commonwealth Secretariat retain a leadership role in Commonwealth educational co-operation, with a staff sufficient to carry out this function.
2. Nothing on the Ministers' agenda is more important than this. In different circumstances we would have focused in this Memorandum on pressing Ministers to initiate new work on, for example: priorities for post-2015 agendas, moving beyond exclusive focus on the MDGs to a more holistic approach; consideration of the role of education in connecting cultures in the Commonwealth; defining Commonwealth positions on issues of education and migration; grappling with questions of the necessary balance between regulation and enablement of growing corporate involvement in education provision. But decisions about the future of education in the Secretariat will determine collaborative action on any and all of those fronts.
3. We recognise that Secretariat resources are constrained; that there must consequently be a re-examination of functions and programme activity across the Secretariat to improve focus and impact; that there may be more effective ways of working, including outsourcing of work to partners in appropriate cases; and that education must be included in these processes. We believe that civil-society partners and friends of the Commonwealth have a valuable role to play in addressing such challenges. CCfE and its members pledge themselves to contribute in whatever constructive way is deemed useful.
4. On numerous occasions in the past three years the Consortium has made submissions – to 17CCEM, to Heads of Government, to the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group, to the British Parliamentary Inquiry into the Role and Future of the Commonwealth – proposing that a high-level review of educational co-operation in the Commonwealth should take place at an early date, recognising that education is of central importance to Commonwealth member countries and that co-ordination of effort by all the different Commonwealth organisations is desirable.
5. The need for such a review is now even more pressing. We urge Ministers to request that it be undertaken before irrevocable decisions are taken about future modalities of Commonwealth educational co-operation including the role of the Secretariat.
6. We need not here restate the importance of education – recently referred to by a Commonwealth High Commissioner as 'the Beating Heart of the Commonwealth' - to Commonwealth member countries in terms of its centrality to national development and individual aspirations. Heads of Government have affirmed that it is a leading priority for the Commonwealth. The need and potential for continuing Secretariat leadership seems irrefutable. If in recent years the Secretariat's education team has encountered particular circumstances that have impinged on its operational effectiveness, such short-term problems should not detract from the essential point that the Secretariat's long-term record in education is one of considerable achievement and impact, especially in such areas as education in small states, distance learning, teacher management and support and professional development, higher education development, and student and teacher mobility.
7. The issue at stake now is whether the Secretariat can legitimately divest itself of its role and responsibilities in education. Education is fundamental to every other area of political, economic, human rights development where the Secretariat aspires to work. The considerable infrastructure for Commonwealth co-operation in education, more extensive than in any other sector, requires nurture and support. The Secretariat alone has the authority to convene high-level expert groups and to mobilise inter-governmental effort. A fairer and more equitable world order in international education relations requires a strong Commonwealth lead. We are emphatic that if Commonwealth co-operation is to continue to prosper, education must remain a key responsibility of the Commonwealth Secretariat.