

Commonwealth Consortium for Education

**IMPLEMENTING THE COMMONWEALTH  
EDINBURGH ACTION PLAN FOR EDUCATION:  
WAYS FORWARD**

**Report on a series of Exploratory Discussions  
sponsored by the Consortium**

**July 2005**

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# **Implementing the Commonwealth Edinburgh Action Plan for Education: Ways Forward**

Report on a series of exploratory discussions  
sponsored by the Commonwealth Consortium for Education

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### *Introduction and Background (Chapter 1)*

Commonwealth Ministers of Education at their latest triennial Conferences in Halifax (2000) and Edinburgh (2003) have defined Commonwealth priorities in education and have called for collective action by governments, Commonwealth inter-governmental agencies and their civil society partners to implement common goals. In Halifax at their 14<sup>th</sup> Conference (14CCEM) Ministers issued the Halifax Statement on Education and endorsed nine areas of activity for Commonwealth countries and agencies to pursue as an initial Action Plan linked to the Statement. In Edinburgh at 15CCEM in 2003 Ministers took as the theme of their discussions ‘Closing the gap: access, inclusion and achievement’ and identified six Action Areas where work would be taken forward to meet the challenges that had to be addressed if their educational aspirations were to be achieved. The activities identified would be components of the Commonwealth Edinburgh Action Plan for Education.

The six Action Areas were:

- Achieving universal primary education
- Eliminating gender disparities in education
- Improving quality in education
- Using distance learning to overcome barriers
- Supporting education in difficult circumstances
- Mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS in education.

Ministers saw partnerships as the key to successful implementation and envisaged that these should be formed ‘at the widest level between and among governments, civil society, the private sector and the international community; and at ground level between pupils, teachers, head teachers and parents’. Accordingly, among the consultations undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec) in the months following 15CCEM were a number of meetings with representatives of civil society to consider how action might be taken forward. Among those present in the discussions were representatives of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCfE), a grouping of over 20 voluntary and professional organisations committed to the development of education, culture, knowledge management and youth development in the Commonwealth. The Consortium offered to convene a series of workshops on the six action areas in response to an agenda set by the Secretariat.

Agreement was reached in September 2004 and a contract was signed. The terms of reference (Annex 1) asked the Consortium to organise workshops in each Action Area with four principal aims. The first was to identify the key players, institutional and individual at pan-Commonwealth level that were active in the various Action Areas. The second was to identify the particularities of the Commonwealth perspective, and of the Commonwealth situation and experience in relation to the Action Areas, and to highlight any special comparative advantage the Commonwealth might have in addressing the Action Areas in general or in particular aspects. The third task was to define issues, gaps and opportunities that Commonwealth agencies might usefully address to add special value to international efforts, without duplicating what other agencies were doing. Finally the Consortium was asked to contribute its thinking about the initial proposals of the Secretariat regarding Good Practice awards that Education Ministers had asked to be implemented in the Action Areas.

The six workshops took place in the United Kingdom over a two-month period from late November 2004 to late January 2005 and were convened by four different Consortium members (Annex 2). To the extent possible invitations were extended to non-UK Commonwealth specialists as well as to UK nationals and a wide range of different Commonwealth countries was represented (Annex 3). Reports were prepared on each workshop and these were reviewed at a seventh meeting convened in Brisbane in early February. Supplementary reports included a South African commissioned contribution on overcoming barriers through distance learning and a special study by a Malaysian consultant on promoting gender parity of opportunity in higher education staff development. The draft report was reviewed at a two-day meeting hosted by the Centre for Commonwealth Education in Cambridge and the final report submitted in April.

#### *Action Areas, EFA Goals and MDGs (Chapter 2)*

The six Action Areas chosen by Ministers overlap with the six EFA Goals and the two education-related Millennium Development Goals (universal primary school completion and gender parity in education) but do not correspond with them entirely. While the focus of discussion in the Workshops was on primary schooling, it was not confined to that level, given that – UPE itself apart – every Action Area raises issues and challenges for education across the whole system. Many Commonwealth countries have substantially achieved the MDGs, including UPE and gender parity, but still find the Edinburgh agenda relevant and important. Commonwealth co-operation in education and Secretariat activity must necessarily be based on a holistic view of the education system recognising that achievement of the MDGs depends on a contribution from activities at many different levels of education.

#### *Commonwealth Capacity (Chapter 3)*

Commonwealth co-operative activity for education development flows through many more channels than the pan-Commonwealth inter-governmental organisations and civil-society agencies considered in this report. The larger picture includes Commonwealth contributions to international agencies, regional co-operation among Commonwealth members, bilateral aid from Commonwealth governments, the work of Commonwealth-based international NGOs, and the international programmes of many smaller voluntary bodies. Beyond this international co-operation, and far exceeding it, are the domestic efforts of governments and civil-society organisations at national level.

The pan-Commonwealth inter-governmental agencies – Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Foundation and Commonwealth of Learning (COL) - are heavily engaged in education activity and beyond them lie other government-supported programmes and institutions like the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, Commonwealth Institute and Commonwealth Education Fund. Together with the pan-Commonwealth voluntary and professional bodies, most but not all of which belong to the CCfE, this constitutes a substantial resource (Annex 6). Some of the Commonwealth NGOs in education, like the Association of Commonwealth Universities, are substantial: others are relatively tiny. There is a clear need for better mapping of resources and programmes.

The accounts submitted, by respondents to CCfE enquiries (Annex 8), of work done by pan-Commonwealth bodies in relation to each of the six Action Areas is summarised in boxes in the main text, and fuller details are provided of programmes executed by ComSec and COL in Annex 7. As might be expected the inter-governmental agencies with their greater resources display the highest level of activity and generally operate larger-scale projects. COL has a focus on the applications of distance learning but its work addresses issues in all six Action Areas. Out of all the Areas, it appears that the least attention was being paid by Commonwealth agencies to education in difficult circumstances, but it is possible that later reporting will show that the emphasis has shifted following the Caribbean hurricanes and the Asian tsunami disaster of 2004.

#### *The Commonwealth Vantage Point (Chapter 4)*

The Commonwealth is a relatively small player in terms of international co-operation and it is often asked whether the Commonwealth brings any special perspective to bear on global problems giving it some kind of comparative advantage in addressing them.

A valuable characteristic of the Commonwealth is that it spans the developing/industrialised-country divide, and so provides a forum where consensual approaches to some of the most difficult contemporary global problems can be worked out in informal settings. The common heritage of Commonwealth countries in language, law and learning and the shared institutional patterns are conducive to a valuable sharing of experience between countries; and the geographical clustering of Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean, southern Africa, South Asia and the Pacific offers opportunities for beneficial regional co-operation. South-South co-operation has been a special feature of Commonwealth collaborative efforts.

Four special roles identified for the Commonwealth are an advocacy role in campaigning for a more equitable world order and promoting the global public good; support for countries negotiating with more powerful interests (World Bank/IMF, wealthy countries, multinational corporations); support for human rights and encouraging adherence to international conventions; a special concern with the development and viability of small states. The Commonwealth can make an important contribution by developing its capacity for persuasion and influence in international forums. It could also perform a valuable service to its member states by helping them to identify and unlock sources of assistance at the disposal of other larger development agencies.

These advantages and opportunities apply abundantly in the education sector. Commonwealth institutional infrastructure in education has a depth and range unmatched by other sectors and several parts of that infrastructure – e.g. COL, CSFP, the Commonwealth Education Fund, regional universities and examination bodies, and some of the Commonwealth professional associations -represent institutional forms that are unparalleled elsewhere and that have proved to work well. A wealth of in-depth expertise and specialist experience has been developed in areas of education that have been the focus of Commonwealth endeavours.

As regards the Action Areas, it is noted that while most Commonwealth members have already reached the MDG goals, Commonwealth countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia together account for the greater part of the global deficit in primary school enrolment (Action Area 1) and the enrolment of girls (Area 2). In that sense these are very much ‘Commonwealth problems’; and the same is unfortunately true of HIV/AIDS (Area 6) to the extent that in the early phases of the spread of the pandemic it is Commonwealth countries of Southern Africa that have been particularly affected. On UPE, most Commonwealth African countries have in the past achieved universalisation at least in the sense of gross enrolment ratios of 100 or better, and so have important experience to share relevant to issues of sustainability as countries attempt to reach UPE for the second or third time. In the area of gender the Commonwealth has particular opportunities through the regular meeting of Women Affairs Ministers, and the growing recognition that there is a new emerging problem of male underachievement in several Commonwealth countries.

On the quality of education (Area 3), the similarity of institutional arrangements in education provides scope for useful interventions; and both ComSec and COL have done cutting-edge work on the professional development of teachers. COL is uniquely placed to take the lead in using distance education to overcome barriers (Area 4) and Commonwealth countries have historically been at the forefront of efforts to reach isolated learners. As for education in difficult circumstances (Area 5), Commonwealth countries have been particularly badly affected by recent natural disasters, and – though in the majority of cases themselves spared from the ravages of civil strife (exceptions are Sierra Leone and Uganda) – they have been major hosts to refugees from Afghanistan, Sudan, Rwanda, Congo DRC.

#### *An Agenda for Future Activity in the Action Areas (Chapter 5)*

Workshop participants identified a number of themes that were common to all the Action Areas:

- help is required to member states with briefing on complex international issues and conventions and, where requested, with preparation for international negotiations
- the need for assistance with better data for planning
- the necessity for the Commonwealth to pay attention in all its initiatives to the special considerations that affect small states

- more rigorous thinking about the most productive ways to share experience and disseminate good practice
- application of peer review as a means to help countries to improve their education systems
- the centrality of teachers and their professional development as a key to progress in all the Action Areas
- the scope for using non-government bodies as partners in development
- the need for cross-sectoral co-operation if progress in education is to be assured
- three priorities are for concentration on the poorest; addressing the plight of orphans; and revisiting policies on the language of instruction.

A number of gaps and opportunities are identified in each of the six Action Areas - between four and nine specific suggestions in each Action Area. (The 36 items are too detailed to be summarised here and the full text of the Report should be consulted in the appropriate section of Chapter 5). Further themes outside the Action Areas, but corresponding to the concerns of Ministers in Edinburgh, are identified for Commonwealth attention in the areas of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), intellectual property rights, and cross-border enrolment.

#### *Good Practice Awards (Chapter 6)*

ComSec proposals for Good Practice Awards, as requested by Ministers, were discussed and recommendations made. It would be desirable to specify a focus for the awards in each Action Area and to simplify the administration, reducing bureaucracy and management costs to a minimum. Workshop participants did not favour confining the Awards to those nominated by Ministries. Care should be taken to ensure Good Practices identified are replicable, have a proven track record and focus on substance more than presentation.

#### *The Way Forward (Chapter 7)*

The Commonwealth possesses substantial infrastructure for education co-operation and development, but efforts of the different agencies and programmes have in the past been fragmented. Education Ministers have now given clearer direction on education priorities, and there is scope for translating these into an agreed programme of specific activities that would constitute components of the Commonwealth Action Plan for Education that Ministers foresee.

Many civil society partners would appreciate guidance on Commonwealth priorities and on the particular areas where their contribution would be most valued. They would welcome the opportunity to work with others in developing and executing projects of acknowledged importance, and would find it helpful in seeking funds for such work to have a Commonwealth 'imprimatur'.

An immediate issue therefore is whether, with the blessing of Ministers and under ComSec and COL leadership, the Commonwealth education constituency could collectively agree a slate of initiatives in the six Action Areas, of the kind identified in the Report, and agree among themselves through a process of voluntary offers which ones they might themselves try to initiate, and where possible implement, seeking also to attract the attention and engagement of other potential interested parties. Such an agreed 'menu' of programmes and projects, effectively constituting an interim Action Plan, would underpin funding applications to multilateral and bilateral agencies.

It is suggested that ComSec might consider convening a consultation among interested parties to study the present report and the feasibility of its recommendations, and that it should use its current series of regional consultations with Ministers to take soundings among Governments on the proposals.

## IMPLEMENTING THE COMMONWEALTH EDINBURGH ACTION PLAN FOR EDUCATION: WAYS FORWARD

### Report on a series of Exploratory Discussions sponsored by the Consortium

#### 1. Introduction

##### 1.1 Background to the Project

1. Education is central to the Commonwealth. This was affirmed in the message sent to Heads of Government by Commonwealth Ministers of Education, assembled at their Fifteenth Conference (15CCEM) in Edinburgh in October 2003; and by Heads themselves at their Meeting in Abuja in December 2003 when they stated that education is of the highest priority for the Commonwealth association. On that occasion Heads also reiterated their commitment to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, especially in regard to health and education (see Box 1).

2. Education as a sector is unrivalled in the depth and breadth of its Commonwealth infrastructure. It includes specialised inter-governmental agencies and programmes and a considerable number of pan-Commonwealth professional and voluntary organisations committed to education co-operation and development (Appendix 6).

3. In pursuit of the Commonwealth's education goals, governments have been feeling their way towards formulation of a co-ordinated programme of activities through which different Commonwealth agencies could combine their efforts to achieve shared objectives. This possibility was mooted at 14CCEM in Halifax, Canada, in 2000 when Ministers

re-emphasised their belief in the central role of education in the development process, the value of Commonwealth agencies, teacher organisations, NGOs and institutions in advancing educational development and the need for greater collaborative efforts within the Commonwealth in this area. Ministers also stressed their own commitment to using education to enhance the personal, community and national development efforts in their respective countries, and to working in a collaborative spirit of Commonwealth co-operation towards these ends. They outlined a frank and realistic overview of the many challenges facing Commonwealth countries, but also highlighted a sense of hope from some of the success stories and promises of partnership and international support.

**Ministers agreed on a small set of projects that would form the initial Action Plan for the Halifax Statement and agreed that there would be a rolling Action Plan that would make it possible to take on board new projects and sunset old ones. Ministers agreed that the Action Plan was to be carried out by clusters of countries, agencies, teacher organisations and NGOs that share an interest in and have a commitment to the activity in question. Ministers mandated the Commonwealth Secretariat to monitor and report on the implementation of the Action Plan that forms part of the Halifax Statement.**

*(Communique of 14CCEM)*

4. The Commonwealth Secretariat implemented a variety of activities in the interval between 14CCEM and 15CCEM, reflecting the nine themes that Ministers in Halifax had identified for follow-up (see

Annex 7a). At 15CCEM in Edinburgh in 2003 Ministers renewed the effort to devise a programme of concrete activities that the Commonwealth would undertake in the following terms:

\* \* \* \*

4. Ministers reviewed progress in education across the Commonwealth in the context of the main theme of the conference - *Closing the Gap: Access, Inclusion and Achievement*. They identified key issues, challenges and opportunities that needed to be addressed if their educational aspirations were to be achieved.

5. They identified six Action Areas where work would be taken forward to address these challenges: Achieving Universal Primary Education; Eliminating Gender Disparities in Education; Improving Quality in Education; Using Distance Learning to Overcome Barriers; Supporting Education in Difficult Circumstances; Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS in Education.

\* \* \* \*

10. Ministers noted with satisfaction the progress made on taking forward the Action Areas identified in the Halifax Statement, and the need to work with vigour if they were to meet the targets of the Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Eliminating Gender Disparity (EGD). To do this, combined efforts and vision will be required from all governments, other public sector stakeholders, civil society and the private sector, including support for policies that enhance and facilitate building capacity and achieving these goals, while avoiding practices that may impede progress.

\* \* \* \*

24. Based on the Conference's rich dialogue and exchanges, Ministers agreed to a set of actions around the six Action Areas. Ministers asked the Commonwealth Secretariat and its partner organisations to monitor and report on the implementation of the Edinburgh Action Plan.

5. The components of the Edinburgh Action Plan that formed part of the 15CCEM Communique, and the statements and reports emanating from Edinburgh – from 15CCEM itself, from the parallel civil-society Symposium and from the associated Youth Summit - on each of the six Action Areas are reproduced in Annex 5.

6. In the months following the Conference, the Education Section of the Commonwealth Secretariat devised programmes of its own in the first two of the Action Areas, corresponding with the two education MDGs, and embarked on a series of consultations with civil society representatives on implementation of the Edinburgh Action Plan. These discussions led directly to an invitation to the Commonwealth Consortium for Education, a grouping of some 22 Commonwealth voluntary and professional bodies active in the Education Sector, to organise a series of workshops on the six Action Areas which would explore where the distinctive Commonwealth niche lay and what were the main gaps and opportunities that the Commonwealth could usefully address. The contract was for £12,000.

### 1.2 Terms of reference

7. The full terms of reference for the project are shown in Annex 1. The key objectives were:

- To identify the key players, institutional and individual, at the Pan-Commonwealth level active in the six Action Areas;
- To articulate the key dimensions of “Commonwealthness” or Commonwealth value added; defining any Commonwealth niche and how it can make a difference;
- To identify potential gaps, including short- and long-term research gaps, that could be the focus for future Commonwealth-driven components of collaborative

action and ways of addressing these gaps that could be undertaken by a range of Commonwealth Partners

- To contribute ideas to the formulation of procedures for the Best Practice Awards, that Ministers have asked to be presented at 16CCEM.

8. The dateline for presentation of the end-of-project report was originally set at 31 January 2005, but by mutual agreement this was later put back by a few weeks. This would make it possible to take account of the results of other relevant meetings on quality of education (London, November 23) and education in difficult circumstances (Cape Town, December 3-5) and to allow for the planning of supplementary activities that would involve widening the circle of international participants involved in the consultative process. In the event many of the consultations took place in January and February 2005, as detailed below.

### 1.3 Activities undertaken

9. The Commonwealth Consortium for Education invited its members to submit proposals for organising workshops in the action areas and four of its members responded. The series took place as follows

- 1. *Achieving universal primary education.*** Council for Education in the Commonwealth, November 26 2004 at Marlborough House
- 2. *Eliminating gender disparities.*** Council for Education in the Commonwealth, December 3 2004 at Marlborough House
- 3. *Improving the quality of education.*** League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers, January 24 2005 at Marlborough House
- 4. *Using distance learning to overcome barriers.*** International Research Foundation on Open Learning (for Federation of Commonwealth Open and Distance Learning Associations) December 13 2004 at Marlborough House
- 5. *Supporting education in difficult circumstances.*** Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators, January 8 2005 at the University of Leeds
- 6. *Mitigating the effects of HIV/AIDS in education.*** Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators, January 18 2005 at Marlborough House.

10. A number of associated activities and studies were also included in the programme. They include a review in Brisbane Australia on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2005 of the draft reports from the six workshops above (CCfE and Eidos); a consultation in South Africa on open and distance learning (IRFOL); a study of factors which enhance gender equality in staffing of Commonwealth universities (ACU); and sponsorship of an observer at the Cape Town Round Table on Education in the face of Environmental Disasters/Difficult Circumstances in December 2004 (CASTME). A final review/synthesis meeting was held in Cambridge in February (CI-CCE/CCfE). The Report was submitted to the Secretariat in April 2005, but at its request a further revision was made in June/July to incorporate additional information about Commonwealth programmes, and an Executive Summary was then added.

11. More detail of the various events held in connection with the project is given in Annexes 2 and 3.

## 2. The Six Action Areas

12. The context of the Ministerial discussion in Edinburgh was the Conference theme of “Closing the Gap: Access, Inclusion and Achievement”. The six Action Areas identified by Ministers were:

- Achieving Universal Primary Education;
- Eliminating Gender Disparities in Education;
- Improving Quality in Education;
- Using Distance Learning to Overcome Barriers;
- Supporting Education in Difficult Circumstances;
- Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS in Education.

13. Three important issues are posed by the Ministers’ chosen agenda for action. The first concerns the interconnections between the individual Action Areas. The second is the relationship between the Action Areas and Commonwealth countries’ pre-existing commitments to the Education for All (EFA) goals, proclaimed in Dakar in April 2000, and to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The third issue is whether the proposed Commonwealth actions in the six Areas selected should focus on any particular level(s) of the education system.

14. Clearly the six Action Areas do not form watertight compartments. To attain UPE it is necessary to address directly issues of under-representation of one or other gender (most usually girls), of children in difficult circumstances and of those affected by HIV/AIDS, including orphans. The quality of schooling is a major influence on enrolment. Distance learning may be an important aid to the training and recruitment of teachers in sufficient quantity and quality. There are obvious links between gender parity and progress in all of the other action areas, including especially the impact of HIV/AIDS on education.

15. For all the above reasons there was a certain artificiality in holding separate discussions on each Action Area. Inevitably the individual workshops tended at times to repeat themes and ideas already touched on elsewhere, and there was repeated reference in discussion to the need to synthesise the findings of the different workshops in an overall report, of the kind that this document represents.

16. There is not a complete coincidence between the six Action Areas and the six EFA goals approved in Dakar. The six EFA goals do not specifically refer to open and distance learning, nor to mitigation of the impact of HIV/AIDS, which are among the Commonwealth proposed areas for action. They do on the other hand address early childhood care and education, adult literacy, and acquisition of life skills, none of which have specific reference in the six Action Areas.

17. Interestingly, the Ministers did not link their recommendations for work in the six Action Areas to the attainment of the MDGs, even though governments have directed in other Commonwealth forums that the Secretariat should give priority to them. This Commonwealth commitment (see Box 1) to the MDGs provides two mission-defining guidelines for the Secretariat’s work in education. Millennium Development Goal 2 and Target 3 addresses the completion of primary schooling by all children. Goal 3 and Target 4, dealing with gender equality, puts the immediate emphasis on primary and secondary education by 2005 and extends this to all levels of education by 2015.

18. The MDGs have been criticised on several counts. Some argue they are not ambitious enough. Most Commonwealth countries, for example, aspire to nine years’ universal education, to include three years of lower secondary education, rather than just primary. Nevertheless, the EFA Global Monitoring Reports are gloomy about the prospects for attainment even of the global primary education target by 2015. Moreover the MDGs are silent about both quality and equality beyond gender disparity.

19. It is problematic, to say the least, for the Commonwealth to encapsulate all its common concerns in education under the (MDG) rubrics of universal primary schooling and gender equality in primary and secondary education. In the course of Ministerial exchanges of view at 15CCEM considerable attention

was devoted to issues like the international recruitment of teachers and the Virtual University for Small States which, though by no means irrelevant to the six Action Areas, are somewhat tangential to them. Similarly the very substantial programme of awards under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan was properly subject to scrutiny in Edinburgh. Such programmes are central to Commonwealth education co-operation. They make their contribution to attainment of the MDGs, but the Goals are not their basic rationale and the Secretariat should be spared having to engage in rather far-fetched casuistry to justify including them in its work programme.

**Box 1 The Education for All Goals: Dakar April 2000**

The six EFA goals to which participants in the World Education Forum, held at Dakar in April 2000, committed themselves were to:

- Expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- Ensure that by 2015 all children, especially girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to and complete free compulsory primary education of good quality.
- Ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.
- Achieve a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
- Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieve gender equality in education by 2015 – with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
- Improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

**Millennium Development Goals relating to Education**

(UN General Assembly Resolution A/56/326, 6 September 2001)

The Millennium Development Goals include two that focus particularly on education as follows:

*Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education*

(Target 3). Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

*Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women*

(Target 4). Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015.

**Aso Rock Declaration by Commonwealth Heads of Government, December 2003**

In December 2003 in Abuja Commonwealth Heads of Government reiterated their “collective commitment and determination to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially in regard to health and education”. In the same Aso Rock Declaration they also affirmed that

“education, whether formal or informal, is central to development in any society and is of the highest priority to the Commonwealth. In an increasingly divided and insecure world, education must play a crucial role for people, both young and old, for them to optimise their opportunities and to bridge divides”.

20. Nowhere does the Conference Communique state that the Action Areas as a whole apply solely to any particular levels of education, even though the first of the Action Areas dealing with UPE is, by

definition, so restricted. But mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS is a challenge facing secondary and tertiary education as much as, if not more than, primary education because – as well as the problems of teacher infection and of orphaned learners that are common to all levels – students themselves in secondary and tertiary institutions are at more direct risk of infection through voluntary or coerced sexual relationships. Again, it can be argued that while open and distance learning can make a direct impact on quantity and quality of primary education through the education of teachers, direct student use of these learning methodologies is likely to take place further up the ‘education tree’ than in the elementary school. Similarly gender equality is explicitly recognised, in the wording of the relevant MDG, as applying to all education levels.

21. It is hardly surprising that the Report of 15CCEM records that exchanges of views in Edinburgh ranged widely across the levels of education. Many of the most salient political issues in education confronting education ministers, even in countries that have not achieved UPE, are in fact ones concerning access to, and the management and financing of, secondary and tertiary education. (The majority of Commonwealth countries have already achieved UPE, at least as measured by gross enrolment ratios). It is well recognised, too, that the different parts of a country’s education system are closely inter-related. The demand for primary education, and its quality, depend in large measure on opportunities for continuation of study at secondary and tertiary levels, and on their contribution to the development of professional capacity and research for the primary schools.

22. For all the above reasons, the Consortium’s series of workshops on the Action Areas worked on the presumption that while the primary level has priority for pan-Commonwealth action in respect of the Action Areas, it was not intended to be the exclusive focus of Commonwealth activity within them. Hence, the workshop discussions did not confine themselves entirely to the primary level; and in response to the strong concerns expressed by Ministers about gender equality in higher education, a special study was undertaken for the Consortium of professional development opportunities for female staff in higher education.

### 3. Commonwealth Capacity

#### 3.1 Conceptual considerations

23. The terms of Reference asked the Consortium “to identify key players, institutional and individual, at the Pan-Commonwealth level active in these areas”.

24. The restriction to ‘pan-Commonwealth’ was deliberate, in order to limit the field of survey, and also recognising that the many informal and bilateral links between Commonwealth countries in education were hardly amenable either to recording or to co-ordination. What it does mean however is that this review necessarily omits a vast amount of co-operative activity between Commonwealth governments, agencies and institutions in the six Action Areas of the following kinds:

- Contributions by Commonwealth member countries to international budgets of the World Bank, regional development banks, United Nations agencies, European Development Fund and other multilateral funds that in turn spend some of their resources on education in Commonwealth developing countries.
- Regional co-operation facilitated by organisations like SADCC, CARICOM and others. In some, Commonwealth voices are preponderant.
- Bilateral assistance between governments orchestrated by the assistance agencies of industrialised countries like UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand; also by Commonwealth developing countries (India, Malaysia, Nigeria, South Africa etc)
- Assistance by Commonwealth-based international NGOs - like OXFAM, ActionAid or Save the Children, to name a few.
- International co-operative ventures and linkages involving smaller voluntary bodies that support projects and links often at local level and for particular schools and colleges.

25. It follows that this review covers only a very small part of activity in the Commonwealth in the six Action Areas because

- **first**, domestic efforts at national level are not covered. In most countries international co-operation accounts for only a very small proportion of the resources available for education.
- **second**, even in respect of international co-operative activity within the Commonwealth, the resources flowing through the channels outlined in paragraph 25 are far greater than those passing through the pan-Commonwealth bodies that are the subject of this study.

26. This poses a challenge to the pan-Commonwealth institutions to explore whether they can identify distinctive roles for themselves, individually and collectively, in education development. Such roles might for example be those of

- leader and mobiliser of national and international effort through advocacy
- broker and co-ordinator to help others locate the resources they need
- catalyst for regional and international co-operation and the exchange of experience and good practice
- generator of distinctive inputs based on Commonwealth comparative advantage that will fill gaps and add value to the effort others are making.

27. It will be noticed that the first three of these roles coincide with the ‘ABC’ (advocate, broker, catalyst) mandates that ComSec has recently defined for itself.

#### 3.2 Organisations and programmes

28. As indicated in Annex 6, the pan-Commonwealth institutions active in the education sector are of three main kinds

- The three principal inter-governmental organisations namely
  - **the Commonwealth Secretariat**, which has an Education Section with six professional staff (two funded externally) and a programme budget of about £400,000 p.a. for education within its Social Transformation Programmes

Division. Amongst the agreements that the Education Section is responsible for monitoring is *The Commonwealth Protocol on the Recruitment of Teachers*, agreed at Stoke Rochford in 2004. The Secretariat controls the disbursement of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation with a budget of around £20-25m per annum, with education in member countries being one of the main beneficiary sectors.

- The **Commonwealth of Learning**, with its international headquarters in Vancouver, Canada, is an official Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of knowledge, resources and technologies in open learning and distance education. COL is helping developing nations to improve access to good quality education and training. There are about 35 staff members in Vancouver and another five in its regional agency in New Delhi (the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia). Its annual budget is approximately £2.5 million.
  - The **Commonwealth Foundation**, promotes civil society in the Commonwealth and has a programme of support for pan-Commonwealth professional organisations including some in the education sector belonging to the Commonwealth Consortium for Education (see below). Budget £3m p.a.
- Certain other programmes and institutions directed to Commonwealth education co-operation with governmental participation and support:
- The **Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP)**, now 45 years old and operating bilaterally within a multilateral framework. Some 24,000 Commonwealth awards have been given under the Plan by about 20 different awarding countries. Presently about 1,400 awards are made each year by a dozen donors: Britain is by far the largest donor, contributing about two thirds of the total number of awards.
  - The Trustees of **The Commonwealth Institute** are supporting the **Centre for Commonwealth Education** at Cambridge, which came into being at the beginning of 2005. The Centre is an affiliate of the Institute in partnership with the Faculty of Education. It is to serve educational needs across the Commonwealth especially in the fields of primary and secondary education. Its purposes are research and scholarship, educational leadership, and consultancy and project development. Plans for implementation of the research programmes and operational activities will drawn up by the Director for consideration by the Centre's Management Committee. The Director will also be advised by an Advisory Board including one member from each region of the Commonwealth. The Centre is submitting a bid, with a number of other Commonwealth Universities, for a research contract on outcomes from education being tendered by the British Government. The Commonwealth Institute also has an Australian affiliate which is administering a major research project, with Australian funding, on the impact of the quality and quantity of physical activity programmes in primary schools and their effect on the current and future health of the children involved.
  - Also worthy of note is a British-funded programme, the **Commonwealth Education Fund**, for promoting Education for All in 17 Commonwealth developing countries largely through advocacy work by civil-society coalitions based in those countries.
- The third strand is pan-Commonwealth civil society organisations with an education focus. These range from fairly substantial players with sizeable budgets and paid staffs, to rather small associations with no paid employees and working through a voluntary committee. The Association of Commonwealth Universities (which also houses the secretariat of the UK

Commonwealth Scholarship Commission) is the largest with a staff of 47 and an annual budget excluding the UK CSC of over £2m. Some 22 of these voluntary and professional organisations are grouped together in the **Commonwealth Consortium for Education** formed in 2001.

29. This range of Commonwealth institutions and programmes having education mandates and concerns is not well mapped, and indeed its diversity is a source of some bewilderment to outsiders, who seem to expect to find every function relating to Commonwealth education development and co-operation to be centralised in a single authority. It was partly with the purpose of attaining a greater measure of coherence in the civil-society contribution that the Commonwealth Consortium for Education was formed. The Consortium has begun the process of mapping in a limited way through its developing series of Briefing Notes, of which the first five have been published. This effort needs to be more vigorously pursued with much greater human and financial resources than the Consortium has so far been able to find.

30. The idea of an Action Plan that harnesses the contributions of many different agencies - inter-governmental, governmental and civil society – as mooted at Halifax and in Edinburgh, presupposes that greater commonality of purpose and coherence of effort can be achieved. The relationship between the viability of the Edinburgh Action Plan and the current state of ‘coherence’ in the education sector is complex

- A credible action plan needs coherence and co-ordination by participants
- Inability to co-ordinate resources and effort is one of the main obstacles to successful formulation and delivery of a Plan
- Yet adoption and collaboration in execution of a Plan might well be the catalytic agent that could produce the coherence that is presently lacking.

### 3.3 Activities in the action areas

31. The resources available to the Consortium precluded preparation of any very detailed inventory of operations in the Six Action Areas. An attempt was nevertheless made to gather information on the main interests and activities of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Education Section, the Commonwealth of Learning and as many as possible of the 22 Consortium members. The tally of replies included

- a. Commonwealth Secretariat Education Section
- b. Commonwealth of Learning
- c. Association of Commonwealth Examination and Accreditation Bodies
- d. Association of Commonwealth Universities
- e. Commonwealth Association of Museums
- f. Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa
- g. Commonwealth Association of Science Technology and Mathematics Educators
- h. Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management
- i. Commonwealth Countries’ League
- j. Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit
- k. Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council
- l. Council for Education in the Commonwealth
- m. Institute of Commonwealth Studies
- n. League for Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers
- o. Royal Commonwealth Society

32. Much the fullest returns have come from the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth of Learning (see Annex 7a and 7b). The very extensive programme of activities recorded by COL partly reflects its superior volume of resources for education co-operation, albeit focused on the use of open and distance learning.

## **Box 2 Pan-Commonwealth Activity in the Six Action Areas - 1**

### ***1. Achieving universal primary education***

#### **ComSec**

The Secretariat (1) held a conference with Jamaican teachers in 2004 on the link between early childhood education and UPE, and this has resulted in a 'Best Practice' publication (2) orchestrated the development of the Protocol on the Recruitment of Teachers designed to help protect primary and secondary education systems against depredations of international recruitment agencies (3) With Aga Khan Foundation, Pakistan, Workshop for 30 Commonwealth senior officials on Early Learning for Later Achievement.

#### **COL**

(1) Has an extensive SchoolNet and e-schools programme, and also a project for establishing a technology network to link up teacher training institutions and schools in Africa and India (2) assists governments to formulate appropriate policies for applying ODL to education (3) in 2004 worked in East Africa to develop a regional course to train teachers to use ICT in the classroom (4) facilitates the development and offer of IT courses for school transformation in India (5) has assisted with review of use of open schooling in India and (6) has assisted with consultancies, advocacy and policy meetings, and institutes to raise awareness about the potential of open schooling in the Pacific, Asia and Africa.

#### **CCfE**

Commissioned and published a briefing paper in 2003 outlining the challenges for the Commonwealth in addressing EFA

#### **CEC**

A working party is exploring possibilities of mobilising resources behind achievement of UPE in one Commonwealth small state.

#### **CPSU**

Undertook a project in professional networking for basic education with NIEPA New Delhi and three Commonwealth Ministries of Education in 2000-2001. Its work on the socio-economic rights of indigenous peoples in the Commonwealth has included a section on education. CPSU has also offered, subject to funding, to undertake an assessment of progress of the Edinburgh Action Plan.

### ***2. Eliminating gender disparities***

#### **ComSec**

Held conferences 2004 on gender equality and education in Nairobi and Chandigarh, India, focusing on good C'wealth practice in girls' education: a collection of case studies highlighting Good Practice is expected to emerge. ComSec working with Institute of Education in London to develop Scorecard for tracking girls' education, and with COL on research on boys' under-achievement in some Commonwealth countries. In 12/2004 a specialist in gender and education joined ComSec team of advisers.

#### **COL**

(1) With ComSec launched a Gender Management Toolkit to ensure gender awareness affects decision making in all areas including education (2) collaborated with a number of international organisations and agencies to organise a forum in 2003 on barriers that females encounter when using ICTs especially for education and training (3) COL/ComSec sponsorship of study on male underachievement (4) co-operation with Forum for African Women Educationalists to create virtual library of gender resources (5) Publication of case studies of women succeeding through distance education (6) organised regional meetings to examine specific barriers to the use of ICTs that women encountered and to document strategies that have been employed to overcome these – reports on this topic were produced in the four regions of the developing Commonwealth.

#### **ACU**

ACU has done extensive work on women's professional development, to bring them parity with men, in higher education and was instrumental in commissioning the documentation on this subject prepared for this review. Key elements of the programme include the development of training modules (initially in conjunction with ComSec), an ongoing series of "training of trainers" workshops, and the development of good practice guides and much needed statistical data.

#### **CAM**

Envisages a project on the position of women in museums and the representation of women in museum collections and exhibits.

#### **CAPA**

Is conducting a project over the years 2004-6, with funding from the Commonwealth Foundation, Netherlands Government and Ford Foundation on increasing the role of women in TVET management and relevant employment.

#### **CCEAM**

An international conference in 2002 addressed issues of advancement of women in educational leadership and sensitisation of educational leaders to gender concerns.

#### **CCL**

Provides scholarships at secondary schools for girls in Commonwealth countries.

#### **CEC**

Sponsored a conference and produced a report on the gender dimension of EFA as it applied both to developing countries and UK.

*Continued on page 17*

33. In the case of civil-society organisations, the reported activities are modest. Disappointingly, there is relatively little evidence that most of the civil-society organisations attempt on a regular basis to combine their efforts with those of other pan-Commonwealth CSOs to achieve greater impact across the Commonwealth or that their programmes reflect the priorities that Commonwealth Governments and Ministers have set. The upshot, at least in terms of appearances, is of small initiatives often involving local partners and with a mainly localised impact.

34. It is only fair to Commonwealth associations to recognise, however, that they have an impact on development in these Action Areas and on other issues beyond any project work they may undertake.

Through their conferences, journals and other activities they help to sensitise their members to the issues of the day and encourage engagement with them. They are vehicles for professional networking and for the exchange of experience and good practice among Commonwealth educators.

## **Pan-Commonwealth Activity in the Six Action Areas - 2**

### **3. Improving the quality of education**

#### **ComSec**

Following the Halifax Conference (14CCEM) in 2000 the Commonwealth Secretariat focused efforts in five main areas of quality improvement:

- (1) Resources for learning. (a) A series of workshops and training programmes led to development of resource materials for junior science and maths teachers. (b) ComSec sponsored low-priced editions of textbooks in key human development areas for tertiary-level students, in conjunction with BookPower.
- (2) School improvement (SI) in small states. (a) ComSec supported a study visit by Namibian educators to Seychelles to examine the successful SI programme there. (b) A survey was undertaken of SI efforts in 32 small states of the Commonwealth and yielded 16 responses (c) Conference held in Malta in April 2003 on incorporation of evaluation into SI programmes in small states.
- (3) Teacher training and professional development. (a) Collaboration with COL and Indira Gandhi National Open University to adapt ComSec head teacher training modules, first developed for Africa, for use in training Indian school principals using distance learning mode. IGNOU will construct a certificate-course programme based on the new modules. (2) Collaboration with Govt. of Tanzania, World Bank, ADEA and UNICEF in developing specialised multi-grade teacher training tools for use by TTCs. Nine draft modules, trialled, awaiting publication. (c) Assistance to Eastern Caribbean States in developing action plan for professional development of teachers. (d) Support for study of teacher education and training policies and practices in SADC region.
- (4) Qualifications frameworks. February 2003 conference in New Zealand for nine C'wealth countries leading to publication.
- (5) Citizenship education and Commonwealth values. (a) Conferences held in Trinidad and Guyana on developing citizenship education in Caribbean. (b) April 2002 Conference in S. Africa on a Commonwealth framework for heritage, multiculturalism and citizenship education. (c) a pan-Commonwealth roundtable in London on citizenship education in July 2002 agreed on establishment of CW Virtual Network on Citizenship Education (d) with the Cameroun National Centre on Education, the British Council and ComSec's Human Rights Unit sponsored a Symposium on Citizenship and Human Rights. Book donations on citizenship and human rights made to the Centre, the Ministry of Education and teachers colleges.

#### **COL**

- (1) Research and publications on strengthening quality of education. (2) Training in Singapore and New Delhi of teacher training college principals from Africa to improve their skills. (3) Support for regional meeting in Samoa to improve quality of vocational education in S. Pacific. (4) Assistance to Maldives to draw up development plan to improve post-secondary education using open and distance learning. (5) Work with teacher training leaders in Nigeria and India on quality assurance indicators for teacher education delivered by distance education. (6) Preparation of desk-based study for IIEP on "quality criteria in the provision of ODL in Sub-Saharan Africa" (7) Design of plan to improve teaching quality in secondary education for Bangladesh (8) Facilitation of the launch of "Green Teacher" – a Diploma in Environmental Education course by ODL for teachers in upper primary schools in India (9) Support for the development and launch of an MA Teacher Education (International) course by the Open University of Sri Lanka.

#### **ACU**

- (1) Leadership training programme (undertaken in conjunction with COL and the University of Abertay Dundee since 2000) for senior figures in African higher education. (2) Low-cost journals programme for African universities. (3) Retired Academic Database, which seeks to identify individuals for short-term positions in universities suffering from severe staff shortages

#### **ACEAB**

The Association's membership is focused on using assessment instruments to measure and improve quality and its conferences and other activities involve sharing of experience with those ends in mind.

#### **CCEAM**

Work on education leadership including book *'International perspectives on educational leadership'* and research into principals' roles in secondary schools in Tonga and Fiji..

#### **CEC and CCfE**

Both these organisations were active in 2003, through their conferences and other initiatives, in preparing the way for adoption of the Commonwealth Protocol on the Recruitment of Teachers. CCfE was also represented on the Commonwealth Working Party and participated actively in developing the text of the Protocol.

#### **CSC**

The UK Commonwealth Scholarship Commission with its secretariat at ACU introduced a Professional Fellowships scheme in 2002, providing Commonwealth professional associations and other relevant bodies in the UK with the opportunity to contribute to the professional development of Commonwealth nationals by hosting professionals on short attachments. LECT (see below) is one of the organisations that has availed itself of this offer.

#### **LECT**

- (1) Provides study visits for UK teachers to Commonwealth (and other) countries under UK Government's Teachers International Professional Development Programme (2) Travel grants for UK teachers to travel to other Commonwealth countries for professional development activities (3) Travel grants for Commonwealth teachers (outside the UK) to travel to other Commonwealth countries for professional development activities (4) Support for regional exchange and professional development programmes for teachers (5) Starting in 2004, Leadership Development Programme for Commonwealth Teachers - supported by Commonwealth Professional Development Fellowships (UK CSC)

*continued on page 18*

35. Here, in the main body of the report, it has only been possible to summarise the record of activities reported in the six Action Areas (see Boxed listing on pages 12-15). Those wanting more detail should consult particularly the reports prepared by ComSec and COL (Annex 7).

### **Pan-Commonwealth Activity in the Six Action Areas - 3**

#### **4. Using open and distance learning to overcome barriers**

##### **COL**

(1) Support for African participation in Kenya's National Consultative forum on Policy for ODL in September 2004. (2) Preparation of skill training materials for ODL delivery in garment industry in Bangladesh and farming in East Africa. (3) Co-operation with Canada and Caribbean to develop distance education programme within Canada's CSFP provision to enable Caribbean CW Scholars to pursue Canadian study programmes at a distance (4) Organisation of national forums on ODL in several countries (5) Strengthening of the in-service teacher training programme by distance mode of the National Teachers Institute, to reach out to rural and remote schools of Nigeria.

##### **CAM**

Conducts a distance-learning programme in museum studies at post-secondary level.

##### **CCfE**

Published one of its briefing notes in 2003 on Distance Education and the Commonwealth of Learning

##### **CEC**

Sponsors the Knowledge Aid for Sierra Leone project which is attempting to explore and develop the potential for improving education through internet-assisted learning.

##### **UKCSC**

Commonwealth Scholarships offered for study at a distance by UK now account for about one third of scholarship holders – 400 students now registered on distance learning courses

#### **5. Supporting education in difficult circumstances**

##### **ComSec**

(1) Post-Halifax mission sent to Sierra Leone to discuss post-conflict reconstruction needs and support given to development of framework for introduction of citizenship education to primary curriculum. (2) In Sri Lanka co-operation with Open University of SL to develop Diploma course to meet education needs of children with disabilities, and include peace and conflict resolution module in OUSL's foundation course (3) With ADEA held two high-level meetings in Africa (Mombasa 6/2004 and Cape Town 12/2004) to consider appropriate responses to education in difficult circumstances, focusing particularly on conflict situations and natural disasters. In Mombasa a Declaration was issued. From the Mombasa activity a resource book will be published in 2005.

##### **COL**

(1) Symposium in Nigeria being planned on use of ODL and ICT to promote access to education for nomadic groups. (2) National forum with Sierra Leone Ministry of Education on EDC in Feb. 2005. (3) Working with National Institute of Open School in India to build networks to support for education of out-of-school youth

##### **CCL**

Awards scholarships for girls in Commonwealth developing countries to attend secondary school. A high proportion of them are personally beset by difficult circumstances.

#### **6. Mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS in education**

##### **ComSec**

(1) Commissioned case studies on behaviour change strategies among teachers and learners in Swaziland, Namibia, Malawi, Zambia, leading to Risk Management Manual. (2) Held Ministerial consultation on HIV/AIDS in small states in September 2004 from which a Statement issued. (3) Conducted workshop in India for leaders of teachers unions on an HIV/AIDS curriculum for primary schools (4) Working with CFTC to support establishment of Chair in HIV/AIDS and Education at Univ of the West Indies.

##### **COL**

(1) Cameroonian students enabled through COL project to take a post-secondary education option in HIV/AIDS prevention by DE. (2) Installation, and associated training, of portable FM broadcasting stations that are used, *inter alia*, to broadcast health messages including those related to HIV/AIDS (3) With ComSec and Association of African Universities, development of toolkit on HIV/AIDS for higher education sector. (4) In addition to above, much work with ministries of health in the Commonwealth on education of public about HIV/AIDS.

##### **ACU**

Active in helping universities to recognise, address and, if possible, pre-empt the potentially devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on their staff, students, and on the communities they serve. In the pipe-line are: (1) a handbook for university leaders, giving guidelines towards a strategic response and good practice; and (2) a project with the University of Guyana and the University of the West Indies to develop strategies to address the impact of HIV and AIDS in the Guyana/Caribbean sub-region.

##### **CAPA**

Ran a programme in 2004/2005, with AAU and ADEA, on strengthening response of polytechnics in Africa to threat of HIV/AIDS.

##### **CASTME**

Has developed teaching aids for teacher- and community-use at primary level on HIV/AIDS through project at Wulugu in Ghana.

##### **RCS**

Organises youth-CHOGMs which serve as a vehicle for increasing AIDS-awareness.

##### **CYEC**

Helped organise C'wealth Youth Forum in Abuja. HIV/AIDS was a major theme and the subject of Communique recommendations.

## 4. The Commonwealth Vantage Point

### 4.1 Conceptual questions

36. The ToR for the project require the Consortium

*From keynote presentations and discussions to articulate “Commonwealthness” i.e. Commonwealth value added; how the Commonwealth can make a difference and what would constitute “measurable success” indicators or “realistic achievable outcomes” related to this Commonwealth niche.*

37. The Commonwealth contains 53 countries located on every continent and, with about 1.7b people, a quarter of the world’s population. But the resources at the disposal of its collective institutions are tiny: the inter-governmental institutions have only about £30m p.a. of programme funds to cover work in all sectors: equivalent, for example, to 0.75% of the UK’s development co-operation budget. Extension of this kind of analysis to the development co-operation budgets of all Commonwealth members – Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, South Africa and the rest – might well show that the multilateral Commonwealth share of the collective resources of Commonwealth donors was no more than a third of one percent.

38. The question that arises is whether there is any point in maintaining separate small-scale Commonwealth institutions and programmes for development co-operation. Might it not be better to direct efforts and resources through other channels, either bilateral agencies or multilateral agencies that operate on a larger scale and so are potentially able to maintain a larger pool of specialists and a wider range of services? Can the Commonwealth make a difference by collective effort, and if so where? Are there areas and functions where the Commonwealth has comparative advantage, and if so which are they? Can one identify some kind of niche in the broad spectrum of international co-operative activity for development that the Commonwealth can comfortably and productively fill, without simply apeing what others are doing on a larger scale and more effectively? In principle one should ask both whether the Commonwealth acting in concert can offer more effective services to its members than other bilateral or multilateral agencies can do: and whether the Commonwealth has particular insights and capacity that equip it to make a unique input to global efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other objectives.

### 4.1 The Commonwealth’s comparative advantage

39. The advantages that the Commonwealth sometimes claims for itself have been analysed by others in a far more comprehensive fashion than can be attempted here. This paper will confine itself to a brief summary of the main aspects of Commonwealth potential comparative advantage that were identified in the Workshops and in the correspondence associated with them. They are considered first in a general perspective and then in relation to education specifically.

#### *The overall comparative advantage*

40. A first particularity of the Commonwealth is in its make-up, with 53 member countries spread through the world’s continents and representing a huge range in population and geographic size, in income per head and in culture and religion. Reflecting this, Commonwealth leaders are wont to boast that the Commonwealth is a microcosm of the world community. In the next breath, however they are very likely to make the valid point that in certain important respects the Commonwealth is not a microcosm of the world community at all, for example because its membership contains a preponderance of tiny states, which gives the Commonwealth particular insights into their problems and makes it well placed to articulate and represent their point of view. It is also true that the Commonwealth’s composition is quite different from that of the world at large: it may have a quarter of the world’s overall population but it is badly under-represented in population terms among the industrialised countries (10%?) and middle-income countries. Although it has a large share of the poorest in the world, it was pointed out that (particularly in Africa) many of those most disadvantaged by climate, environment and conflict are outside and not inside the Commonwealth.

41. The association of comparatively rich and very poor states in a grouping like the Commonwealth does offer opportunities for informal dialogue among members and the reaching of consensual positions

on global development issues in the areas of debt, international financial mechanisms, trade, the environment and the like. The relative informality and manageable scale of Heads of Government meetings and ministerial conferences (and the absence in these exclusively English-speaking forums of the need for interpreters) facilitate the possibilities of real dialogue between rich and poor in the Commonwealth. The present year, 2005, will be a crucial test of this element of comparative advantage in terms of leadership and advocacy. Can Britain, with its membership of the EU and close relationships with the US, use its influence as President of the EU and Chair of the G8 to bring about significant improvement of the global development climate for its Commonwealth partners?

42. The actual location of the Commonwealth countries, in clusters of contiguous or neighbouring states, is another important characteristic in so far as it creates 'Commonwealth sub-regions' in Central and Eastern Africa, in South Asia, in the Caribbean and in the Pacific. These sub-regional institutions, many of them development-oriented, extend the reach of the Commonwealth and deepen its experience of engagement in co-operative programmes and projects. They form a part of the infrastructure for South-South co-operation, which the Commonwealth has traditionally promoted through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation.

43. Particularly important as a basis for co-operation is the shared heritage of the Commonwealth particularly, though not only, in terms of the 'three golden threads of language, law, and learning' that bind the members together. The common use of English is obviously a central factor in ease of communication and sharing of experience. Common understandings of the role of parliament, government, the judiciary and the military, and assignment of a respected role to the voluntary sector have been part of the Commonwealth tradition. Similar institutional patterns and traditions in respect of democratic institutions, the law, relationship of the public services and private sector, make the sharing of experience and learning from good practice elsewhere particularly apposite.

44. These elements of common heritage, extending to shared cultural interests in literature the arts and sport, have provided a basis for the articulation of Commonwealth values as proclaimed in Singapore and Harare – commitment to good governance, democracy and human rights, tolerance and respect for diversity, peaceful settlement of disputes, and so on.

45. They have also provided a framework within which movement of people has taken place: for permanent settlement and migration, for employment and trade, for personal and family reasons. As a result many individual Commonwealth citizens have kith and kin in another Commonwealth country and there are multiple connections and links in place across the Commonwealth involving local communities, voluntary associations and charitable bodies, faith groups, schools and colleges, firms and companies. Further it has led to the emergence of an extensive network of professionals with wide experience of developmental issues, and well-trying ways of addressing them, in the education and other sectors. These connections, underpinned by relatively good communications links, constitute a useful basis for co-operative programmes/projects.

46. The Commonwealth's own infrastructure for dialogue and co-operation represents a well-trying resource with important strengths. CHOGMs, Ministerial Conferences, and expert groups testify to the Commonwealth's 'convening power', even if it is not alone in this. (Cynics say that it is largely because the Commonwealth has so few significant resources to fight over that it manages to conduct its business so smoothly!). Commonwealth professional associations, the Commonwealth Foundation and Commonwealth of Learning, CSFP, all represent unique instruments for international co-operation and consultation that have been found to work well.

47. From among the many special roles the Commonwealth might play in the light of its comparative advantage, those that appear to stand out as useful Commonwealth functions include at least the following four:

- The advocacy role, campaigning for a more just and equitable world order with a fairer sharing of resources. Also promoting the global public good in all matters requiring international co-operative action (e.g. environment) or affecting

relations between states (trade, intellectual property rights, migration and brain drain etc)

- Provision of support services for individual countries and groups of countries engaging in negotiations with more powerful interests (e.g. the World Bank and IMF, wealthy countries and multinational corporations) on trade, aid, investment and other international protocols.
- Support for human rights and co-operating to ensure adherence to international conventions and agreements by all members of the Commonwealth association. Monitoring and support to encourage and ensure compliance.
- A special concern with the development of small states, their place in the world community, and securing a voice for them in international councils.

48. The case for developing the Commonwealth's political role as advocate, is related to the question of how far the Commonwealth can be effective as a single-handed executor of development programmes, working solely within the resources of the association – whether multilateral, bilateral or voluntary-sector. Knowing that these resources are very limited, the Commonwealth Secretariat and COL have in practice learned to 'piggy-back' quite extensively on resources at the disposal of other multilateral and bilateral agencies, that may be willing to sponsor or co-sponsor particular Commonwealth activities and projects. It has also acted as a broker to help unlock the resources of other assistance agencies for development in Commonwealth countries. These are well-tried ways of extending the Commonwealth's reach.

49. In parallel, the Commonwealth could more actively embrace the idea that part of its distinctive contribution is to act as a catalyst engaging in advocacy, intervention and persuasion in global forums, with the aim of ensuring that other more powerful bodies take effective action in the global (and Commonwealth) interest. In education this would involve active dialogue with the UN and UNESCO, the World Bank and other multilateral agencies and participation in international task forces and working groups addressing issues of particular concern to Commonwealth member states. To engage successfully in such activities the Commonwealth Secretariat needs to expand and deepen its analytical capability.

50. Such functions are of course applicable to all sectors, including education.

#### *The comparative advantage in education*

51. Education co-operation in the Commonwealth has a long history and the central education secretariat predates the formation of the Commonwealth Secretariat itself by six years. The workshop participants identified four principal components of the Commonwealth's current particular strengths and comparative advantage in education.

- Similar institutional arrangements of education systems. Common features include school organisation and curriculum, structures of teacher employment, qualifications and examination systems, boards of governors and school committees, inspectorates. This provides a strong basis for fruitful exchange of experience and sharing of good practice.
- A pan-Commonwealth institutional infrastructure in education that appears stronger than that in any other sector. Established institutions without parallel elsewhere include the Commonwealth of Learning with its expertise in distance learning, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, and newer initiatives like the Commonwealth Protocol on the Recruitment of Teachers and the Centre for Commonwealth Education. The Commonwealth Education Fund, though funded only by the UK, is innovative in concept. The presence of regional education institutions with a predominantly Commonwealth membership, particularly universities (South Pacific and West Indies) and examination bodies (Pacific, Caribbean, West Africa) is also relevant.
- A well developed structure of civil-society organisations committed to education development in the Commonwealth and to working with governments and multilateral organisations. Outstanding among them is the Association of Commonwealth Universities, but there are two dozen others making greater or

lesser contributions to Commonwealth education development and co-operation, mostly in membership of the recently formed Commonwealth Consortium for Education.

- Specialist experience in particular areas stemming from recent and present work by Commonwealth agencies. Examples of in-depth expertise would include Commonwealth work on management and support of teachers, or education development in small states. COL's work in open and distance learning is internationally pre-eminent, as is ACU's role in benchmarking higher education performance and promoting women academics' professional development. In the past the Commonwealth has had international recognition for its work in other fields such as student mobility and higher education co-operation and institution building.

#### 4.3 The Commonwealth niche in the six Action Areas

52. The above factors – relating to the Commonwealth in general and to its education capacity in particular – are broad based. The Consortium was also invited to specify what were the particular considerations that could help to provide a particular Commonwealth entry point in each of the six Action Areas. Workshop participants mentioned the following factors.

##### *Achieving universal primary education*

- This was an MD Goal and, as such, a stated Commonwealth priority.
- Commonwealth countries in South Asia and Africa account for a major part of the global deficit, so there is a sense in which the global problem is very much a Commonwealth problem.
- Many Commonwealth countries in Africa have in previous periods had gross enrolment ratios in primary education above 100, and so nominally achieved UPE. They have now regressed. This suggests the Commonwealth may provide a particularly good 'laboratory' for understanding not only how to achieve UPE, but also the conditions for its sustainability.
- The Commonwealth Education Fund, though not at present well integrated in the pan-Commonwealth infrastructure, offers an innovative approach to advocacy for UPE (and progress in some of the other Action Areas).

##### *Eliminating gender disparities*

- This too was an MD Goal and thus a stated Commonwealth priority
- Commonwealth countries of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa include many with wide gender disparities. A large proportion of the girls out of primary school are in Commonwealth countries.
- The linking of Gender and Education in the Secretariat and regular triennial meetings of Education and Women's Affairs Ministers could give the Commonwealth particular 'purchase' on this problem (but this remains potential rather than actuality – the latest WAMM for example appears hardly to have discussed this MDG).
- Commonwealth countries have been among the first to recognise male under-achievement as an important aspect of gender inequality: a phenomenon experienced not only in UK, but also in the Caribbean, South East Nigeria, and SE Asia.
- In higher education ACU's work and network-building on professional development of women academics, some of it with the support of UNESCO and Carnegie, has made it an international leader.

##### *Improving the quality of education*

- The similarity of institutional arrangements among Commonwealth countries offers scope for useful interventions in specific areas of quality improvement.

- Commonwealth Secretariat work with ADEA on strengthening the teaching profession, and programmes for headteachers, gave it an early lead in this area, though other agencies have greatly increased their involvement in the past decade. Establishment of this as a Commonwealth ‘niche’ may depend partly on future progress with actualisation of the Commonwealth Teachers Grouping.
- The existence of Commonwealth professional associations in areas of education like examinations and education management offers potential scope for creative collaboration, even though it has to be recognised that these associations presently have very limited reach.

*Using distance learning to overcome barriers*

- The Commonwealth of Learning with 15 years operational experience is the leading international agency in this field.
- Commonwealth countries themselves have deep infrastructure in this area and long experience of using ODL in extension work, correspondence courses, adult education, open schooling, open colleges and universities.
- Recent initiatives by the Canadian and British Commonwealth Scholarship agencies have developed a bank of valuable experience in using awards to support international study at a distance.

*Supporting education in difficult circumstances*

- Emergencies and natural disasters are not a specifically Commonwealth problem, but member countries have had bad recent experiences with hurricanes (Caribbean), floods (Mozambique and perennially Bangladesh), dam collapse (Pakistan), volcanoes (Montserrat), tsunamis (India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and other Commonwealth countries bordering the Indian Ocean) and these can be particularly devastating for small states of which the Commonwealth has many.
- Conflict. In general Commonwealth countries have not been the scene of the worst recent international conflicts, although Kashmir is a source of continuing tension; nor (with exceptions such as N. Ireland, Sierra Leone, Uganda) of serious internal conflicts. But Commonwealth countries have been prominent in hosting overspill refugees from conflicts in neighbouring countries. Pakistan, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda all figure very high on international list of refugee hosts and they have considerable experience of accommodating refugee populations.

*Mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS in education*

- A Commonwealth problem, to the extent that its incidence has particularly affected the Commonwealth countries of Africa and is increasing at an alarming rate in the Commonwealth Caribbean and Asia.
- Commonwealth infrastructure in youth and gender, though modest in scale, offers possibilities of reinforcing efforts through CW health and education programmes.

## 5. An Agenda for Future Activity in the Six Action Areas

### 5.1 Conceptual Considerations

53. The terms of reference for the project ask the Consortium

*To identify potential gaps that could be the focus for future Commonwealth-driven component, (i.e.- a portfolio of pilot activities or research) and ways of addressing these gaps which could be undertaken by a range of Commonwealth Partners.*

*To identify both short and long term research gaps to assist the Commonwealth Secretariat in taking forward the Action Plan.*

54. The Workshops interpreted these elements in their terms of reference to indicate that they should

1. identify priority issues in the six Action Areas that the Commonwealth could usefully address, bearing in mind the most urgent needs facing its member countries, the Commonwealth's own characteristics and capacity, and the desirability of avoiding duplication of what others were already doing effectively and well.
2. make suggestions for useful activity in those areas. This might take a number of forms: for example advocacy and lobbying; concerting action by member countries to attain desired results; commissioning or undertaking studies and research; making available guides and resource books; undertaking pilot projects; or acting in a brokerage role to ensure the necessary actions are taken.

55. The presentation that follows draws on the reports of the workshops that took place in the UK on each of the six Action Areas, and on documents emanating from the supplementary activities. It is evident from the reports that the groups were not equally successful in focusing on the objectives in paragraphs 53-54, and in the time at their disposal it was not always easy for participants to order their priorities.

### 5.2 Some common themes

56. The discussion below in sub-Section 5.3 is organised for convenience under the six Action Areas even though - as pointed out earlier - the Action Areas are closely interconnected, and activities identified in one area may well impact on others. A further set of issues, including GATS, Intellectual Property Rights and Cross-border Enrolment discussed at the ODL Workshop, do not fall strictly within the Action Areas. Since however they are closely linked to the Action Areas, and had in fact been the subject of discussion at 15CCEM, proposals on these issues are included below as a separate category (5.3(G)).

57. Certain prominent themes kept recurring in the different discussions on the individual Action Areas. Some of the issues and approaches that participants found to be common to all the Areas include:

1. A need for briefing and other help to member states, especially the smaller ones, to enable them to grapple with the implications for them of complex international issues/ initiatives/conventions; and to assist them, where so requested, to prepare for international negotiations.
2. A need for better data as a basis for planning. This applies both to basic data of the kind that is supplied to world bodies for international data sets – where there are too many ‘blank’ entries against Commonwealth countries – and to more disaggregated data at both national and local levels. Could the Commonwealth be of more assistance in this area?
3. The special problems faced by small states arising from scale, isolation and dependence. Their smallness makes them especially vulnerable to catastrophes like natural disasters and

HIV/AIDS, and to the phenomenon of ‘brain drain’. This is a dimension that any Commonwealth programme has to bear in mind, even while recognising that many Commonwealth small states score better on the Human Development Index than some of the larger fellow-members of the Commonwealth.

4. The most productive ways to learn from one another. Commonwealth co-operation is largely predicated on the value of international sharing of experience and good practice through conferences and meetings, collections of case studies, exchanges, study visits, and links. More rigorous thinking needs to be applied to questions of how lessons of good practice elsewhere are most effectively disseminated and how they can best be learned.

5. The idea of peer review. This finds favour as a way of supporting individual countries’ efforts to attain the MDGs, to achieve compliance with international conventions and declarations (including Commonwealth ones) to which they have subscribed, and to cope with the many difficult challenges they face. It has the potential to provide a fruitful way of exchanging experience and sharing good practice, especially on a sub-regional basis.

6. The centrality of teachers for progress in all the Action Areas. Management and support for teachers, their status and morale, professional competence, remuneration and deployment are key to progress in the Action Areas. The Commonwealth has a record of productive engagement in this area.

7. The scope for using non-government bodies as partners in development. Partnerships between government and civil society organisations of all kinds – faith-based bodies, community groups, women’s associations, professional organisations - should be a characteristic of Commonwealth co-operative programmes in the Action Areas. Many CSOs possess a depth of development expertise and a special capacity for mobilising public opinion and awareness.

8. Linking education with work in other sectors. Progress in the education Action Areas depends on parallel action in complementary areas of health, youth, gender, and economic affairs. The tendency for Commonwealth agencies, and divisions and sections within them, to work in watertight compartments persists and requires continuous attention.

9. Three focal points for action: the poorest, orphans, language policy.

- Concentration on the poorest. Poverty lies at the root of many of the challenges faced by Commonwealth countries in the Action Areas.
- The plight of orphans is a neglected area that needs to be addressed if the MDGs are to be attained, especially in Action Areas 1, 3, 5 and 6.
- Policy on language of instruction is a key issue for enrolment and for learning progress.

### 5.3 Gaps and opportunities in particular action areas

58. The following list has been distilled from the reports of the workshops.

#### *A. Achieving universal primary education*

- A1. Campaign in international forums on macro-economic issues to mobilise resources for UPE by introducing more favourable regimes on international financing, aid, trade, debt
- A2. Ensure budget transparency in relation to allocations for (primary) education.
- A3. Analysing the sustainability of UPE, understanding better why in the past some countries have relapsed, and how likelihood of future relapse may be minimised.

- A4. Support creation of improved data-bases at national level, and disaggregation at local level to understand better the profile of those not entering school and dropping out. Actual attendance as distinct from enrolment should be addressed.
- A5. Use inter-regional and inter-country comparisons to assess the actual and potential contribution to attainment of UPE of good practice in such fields as:
  - Multi-grade teaching
  - The role of private school provision
  - Decentralisation of school management
  - Language policy
  - Deployment of teachers, structure of the teaching profession, and teachers' conditions of service.

*B. Eliminating gender disparities*

- B1. Mobilise more actively women's networks in alliance with education and health behind the gender parity MDG. This applies both to inter-ministerial dialogue (WAMM, CCEM, health ministers), to intra-Secretariat operations, and to use of women's organisations locally.
- B2. Extend past Commonwealth work on assessment of progress towards attainment of the gender parity MDG, and explore the feasibility of incorporating human rights indicators in measures of gender disparities.
- B3. Develop locally based data to identify reasons for girls' under-representation, and identify pockets of difficulty. This should include information on actual attendance, not just enrolment, for girls. (Link with A4 above).
- B4. Extend Commonwealth work on gender budgets explicitly to education and incorporate this dimension in CFTC's budget-tracking work.
- B5. Develop women's leadership/advocates/ambassadors/ role models to address gender disparities in education.
- B6. Take stock of the best means (including peer review) for collation, analysis and dissemination of different countries' best practices in girls' education, and apply the conclusions derived from this stocktaking.
- B7. Create a website to be hosted by ComSec or by the ACU as a focal point to locate up-to-date information about such matters as research grants and scholarships; examples of current policies and practices; training materials; statistical data; research reports; benchmarks against which universities can monitor their progress; information on conferences and training programmes; contacts for potential collaborative activities or consultancies on gender-related issues; link programmes.
- B8. Provide and demonstrate clear leadership, committed to the development *and application* of gender-equitable policies, backed by sound legislative frameworks, and the setting and meeting of appropriate targets subject to regular audit.
- B9. Underpin such leadership by promoting, undertaking, reporting and disseminating research about gender disparities in education, (on e.g. pedagogy as it affects men and women, the impacts of various interventions) to underpin the development of better policies and practices.

*C. Improving the quality of education*

- C1. Re-affirm that the highest priority for quality improvement is the morale and status of the teaching profession. The Commonwealth Secretariat with its partners should build on its work in teacher management, support and professional development.
- C2. Produce a series of short guides/resource books on aspects of quality improvement, possibly modelled on earlier Secretariat series.
- C3. Develop strategies for productive professional interchange in areas of quality development and quality assurance, taking advantage of similar/common features of Commonwealth education systems.

- C4. Apply technical co-operation and exchange programmes to strengthen the development and use of quality relevant indicators, and collection and analysis of the necessary data to underpin them.

*D. Using open and distance learning to overcome barriers*

59. In this area COL is already very active and it would be unproductive for new proposals to run counter to, or to duplicate, its programmes. The following have been selected from a rather long list of suggestions on p10 of the ODL Workshop report, some of them somewhat general. COL is now widely consulting governments, institutions and practitioners with a view to the preparation of its Three-Year Plan 2006-2009 that will lay out its programmes for the future. After approval of the Plan by COL's Board, CCEMs are asked to endorse it. Until the Plan is approved there cannot be certainty what will be undertaken, but it is anticipated that the following areas will all be embraced in some fashion.

- D1. Promote knowledge sharing and dissemination of good practice in the use of ODL in particular educational areas (education in difficult circumstances, teacher education).
- D2. Use ODL to enhance teacher education and teacher professional development capacity.
- D3. Promote the legitimacy of ODL via validation, equivalency, good-practice guidelines.
- D4. Develop mechanisms to facilitate accreditation of courses between countries.
- D5. Use Commonwealth school networking not only to broaden curriculum and cement Commonwealth links, but also to encourage development of e-learning.
- D6. Advocate, and raise awareness about, the use of open schooling to increase access to school level education in situations where students cannot attend conventional schools for a variety of reasons, such as economic and cultural issues.
- D7. Support literacy and livelihoods through ODL.
- D8. Assist existing institutions to strengthen their ODL delivery systems and the ODL competencies of their staff.
- D9. Take forward the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) following the plan set out in the *Invitation to Participate*.

*E. Supporting education in difficult circumstances*

- E1. Develop simple guidelines for curriculum elements in school that would assist disaster-preparedness.
- E2. Undertake development work on an accelerated curriculum for over-age learners re-entering school after emergencies.
- E3. Promote research on strategies for rehabilitation of children post-emergency and post-conflict, with priority for orphans.
- E4. Work through international machinery to ensure that education forms an integral part of response to emergencies, and that humanitarian relief is more closely co-ordinated with longer term development assistance.

*F. Mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS in education*

- F1. Develop a resource book for heads on running a school where HIV/AIDS is a major issue, to include material on coping strategies in cases where teachers are absent (use of multi-grade teaching etc) and support strategies for children.
- F2. Work on profile of HIV/AIDS by mobilising leaders to address issue. Designate a Commonwealth Spokesman on HIV/AIDS and use Commonwealth Day for messages re HIV/AIDS.
- F3. Involve Commonwealth Secretariat in work of Inter-Agency Task Team.
- F4. Give priority to orphans.
- F5. Use Commonwealth Youth infrastructure in pro-active way.

G. *Themes addressed outside the Action Area limits*

GATS

- G1. Provide briefing and assistance for Governments in formulating negotiating positions.

Intellectual Property Rights

- G2. Provide neutral information and advice to governments, complementing work COL is already doing with a group of IP specialists in Commonwealth countries to prepare guidance documents on intellectual property as it pertains to open and distance learning.
- G3. Promote open courseware and/or differentials in charges applying to acquisition of 1<sup>st</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> world Intellectual Property, building on what COL is already doing in collaboration with the Hewlett Foundation, eduSource Canada and other organisations, to create and make available free open education resources.

Cross-border Enrolment

- G4. Develop quality and regulatory frameworks in international, cross-border education.
- G5. Promote DL scholarships (in addition to conventional scholarships).
- campaign for provision in awards schemes of more opportunities for DL study mode
  - clarify refugee eligibility
  - better information on availability, sources and conditions of DL awards
- G6. Work with/through the ACU/UUK Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, on quality assurance in cross-border education and particularly on the provision of local student support.

## 6. Good Practice Awards

### 6.1 The Proposal

60. The ToR for the project asked the Consortium to *assist with “criteria” from each of the sessions which feed into procedures for Best Practice Awards to be presented at 16CCEM*. This was in recognition that in Edinburgh Commonwealth Ministers had resolved to promote education individually and collectively by (among others)

(Para 31 b) “making awards for good practice in the six Action Areas, to be presented at 16CCEM”

61. At the five workshops taking place in Marlborough House when representatives of the Commonwealth Secretariat were able to be present, the initial thinking of ComSec about the awards was explained to workshop participants and reactions were invited.

62. Basically the ComSec proposal was that an Awards Committee, serviced by ComSec but with independent members, would be established in the first months of 2005. The Committee would work out the criteria for ‘eligible good practice’ to be the subject of submissions and awards. It would also work out the steps and procedures to be followed in notifying ministries of education in Commonwealth countries about the awards, the submission of entries, and the procedures of selection for awards from among the entries received. A process of screening and evaluation would produce a list of around a dozen finalists to be invited to attend 16CCEM, where their entries would be judged by an independent jury, and an Awards Ceremony would be held. Awards would be made in each of the six Action Areas as requested by Ministers. Nominations would be made solely by Ministries.

63. These outline proposals would be refined and a letter would be sent to Ministries of Education seeking their agreement to what was proposed, before the Committee was established and detailed work was undertaken. It would also be necessary to clarify the available budget for the management of the awards programme and for the awards themselves.

### 6.2 Reactions and Suggestions

64. Time available for consideration of the Awards Programme varied considerably between workshops and not all of them were able to consider the proposals at length. Certain of the responses below were common to several of the workshops, however

- ❖ It would be desirable to specify in each Action Area a particular focus for the awards, each time they were offered, to simplify the process of selection and judging. Otherwise, because some of the Action Areas are so wide in their compass, the awarders could too easily find themselves making subjective judgments about the relative importance of fields of intervention rather than of the merit of the good practices themselves. The UPE group proposed that the focus of the first awards should be on the poorest and most marginalised children; the Quality workshop suggested that teacher professional development could be the focus of quality awards.
- ❖ The focus of the awards could usefully reflect Commonwealth values and its strategic approach to education development. If the principle of partnership with civil society, and a focus on greater equity or respect for diversity are important to the Commonwealth, such perspectives could be incorporated in the criteria. Regard should also be had to the likely next theme of 16CCEM, if known in time and relevant to awards.
- ❖ Ways should be found to modify the ComSec initial proposal that only Ministries could make submissions. Civil society, institutions and individuals should be able to make submissions as well as Ministries of Education. Ministries were not in all cases well informed about professional practice and innovation at school and district level.

- ❖ It was highly desirable to simplify the administratively complex-looking schema that a ComSec paper had outlined. Bureaucracy should be kept to a minimum and administrative costs should not be disproportionate to the value of the awards themselves.
- ❖ Maximum publicity should be given to the Awards at the advertisement stage and at the awards ceremony at 16CCEM.
- ❖ ‘Good practice’ chosen for awards should
  - be replicable elsewhere
  - have a proven track record, and not be simply a blueprint/proposal
  - take account of the programme implementers as well as the designers and sponsors
  - focus on substance as much as presentation. (try to avoid favouring unfairly those with resources to make a slick presentation).
- ❖ The planning group for the Awards should give guidance on the following matters
  - what constitutes a ‘practice’. A programme? A project? An institution? A procedure? A policy? All of the above?
  - whether donor-assisted projects and programmes would be eligible or excluded (or form a separate category).
  - whether only ‘innovations’ are eligible (provided they have some track record), or whether established policies and practices particular to the submitting country or institution could also be considered.
  - whether to specify levels of education for submissions and awards.
  - whether or not to introduce provisions that would ensure regional representation in the receipt of awards (would it be acceptable if free and fair competition resulted in the awards in all six areas being taken by India or Scotland/UK?).

65. It was noted that COL already had a programme of awards in distance learning. Consideration could be given to making these the open learning component of any wider scheme.

## 7. The Way Forward

66. This document represents an attempt by the Commonwealth Consortium for Education to distil the main conclusions to be drawn from the series of workshops and consultations that it was mandated to hold on the six Action Areas where Commonwealth Ministers of Education would like to see constructive work undertaken. Ministers generally, and the Conference hosts in particular, were looking for outcomes from 15CCEM that could be implemented and would make a difference to Commonwealth education development.

67. The challenge was to find ways of giving a more concrete reality to the aspirations and statements of intention contained in the Edinburgh Communique and Action Plan. These were understandably expressed in somewhat general terms, but they represented Ministers' considered judgment on priorities and where the focus of Commonwealth collective action should be. Could they be operationalised through the collective efforts of Commonwealth partners?

68. The approach in the deliberations undertaken was, therefore, to explore the dimensions of the Commonwealth resource in these areas and to identify the themes and issues where organisations with pan-Commonwealth education mandate could make a distinctive contribution in developing responses and solutions to the challenges that Commonwealth member countries face. The report has attempted to outline the potential and limitations of Commonwealth activity in education, recent and current activity in the six action Areas identified at 15CCEM, and possible strategic approaches and particular programmes that the Commonwealth could consider adopting and undertaking.

69. The sense that emerges from the report is that the Commonwealth has a well developed infrastructure in education, with a wide array of programmes by individual agencies, both inter-governmental and non-governmental. In this case however the total effect seems to be less than the sum of the various parts because in most cases the different bodies take little account of overall Commonwealth priorities set by Heads of Government and Ministers of Education, or of the activities of their partners. It was consciousness of this fragmentation, and the possibility of achieving greater effectiveness through concerted effort that inspired the creation of the Consortium nearly four years ago.

70. Even with the creation of the Consortium it remains true that limited progress has been made in mapping the range of organisations and programmes in education that carry a 'Commonwealth' title. One of the urgent needs identified in the course of executing this project is the preparation of an information guide or directory setting out the mandates and activities of the two or three dozen Commonwealth associations, organisations and programmes in the education sector.

71. The aim of achieving greater coherence in Commonwealth education efforts does not presuppose development of a centrally directed programme to which each body would have to subordinate its own activities. Independent bodies have their own mandates and constituencies, and they themselves must determine how they dispose their own resources.

72. At the same time many of them would undoubtedly welcome guidance on Commonwealth priorities and on the particular areas where their contribution would be most valued. They would also welcome the opportunity to work with others in developing and executing projects of acknowledged importance, and would find it helpful in seeking funds to be able to have a Commonwealth 'imprimatur' on their application. This is the rationale for developing some kind of Commonwealth Action Plan addressing the six Action Areas that Ministers have identified.

73. An immediate issue therefore is whether, with the blessing of Ministers and under Commonwealth Secretariat and COL leadership, it might be possible for the Commonwealth education constituency to collectively agree a slate of initiatives in the six Action Areas, of the kind set out in this report, and to agree among themselves through a process of voluntary offers which ones they might try to initiate, and

where possible implement, in time for 16CCEM. This agreed 'menu', effectively constituting an interim Action Plan would underpin funding applications to multilateral and bilateral agencies.

74. This report, together with the attendant workshops and other activities on which it is based, has been commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat and it will fall to the Secretariat to decide what follow-up action to take and whether there is any 'mileage' in the kind of proposal outlined above.

75. If the Secretariat sees merit in what has been suggested, two steps might be taken in the near future. First, the Secretariat might deem it appropriate to convene a consultation by all the interested parties, using this report as the baseline document but inviting other comments and proposals. Second, it might use the forthcoming series of regional consultations with Ministers of Education to take soundings on what has been proposed.

76. For their part, members of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education are at the disposal of the Secretariat to help take matters forward, in whatever way is found appropriate.