

18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM)

28-31 August 2012

Mauritius Communiqué

1. The 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM) was held in Pailles, Mauritius from 28-31 August 2012. The Conference was opened by the Hon Dr Ahmed Rashid Beebeejaun, GCSK, FRCP, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, who stressed the importance of education as the driver of economic growth and development of human capital.
2. Chairing the Conference, the host Minister, the Hon Dr Vasant K Bunwaree, Minister of Education and Human Resources, Republic of Mauritius, focussed on the primacy of education in a knowledge-driven world.
3. Addressing the Conference at the Opening Ceremony, HE Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General, laid strong emphasis on the pivotal role of education and stated that: 'There can be no question that education is central to all sustainable democratic, social and economic advances.'
4. The Hon Dr Kenny D. Anthony, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, delivered the keynote address on the theme "Not money but education – valuing Human Development in the face of financial crisis." He quoted the Nobel Laureate Economist and his fellow St Lucian Sir Arthur Lewis, who stated, 'The fundamental cure of poverty is not money, but education,' and therefore urged that we proceed with caution as we attempt to deal with budgetary constraints.
5. The conference, attended by delegations from 39 countries, of which 34 were led by Ministers, included four parallel forums: Stakeholders, Teachers, Post-Secondary/Higher Education, and Youth. Ministers, government senior officials and delegates from the other four parallel forums and partner organisations met to reflect on the theme 'Education in the Commonwealth: Bridging the Gap as we accelerate towards achieving internationally agreed goals'. The discussions of each of the four parallel

forums provided specialised background knowledge for Ministerial deliberations from wide-ranging and diverse perspectives. The Statements from the four parallel forums are appended. In parallel with the conference, an exhibition showcased the latest developments in the field of education.

6. Prior to the Ministerial meeting, Senior Officials held a one day meeting on 28th August 2012, to consider the 18CCEM arrangements and documentation, the summary of which was tabled and approved by Ministers.

7. Ministers reviewed progress of education in the Commonwealth in the context of the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) targets, together known as the Internationally Agreed Goals (IAGs), and noted good progress towards the achievement of the IAGs, notably universal primary education. Ministers received the report, *Education in the Commonwealth, Towards and Beyond the Internationally Agreed Goals*, and noted with concern that 23.3 million primary age children remain out of school in Commonwealth countries. Further, Ministers noted that globally 775 million adults, of which over 460 million were in Commonwealth countries, still could not read and write, two thirds of these being women.

8. Furthermore, Ministers acknowledged that despite the significant increase of access to education, quality and equity represented common challenges across all Commonwealth countries. In view of the need to address these challenges systemically, Ministers reaffirmed the importance of education as a fundamental human right, critical to advancing Commonwealth values of Democracy, Development and respect for diversity. Ministers' deliberations were preceded by high quality presentations by representatives from a number of government and other partner institutions.

9. Ministers noted that unless robust advocacy for the pivotal role of education post-2015 – in the economy, for society, for democracy and for development – is made, there was a risk that it might lose its place in the global priorities.

10. Ministers noted the strategic planning process currently underway, and expressed concerns regarding the Secretariat's discussion paper. Ministers stressed the

importance of not only maintaining but expanding the core work of the Education Section leading up to 2015 and beyond, in view of the serious challenges in access and quality faced by many of the members.

11. Ministers acknowledged the need for reform of the Commonwealth Secretariat, and in particular the need for greater emphasis on impact, focus, value-for-money and capacity building in its education programmes. They re-affirmed the need to suitably strengthen the Secretariat for this purpose. While welcoming the use of an online platform for education, they alerted the Secretariat to the needs of those members with lower access to technology infrastructure and capacity.

12. Ministers established a Commonwealth Ministerial Working Group to effectively articulate the Commonwealth recommendations into the UN High-Level processes responsible for developing the post-MDGs and post-EFA goals. They requested the Commonwealth Secretariat to provide terms of reference for the Working Group, noting that the deadline for finalising the Working Group's recommendations was November 2012.

13. Ministers stressed that education promoted social cohesion, tolerance and peace, and encouraged respect and understanding. They further acknowledged the benefits of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, especially in early years. They also acknowledged the benefits of learning English as a language for communication.

14. Ministers noted the need to focus on teacher professional standards and school leadership in their efforts to improve quality education, while observing that the post-2015 development framework should include knowledge and skills that enable young people to meet 21st century requirements. Furthermore, they stressed the need for standards frameworks, which could be applied nationally and regionally.

15. Ministers reiterated that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was not only about climate change but also about other environmental, social, economic and political factors, and it was an issue requiring global action and not only by small states. They strongly advocated that ESD be addressed explicitly in any forthcoming IAGs for education. They further noted that policies for ESD were welcome and necessary, but

insufficient in themselves, and re-affirmed that a variety of strategies was necessary to turn policy into practice, including: a multi-sectorial approach, public/private partnership, community engagement, using cultural traditions and mass media approaches, and information and communication technology.

16. Ministers stressed that ICT was vital to increasing access at all levels, hence improving the efficiency of the education system, but that technology should be driven by educational needs. They noted that while there was a plethora of initiatives for the development of Open Education Resources (OER), such as scientific publications, eBooks and journals, there was a need to set up a common platform for OER materials for harmonisation and ease of access. They further highlighted the need for a common framework for all open universities of the Commonwealth, especially those in small states. Quality assurance mechanisms should be strengthened to make them more relevant to the needs of stakeholders.

17. Ministers observed that external financial assistance, though significant, was a small part of the overall financing of education. Such assistance should, therefore, be considered as a catalytic support to enable the capacity of local institutions to be strengthened and include reasonable conditions. They further wished for improved cohesion in donors' financing of education in relation to the post-2015 development framework.

18. Ministers complimented the Commonwealth Secretariat on its work and achievements over the past three years, 2009-2012. They also noted and appreciated its increased collaboration with educational organisations.

19. Ministers welcomed Professor Asha Kanwar's appointment as President and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the first woman to head a Commonwealth inter-governmental organisation. They further commended Sir John Daniel, former President and CEO of COL, on his work and contribution to the advancement of the organisation. They further commended COL on its growing impact since 17CCEM, especially in relation to its needs-based work in each Member State. Ministers were pleased with the leadership of COL in developing innovations in technology to enhance

access to education in both the formal and non-formal sectors. Ministers endorsed the three-year plan for 2012-15 'Learning for Development'. They emphasised the need for strengthening the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), and for the development and use of OER in providing quality teaching and learning for all.

20. Ministers commended the achievements of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CFSP), and recognised the success of the CFSP Endowment Fund. They appreciated the announcement by the Government of Mauritius to launch 54 scholarships from the Open University of Mauritius, and one additional scholarship at the University of Mauritius from 2013, and invited other countries to follow the example of Mauritius. They further encouraged member countries to contribute to the Endowment Fund.

21. Ministers were apprised on the findings of the proposal to establish the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility (CTEF). They noted their deep interest in supporting tertiary education in the Commonwealth, and welcomed and endorsed the proposal by the Government of Malaysia for the establishment of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility at the National Higher Education Research Institute, University Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia. They commended the Government of Malaysia for their support for the CTEF and looked forward to the CTEF becoming operational. Ministers noted the need for an effective governance structure of the CTEF, and recommended the establishment of satellite units in other Commonwealth countries.

22. Ministers welcomed the use of the Commonwealth Connects on-line platform and commended its potential value in enabling on-going co-operation and collaboration in education across the Commonwealth, noting that it could also be used as a medium to encourage more frequent interaction between them.

23. Ministers noted the issues highlighted by the parallel forums: Youth, Stakeholders', Teachers' and Post-Secondary and Higher Education Leaders', and appreciated the need for partnership at all levels. They:

a. welcomed the establishment of the Commonwealth Students' Association;

- b. agreed that education should remain a core priority of the Secretariat's work, given the central role of education in development programmes throughout Commonwealth countries, especially its key role in nation building, developing economies, citizenship, personal aspiration, and meeting the needs of the very high number of people aged under 25 in many Commonwealth countries;
- c. called on the Commonwealth Secretariat to ensure that stakeholders are engaged in the process of meeting the needs of education in the Commonwealth;
- d. noted that post-secondary education had not been addressed in the existing Millennium Development Goals for Education, and advocated that it be explicitly included in any forthcoming IAGs for education.
- e. emphasised the need for education for children in conflict and post-conflict situations.

24. Ministers appreciated and thanked the Government of the Republic of Mauritius for its hospitality and for its organisation of the Conference in collaboration with the Secretariat. They welcomed the offer from the Bahamas to host 19CCEM in 2015.