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**15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers  
Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom, 27-30 October 2003**

## **THE EDINBURGH COMMUNIQUÉ AND ACTION PLAN**

1. Education Ministers and representatives from forty-eight Commonwealth countries met in Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom from 27-30 October 2003 for the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (15CCEM).
2. The essence of the Conference can best be encapsulated in the following statements:

*I am a beautiful, confident, strong, educated young woman... We need more of us.*

*Carolanne Makakaufaki, Tonga, Youth Summit Delegate*

*If we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure.*

*Professor Amartya Sen, Keynote Speaker*

3. Unique about this Conference was the input of a Youth Summit and a Parallel Symposium, which fed directly into the Ministerial Conference. Ministers engaged in discussions around the theme of the Conference and the six Action areas in break-out sessions with the Parallel Symposium and the Youth Summit. The range and complexity of the discussions are summarised in

Annex A, attached. Summaries of the Conclusions of the Youth Summit and the Parallel Symposium are attached at Annexes B and C.

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.
6. The key point made by delegates from the Youth Summit was that young people should be directly involved in developing education systems, including participation in Youth Councils, and involvement in the selection of teachers and in the design and evaluation of resource materials and the curriculum.
7. Running through the recommendations made by the Parallel Symposium was the recurring theme of Partnership without which, they suggested, future action on all six Action Areas could not be taken forward successfully. Such partnerships 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.
8. They also recommended sharing knowledge through a network of Best Practice. To show the importance that the Commonwealth places on this, they recommended the creation of an award for Best Practice in each of the six Action Areas, which would be presented for the first time during 16CCEM.
9. Ministers affirmed that education is a crucial means for adapting to and directing change; reducing poverty, ensuring security; improving health and well-being; enhancing economic prosperity and personal security and safety; promoting fairness, justice, and peace; and achieving environmental sustainability.
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.
11. Welcoming delegates to Scotland, First Minister the Rt Hon Jack McConnell MSP, said that *Scotland has a long tradition of valuing and investing in education. I hope that we can all learn from the ideas, expertise and experience from around the world which is collected here this week.*

12. The UK Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon Charles Clarke MP, opened the 15CCEM with the statement that *education is at the centre of the Commonwealth*. He launched the Global Gateway, an on-line system to promote and enable partnership working to support Commonwealth education.
13. Ministers affirmed the unique value of the Commonwealth recognising that it is ideally placed to share expertise, resources and best practices in education as a vital component in attaining the individual and collective goals and aspirations for their countries. Noting the significance that Youth Summit delegates placed on meeting together as members of the Commonwealth, it is important to provide opportunities for young people to learn about the Commonwealth and its values.
14. Education Ministers discussed the critical issue of cross-country teacher recruitment. This was viewed by Ministers as one of the most urgent issues to be addressed in "closing the gap". They established a working group on this issue, to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, to develop appropriate and ethical codes of conduct. The working group is to report to all Ministers by the end of April 2004, and an ad hoc group of Ministers will finalise the document by September 2004.
15. Ministers emphasised the importance of ongoing, lifelong professional development for all teachers including the leadership development of head teachers.
16. Ministers accepted the new structure of the Commonwealth Secretariat. They recognised that it complements the already existing Commonwealth advantages, namely, the broad similarity amongst educational systems, the almost universal use of the English language, and the multiplicity of civil society organisations and professional associations that exist at a Commonwealth level and which contribute to Commonwealth education and training. Ministers approved the Education Section's Work Plan which focuses on the new role of advocacy, brokering and acting as a catalyst.
17. Having made notable progress with the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, Ministers gratefully received Malta's declaration to become the fourteenth country to agree to fund a Fellowship under the Plan. Ministers recognised that smaller states need more scholarships and fellowships.
18. Ministers supported the establishment of the Centre for Commonwealth Education, a partnership between the Commonwealth Institute and Cambridge University as a significant additional asset in meeting the educational challenges facing the Commonwealth. They welcomed the announcement of a £1.25m private donation to the centre for carrying out some of its future activities.
19. Ministers complimented the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) on its work and accomplishments of the past three years. They approved the 2003-06 business plan and pledged financial support. In view of the impending

retirement of President Gajaraj Dhanarajan, they recorded their appreciation for his significant contribution to the Commonwealth through his many years of dedicated work. They also welcomed the new Chair, Mr Lewis Perinbam.

20. Ministers endorsed the proposal, requested at the 14CCEM, for a Virtual University for Small States, designed to offer opportunities for expanded access to education, teacher training and upgrading, and which may also benefit other regions and states of the Commonwealth. Ministers decided that COL should take leadership of this capacity-building initiative, and collaborate with existing resource institutions in member countries. In order for this initiative not to be a burden on COL, Ministers directed COL to work with the Commonwealth Secretariat to identify sources of funding to take this concept forward.
21. Education Ministers agreed to the attached message to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), to be held in Abuja, Nigeria in December 2003 emphasising the importance of mobilising a broad range of Commonwealth resources in meeting educational targets by 2015, as a contribution to social reconstruction in the Commonwealth.
22. Ministers were unanimous in voicing their appreciation for the outstanding hospitality and warm welcome extended by the UK and the Scottish hosts.
23. Ministers warmly welcomed the suggestion that the next Conference be held in Malaysia, subject to confirmation by the Malaysian Government.
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.

## **THE EDINBURGH ACTION PLAN**

### **MINISTERS AGREED:**

25. To meet with Youth Summit delegates from their own country to consider the outcomes of 15CCEM.
26. That every future CCEM will have a Youth Summit where Ministers inform delegates on progress and consult them on future actions. As the Youth Summit said, *We can't do it ourselves, but you can't do it without us.*
27. That a Working Group be established to consider cross-country teacher recruitment, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, to report back to

Ministers in April 2004; and that an *ad hoc* group of interested Ministers would then meet not later than September 2004 to agree action.

28. Recognising that many countries regard education as a public good and that there is widespread concern that the inclusion of education under the WTO and GATS as a service could lead to its commodification, Ministers agreed that Commonwealth Heads of Government should affirm the paramount importance of safeguarding the values, standards and quality of education.
29. That the Commonwealth as a whole, and most particularly the wealthier countries within it, use their influence within the G8 and elsewhere to ensure that the Dakar commitments are adhered to by the international community, in particular within the framework of the fast track initiative.
30. To develop mechanisms to include learners in decisions about their education.
31. To individually and collectively promote education by:
  - a) Sponsoring an international commonwealth education day where the funding raised will be used to train young people as peer educators in HIV/AIDS
  - b) making awards for good practice in the six Action Areas, to be presented at 16CCEM
  - c) Promoting teaching as a career and encouraging teacher representation at parallel forums at 16CCEM
  - d) Introducing and/or strengthening initiatives to promote the involvement of parents and guardians in education..
32. Ministers agreed to develop a shared understanding of the elements which constitute an excellent education system, recognising that education must be of high quality if it is to make a positive difference to the lives of young people and their communities.
33. That the more developed countries should be requested to facilitate greater opportunities for higher education and skills training for Commonwealth citizens, in a spirit of co-operation and sharing.
34. To ask the Commonwealth Secretariat to take stock of best practices in eliminating gender disparity.
35. To share best practice and expertise in supporting children in difficult circumstances.
36. To include compulsory age-appropriate HIV/AIDS education in the curriculum of every education system within the Commonwealth, including teacher education.

Commonwealth Secretariat  
Edinburgh, Scotland  
30 October 2003

## **ANNEX A**

### **SUMMARY OF THE KEY POINTS RAISED IN THE DISCUSSION ON THE THEME OF THE CONFERENCE AND THE SIX ACTION AREAS**

#### **ACCESS**

1. Ministers recognised that too many children in the Commonwealth are still denied access to education. The barriers to access were identified as culture; lack of finance, proper infrastructure and teachers. In order to address the problem, Ministers recommended development of partnerships between governments, civil society, donor organisations and the international lending agencies. In order to increase access at tertiary level the more developed countries needed to offer university places to Commonwealth students at concessionary rates.

#### **INCLUSION**

2. Ministers fully recognised that inclusion is a critical issue in education; that is inclusion of each individual in the educational process. Accordingly, barriers to participation should be identified and removed and provision made for each individual to obtain high quality relevant education. There should be equality of opportunity irrespective of gender, religious belief, ethnicity, socio-economic status, colour or disability. Every student should have access to good quality education at least to the end of primary school.
3. Ministers identified the development of the necessary policies, strategies and legislation as critical and urged governments which have not yet taken the necessary actions to do so urgently.

#### **ACHIEVEMENT**

4. Ministers felt that a key action in addressing achievement was the development of a clear definition of achievement. They felt that since achievement was likely to mean different things to different members, each country should articulate its own definition and then identify clear standards for measurement. Ministers also strongly suggested that measures of achievement must be based on the full value added as a result of education and not simply on academic outcomes.

5. They were also of the view that whereas there were many variables which impinged on achievement, school leadership, teacher quality and parental involvement were critical variables for which training must be provided.
6. Ministers also noted that whereas the scourge of HIV/AIDS has been noted and was being addressed, other impediments to achievement like illegal drugs needed to receive similar attention.
7. Ministers noted the importance of developing instruments for measurement and the development of standards.

**Ministers took a particular note of the six Action Areas for specific focus leading to 16CCEM and they vowed to work in harmony with broad range of commonwealth resource capacity to address these areas:**

## **UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION**

8. Ministers stressed that poverty is the biggest barrier to the provision of universal primary education. Poverty can only effectively be addressed if governments face the requirement to modify the existing international trade and finance regimes to create a more level playing field.
9. Ministers reaffirmed the priority to be given to the UPE but insisted it be set in the context of the Dakar consensus on Education for All (EFA) that stressed the importance of basic education. They emphasized that the issue must not be restricted to the concept of access, but more importantly to completion. Moreover, quality education is essential if learners are to have a realistic expectation of a productive future.
10. Continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, along with the training of new teachers is essential for both the provision and the quality of education. Given the massive requirements, open and distance learning should be seen as a key means to address these requirements. In addition, ODL may be a means to address the particular needs of marginalised and mobile minorities, including Nomads.
11. One of the main groups not participating in primary education is girls, so increasing their attendance is essential. Security and the need for separate facilities were considered critical for girls to access school-based education. Community and family support could play key roles.
12. In addition, if there is to be universal access, those with special needs must be included.

## **ELIMINATING GENDER DISPARITY**

13. Ministers were keen to achieve the UN millennium target date of 2005 to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education. Ministers recognised the importance of women having access to tertiary education so that they can become role models for younger girls and women. They also noted the continued need to encourage girls into non-traditional areas of study such as mathematics and science, and women into leadership levels of education. Moreover, they appreciated the benefits to family welfare from better educated mothers.
14. While girls' access and completion remain a challenge, boys' under-achievement is a growing concern. A close review of policies, cultural practices, and curricula in Commonwealth countries would assist in addressing all gender-related issues.
15. Ministers agreed it was important to share best practice both in terms of policy and its subsequent translation into action. They felt a stock-taking of progress to date of evidence based best practices, available at country level, would be a useful starting point for the Commonwealth Secretariat to undertake. A more formal information sharing should be explored with other Commonwealth agencies such as COL for broader outreach.
16. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on gender mainstreaming in education policy and related national development plans including poverty reduction strategies as critical to the required resource allocation in reducing gender disparities.

## **IMPROVING QUALITY IN EDUCATION**

17. Ministers stressed the importance of improving education outcomes for all learners. This will be achieved using a variety of mechanisms to enhance quality, including the strengthening of Commonwealth qualifications, accreditation frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms.
18. Ministers agreed on the importance of increasing teacher quality. They identified the issues of teacher selection, training, retention and ongoing professional development as vital to the improvement of education outcomes. They look to the Commonwealth Centre for Education in Cambridge to play a key role in this respect.
19. Ministers also pointed to the need to ensure that quality leadership exists at the school, regional and national levels. They stressed the importance of the professional development of head teachers and senior education officials. Moreover, they agreed on the urgency of improving the status of teachers so that they are in the position to "recapture the glory of teaching".

20. Ministers further committed themselves to ensuring the availability of quality resources, appropriate to the needs of students and reflective of the local environment.
21. Lifelong learning should play a vital role in the provision of quality education, as should access to higher and vocational education.

## **DISTANCE EDUCATION**

22. Ministers noted the importance of addressing policy issues and designing strategies that position open and distance learning (ODL) to be a key instrument for enhancing access and inclusion. There is a need to invest in the development of the skills and infrastructures required for the delivery of quality ODL. Ministers understand the value of sharing Commonwealth best practice, policy and plans, and noted that the role that ODL can play in delivering education and training to geographically separated populations and to those requiring flexible learning options. There are benefits to be derived by strengthening Commonwealth networks and by adjusting intellectual property rights protocols so that they recognise education and education products as social goods, perhaps by developing Commonwealth conventions designed to reduce the costs of moving knowledge products amongst Commonwealth jurisdictions.
23. Ministers recognized the importance of addressing the risk that the use of technology to deliver education across borders could lead to the treatment of education as a commercial commodity subject to GATS rather than as the public good that it is.

## **EDUCATION IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES**

24. Many countries in the Commonwealth have to provide education to millions of children living in very difficult circumstances: poverty, unemployment, homelessness, war, famine, and of course, HIV/AIDS. The Commonwealth countries have ratified international treaties to address these issues: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ILO Convention, the Dakar Framework for Action and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The challenge now is for all Commonwealth countries to put these commitments into action.
25. There are many examples in the Commonwealth of actions that make a difference and which should be shared. To do so, it was recommended that a knowledge sharing system of best practices be set up, to share expertise, including databases to know where all children are and avoid 'invisible' children; the development of national indicators on improving participation by children in difficult circumstances; and the setting of targets and reporting on them.

## **EFFECTS OF HIV/AIDS IN EDUCATION**

26. Ministers addressed multi-sectoral issues related to the spread of HIV infection and the impact of AIDS. They noted the urgency of accelerating educational responses, particularly the need to improve curricula and materials and the value of involving young people in this process. Teaching and learning must share information and promote understanding, but also focus on the necessary changes in social and sexual behaviour.
27. Ministers agreed to take urgent action in the area of HIV/AIDS education. They noted the importance of anticipating and preparing for the impact of AIDS on future numbers of orphans and students in the education system and on the supply and demand of teachers. They also requested international assistance to curtail the spread of the pandemic. EFA would not be achieved without tackling HIV/AIDS.

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