



1. In this paper the Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCfE) highlights educational issues which we believe should inform the agendas of the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and the Commonwealth People's Forum in Malta. From an educational perspective we address the CHOGM remit of how the Commonwealth should deploy its capacities in *Adding global value*, and the CPF theme *What makes societies resilient?* We end by urging Heads to act swiftly to restore an effective Commonwealth professional capacity in education.

2. Education provides knowledge and skill, and shapes attitudes that can help to overcome poverty, reduce inequality and social injustice, and cope with climate change. It plays an important role in equipping societies to address the many contemporary challenges they face - of migration, urbanisation, unemployment, conflict, extremism, and gender discrimination. The attainment of each of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and of the Commonwealth's own stated objectives depends on extending the boundaries of knowledge through research, preparing an appropriately skilled workforce, and the participation of an educated, informed and engaged public. Education should be seen not as one of several competing service sectors, but as a foundation that enables all sectors to achieve their own aims, and benefitting in turn from their inputs. The Commonwealth should encourage these cross-sectoral interrelations in its work, countering tendencies to treat each sector in isolation.

Adding global value in the international educational order

3. Globalisation is making national education systems increasingly interconnected, adding a new dimension to international economic and political relations. As evidence of this:

- the global market in educational goods and services has grown exponentially;
- teachers and students are ever more internationally mobile, with short-term education mobility a potential gateway to longer-term migration;
- communication technologies enable students enrolling in their home country to acquire international qualifications by distance education, through courses delivered from abroad;
- systems for cross-border accreditation and recognition of qualifications consequently assume ever more importance;
- the emergence of international school chains adds an extra controversial dimension to existing concern in domestic contexts over privatisation of school and college ownership/ management;
- governments pay ever closer attention to country rankings in international achievement tests (PISA etc) and to charts comparing countries' progress towards the internationally agreed goals;
- education systems must frequently cater for the learning needs of non-native language speakers among immigrant populations, who may include numerous refugees from conflict abroad.

4. In many respects the internationalisation of education is a welcome development contributing to international understanding and global solidarity. But it involves costs as well as benefits, with the costs falling largely on countries less able to bear them. Study abroad involves heavy expense to the students' home countries. If graduates fail to return home the prior investment in their upbringing is not recouped by their native country. The burden of hosting and educating refugees falls mostly on developing countries. As with education, knowledge has increasingly become a commodity and its production and dissemination is controlled largely by more developed countries, using Intellectual Property Rights protocols to bolster their position. Poorer nations struggle to gain access to scholarly materials and to publish in international journals. Wealthy countries control the internet.

5. The sets of relationships, regulations and agreements that govern these global exchanges constitute what may be described as the *international education order*. As we have indicated, while this order is in many respects beneficial and beneficent, it is liable to disadvantage poorer and smaller nations.

6. The Commonwealth community contains major providers and consumers of international education services and so is particularly well placed to take an international lead, through UNESCO and in other appropriate fora, in addressing these issues. The prominence of English as the language of global discourse makes Commonwealth countries, along with the United States, key players. They are major hosts to international students; they have pioneered cross-border distance-learning and international university and other educational

partnerships; they are home to many of the major commercial and non-profit organisations supplying educational goods and services internationally.

7. The Commonwealth community can thus play a crucial role in achieving a more equitable international education order, and in ensuring that new knowledge and scientific discoveries are more accessible to all. By active exploration of ways to accommodate the interests of its various members - rich and poor, large and small - in educational exchange and knowledge sharing, the Commonwealth could surely add immense global value.

Making societies resilient

8. The nub of resilience is the capacity to survive and cope with the impact of shocks and unfavourable change in conditions, and to learn to adapt to and manage such change. The sources of shock and stress are many. They include natural disasters and conflict; and changes - sudden or gradual - in technology, market conditions, social trends, cultural values and fashion. For some countries fortunate geographical position, climate, and resource endowment may cushion adversity. For most, however, there are no simple formulae for achieving national resilience.

9. Education can play a part in creating resilience by equipping societies to understand, interpret and respond to threats of whatever kind, making them less vulnerable to any adverse effects. It may enhance individuals' capacity to foresee and understand change and their readiness to adjust. By deepening and broadening skills it broadens a person's future options, especially in the labour market.

10. In periods of conflict and stress, schools and colleges can serve as safe havens for young learners providing a measure of continuity and stability, and helping them survive psychological and physical traumas. Education's role in countering the dangers of extremism is crucial.

Commonwealth capacity in education

11. The Consortium welcomes, and asks Heads to endorse, the decision of Education Ministers in Nassau to create an Education Ministers' Action Group. This can provide much needed continuity of direction and oversight for Commonwealth co-operative action in education between CCEMs.

12. We believe that strengthening Commonwealth ability to play a full part in shaping educational agendas for global development calls for two further important interventions:

- i) commissioning an assessment of existing Commonwealth capacities in education, among its collective inter-governmental institutions (the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth of Learning, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, and Commonwealth Education Trust) while also taking account of the Commonwealth's non-government organisations, as represented in this Consortium, and of the vast educational resource base held by national agencies, the private sector and voluntary bodies. Such an assessment would confirm areas of Commonwealth comparative educational advantage and identify issues where the Commonwealth could take a productive lead on the international educational stage.
- ii) halting and reversing the relentless downsizing of Secretariat capacities in education. Since Heads last met in Colombo (2013), the Secretariat has dispensed with a dedicated Head of Education for the first time in its 50-year history. Reducing its professional strength in education to a third of the level at which it stood 20 years ago, leaves it without the capacity to do other than administer triennial conferences and service international meetings. Its esteemed line of educational publications has become a thing of the past.

13. The Consortium urges Commonwealth leaders to review these developments and to seize the opportunity that so clearly beckons to confirm education as a key sector where the Commonwealth can add sustainable global value.

Submitted on behalf of Members of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education

Association of Commonwealth Examination and Accreditation Bodies
Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies
Association of Commonwealth Universities
Building Understanding through International Links for Development
Commonwealth Association of Museums
Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa
Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Teachers
Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management
Commonwealth Countries League Education Fund

Commonwealth Human Ecology Council
Commonwealth Legal Education Association
Commonwealth Students Association
Commonwealth Teachers Group
Council for Education in the Commonwealth
English Speaking Union of the Commonwealth
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