

Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCfE)

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MEMORANDUM TO COMMONWEALTH MINISTERS OF EDUCATION AT 17CCEM

50 Years On: New Opportunities for Commonwealth Co-operation in Education

1. The Commonwealth can be proud of its record in education over 50 years since 1959. Much has been achieved by all countries at national level. International co-operation, including that through Commonwealth agencies, has contributed to such progress. Apart from the Secretariat itself, important elements of the Commonwealth's inter-governmental infrastructure include the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, the Commonwealth of Learning, the Virtual University of the Small States of the Commonwealth, and the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol.
2. These 'official' institutions and programmes are complemented by the many Commonwealth civil-society bodies. Their role and capacity is confirmed by four Forums at 17CCEM. The Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCfE) has 23 pan-Commonwealth CSOs in membership. Helped by the Commonwealth Foundation, it has prepared the *Commonwealth Education Directory 2009* and *Commonwealth Education Briefs 2009* to assist Ministers and the Forums in their deliberations in Kuala Lumpur.
3. There is no room for complacency. Many Commonwealth programmes are inadequately funded and efforts sometimes appear fragmented. The resources at the disposal of the professional education team in the Secretariat, and the level of support for the CSFP, have not kept pace with opportunity and need. We therefore urge Ministers at 17CCEM to combine celebration of past achievement with a sober appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of Commonwealth education infrastructure, and a commitment to renewal.

Recommendations

4. Members of the Consortium would like to see
 - More specificity in Ministerial recommendations at the CCEMs
 - Between CCEMs, greater effectiveness of high-level monitoring of progress towards targets set.
 - Direct engagement of partner countries' development actors (AUSAID, CIDA, DFID etc) to formulate and fund a Commonwealth EFA programme in partnership with civil society.
 - Re-examination of priorities for Commonwealth co-operation, with greater attention paid to providing education opportunity at secondary and tertiary levels, and in areas of skill development.
 - Establishment of a high-level group to map out how the education sector can contribute to fostering Respect and Understanding and the promotion of Commonwealth values.
 - A broader base of support for the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan with more countries offering Scholarships in their tertiary institutions and supporting the Endowment Fund.
 - Encouragement of professional associations and networks in education, assisting creation of direct links between individuals and institutions. The Commonwealth Foundation's capacity to nurture such networks and exchanges should be enlarged.

Overcoming compartmentalisation

5. Ministers are urged to address the compartmentalisation and fragmentation in Commonwealth efforts in education. Proposals are needed in three major areas

(i) Interconnections between levels and forms of education.

The Commonwealth should adopt a more holistic approach to education development. Progress in achievement of the Millennium Development Goals depends on complementary efforts at other levels of education; and has consequences for them, particularly the challenge of affording adequate secondary education provision. If recent progress in basic education is to be sustained, it will be necessary to embrace the wider six goals of Education for All rather than confining effort to the two MDGs alone.

(ii) Co-operation between sectors.

The different sectors of human development complement each other. A comprehensive human development approach is required. The Commonwealth Secretariat contains sections for education, health and gender, and a separate Youth Affairs Division. Yet education is hardly ever discussed at Ministerial meetings on Gender, Health and Youth; and CCEMs in turn often fail to focus on inter-sectoral issues.

(iii) Working with civil society and the private sector.

Reference is often made to the desirability of alliances between official and civil-society bodies, both at national and pan-Commonwealth levels. Ministers could usefully task working groups with proposing ways to develop better synergy between the different partners.