

Commonwealth Consortium for Education

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Submission to the Kampala CHOGM

The Commonwealth Consortium for Education comprises 23 pan-Commonwealth voluntary and professional organisations, committed to promoting educational co-operation and development in the Commonwealth. We wish to draw the attention of Heads to the important educational dimensions of two major themes on the agenda of their Kampala Meeting, namely

- Social Transformation.
- The Report of the Commission on Respect and Understanding (Sen Commission).

We suggest fuller use should be made of civil society, Commonwealth institutional and professional networks in particular, in carrying these agendas forward. We also ask Heads to mark the 50th anniversary of Commonwealth education co-operation in 2009.

Social transformation through education for development

We welcome the choice of theme for the Kampala summit, in particular its emphasis on human development as a driver of social transformation. The enlargement of human capabilities through learning, good health and a supportive social environment is crucial for development.

The Commonwealth's collective commitment to attain the Millennium Development Goals and eradicate of poverty is commendable. In education Commonwealth countries have made huge advances in enrolment over the past 50 years. But in some countries basic-level enrolment rates have approached universality more slowly than planned, due to rapid rates of population growth and adverse trends in the global economy over long periods. A much greater sense of urgency is now needed, given that the Commonwealth has already fallen short on the 2005 gender-parity target for schooling, and several member states seem doomed to miss the 2015 target for universal primary-school completion. Moreover, quantitative growth has often not been matched by improved quality, partly due to the rapid pace of past expansion and to lack of resources.

In some cases imbalanced education development with inadequate attention to education beyond the basic level has impeded progress at the basic level. At the same time as it works towards primary schooling for all, the Commonwealth must now look ahead to the next phase, involving universalisation of lower secondary education and the strengthening of scientific, technical and vocational (including teacher) education. The ability to compete in the modern global economy requires a strong technological and scientific substructure based on colleges and universities.

We urge Heads of Government to heed the request of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Cape Town that they provide adequate resources (including sustainable strategies for resource sharing) to ensure achievement of the education MDGs by the Commonwealth and that they adopt holistic approaches to education development.

Founding members of the organisations: The Association of Commonwealth Examination and Accreditation Bodies • The Association of Commonwealth Studies; The Commonwealth Association for Science Technology and Mathematics Educators • The Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management • The Commonwealth Countries' League • The Commonwealth Institute • The Commonwealth Linking Trust • Council for Education in the Commonwealth • The English-Speaking Union of the Commonwealth • The Federation of Commonwealth Open and Distance Learning Associations • The Institute of Commonwealth Studies (and Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit) • The League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers.

Promoting respect, understanding and Commonwealth values

Many Member States are afflicted by a sense of insecurity in the face of external terrorist threats, and various forms of internal violence. Education has a central role to play in this context. UNESCO's constitution famously observes that 'Since war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed'. It is also in the minds of men and women that the defences of security must be built: education – in the family, in schools, through the media – is the main instrument at society's disposal for shaping minds and hearts.

Commonwealth values of tolerance, consensus-building and respect for difference are a cornerstone in the bulwarks that protect our societies against threats to security. We believe that much more should be done by member countries and by the Commonwealth collectively to promote an understanding of the core values on which our Association is built. Education about the Commonwealth and Commonwealth values has lacked a champion since the Commonwealth Institute decided a few years ago to switch the main focus of its work away from such concerns, and we urge Heads of Government to agree, in the context of their consideration of the Report of the Commission on Respect and Understanding, on the necessary steps to be taken.

We invite Heads, in addressing the Report of the Commission on Respect and Understanding

a) to consider what steps can appropriately be taken to promote appreciation of the Commonwealth and its values;

b) to refer to Commonwealth Education Ministers those parts of the Sen Report that call for a response from the education sector, with a request that they prepare specific proposals for the consideration by Heads in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009.

Using and developing Commonwealth civil-society networks.

In pursuing agendas for social transformation and for strengthening cultures of understanding and respect, Governments can usefully work with and through social institutions such as faith groups, professional associations, trades unions, co-operatives, voluntary bodies and community groups. Many such bodies engage in collective development efforts via partnership arrangements or through associations and networks operating across the Commonwealth. In the Commonwealth, as an association of peoples, we would expect greater official encouragement of such networks.

We request Commonwealth Governments to support civil society links and partnerships on a much more generous scale through the Commonwealth Foundation and other institutional mechanisms.

Fifty years of Commonwealth education co-operation

In 2009 Commonwealth education co-operation will be fifty years old. The first Commonwealth Education in Oxford in 1959 launched the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan and for the first time established an education secretariat, the Commonwealth Education Liaison Unit. *We ask Heads to plan a special programme of celebrations in 2009 of a half century of Commonwealth education co-operation, and to commission a special review of the lessons learned from experience and of the potential to develop and strengthen collaboration in future.*