

19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers

Education in the Commonwealth: Quality Education for Equitable Development: Performance, Paths and Productivity (3Ps)

The Nassau Declaration | 22 - 26 June 2015

The following document is a Ministerial Declaration outlining the major topics and issues discussed at the 19th CCEM as well as the major remedial initiatives proposed.

1. The 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (19th CCEM) was held in Nassau, the Bahamas, from 22 – 26 June 2015. The Conference was opened by the Rt. Hon. Perry Christie, Prime Minister of The Bahamas. H. E. Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General, addressed the conference at the opening ceremony. The host Minister, Hon. Jerome K Fitzgerald, Minister of Education, Science and Technology, chaired the conference.
2. In discussions, Ministers highlight that the 19th CCEM is taking place at an historic turning point, following the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the crossroads in the global education agenda as part of the wider transition from MDGs to SDGs. Education for Sustainable Development is recognized as a priority for future planning by Ministers, as well as the role of education at the heart of the process for driving the SDGs.
3. Ministers note that the Commonwealth Ministerial Working Group had significant and valued input to the education component of the SDGs, considered within the national context of each country. Ministers endorse the Incheon Declaration, noting that further input may be made to the process of finalizing the SDGs in New York in September 2015. Ministers highlight the Commonwealth values of equity, access, and development, stressing the key role of Education for Sustainable Development.
4. Ministers recognize the positive role that key partners bring to the CCEM, and welcome the growing voice and engagement of youth, teachers, civil society, and other stakeholders.
5. The 19th CCEM also saw the official inclusion of a specific forum for *small states*; Ministers celebrate this as a significant and positive step in ensuring that the voice of small states continues to be heard on the world stage, given that 31 of the 53 Commonwealth nations are small states. Likewise, the role of *education for building resilience* is championed by Ministers as a key factor in combating issues of vulnerability, particularly those faced by small states, such as climate change, migration, mobility, and financing.
6. The Ministers celebrate successes that have been achieved to date in the drive for universal primary education, but note that achievements in relation to *access* leave much work to be done in the areas of *equitable provision* and *quality*. Ministers also acknowledge the wider responsibility of member-states to ensure the continued *relevance* of education, ensuring that it prepares the next generation of Commonwealth citizens to contribute positively to the social and economic development of their communities.

7. Commonwealth nations recognize the need for evidence based interventions and policy, building on meaningful data is emphasized by ministers in the drive for establishing sustainable models of education, which enable *accountability* and *effective systems of governance*. Addressing the Post-2015 Development Goals, Ministers note the importance of continuing to meet the needs of all learners, regardless of gender, race, or religion, or other aspects of marginalization – recognizing continued challenges in relation to provision for boys and girls (both of whom continue to face issues of equitable access in various Commonwealth contexts), as well as pupils with *special educational needs*.

8. Ministers commit to focus on the core *purpose* of education, to serve the needs of their diverse populations, furthering international drives for *sustainable development*, and *equitable, high quality provision*, while recognizing the continued role of education in supporting efforts for economic growth and poverty eradication, as well as acting as a tool for socialization.

Early Years

9. Ministers recognize the key role that *early childhood education* plays as the foundation for all lifelong learning, and wider social and economic outcomes, and the need for continued and appropriate investment in this stage.

Ministers are also mindful of the need, by committing to the strengthening of public institutions, to retain effective, positive, and accountable partnerships with the private sector, and civil society, as part of wider efforts to improve quality and access. Ministers commit to strengthening engagement with these parties to support the development of education systems that serve the needs of their communities.

Gender

10. Ministers will continue to build on good practice in promoting sensitive gender mainstreaming for gender equity, including reducing barriers to girls education, and addressing specific concerns over the under-achievement of either boys or girls in Commonwealth contexts in which either faces specific challenges.

Technology

11. Ministers commit to making effective use of technology and innovation in ICT to ensure that education systems continue to meet the needs of quality, *equity*, and *access*. The significance of online learning as a universal tool for lifelong learning is recognized by Ministers, and the key role of the Commonwealth of Learning in driving innovation in this field is recognized.

To support the Commonwealth of Learning initiative achieving their Strategic Plan. Malaysia has committed a contribution of USD 200,000, and has also committed to support the sustainability of Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility (CTEF) by sponsoring RM 200,000 towards the establishment, and RM 500,000 annually (2014 – 2018) towards its administration. India has offered to provide its e-learning platform, SWAYAM, to host e-courseware developed by the Commonwealth of Learning, and has also volunteered to post digitized learning material of Commonwealth Countries on its anticipated National E-Library, with links to the Commonwealth Education Hub.

Ministers note the continuing need for effective ICT infrastructure to facilitate learning in several member-states, and commit to support development in order to address this requirement. Ministers welcome the

role of the Commonwealth of Learning, and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth in supporting affordable access to all learners.

The role of Parents and Civil Society

12. Ministers acknowledge the key role of parents, and wider civil society, in education, without compromise to equity and quality. Ministers commit to strengthening engagement with these parties to support the development of education systems that serve the needs of their communities, while recognizing the key role of families in shaping culture.

Role of Teachers

13. Acknowledging the central role of teachers in quality education, Ministers commit to raising the status of teaching as a profession. This will be achieved by enhancing pre-service and continuing professional development, and conditions of service, ensuring that teachers are motivated and supported in the classroom and building

Ministers reaffirm the importance of effective governance of teaching to promote accountability and transparency.

India has offered to set up a Malaviya Commonwealth Chair, for teacher education which will singularly focus on issues pertaining to curriculum development, pedagogy, students' assessment, pre-service and continuing professional training, and capacity development.

Youth

14. Ministers recognize the potential of learners and youth to act as agents of social change and peacebuilding, and will continue to support policies and programmes in schools that actively engage pupils in building conflict resolution skills, tolerance, respect, and social inclusion, as a way of preventing school-based violence and extremism. They support Commonwealth action, including in partnership with UNESCO, in keeping with the report on Civil Paths to Peace by the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding.

Ministers reaffirm the key role that entrepreneurship education plays in promoting unique and valuable life skills, as well as career pathways. Ministers are committed to the enhancement of curricula at all levels of education to strengthen entrepreneurship programmes and skills development.

Ministers acknowledge the important role that can be played by appropriate cooperation and collaborative national student associations, and commit to supporting and partnering with such bodies to ensure a student voice in education policy, and fit-for-purpose education. Ministers also endorse a name change for the CCEM Youth Forum to the Commonwealth Students Forum, and commit to supporting young student delegates to attend.

Spirit of Sharing / Spirit of Giving

15. Ministers celebrate the positive atmosphere of mutual lesson-learning within the Commonwealth, as exemplified by the CCEM, as well as the importance of retaining the positive momentum of the event. To this end, the development of a shared platform for the effective dissemination of ideas, pooling of resources, mutual support, and sharing good practices, is recognized as a clear need by Ministers. It is the belief of Ministers that the Commonwealth Education Hub can serve this purpose.

Ministers reaffirm, in accordance with local context, their commitment to appropriate domestic financing of education, to the level of 4-6% of GDP / 15-20% of total public expenditure, as well as the wider targets established for official development assistance (ODA), including targets of 0.7% of gross national product (GNP) for ODA to developing countries.

Ministers will, through the strengthening of their public institutions, continue to recognize the need for appropriate and effective partnerships with the private sector and civil society to address wider financing issues, ensuring accountability and equity, quality, and access are not compromised, and while recognising the importance of education as a public interest, and a public good. Ministers also recognize the responsibility of Commonwealth members to support each other when in need, by sharing resources, funding, and expertise, while ensuring efficiency in the use of existing resources.

Cross-Commonwealth Education Developments

16. The role of the Commonwealth in continuing to support development of effective education initiatives is recognized by Ministers, as is the need for greater coordination of *quality assurance* in education by Commonwealth institutions, where requested by member states, as well as the potential for *shared curricula and quality frameworks* where this is something member states wish to explore. The positive role of mobility is celebrated by Ministers, who recognize the role that a globalized economy can play in supporting the economies and education systems of member states. Ministers also recognize the emergence of additional Commonwealth states as *education destinations* for Commonwealth members.

Lifelong Learning

17. Ministers commit to supporting the continued development of the continuum of lifelong learning, and recognize the key role this plays in the economic and social development of Commonwealth countries. Ministers call for continued efforts to ensure that those who have not completed school, or not had access to *basic education*, or wish to continue their professional development, are given lifelong access to support in numeracy, literacy, and skills for employment. Ministers are also committed to developing lifelong, distance, and *technical vocational education and training*, linked to local, regional, and international, labour markets.

Policy Frameworks

18. Ministers recognize that all countries must not compromise on *equity* and *quality*, learning from good-practice, and the lessons of countries that have made significant progress in these areas. Therefore, in line with the core values of the Commonwealth Charter, the Commonwealth Secretariat will be developing effective *policy frameworks* to support efforts in this area, to be adopted by member states that wish to do so.

Scholarships

19. Ministers call for continued and expanding support for Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships, a flagship of Commonwealth cooperation, recognizing the positive role of cross-border mobility, partnership building, and leadership development. Ministers are mindful of the continued importance of ensuring that scholarships are awarded to the most able, but meet the needs of the most deserving.

Research Collaborations

20. Ministers call for the establishment of effective and meaningful *research collaborations*. To this end India has offered to establish a *Commonwealth Consortium*, for need-based-research throughout the Commonwealth. It is anticipated that the newly launched Commonwealth Education Hub will play a role here, in facilitating Research Collaborations, supported by efforts, led by India, and the new consortium.

Building on the success of the Commonwealth Secretariat Science Conference in Bangalore 2014, India also offered to support *cross-border efforts* to drive research in areas of priority to member states.

Looking to the Future

21. Ministers look to a fruitful, rich, and collaborative future for the Commonwealth, and welcome the opportunity offered by the upcoming meeting of the executive heads of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, focusing on University, Society, and Employment, to be held in Accra, Ghana 2016.

Ministers welcome the development of *Commonwealth Connects* and the *Commonwealth Education Hub*, and recognize their potential to act as a transformative resource for the entire education community of the Commonwealth and applaud the vision to create 'one-stop non-stop shops' to serve the community.

Commonwealth Action Group on Education

22. Ministers agree to establish a Commonwealth Accelerated Development Mechanism for Education (CADME) to assist with the implementation of the *SDGs* in Commonwealth countries. On taking forward recommendations of the 19th CCEM Commonwealth Secretariat assist in establishing a Commonwealth Education Ministers Action Group – CEMAG – to have regional representation, as well as that of Youth, Teachers, Stakeholders, Multilaterals, and other partners, with regular online networking and meetings where appropriate, to ensure momentum and continued action on the points recorded herein. Both CEMAG and CADME will maintain networking between ministerial meetings, supporting and supplementing, and not replacing existing international initiatives, such as the framework agreed at Incheon in 2015.

23. Ministers express their thanks and appreciation to the Government and the People of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas for their hospitality in hosting the 19th CCEM and the Commonwealth Secretariat for the organization of the event.

24. Ministers welcome the offer by the Government of Fiji to host the 20th CCEM in 2018, and the Government of Kenya's interest in hosting the 21st CCEM in 2021 was acknowledged.

25. The 19th CCEM was declared closed.