



Commonwealth Consortium for Education

DRAFT REPORT 2018

Recording Activities of the Consortium in 2017

August 2018

**Commonwealth Consortium for Education
c/o Association of Commonwealth Universities
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FOREWORD

The Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCfE) sees one of its main functions as being to help mobilise Commonwealth civil society bodies in support of intergovernmental activity for the promotion of education development in the Commonwealth, and in most years the holding of a Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) or a Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) provides a focus for activity and dialogue. The decision of Commonwealth Heads of Government in Malta in 2015 that their next biennial meeting - the CHOGM, to be hosted by the United Kingdom Government in London - would be moved from the closing months of 2017 to the late Spring of 2018, meant that in 2017 for a second year running there would be neither a CHOGM nor a CCEM. We have become accustomed to having such a 'blank' year once in every six-year cycle, but since the modern CHOGMs were started 50 years ago there has not previously been a two-year gap, nor the curious consequence of two successive CCEMs (in 2015 and 2018) taking place in the same year as CHOGM.

CCfE endeavoured to use this unexpected breathing space to ensure that Commonwealth education co-operation, which has taken something of a pounding in recent years as reflected in particular by the diminished professional capacity of the Commonwealth Secretariat, progressed towards a better state of health. There were three principal thrusts to these endeavours:

- Throughout the year we participated actively in the process of planning for the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers due to be held in Fiji in February 2018, serving with others on the Steering Group for the Ministerial Conference, and taking joint responsibility with others as members of its Planning Committee for delivering a four-day Integrated Partners Forum to serve as the focal point in Fiji for civil-society interaction with the Ministerial Conference. Activities in that respect are described in Section 1 of this report.
- In the first half of 2017 we invested considerable energy in advocacy work for the role of education, and social development more widely, to be accorded higher priority in both policy and resource terms in Commonwealth co-operation agendas. The principal context for this was the process of formulating and agreeing the content of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Strategic Plan for the four-year period 2017/18 to 2020/21 inclusive. Section 2 refers.
- Third, in the later months of 2017 Consortium members decided to commission a thinkpiece in advance of 20CCEM, examining options for revitalising educational co-operation in the Commonwealth in the new situation of seemingly low priority and diminished resources for education at the Secretariat, as evidenced by the content of the new Strategic Plan. Dr John Kirkland, the recently retired Deputy Secretary-General at the ACU, was engaged to conduct this study. (See Section 3).

The Consortium continued throughout the year to provide basic services of providing information and support to members and promoting interaction among them; additionally, where appropriate, representing their collective views and interests in wider fora.

1. Inter-Governmental Activities

As noted in the Introduction, there was no Education Ministers Conference or Heads of Government meeting in 2017, but with the next event in each of these series scheduled for the early months of 2018, there was an extensive programme of planning and consultations in which the Consortium played a full part.

20CCEM

In November the Consortium was an active participant in the meeting of the Steering Group for the Twentieth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM) due to be held in Fiji in February 2018.

The Consortium was also fully involved in a series of meetings, five in all during the year, convened by the Commonwealth Secretariat to discuss with non-government partners the shape of civil society engagement in the CCEM. It was agreed in the early meetings in this series that for a number of reasons it would be desirable to combine the hitherto separate CCEM 'parallel forums'

for students, teachers, tertiary education, and civil society at large into one Integrated Partners Forum (IPF) combining these different strands but still providing for some separate specialised break-out sessions.

A Planning Committee was formed for the IPF with representation from the Commonwealth Secretariat and the organisations that had previously taken responsibility for the separate forums - the Commonwealth Students Association, the Commonwealth Teachers Group, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, and the Commonwealth Consortium for Education with the Royal Commonwealth Society and Council for Education in the Commonwealth. This Planning Committee met two or three times in 2017 and faced the seemingly insuperable obstacle that funding of the kind generously provided at recent CCEMs by Nexus Strategic Partnerships for bringing in speakers, especially from the private sector, was unavailable this time and resort was had to all kinds of improvisation, including 'piggybacking' on other events taking place at the same time. It was unclear initially whether the Commonwealth Secretariat would be able to provide a co-ordinator for the IPF, but it eventually 'came up trumps' with the appointment first of Liz Dawes and then crucially in the final months of 2017 the assignment of Amina Osman to be in overall charge of delivering the IPF.

CHOGM

The Consortium participated in the briefing meeting for Commonwealth accredited bodies organised by the UK Government in its capacity as host for the 2018 CHOGM, and in the two-day pre-CHOGM dialogue organised by the Round Table in October 2017.

2. Advocacy

Among the Consortium's key objectives are 'generating support for Commonwealth institutions and programmes in education' and 'contributing views and insights to the formulation of policies on Commonwealth educational co-operation'. These objectives are pursued through submissions as part of formal consultative processes, oral and written representations to Commonwealth policy makers in the Commonwealth's inter-governmental organisations (the IGOs - Secretariat, Foundation, Commonwealth of Learning) and member governments, contributions to discussions and debates, and occasionally through publications.

In 2017 there were few calls on CCfE to make formal presentations of its views. Contrary to what might have been expected in a Commonwealth that has transparency as one of its guiding principles, and that frequently affirms the value of partnership with Commonwealth non-governmental associations, CCfE and other Commonwealth associations were not invited by the Commonwealth High-Level Group on Governance to submit views on its terms of reference (which have still not been made public). Nor, during the process of its formulation, was there any public discussion and debate about the content of the Commonwealth Secretariat's new Strategic Plan for the quadrennium 2017/18 to 2020/21 inclusive. This is a matter of acute concern to organisations like CCfE working in the area of human development because of the greatly diminished resources that the Commonwealth Secretariat now devotes to these aspects of its work, resulting in reduced Commonwealth impact in this vital aspect of international co-operation and a diminution of opportunities for Commonwealth NGOs to engage in collaborative work.

The most significant overture to Commonwealth associations asking for their views was a request in the Dialogue with the Secretary-General in October 2017 for organisations to submit observations on partnership. It seems that this request was directed more to exploration of whether and how organisations could contribute to delivery of Secretariat programmes, where Members have indeed expressed themselves more than ready to help in any way they can, than vice-versa - i.e. Commonwealth IGO support for civil-society initiatives. Even the objective of mobilising CSO contributions to Commonwealth Secretariat programmes is only possible to achieve when the Secretariat's annual Delivery Plans (which operationalise its Strategic Plan) are shared with partners, a step the Secretariat was explicitly reluctant to take.

In the Consortium's 2017 Report detailing its activities during 2016 we observed that

Rumours to the effect that the Secretariat strength in the education sector was about to be drastically reduced were a warning sign that 2017 would be a year in which advocacy activity would be of unusually high importance to those promoting the value of education in building and sustaining the Commonwealth.

This did indeed turn out to be the case. Although the proposed content of the Secretariat's Strategic Plan was shrouded in secrecy, personal contacts with Secretariat professional education staff with whom Consortium members are regularly in contact revealed that only one of the three Education Advisers in post at the start of 2017 would be offered a renewal of contract, and that the same situation would exist in the health sector. Both of these were to be incorporated alongside a rather larger Youth team into a Social Development Policy unit. In education the professional education staff had been five- or six-strong as recently as 19CCEM in The Bahamas in 2015, and the prospect that one Senior Adviser could be expected to handle the challenge of managing a Commonwealth conference as large and complex as 20CCEM promised to be, gave particular cause for alarm.

That immediate anxiety was overshadowed by deeper and broader concern about the messages being conveyed about priorities for Commonwealth action. Even in the unfortunate context of the severe budgetary constraints with which the Secretariat was involuntarily confronted, this seemed to accord ill with the priorities of developing member states, with the central part that education exchange played in building and maintaining Commonwealth relations, with the extent of existing Commonwealth infrastructure in education, or with the centrality of education to all the principal thrusts of Secretariat work on democracy and promotion of human rights, skill development for economic transformation, climate change and environmental protection, or countering extremism. Should a family of nations where 60% of the population is aged under 25, and in urgent need of expanding educational opportunity, really be content for only one or two percent of its secretariat's professional capacity to be devoted to education?

Reasoning of this kind formed the basis of intensive advocacy efforts in the first half of the year with Commonwealth government representatives in London, and in personal meetings with the Commonwealth Secretariat staff including both the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland, and Deputy Secretary-General Josephine Ojiambo. Although the processes of negotiating and finally approving the Strategic Plan took place behind closed doors, it is rumoured that it was developing-country Governments that insisted on the retention of (a greatly truncated) social development programme in the Secretariat. This and the temporary re-employment of one of the two education advisers who had been earlier laid off may indicate that the arguments presented in CCfE's advocacy efforts were found to carry some weight. That said, at the close of the year education and social development remained in an extremely unsatisfactory place in terms of Commonwealth Secretariat resources devoted to them.

3. Project on Commonwealth educational co-operation

CCfE felt it essential to complement its advocacy efforts with formulation of constructive proposals for providing new impetus to educational co-operation in the Commonwealth. CCfE had for several years requested Commonwealth governments to commission a review of Commonwealth work in the education sector to identify where co-operative effort would have most useful impact, and how in the context of scarce resources the capacities and expertise of different stakeholders could best be harnessed through partnership arrangements in pursuit of shared goals.

With the approach of 20CCEM and CHOGM in the first half of 2018, this challenge assumed greater urgency: the erosion of the Secretariat's professional capacity in education and the consequences for progress towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4 on Education, needed to be addressed. The scope for new approaches to collaborative working merited early exploration by partner agencies.

With such considerations in mind in early July the Consortium convened a brainstorming session at Marlborough House to consider possible terms of reference for a consultancy report and to canvass names of possible authors. It was agreed that what was needed was a forward-looking report, about 30 pages long, identifying capacities in Commonwealth organisations in the education sector, and examining future opportunities and scope for developing co-operative work in partnership.

We were extremely fortunate in being able to locate Dr John Kirkland as consultant to undertake this study. He was on the point of retiring as Deputy Secretary-General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities where he had served with distinction for nearly 20 years, and was willing to immerse himself immediately in a few months' work, bringing both personal commitment and a wealth of experience to the task. Given the tight timetable to which we were working, if the fruits of his enquiry were to be shared with Ministers at the forthcoming CCEM these were invaluable assets. Accordingly a contract was signed with Dr Kirkland in the early Autumn 2017.

In brief, the terms of reference for this study as finalised in September asked the consultant to

- reflect briefly on the place and role of education in the Commonwealth's collective existence and purposes;
- summarise the nature and extent of existing co-operation in education taking place under a Commonwealth banner;
- consider what value, if any, beneficiaries and donors derive from working with or through the Commonwealth in the education sector compared with alternative channels, and identify areas of activity where the Commonwealth community can add particular value;
- canvass views on options for strengthening and improving Commonwealth consultative mechanisms in education;
- explore ways in which Commonwealth bodies working in the field of education could work together more effectively.

It was estimated that about eight weeks full-time work would be required for the assignment.

Dr Kirkland began intensive work in early October, interviewing a wide range of organisations and individuals wherever possible through face-to-face discussion. Those approached included staff of the three Commonwealth inter-governmental organisations, selected members of high commissions in London and the UK Government, representatives of Commonwealth associations in the education sector, and knowledgeable individuals. He was able to use a consultancy visit to Africa on behalf of another organisation to conduct personal interviews in Southern and Eastern Africa.

Dr Kirkland shared with Consortium members and others some preliminary insights gleaned from his initial work at a brainstorming session at Marlborough House in mid November and in early December was able to circulate for comment a first draft of his report. The Consortium distributed this to over 50 organisations and individuals spread across Commonwealth regions, and held a round table meeting to discuss the draft and preliminary comments received on December 19. At the end of the year there was every expectation on the part of the Consortium and the consultant himself that a final text would be available in mid to late January 2018, a few weeks in advance of 20CCEM.

4. Outreach and communication

Communications with members - information and alerts

The Consortium serves as a clearing house to keep members informed of new developments in Commonwealth educational co-operation, and to alert them to events of interest. This is mainly effected through:

- The Consortium website at <http://commonwealtheeducation.org>
- A calendar of upcoming events of particular Commonwealth relevance in the areas of education, culture and youth
- supplementary email alerts drawing members' attention to information received from the Commonwealth Secretariat and others about matters requiring action or of likely interest and concern.

Website

The Website, revamped in 2015, is now overseen and updated as appropriate by the Secretary

Commonwealth Education Calendar

Four editions of the Calendar, distributed by email to about 200 users and is posted on the Consortium's website, were produced in January, April, July and September 2017.

Publications

Sufficient stocks of the Consortium's *Commonwealth Education Directory 2015*, were available to meet demand from interested parties, but are now almost exhausted, requiring decisions on whether and when an updated fifth edition should be produced.

5. Representation

The Consortium endeavours to play a full and constructive part in Commonwealth deliberations and consultations. It thereby aims to ensure that the contribution education makes to the well-being and

progress of Commonwealth peoples is recognised and harnessed for the common good; and within the framework of Commonwealth educational co-operation to draw attention to the part that civil society organisations usefully play.

In 2017 the Consortium engaged actively in a number of Commonwealth Secretariat-convened consultative fora. In addition to the many gatherings concerned with advance planning of 20CCEM and CHOGM, alluded to in Section 2 above, these included a 'Commonwealth Family meeting' at the Secretariat in October for exchange information and views between the Commonwealth Secretary-General and staff and Commonwealth accredited organisations; and a meeting of the Youth Policy Group convened by the Youth Affairs Division in January.

CCfE participated in a number of quarterly consultation meetings for Commonwealth accredited organisations convened at quarterly intervals by the recently constituted Informal Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO).

Consortium officers also endeavoured to attend where possible events organised by CCfE members. Their more direct involvement in executive operations of Commonwealth civil-society bodies included:

Mark Robinson was a Trustee of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth (CEC) and the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (CHEC); and was Treasurer of The Round Table

Beth Kreling was an Editorial Board Member of The Round Table

Peter Williams continued as Hon. Secretary of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth's Support Group for the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, on which Mark Robinson and Beth Kreling also serve.

6. Finance

A financial statement covering 2017 and earlier years for comparison, is attached to this report at Appendix A. For the year 2017 CCfE registered a surplus of income over expenditure of £356 - compared with £442 in 2016.

The balance at the end of the year was £16,772.

Subscription income was £1,025 compared with £950 in the previous year and it was anticipated that three or four more outstanding subscriptions (represented by debtors in the table at Appendix A) would be recovered.

Expenditure remained at a reduced level reflecting in part the ongoing performance of administrative tasks on a voluntary basis by the Secretary/Acting Secretary and the unusual conjunction of circumstances that, as in 2016, there was neither a CCEM nor a CHOGM in 2017. (In 2018 both were due to be held). Operating costs on the administrative side were, however, somewhat higher (£570, against £382 in 2016) due to the fact that while our substantive Secretary lives in London, her maternity-leave replacement travelled to events from his north Cambridgeshire home.

In appraising the true overall financial position of the Consortium it is relevant to note that, as recorded in Section 3, in 2017 a considerable part of the Consortium's activity in the year was centred on the design and commissioning of a survey of Commonwealth educational co-operation, using grant funds provided earlier in the decade by the Commonwealth Foundation. The project was very near completion at the end of 2017 but at the year-end the consultant's invoice for the contractual sum had not yet been presented and paid. The effect of settling this account in the first quarter of 2018 would be to reduce the Consortium's reserves by approximately a third, to about £11,000.

The Consortium continues to hold its account with the Unity Trust Bank.

7. Membership and administration

The Consortium continued to enjoy accredited status with the Commonwealth.

Members (see listing at Appendix B)

Eighteen organisations were in membership of the Consortium in 2017. There were 16 full members and two associates. In addition, the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth of Learning and Commonwealth Foundation are deemed 'special members' of the Consortium.

The majority of the members (13 out of 18) have their current headquarters in the United Kingdom, but several of these have branches or corporate/individual members spread across Commonwealth regions. The Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) and Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management (CCEAM) have their base in Australasia; the Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM) operates out of Canada, the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics and Technical Universities in Africa is in Kenya, and Association of Commonwealth Examination and Accreditation Bodies in the Caribbean (St Lucia). A list of current members is attached at Appendix B

Subscriptions were received from 14 of the 18 members. In one case, that of BUILD, there is a reciprocal exchange of membership, neither body paying a subscription to the other.

Officers

Chair. Professor Colin Power, based in Australia, remained as Consortium Chair. The Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (CHEC) continued to provide the London Chair (Alternate Chair) in the person of Mark Robinson, who is also a Trustee of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth. He presided over meeting of the Executive in Professor Power's absence.

Treasurer. The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) filled the role of Treasurer through its Secretary-General. On the retirement of Professor John Wood as Secretary-General of the ACU in March 2017, his successor in the post, Dr Joanna Newman MBE, kindly agreed to become CCfE's new Treasurer. ACU's Chief Finance Officer, Revd Keith Stephenson, continued to undertake day-to-day management of the Consortium's finances.

Secretariat. Beth Kreling remained CCfE Secretary during the year but from May onwards was on maternity leave, and so obliged to devote much less time to Consortium affairs. In Beth's absence Peter Williams, the Hon President, served as Acting Secretary for the last eight months of 2017.

A well-attended Executive Committee meeting was held in London on July 18, and three additional meetings of members discussed and reviewed forward plans and initial findings of the study of educational co-operation.

8. Acknowledgments

The Consortium wishes to put on record its appreciation to its members, officers and other partners who made significant inputs to its work in 2017 and earlier. We single out for special mention:

The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) which handled our financial administration (through John Wood, Joanna Newman and Keith Stephenson) and provided the Consortium with its mailing address. We record our particular thanks to Professor Wood for serving as our Treasurer from 2012 until his retirement in March 2017.

The Commonwealth Human Ecology Council which provided us with our Alternate Chair, Mark Robinson.

The Commonwealth Secretariat through whom our accredited status with the Commonwealth afforded us opportunities to participate in policy-making and professional dialogues and enabled us to use accommodation in Marlborough House for our own meetings. In particular close contact was maintained with the Education team within the newly established Social Development Policy Unit headed by Layne Robinson. The Consortium would also like to record its thanks to the Secretariat's Partnerships Support Officer, Emma Kerr, who moved on at the end of the year, for the assistance of many kinds she afforded us over several years.

The Council for Education in the Commonwealth from whose membership the Consortium's secretariat (Beth Kreling, Peter Williams) was drawn.

Link Community Development International with which the Consortium has had an especially close working relationship over a decade since 2006, but which has now decided that following its move from London to Edinburgh in 2014 the continuation of this relationship is no longer practical. In respecting LCDi's decision the Consortium would like to register its appreciation of the contribution that LCD made to CCfE's programmes over an extended period.

Dr John Kirkland for generously putting his skills and experience at our disposal at short notice for the conduct of the commissioned review of Commonwealth educational co-operation referred to in Section 5 of the Report and for the commitment and energy he brought to this task.

APPENDIX B

Consortium Members and Officers in 2017

Members

(16 Members and two Associate Members = 18)

ACEAB	- Association of Commonwealth Examination and Accreditation Bodies	www.aceab.org
ACLALS	- Association of Commonwealth Literature & Language Studies	www.aclals.org
ACU	- Association of Commonwealth Universities	www.acu.ac.uk
BUILD	- Building Understanding through International Links for Development	www.build.org.uk
CAM	- Commonwealth Association of Museums	www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/
CAPA	- Commonwealth Association of Technical Universities and Polytechnics in Africa	www.capa-sec.org
CASTME	- Commonwealth Association of Science, Mathematics and Technology Teachers	www.castme.org
CCEAM	- Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management	www.cceam.org
CGEF	- Commonwealth Girls Education Fund	www.cgefund.org
CEC	- Council for Education in the Commonwealth	www.cecomm.org.uk
CHEC	- Commonwealth Human Ecology Council	www.checinternational.org
CLEA	- Commonwealth Legal Education Association	www.clea-web.com
CSA	- Commonwealth Students Association	www.commonwealthstudents.org
CTG	- Commonwealth Teachers Group	<i>email: s.garg@nut.org.uk</i>
CYEC+	- Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council	www.cyec.org.uk
ESU	- The English-Speaking Union of the Commonwealth	www.esu.org
RCS	- Royal Commonwealth Society	www.rcsint.org
ROSL+	- Royal Over-Seas League	www.rosl.org.uk

Special Members (3)

CF	- Commonwealth Foundation
COL	- Commonwealth of Learning
COMSEC	- Commonwealth Secretariat

+ Denotes Associate Member of the Consortium

Officers

Chairperson:	Professor Colin Power AM
Alternate Chair:	Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (Mark Robinson)
Treasurer:	Association of Commonwealth Universities (Prof John Wood until March, Dr Joanna Newman from April, assisted by Rev. Keith Stephenson)
Hon Secretary:	Council for Education in the Commonwealth (Beth Kreling)
Hon President	Peter Williams