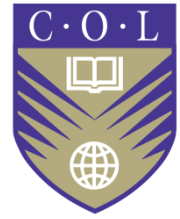


# *14th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 26–30 November 2000 - Communiqué*

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## COMMUNIQUÉ

(The following summary of the content and outcomes of the conference is provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat on behalf of Ministers of Education.)

1. The Fourteenth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers was held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, from 26 to 30 November 2000. It was opened by Senator Gildas Molgat, Leader of the Government in the Senate, and was chaired by the Hon Glenn Hagele, Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training of the Province of Saskatchewan and Chair of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. Ministers reviewed developments in education across the world in the light of globalising forces, which present both challenges to the achievement of equity and opportunities for enhancing diversity. They reflected on how the goals and aspirations emerging from recent world conferences on education could be translated into effective action in a Commonwealth context. This context includes the serious threats to health, human security and national development posed by HIV/AIDS, the pressing issue of burdens of debt, and the particular vulnerabilities of small states and countries affected by armed conflict. Ministers noted the many achievements of education co-operation in the Commonwealth over the last 40 years and, in their Halifax Statement and its associated Action Plan, renewed their determination to improve education and human development in their countries and to collaborate to achieve these goals. To this end the Ministers intend to make a formal presentation to the High Level Review Group and in so doing emphasise that the promotion of Commonwealth education co-operation should remain a key and discrete function of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The work programmes, plans and financing of The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and its submission to the Commonwealth High Level Group were discussed in detail and warmly endorsed. Consideration was also given to the enhancement of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, to the role of physical education and sport in education and to the importance of citizenship education to build a robust and democratic civil society.

## **HALIFAX STATEMENT ON EDUCATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH**

In their Halifax Statement, Ministers set out a framework that would guide Commonwealth co-operation in education for the foreseeable future. They affirmed their commitment to achieving education for all in keeping with the goals set at Jomtien in 1990 and the framework for action agreed at Dakar in 2000. They 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.

## **EDUCATION IN A GLOBAL ERA: CHALLENGES TO EQUITY, OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSITY**

3. Ministers had extensive discussions in plenary and committee sessions on the main theme of their conference "Education in a Global Era: Challenges to Equity, Opportunities for Diversity". They emphasised the timeliness and critical importance of this theme and the fact that it dealt with globalisation concerns in relation to two of the most pivotal issues in education and development. In a wide-ranging discussion, Ministers highlighted some of the constraints and challenges resulting from globalisation, but also outlined the opportunities to be grasped through globalisation. They focused their discussion on the search for feasible strategies and concrete action within the context of Commonwealth education co-operation. There was a strong concern about the impact of globalisation in terms of education and cultural integrity and the role of member states in safeguarding local education systems and cultures.
4. The need to intensify efforts to promote gender equity in access to education was given strong emphasis. While it was conceded that in some member states boys were under-achieving it was also felt that the access of girls to education was a priority issue for the Commonwealth as a whole. Also, following the lead of the keynote speaker Mrs. Janet Museveni (First Lady of Uganda), Ministers highlighted the critical importance of bringing the benefits of education to disadvantaged populations in their countries. They highlighted lessons that had been learned in terms of making the educational process and provision sensitive to the cultural values and beliefs

of these populations. Strong political leadership and adequate resources were stressed as important pre-requisites for success in this area.

5. Ministers recognised that education is a liberating force with moral and spiritual dimensions as well as a contributor to social and economic development. They therefore emphasised the need for re-orienting education in Commonwealth countries along the following lines:

- Education should produce thinkers rather than mere implementers; and
- Education should be more holistic, dealing with all levels and different approaches.

6. During their discussions Ministers emphasised the role of education as a tool for achieving and effectively managing pluralism in society as a pre-requisite for maximising social and economic development. Pluralism has to be accepted and celebrated rather than merely being tolerated. They highlighted the critical importance of helping countries make use of new technologies in the delivery of education and the need to prevent weaker members of the Commonwealth from being marginalized as globalisation intensified. There was also a clear acknowledgement that each country has the responsibility to ensure that it develops the right policies and strategies to meet its own needs. In this regard Ministers felt there was a role for the Commonwealth in assisting with this process as well as in brokering the way in which other agencies intervene with assistance to countries.

7. Ministers discussed major obstacles to educational development at some length, including HIV/AIDS, natural disasters and civil conflicts. They recommended that:

- the Commonwealth makes increased use of education to combat HIV/AIDS through a holistic and multi-sectoral approach that emphasises prevention and mitigation; and
- the Commonwealth should develop strategies to ensure that education continues during periods of disruption due to civil conflict and/or natural disasters, both in the country directly affected and its neighbours.

8. Ministers made a number of recommendations for Commonwealth co-operation in education along the following lines:

- the Halifax Statement should be used as the guiding instrument for education co-operation in the Commonwealth, and be given practical realisation through a rolling action plan;
- the Commonwealth should promote strategic mobility for capacity building and encourage regional as well as pan-Commonwealth mobility under a revised and expanded scheme of awards and exchanges;
- data collection, analysis and dissemination should be used to ensure a reliable database to inform policies and action plan;
- the Commonwealth should continue to give special emphasis to small states in education and human development work, while not neglecting the larger states where the bulk of the problem of access remains unresolved;

- the Commonwealth should promote greater use of education to encourage acceptance and respect for diversity of cultures. The attempt should be to pursue unity rather than uniformity of cultures;
  - the Commonwealth should continue its work in brokering assistance to member countries from a wide variety of sources; and
  - the Commonwealth should promote and expand exchanges at tertiary level while safeguarding local systems of higher education.
9. Ministers noted that the use of English in Commonwealth schools and universities provided access to a rich heritage of teaching resources and connectivity to the rest of the world. It brought benefits to countries in a world where the ability to tap global knowledge networks and compete in global markets are becoming increasingly important. At the same time, Ministers note that in societies where a non-indigenous language is used as the medium of instruction, it tended to detract from the cultural sensitivity of their education systems, impair access and stifle creativity. They emphasised the value of educational systems that are inclusive and culturally sensitive, but which at the same time ensured that learners retained a capacity to be part of an open global society. They requested the Commonwealth Secretariat to study these issues further and report to them at their next meeting.

## **COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT EDUCATION PROGRAMME AND TWO-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN IN EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

10. Ministers commended the excellent work carried out by the Education Department during 1997-2000, which was described as important and highly relevant to the needs of member countries of the commonwealth. Strong appreciation was also expressed for the way in which such an impressive range of key activities had been accomplished using the very limited human and financial resources of the Department. There was special commendation of the Department's work in small states and an appreciation that the Commonwealth was now the leading player in this specialist area. Ministers also praised the Department's role in brokering funding and expertise from other agencies to benefit important work in member countries. They agreed that one of the most highly appreciated areas of work was in exchange of good practices facilitated by the Department. Ministers recommended that in reporting on its work the Department should highlight the impact on member countries and the benefits achieved. In this regard they also recommended that attention be given to evaluation of the many activities and projects to help determine what has worked and what has not, and why, so that countries could learn more from the work of the Secretariat. Ministers also suggested that greater emphasis should be given to publicising the work of the Secretariat in a way that makes it easier for countries to access the information on a regular and systematic basis.
11. The Ministers also discussed the Two-Year Strategic Plan on Education and Human Development for the period 2000-2002. They expressed satisfaction that the re-organisation of the Department's work programme and staff portfolios was very much in line with trends in

education and development that would benefit member countries. They observed that the proposed changes were in keeping with current efforts of Commonwealth countries to improve access, equity and quality in education as well as in capacity building and utilisation for policy formulation and implementation in education. The introduction of tasks related to building knowledge banks for education in various regions of the Commonwealth was highly commended as a key innovation that would benefit co-operation in education and make the work of the Department more effective. Ministers requested a more explicit emphasis in the plan on gender and on the role of education in promoting democracy, citizenship and other values that are central to the Commonwealth. Some Ministers raised the issue of resources for the new plan and cautioned that efforts should be made to match resources to the range of proposed activities if expectations were not to be raised in an unrealistic manner.

## **THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING**

12. Ministers enthusiastically received the comprehensive report of the Board of Governors of The Commonwealth of Learning, and commended COL on its achievements over the last three years, made possible through the skilful leveraging of its limited resources in order to magnify its impact throughout the Commonwealth. Ministers also considered COL's Three Year Plan (2000-2003), the strategic vision of which had previously been endorsed by Heads of Government during their meeting in Durban, November 1999.
13. Ministers noted COL's work and accomplishments of the past three years, endorsed the Three Year Plan (2000-2003), and confirmed their desire to give effect to the decision of Heads of Government to endorse an annual core budget of \$9 million.
14. Many delegations recorded their gratitude for the assistance provided them by COL and encouraged COL to be bold in its interpretation of its mandate in the face of the rapid transformation in education and training as a consequence of the information and communications revolution. They expressed appreciation for the analysis COL had provided of the trends in virtual education and encouraged it to look for innovative ways in which it could help local institutions strengthen their presence in this environment, perhaps by responding more positively to appeals for COL to become directly engaged in the process for accreditation and credit recognition as well as quality assurance. Ministers recognised the efficacy of distance education systems, and re-iterated their keen desire to see these deployed in the interests of teacher training, basic education for all, skills development and improved access, especially for girl children and women.
15. Most countries made formal pledges of financial support for the Three Year Plan, many confirming significant increases over previous years with a view to permitting the goal of \$9 million, agreed to by CHOGM, to be realised.
16. Ministers also warmly received and strongly endorsed the proposed submission from COL to the High Level Review Group reviewing the future of the Commonwealth.

## HIGHER EDUCATION CO-OPERATION

17. The Report on the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) for 1996-1999 was received with appreciation by Ministers. They noted with pleasure that forty per cent of successful applicants over the three-year period were women, marking a continuing trend of increasing female participation. Ministers approved a number of proposed changes to the administration of the CSFP, which had been designed to raise the profile of the Plan, increasing the number of participating countries, expanding its flexibility, improving communication and overall co-ordination and strengthening partnerships in the nomination and selection of candidates.
18. Ministers were pleased to note that the CSFP UK Tracer Study: Initial Findings, while reflecting work still in progress, provided clear evidence that many scholars returned to make valuable contributions in their home countries and to reach positions of high prominence in academia, government and the private sector. These findings confirmed the continuing value of the scheme and Ministers urged that further tracer studies should be conducted covering all awarding countries and that efforts should be made to collate an alumni register as a first step in utilising this valuable resource to promote the Commonwealth and its image.
19. Ministers warmly thanked the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) for their continuing collaboration to monitor and report on the progress of the CSFP scheme. They also noted with approval the report on the Commonwealth Universities Study Abroad Consortium (CUSAC). This had developed from a pilot study initiated by the Commonwealth Secretariat into a pan-Commonwealth student mobility scheme, now administered by the ACU. In the short period since transferring to the ACU, CUSAC had expanded rapidly to involve over 70 universities, with over 200 students per year benefiting. Ministers commended this further example of the generating and incubating role of the Secretariat's Education Department and its effective collaboration with a Commonwealth partner. Gratitude was expressed to the ACU for its important contributions to educational co-operation and to enhancing student mobility and academic exchanges in the Commonwealth.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT

20. Ministers welcomed the report of the CHOGM Committee on Co-operation through Sport (CCCS) on the role of physical education and sport in education and development. They recognised the important contribution made by physical education and sport to all youth, and particularly to disadvantaged youth, including young girls, youth at risk and those with special needs. They also recognised the importance of promoting the benefits of participation in sport and physical activity, as necessary underpinnings to life-long health, well-being and achievement in a wide variety of spheres and as a crucial aspect of individual, community, social and economic development. Ministers supported the proposal by the CCCS to establish an informal advisory expert group on sport and education. They requested the CCCS to continue its work linking physical education and sport to education and to report to forthcoming meetings of

Commonwealth Education Ministers. Ministers noted the Berlin Agenda for Action and the Declaration of Punta del Este regarding physical education and sport.

## **CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION**

21. Reports from the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Institute on citizenship education were warmly received by Ministers. They recognised the essential role that such education plays in inculcating and sustaining the fundamental values of democracy, human rights, peace and justice on which the Commonwealth is founded. Citizenship education is crucial to developing and reinforcing each individual's personal sense of worth and responsibility and to building a robust civil society in which individuals have the knowledge, skills and capacities needed to fully engage in the democratic institutions and processes of their community and country. Ministers congratulated the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Institute for the excellent work they were doing in this field and encouraged them to strengthen their efforts to make its benefits available throughout the Commonwealth.

## **MINISTERS' CONFERENCE AND PARALLEL EVENTS**

22. The Conference was attended by 290 delegates from 45 Commonwealth countries, 3 British Overseas Territories and 21 observer organisations, 37 of the country delegations being led by Ministers. COL participated, led by its President and Chairman. The observer groups included numerous Commonwealth, international, regional, and non-governmental organisations. Twelve members of the press were accredited and for the first time ever in a Commonwealth Ministers meeting were invited to be present throughout the entire proceedings.
23. In parallel to the Conference, an international symposium and trade fair was held, organised by the Department of Education, Nova Scotia, in partnership with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, Government of Canada, COL, the British Council, and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The symposium, on the theme 'Commonwealth Knowledge Solutions' attracted about 400 participants from around the world and the Trade Fair, under the title 'Shopping for Solutions', featured 70 booths displaying materials from Ministries, international agencies, NGOs, educational institutions and the private sector. Interactions with the Ministerial meeting took place at several joint events, including the Opening Ceremony, the Keynote Plenary Address given by Mrs. Janet Museveni, First Lady of Uganda, a scheduled visit to the Trade Fair, and a Forum during which the combined participants participated in panel discussions. Ministers also received a report summarising the deliberations of the Symposium.

## **APPRECIATION**

24. Ministers expressed their deep gratitude to the government and people of Canada, and in particular the Province of Nova Scotia, for the excellent arrangements made for the Conference and for the warmth of hospitality they had received. They also expressed their appreciation to

the Commonwealth Secretariat for its excellent arrangements and the high quality of the working documents prepared for the Conference.

## **NEXT MEETING**

25. Ministers agreed to hold their next Conference in 2003 at a place to be decided.

**Commonwealth Secretariat**  
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