

# COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION BRIEFING NOTES

Prepared by the Commonwealth Consortium for Education

A grouping of voluntary and professional bodies committed to education development in the Commonwealth

## No. 1. COMMONWEALTH CO-OPERATION IN EDUCATION: A PROFILE

### Introduction

The Commonwealth association is often said to rest upon three main pillars – language, law and learning. The third of these, education, is an area where much co-operative activity takes place, in part reflecting the importance of the first two. Commonalities in English-language use, and in legal/institutional frameworks derived from shared history and traditions, are sound bases for education interchange.

Commonwealth collaboration in education takes many different forms. It extends across the spectrum of multilateral co-operation, shared regional institutions in some parts of the world, bilateral co-operation between individual governments, activities of pan-Commonwealth associations and professional bodies in the non-government sector, commercial transactions in education goods and services, and a host of unregulated movements of individual students and teachers to learn and teach in a Commonwealth country abroad. This Briefing Note aims to provide an overview, charting the main elements in education co-operation in the Commonwealth. Companion briefing notes in the series (see last page) give more detail.

The modern Commonwealth is generally considered to date from the late 1940s when India and Pakistan gained their independence, later assuming republican status in 1950 and 1956 respectively. The majority of Commonwealth members joined the association on gaining independence, in most cases from Britain, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Box 1). The Commonwealth Secretariat was founded in 1965. The four Commonwealth Secretaries-General to date have been Arnold Smith (1965-75), Shridath Ramphal (1975-90), Emeka Anyaoku (1990-2000) and Don McKinnon (from 2000).

Starting in 1966 meetings of Commonwealth prime ministers, and later Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs), have taken place regularly, normally every two years. These lay down Commonwealth policies and priorities. Landmark statements setting out fundamental principles came from Singapore in 1971, and Zimbabwe (the Harare Declaration) in 1991.

In education, the year 1959 is normally regarded as the start of the modern era of co-operation, even though some parts of today's infrastructure have earlier origins. The Commonwealth Institute and The League for Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers were both founded in the days of empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1911 the first Imperial Education Conference was held. The Association of Commonwealth Universities dates from 1913.

### Box 1: 53 Member States of the Commonwealth

Antigua/Barbuda	Ca	1981	Mozambique	Af	1995
Australia	Pa	1931	Namibia	Af	1990
Bahamas	Ca	1973	Nauru	Pa	1968
Bangladesh	As	1972	New Zealand	Pa	1931
Barbados	Ca	1966	Nigeria	Af	1960
Belize	Ca	1981	Pakistan	As	1947
Botswana	Af	1966	Papua New Guinea	Pa	1975
Brunei Darussalam	As	1984	St. Kitts Nevis	Ca	1983
Cameroon	Af	1995	St Lucia	Ca	1979
Canada	Ca	1931	St Vincent	Ca	1979
Cyprus	Eu	1961	Samoa	Pa	1970
Dominica	Ca	1978	Seychelles	Af	1976
Fiji	Pa	1970	Sierra Leone	Af	1961
Gambia	Af	1965	Singapore	As	1965
Ghana	Af	1957	Solomon Is	Pa	1978
Grenada	Ca	1974	South Africa	Af	1931
Guyana	Ca	1966	Sri Lanka	As	1948
India	As	1947	Swaziland	Af	1968
Jamaica	Ca	1962	Tanzania	Af	1961
Kenya	Af	1963	Tonga	Pa	1970
Kiribati	Pa	1979	Trinidad/Tobago	Ca	1962
Lesotho	Af	1966	Tuvalu	Pa	1978
Malawi	Af	1964	Uganda	Af	1962
Maldives	As	1982	United Kingdom	Eu	-
Malaysia	As	1957	Vanuatu	Pa	1980
Malta	Eu	1964	Zambia	Af	1964
Mauritius	Af	1968			

**Af** – Africa (18)      **As** – Asia (8)      **Eu** – Europe (3)  
**Pa** – Pacific (11)      **Ca** – Canada/Caribbean (13)

It was in 1959 that the first Commonwealth Education Conference was held in Oxford. It led directly to the creation of a small secretariat for co-operation in Education, the Commonwealth Education Liaison Unit (CELU), and to the launch of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP). In 1966 the CELU was absorbed into the Commonwealth Secretariat.

### The Multilateral Framework in Education

#### *The political level*

Heads of Government lay down Commonwealth priorities and these at present highlight democracy and good governance, and pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs include two education goals – the achievement of universal primary education by 2015 and the attainment of gender parity in school education by 2005 (see Briefing Notes Nos. 5 and 6). Heads have made two important recent statements in relation to education, at Abuja in 2003 affirming

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.

In their 2005 Malta Communique Heads

affirmed the centrality of education to development and democracy, as it provides the foundation for realising broader Commonwealth political, economic and social objectives. They ... encouraged all governments to allocate the resources necessary to meet the education MDGs ....

At CHOGMs, Heads of Government normally deal with education under the heading of 'functional co-operation'. Important education topics with which they have been particularly concerned in the past few years have included the education MDGs, co-operation in distance education and the work of the Commonwealth of Learning, Commonwealth student mobility and the CSFP, Commonwealth studies and education about the Commonwealth, targeted recruitment by Commonwealth industrialised countries of health and education personnel from developing countries, and the changing status and role of the Commonwealth Institute.

At the next level down 'functional' ministers in the different sectors also meet regularly. Finance ministers convene annually, normally in September. Ministers of Education, Health, Women's Affairs and Law have customarily held conferences every three years. These ministerial gatherings discuss international issues of concern to member states, review progress and institutional arrangements for co-operation in their sector, and set priorities and approve work plans for the Commonwealth Secretariat – subject always to confirmation by Heads of Government.

Commonwealth Ministers of Education will have met 16 times, following their scheduled meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, in December 2006. The business of their conferences, normally lasting three days, is of three main kinds. First, Ministers usually choose a main theme on which they exchange experience, and identify common issues and useful innovations. Conclusions and recommendations are distilled from discussion for report and follow-up. At recent conferences Ministers' conclusions have been partially influenced by a 'Parallel Symposium' (Gaborone, Halifax, Edinburgh) or 'Stakeholder Forum' (Cape Town), providing for civil society involvement and discussion with Ministers of the issues before them. An additional parallel event in Edinburgh and Cape Town has been a Youth Forum; and in Cape Town a Teacher Forum was added.

Second, Ministers review the progress of the Commonwealth of Learning, the Commonwealth and Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, and the Education Section of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Third, they approve a Conference Communique, incorporating the conclusions of the Conference and Ministers' decisions concerning future action. At 14CCEM in Halifax Ministers agreed the Halifax Statement *Education: our Common Future*. At 15CCEM they approved the *Edinburgh Action Plan for Education*, focusing on six action areas: achieving universal primary education; eliminating gender disparities; improving quality; using distance learning to overcome barriers; supporting education in difficult circumstances; and mitigating the

impact of HIV/AIDS in education. More information about the CCEMs is contained in Briefing Note 2 in this series.

#### *The Commonwealth Secretariat*

The Secretariat, based in London, provides administrative support to Ministers, services their conferences and implements their decisions. A Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD) contains sections for gender, health and education. The STPD Director reports to the Deputy Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. The Education Section has six professional staff headed by a Deputy Director.

The Secretariat has very limited programme money. The annual budget of the Education Section, excluding staff salaries, is roughly £0.5m. p.a., drawn in the main from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation; though additional funding comes from partnership with other agencies. The Secretariat's role is defined as that of advocate, broker and catalyst. Its 2003-2006 work programme in education was focused on the six Action Areas defined at 15CCEM and the principal objective in the 2004/05-2007/08 period is "to improve the quality of universal primary education (UPE) and gender equality in primary and secondary education".

#### *Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation*

CFTC, founded in 1971, is the Commonwealth's main assistance instrument. It is financed by voluntary contributions from member countries and has an annual budget of about £20m p.a.. It works mainly on the basis of south-south co-operation, supplying experts, training and advisory services. The education sector in member countries is prominent among sectoral beneficiaries.

#### *Commonwealth of Learning*

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was founded in 1988 and is based in Vancouver, Canada. Its focus is open and distance learning. It is the only official Commonwealth agency located outside Britain and is the world's only intergovernmental organisation solely concerned with promoting open and distance learning. Its role, as declared in its Mission Statement is to help... governments and institutions to expand the scope, scale and quality of learning by using new approaches. COL promotes policies and systems to make innovation sustainable and works with international partners to build models, create materials, enhance organisational capacity and nurture networks that facilitate learning in support of development goals.

COL's programme is geared to addressing the key learning and development challenges associated with the UN's MDG and EFA targets such as gender equity, sustainable development, environmental protection and civil rights; as well as the Commonwealth objectives of peace, democracy, equality and good governance.

COL has an international Board of Governors, including government representatives, and employs a staff of 40 in Vancouver and at the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia in New Delhi. The CEO and President is currently Sir John Daniel. The budget, is funded mainly by voluntary contributions from member countries. COL's work is more fully described in Briefing Note 4.

### *Commonwealth Foundation*

The Foundation, based in Marlborough House, was created in 1966 to promote co-operation between, and involvement in Commonwealth activities by, civil society. Within its Culture and Diversity programme area, the Foundation is focusing on universal primary education, with a particular emphasis on girls' enrolment and retention in primary and secondary education and successful strategies that have involved civil society. In addition, the Foundation gives regular support to a number of Commonwealth professional associations working in the field of education.

### *Commonwealth Institute*

For most of its existence the Institute, which operates under a pan-Commonwealth governing board, concentrated its activity on education about the Commonwealth (the subject of Briefing Note 8 in this series). In 2004, the Institute decided to change its focus to the development of primary and secondary education in Commonwealth countries, to be promoted through a Centre for Commonwealth Education in Cambridge.

### *Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan*

Launched at Oxford in 1959 the CSFP operates bilaterally within a multilateral framework. Awards are principally for postgraduate study in another Commonwealth country, though recent innovations have included awards for split-site and distance-learning programmes as well as professional fellowships. Awards generally cover travel, living costs, and tuition expenses. Whilst the tenure of a fellowship is between three and six months, scholarships are tenable from one year (for full-time taught programmes) to three years for doctoral study or part-time master's courses by distance.

Scholars and Fellows have been drawn from all 53 Commonwealth countries, as well as dependent territories; but awarding countries currently number only 14. Britain has been particularly generous, providing almost two thirds of the total awards in some recent years at a current (2006/2007) cost of £14m p.a. Historically, Canada has also been a substantial contributor. Around 1,500 awards were held in 2005/06.

So far about 25,000 individuals have benefited from awards. A Directory of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows was published in 2003, listing names of 20,000 award holders for the period 1960-2002 and providing more detailed profiles of 1800 individual Scholars.

Under the overall supervision of Ministers' Conferences, management of the Plan lies with the Secretariat, with whom the Association of Commonwealth Universities has produced reports on the working of the Plan for the most recent Education Ministers' Conferences. For more information on CSFP, see Briefing Note No. 3.

### *Commonwealth Universities Study Abroad Consortium*

Since its formation in 1993, CUSAC has provided a framework for member universities throughout the Commonwealth to provide study-abroad opportunities on a reciprocal basis. There are currently about sixty members drawn from all areas of the Commonwealth. Meetings are held every two years, the most recent in

Penang (2006). Most, but not all, CUSAC activities are based at undergraduate level.

### *Regional Co-operation in Education*

The Commonwealth's membership of 53 countries includes 30 'small states' with populations of two million or less, and several small dependencies. Given the presence of geographical clusters, the sharing of expensive facilities makes sound sense. The University of the West Indies and the University of the South Pacific are regional institutions which many states support. There are shared examination arrangements among Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean, South Pacific and West Africa.

In addition, extensive Commonwealth consultation and co-operation in education takes place at regional level through the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Southern African Development Community (SADC), South Pacific Commission and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), in all of which Commonwealth states form the great majority.

## **Bilateral Aid for Commonwealth Education**

Important as the multilateral infrastructure is, it is dwarfed in scale by bilateral assistance through such bodies as the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), Canada's CIDA or Australia's AusAID. These three industrialised countries and New Zealand together in the period 2002-2004 made average annual ODA commitments of almost US\$7.5 billion, of which US\$650 million (£350-400m) went to education. As well as direct commitments to the education sector, additional funds went for overall budget support, some of which would be spent by the recipient country on education. As well as industrialised Commonwealth members, many others like India, Nigeria, Malaysia, Pakistan and South Africa have their own technical co-operation programmes.

## **Independent Voluntary and Professional Bodies**

A characteristic of Commonwealth infrastructure, particularly in education, is the proliferation of non-government bodies many of them specifically pan-Commonwealth in character. The Association of Commonwealth Universities with some 500 member institutions throughout the Commonwealth, is prominent among them. ACU helps members to orchestrate their views and to exchange experience of best practice and provides them with advisory, information and recruitment services.

A Commonwealth Teachers Grouping, enabling representative teachers' bodies across the Commonwealth to participate more actively in Commonwealth education interchange, is expected to become more active following its launch at the Teachers Forum in Cape Town in December 2006.

In 2001 several Commonwealth voluntary and professional organisations created the Commonwealth Consortium for Education, the body that has commissioned and published these Briefing Notes. Through this grouping the presently 23 members concert

their efforts on behalf of Commonwealth education development, co-ordinate their approach, and build a more effective constituency for partnering official Commonwealth multilateral and bilateral agencies.

### Briefing Notes in this series

1. Commonwealth co-operation in education: a profile
2. Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers
3. The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan
4. Distance education and the Commonwealth of Learning
5. The Commonwealth and Education for All
6. Gender and education: the Commonwealth dimension
7. Commonwealth education co-operation: role of civil society
8. Education about the Commonwealth
9. Science, technology and mathematics education.
10. Commonwealth student mobility: trends and issues
11. Teacher development and mobility in the Commonwealth
12. School and college linking in the Commonwealth

Many of the civil-society organisations, both international and national, that contribute strongly to education development, are Commonwealth-based. They include well-known names like CODE, CUSO and CBIE in Canada; or OXFAM, ActionAid, Save the Children in the UK to name but a few of the larger ones. The last three named bodies jointly manage the Commonwealth Education Fund established by the British Government in 2002 to support civil-society coalitions to promote Education for All in 17 Commonwealth developing countries. Faith groups of a wide range of religions and denominations are also prominent among active international and national agencies supporting work in education and health in Commonwealth countries.

At national level countless voluntary bodies work for education development, and have fine records to share. Some, like Bangladesh's BRAC or Jamaica's JAMAL, have international fame and attract aid-agency support; while thousands of others work on a more local basis.

Briefing Paper No. 7 in this series addresses the role of Commonwealth civil society in education co-operation.

### Informal Individual and Institutional Exchanges

Much Commonwealth interchange in education is informal and unmanaged. Intra-Commonwealth flows of students are substantial, about 180,000 in 2004-05, despite the 'marketisation' of higher education and charging by richer countries of full-cost fees to international students, which can impede access for poor students and those from poor countries. This recorded intra-Commonwealth student mobility of 180,000 represents 8% of the world total, the same as in 2000.

There has traditionally been considerable movement of individual teachers between Commonwealth countries, to the benefit of both individual teachers and the institutions to which they have moved. A recent ministerial concern, however, has been targeted teacher recruitment by employing bodies and recruitment agencies based in some

more affluent Commonwealth countries, threatening to deplete cadres of specialised teachers in some developing countries. At Stoke Rochford in 2004 Ministers agreed a Protocol to introduce an element of voluntary regulation to such targeted recruitment, to limit its potentially harmful effects for vulnerable systems.

Another area where exchanges have rapidly multiplied is school linking and institutional partnerships across national boundaries. As well as promoting Commonwealth friendship and understanding, they can serve important educational and developmental objectives. The potential of school and college links in the Commonwealth is the theme of a major civil-society conference in Cape Town at the time of 16CCEM.

### Commercial activity

Supply of education-related goods such as laboratory equipment and workshop machinery, computers for classroom and school-office use, or books and materials, is a growing component of international trade. Provision of education services like consultancy, examinations and qualifications, recruitment of teachers, or provision of study and training opportunities is another growth area.

### Pan Commonwealth organisations

**Commonwealth Secretariat** [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)  
Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HX

**Commonwealth of Learning** [www.col.org](http://www.col.org)  
1285, West Broadway, Suite 600, Vancouver BC V6H 3X8

**Commonwealth Foundation**  
[www.commonwealthfoundation.org](http://www.commonwealthfoundation.org)

Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HY

**Commonwealth Institute** [www.commonwealth.org](http://www.commonwealth.org)  
Kensington High Street, London W8 6NQ

**Association of Commonwealth Universities** [www.acu.ac.uk](http://www.acu.ac.uk)  
Woburn House, 20-24 Tavistock Sq., London WC1H 9HF

**CSFP website:** [www.csfp-online.org](http://www.csfp-online.org)

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