



1. Introduction

The 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) will be held in Fiji, on 19-23 February 2018. The CCEM is a high-level meeting held every three years where education ministers from the 52 Commonwealth countries meet to discuss key issues and engage in meaningful dialogue on education. The forthcoming 20CCEM will convene under the theme: **‘Sustainability and Resilience: Can education deliver?’**. In line with the theme, one of the primary objectives of 20CCEM will be to address and define mechanisms through which education systems across the Commonwealth can enable sustainable development and address major global challenges, such as climate change. Additionally, as the first CCEM to be held after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development, the conference aims to support and further member states’ commitment toward the attainment of inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all.

20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM)

Theme: Sustainability and Resilience: Can education deliver?

Sub-themes:

- i. **Education for sustainable development:** Education as a key enabler for sustainable development; skills development and transitioning youth to decent work.
- ii. **Building resilience through education:** Climate change and the curriculum; displacement and migration due to climate change and the challenges faced by small and atoll islands (including the role of education in weaving resilience using traditional knowledge and local culture).
- iii. **Education governance & management:** Strengthening of the teaching profession and school management; issues of quality & equity; financing of education; societal barriers (including drug abuse and internet/social media); and advocacy for education strategies across the SDGs.

2. Background

2.1 Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM)

The triennial Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) is the second largest meeting organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat following the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). CCEMs provide Commonwealth education ministers with the opportunity to discuss key education issues in the Commonwealth in relation to a specific theme. Ministers have the opportunity to share knowledge and good practices in the education sector, receive updates on actions achieved against CCEM mandates, as well as identify areas of action for the next three years for education in the Commonwealth.

The 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (19CCEM), ‘Quality education for equitable development: performance, paths and productivity’, was hosted by The Bahamas in June 2015. The

conference was attended by over 700 delegates from 38 Commonwealth countries and closely preceded international agreement on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, allowing for discussions pertinent to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At 19CCEM, ministers agreed on actions for the strengthening of education in the Commonwealth, acknowledging the need for member states to have education sector plans that support progress towards the SDGs. Initiatives undertaken as an outcome of 19CCEM include: the establishment of the Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG); the establishment of the Commonwealth Accelerated Development Mechanism for Education (CADME) Technical Working Group; the development of the Commonwealth Education Policy Framework and the Commonwealth Curriculum Framework for enabling the SDGs; and the establishment of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) Task Force.

2.2 Issues and challenges faced by Commonwealth member countries

While advances have been made by Commonwealth countries in education over the past 15 years, in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA) initiatives, there are still challenges that must be urgently addressed. These include:

- **Low early childhood education enrolment rates** - while enrolment in early childhood education is expanding across the Commonwealth, currently only one third of children in developing Commonwealth countries access early childhood education.
- **Low primary and secondary school enrolment rates** - approximately 17 million primary aged children and 16 million lower secondary aged youth remain out of school in the Commonwealth.
- **High adult illiteracy** - over 400 million adults in the Commonwealth are illiterate.
- **Continued gender disparities in primary and secondary schooling** - although gender discrimination towards girls has improved, approximately 3 per cent more boys than girls are enrolled in primary schools across Commonwealth countries. Notwithstanding this, in some countries, boys are underrepresented and underperforming, particularly at the secondary level¹.
- **Disparities in the allocation of resources to education** - despite the Nassau declaration reaffirmed commitment to education financing at 4-6% of GDP (or 15-20% of total public expenditure), considerable disparities remain in the allocation of resources to education within the Commonwealth.

3. Progressing towards 20CCEM

The 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM) is returning to the Pacific region after over 40 years. The conference theme on sustainability and resilience is especially relevant to the prevailing global dialogue on climate change and the capacity of education systems to deal with the challenges brought on by climate change. 20CCEM will be particularly important as it will be the first CCEM to be held following global adoption of the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, 20CCEM will provide an opportune moment for education ministers to discuss progress against SDG4 targets, as well as to find solutions to challenges facing education systems in the Commonwealth. Education ministers can also utilise this opportunity to deliberate on how the commitments made at 20CCEM can be brought to the attention of Commonwealth heads of government at the next Commonwealth Summit in April 2018.

3.1 Thematic Issues Paper and SDG4 Status Update Report

The Commonwealth Secretariat has initiated the development of two key reports to present to ministers of education: (1) the Thematic Issues Paper and (2) the SDG4 Status Update Report. The content of these reports is briefly outlined below.

The **20CCEM Thematic Issues Paper** will cover the conference theme and sub-themes (education for sustainable development; building resilience through education; and education governance and

¹ Commonwealth Secretariat. 2015. Education in the Commonwealth: Quality Education for Equitable Development

management). In this regard, the paper will draw attention to the intended focus and scope of substantive issues that the conference will address.

The **SDG4 Status Update Report** will provide a snapshot of education in all 52 member countries. The report will present valuable data and analysis to member countries on their progress on SDG4 since the implementation of the new global education agenda in September 2015.

In addition to the documents above, the following will be presented for the consideration of ministers at 20CCEM:

- Reports from:
 - The Commonwealth of Learning (COL)
 - The Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowship Plan (CSFP)
 - The Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility (CTEF)
 - The Commonwealth Secretariat's Education team on its 2015 - 2018 Work Programme

4. 20CCEM Objectives

The overall goal of 20CCEM is to advance the attainment of inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all across the commonwealth. In line with the conference theme, one of the primary objectives of 20CCEM will be to address and define mechanisms through which education systems across the Commonwealth can enable sustainable development and address major global challenges, such as climate change.

In light of the above, the main objectives of 20CCEM are to:

- Outline the commitments and reforms needed to facilitate inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning in the Commonwealth and agree key messages to be communicated to heads of government convening at the 2018 Commonwealth Summit; and
- Agree on actions to address specific issues affecting education systems in strengthening sustainable development and building resilience across the Commonwealth.

5. 20CCEM Programme

A draft programme for the 20CCEM Ministerial Meeting is provided in Appendix I. The ministerial programme comprises of the following main elements:

5.1 Resilience qualifications side event

This half-day meeting on the Professionalization of the Resilience sector is an official side event for 20CCEM and will be held two days before the formal commencement of 20CCEM. It will be a high-level meeting for senior government officials across the Commonwealth to deliberate on the prospect of developing Resilience qualifications in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. The meeting will be co-hosted by the European Union's Pacific Technical and Vocational Education and Training initiative (EU PacTVET) and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

5.2 Pre-20CCEM EMAG

A brief meeting of the EMAG specifically focussed on the outcomes of 20CCEM will be held before the formal commencement of 20CCEM. This will be the final EMAG meeting under the chairmanship of the Minister of Education, The Bahamas before handing over to incoming chair, the Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts, Fiji.

5.3 Senior Officials Meeting

The Senior Officials' Meeting will also be held prior to the formal commencement of 20CCEM and will provide senior officials from the ministries of education of Commonwealth countries with the opportunity to meet and discuss relevant issues in relation to the 20CCEM theme.

5.4 Small States Ministers Forum

First held at the 19CCEM, the Small States Ministers Forum will run concurrently with the Senior Officials Meeting and will provide a platform for the effective discussion of issues specific to small states within the Commonwealth, which comprise approximately 60% of the Commonwealth's membership.

5.5 Education Ministers Meeting

The ministerial meeting will convene over three days and is restricted to ministers of education across the Commonwealth, their designated representative(s) and invited observers. Two keynote speakers will address ministers on a topic in line with the prevailing theme. Ministers will also have the opportunity to participate in ministerial roundtables on education for climate change mitigation, skills for development, and education governance and management. At the closing of 20CCEM, Ministers will issue a ministerial declaration that outlines a clear set of commitments for member states and sets out education priorities and agenda for the next three years across the Commonwealth.

6. Integrated Partners Forum

Concurrent to the ministerial meeting, teachers, civil society members, higher education leaders and students will meet for the Integrated Partners Forum (IPF). The forum will provide an opportunity for the wider education community across the Commonwealth to meet, network and exchange ideas; engage in dialogue; and communicate their priorities to ministers. The programme will feature a mixture of panel sessions, presentations, debates and world café style workshops. There will also be opportunities for IPF representatives to meet and engage with Commonwealth ministers and senior government officials. At the end of the forum, IPF partners will present a joint Statement to the Commonwealth education ministers detailing their shared recommendations for education across the Commonwealth.

The forum delegates will amongst other things:

- Discuss and debate key issues to advance an inclusive and equitable quality education, including skills development, and lifelong learning opportunities for all, accountability in education and sustainability and resilience.
- Develop and present a communique to Commonwealth Education Ministers with recommendations for key messages that Commonwealth education ministers wish to communicate to Heads of Government convening at the next Commonwealth Summit.

While prior CCEMs have held separate forums for civil society stakeholders, higher education leaders, students and teachers, the 20CCEM steering committee agreed that this will take the form of an integrated forum at 20CCEM. This format will allow for greater collaboration among the various groups who each have an important role in helping Commonwealth education ministers attain the SDG4 targets.

For further information and details please contact the Education Section: 20CCEM@commonwealth.int



Appendix I: Draft programme for the 20CCEM Ministerial Meeting

Monday 19 February

Delegates' arrival and registration

Resilience qualifications side event

Time available for pre-conference meetings

*Opening of concurrent Integrated Partners Forum (IPF)

Tuesday 20 February

Senior Officials Meeting

Small States Ministers Forum

Lunch with ministers and selected representatives of the IPF

Meeting of the Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG)

Opening ceremony including keynote

Welcome cocktail hosted by the Honourable Prime Minister of Fiji

*Concurrent Integrated Partners Forum (IPF)

Wednesday 21 February

Session 1

- Keynote: Education for sustainable development
- Reflections & discussion

Session 2

- Update on Nassau Declaration Action Plan
- Thematic Issues Paper
- Discussion

Commonwealth Secretary-General's Lunch for ministers

Session 3

- Global perspective & overview on Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4)
- Status update report on SDG4 in the Commonwealth Countries
- Discussion

Session 4

- Commonwealth progress reports and work programmes:
 - Commonwealth of Learning (COL)
 - Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP)
 - Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility (CTEF)
 - Commonwealth Secretariat's Education Team (COMSEC)

Dinner hosted by the Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts, Fiji

*Concurrent Integrated Partners Forum (IPF)

Thursday 22 February

Session 5

- Keynote: Building resilience through education
- Reflections & discussion

Session 6

- Integrated Partners Forum statement
- Discussion

Lunch with ministers and selected representatives of the IPF

Session 7:

- Education for climate change mitigation
- Skills for development
- Education governance & management

Session 8

- Reports from ministerial round tables - Plenary

Commonwealth Secretary-General's Reception

*Concurrent Integrated Partners Forum (IPF) running until lunch time

Friday 23 February

Session 9

- Taking an integrated approach
- SDG4 elements: Early childhood care and education
- Discussion

Session 10

- SDG4 elements: Primary and secondary education
- SDG4 elements: Technical and vocational skills
- Discussion

Session 11

- SDG4 elements: Tertiary education
- SDG4 elements: Adult education and learning
- Discussion

Lunch with ministers and selected representatives of the IPF

Session 12

- Closing of Ministerial Meeting and 20CCEM Declaration issued