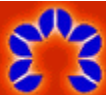Fifteenth Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers
Edinburgh, Scotland, 27-30 October 2003

Access, Inclusion and Achievement:
Closing the Gap

Country Response: Canada

Prepared by the
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
Conseil des ministres de l'Éducation (Canada)

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Prepared for

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

by

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Introduction

The Fifteenth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers is to be held in Edinburgh from October 27 to 30, 2003.   To support the work to be undertaken at this Conference, each country has been asked to prepare a Country Response Paper. The purpose of the paper is to provide each country with an opportunity to share with the rest of the Commonwealth current policies, strategies, practices, critical concerns and aspirations for education in the country, specifically in relation to the theme: Access, Inclusion and Achievement – Closing the Gap. The Country Response Paper is in two sections: Part A consists of best practices, case studies, innovative solutions and policies, and outstanding challenges organized around the themes of access, inclusion and achievement; Part B is linked to the nine points presented in the *Halifax Statement for Education*, which resulted from the last Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in 2000, and presents progress and success since that meeting in the areas most relevant to Canada's experience.

Canada is a northern country in the western hemisphere that occupies the second-largest land mass in the world. Canada has a culturally diverse population totalling more than 30,000,000, with most Canadians living in urban areas near the southern United States/Canada border, while others inhabit a variety of regions stretching from sea to sea to sea. More than 79 per cent of Canadians live in an urban area of over 10,000, with 51 per cent of the population concentrated in only four broad urban regions.

Canada has two official languages — English and French. According to the 2001 census, English is the mother tongue of about 59 per cent of the population, and French is the mother tongue of 23 per cent. In Quebec, 41 per cent of the population speak both languages. In other provinces, the proportion of those who speak both languages decreases — in New Brunswick, 34 per cent; in Ontario, 12 per cent; and in Manitoba, 9 per cent. French-English bilingualism has increased since the 1996 census to almost 18 per cent of the population. Education is available in either official language, wherever numbers warrant.

The 2001 census also showed that Canada is becoming more and more a multilingual society, with 18 per cent of the population reporting a mother tongue other than English or French, a substantial increase since the 1996 census.

Politically, Canada is a federation of ten provinces and three territories, each of which, within the federated system of shared powers, is responsible for education. The Constitution Act, 1867, provides in part that "in and for each province, the Legislature makes laws in relation to education."   Canada does not, therefore, have a central ministry or office of education. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) provides a forum for education ministers from the provinces and territories to discuss issues of shared concern, undertake educational initiatives cooperatively and represent pan-Canadian education internationally. The CMEC web site (www.cmec.ca) provides additional information and links concerning education in Canada.

Despite the fact that each of the provinces and territories has developed its own educational structures and institutions, reflecting the circumstances of regions separated by great geographic distances and the diversity of the country's heritage, its thirteen educational systems are more alike than they are different. All systems maintain a three-tiered structure of elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schooling. All jurisdictions provide universal, free elementary and secondary schooling that is compulsory. Postsecondary education is provided by universities and colleges, community colleges, cépegs (collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel) and institutes of technology.

The three northern territories (Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Yukon) have been assigned responsibility for the delivery of educational services to all residents, including Status Indians and Inuit through federal statute. The Government of Canada provides funding for education in these territories, and all three territorial governments have established their own department of education to manage the delivery of educational services. And although the provinces retain constitutional authority for education in all lands, the federal government provides for the education of registered Indians and Inuit people, with the exception of the Cree, Inuit and Naskapi of Quebec whose education is the responsibility of that province. The federal government also provides for the individuals in the Armed Forces, Coast Guard and Correctional (penitentiary) Services.

Education is of primary importance in Canada and in response to the challenges and opportunities in today's education, departments and ministries in the provinces and territories have developed, implemented and updated comprehensive plans for the improvement of education. Central to all these plans is increased focus on the topics that have been chosen as the major themes for the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, *Access, Inclusion and Achievement: Closing the Gap.*

With 13 educational jurisdictions, it is clearly impossible to outline the best practices, innovations and challenges in each. The examples included in this document serve as illustrations of the countrywide attention that is being paid to expanding access, widening inclusion and improving achievement. In such short overviews, the initiatives of only a few provinces or territories can be featured – but every educational jurisdiction in Canada has tackled the challenges of "closing the gap" in ways that reflect their unique populations and needs. Much more can be learned by visiting the web sites of the ministries and departments of education listed at the end of this paper.

Recognizing that good data reporting is a first and essential step in identifying the nature and extent of the challenges in access, inclusion, and achievement and in monitoring the impact of changes in policy and practice, the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program was introduced by the Canadian Educational Statistics Council. The first report was published in 1996, the next in 1999, with the third to be available late in 2003. The reports look at educational demand, enrolments, and attainment, related to factors such as socio-economic status; staffing in education; investment, spending and tuition patterns; educational outcomes, with attention to gender and linguistic issues; education and labour market participation; and adult education participation rates.

Closing the Gap

Access

Given the immense size of Canada and the widely dispersed population — just over thirty million people in almost ten million square kilometres — providing access to educational opportunities is one of Canada's greatest challenges. The vast majority of the population lives in urban centres, but there are hundreds of smaller communities and some of these are not accessible by road – but only by ferry, coastal boats, and air and are sometimes hundreds of kilometres from their nearest neighbours. This has an enormous impact on access to equitable education as, for example, in Newfoundland and Labrador, almost 25 per cent of the schools have fewer than 100 students. Groups in the population can also be marginalized by their socio-economic status, by rigid structures of delivery or requirements, through the lack of opportunities in their communities, and by lack of information about programs and support. Each of these must be addressed in efforts to close the access gap.

The Influence of Geography and Population Trends

Geography has an enormous impact in the Northwest Territories (NWT), with a land mass of 1.2 million square kilometres and a population of 41,000 scattered over 32 communities. In response to 60 per cent of their students not completing secondary school, NWT senior secondary courses have now been extended to 95 per cent of the smaller communities so that students can complete their education without leaving home and family. While this has shown some success, there is still substantial drop off at the grade ten level, two years before completion. In the search for further solutions, alternatives are being developed to the current academic stream to allow, for example, special tailoring of additional mathematics and science curricula to occupations and trade.

Shifts in population from rural to urban centres are being experienced in all jurisdictions and the responses include new projects, structures and funding. For example, several Quebec regions are experiencing the cumulative effect of a declining birth rate and the exodus of young families to urban centres, leading to the issue of how schools can survive and educational services can be maintained. The use of information technologies is seen as a partial solution and three pilot projects, carried out over 18 months, examine real life problems such as a lack of teachers, distance of students from their schools and the small number of students in a school. The results of this research have wide application and implications for rural and educational development.

Despite a population growth, Ontario's school population is expected to decline in all areas but the Greater Toronto Area by 2005. In some locations, schools are already operating at less than 50 per cent capacity, a few at less than 25 per cent. Beginning in 1998, educational governance has been streamlined, resulting in 12 French-language

boards and 60 English-language boards for a total of 72 district school boards, and the francophone population effectively gaining full governance of their school systems. A number of special grants, introduced as part of a new funding formula, provide funding sources that recognize the additional costs of operating small schools in isolated areas as well as in widely dispersed schools.

The Role of Technology

Technology is seen as an important tool to improve access in all jurisdictions. In late 2000, the Saskatchewan Educational Technology Consortium was created by educational partners in the province to provide leadership in the use of technology to achieve the goals of elementary and secondary education, particularly through partnerships and collaboration. The Consortium's vision is "working together to support teaching and learning with technology in Saskatchewan". Initiatives include: working with Saskatchewan Learning to connect teachers and students to each other and the world through CommunityNet; collaborating with school divisions to develop web-based learning resources; supporting innovative teaching and learning in face-to-face and on-line classrooms; and providing leadership for e-business opportunities in the education sector.

Alberta Learning is developing a Learning and Technology Policy Framework to provide direction and coordination for the use of technology in Alberta's learning system. The Framework will inform Ministry decisions by establishing a context for the assessment of trends, needs, best practices, and new initiatives, and ensuring that investment in technology is consistent with learning system objectives and priorities, and optimizes benefits to learners. Other jurisdictions have similar policy documents in development or in place, with quality and access as the underlying goals.

Postsecondary Attendance

Within the postsecondary, training, and adult education systems, access issues can be even more difficult. According to research conducted by the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, close to 1.7 million students are enrolled in courses leading to degrees, diplomas or certificates at public colleges and universities throughout Canada, equivalent to five per cent of the population. Although young people from all income groups are more likely to attend postsecondary education than they were 15 years ago, participation by youth from middle-income backgrounds has grown much more than that of those from low-income backgrounds.

In a July 2003 report, *Who Goes to Post-Secondary Education and When: Pathways Chosen by 20-year-olds*, important differences are revealed between those who go directly to postsecondary studies (59 per cent of all secondary school graduates) and those who do not, or who delay further studies. For example, the odds of not going to postsecondary school were three times greater for those whose parents did not have a

postsecondary school education than for those whose parents had a university degree. Those who did not continue to postsecondary education also tended to: have parents who did not think that going beyond secondary school was very important; have lower marks in the last year of secondary school; have friends who were not interested in furthering their education after secondary school; and/or have worked for pay during their last year of secondary school. This report uses data from a longitudinal survey undertaken jointly by Statistics Canada and Human Resource Development Canada to examine key transitions in the lives of young people, particularly with respect to education, training and work.

The Cost Factor

Clearly the cost of postsecondary education can be a major deterrent. The federal government and all provinces and territories provide financial programs for qualified students to assist with the cost of postsecondary education.

Newfoundland and Labrador has made significant adjustments to tuition rates at publicly-funded postsecondary institutions. By September 2003, tuition fees for most programs at Memorial University will have been reduced by 25% since 2001-02. Tuition rates at the public colleges have been frozen since 1999. Further, the provincial student loan program has been revised to minimize student debt. Under certain conditions, students may have the entire student loan converted to a non-repayable grant. The provincial government has also introduced a Student Loan Tax Credit designed to provide graduates residing in the province with a non-refundable tax credit for a portion of their payment on the principal portion of their provincial student loans.

The Canada-Saskatchewan Integrated Student Loans program introduced in August 2001 provides support to low-income students. Several federal and provincial debt reduction benefits are available to students in Saskatchewan to reduce the amount of student loans they will have to repay and minimize their student debt, including Saskatchewan Student Bursaries, provincial loan remission, Canada and Saskatchewan Study Grants, the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation Bursaries, the Interest Relief Benefit, and the Debt Reduction in Repayment.

Alberta has an extensive program of merit-based scholarships as well as programs aimed at enhancing the participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including maintenance grants for socially-disadvantaged individuals, non-repayable assistance to individuals from northern, rural areas of the province, loan benefit relief, and programs to reduce debt upon completion of studies.

Nova Scotia's debt reduction program, outlined in March 2003, provides graduated debt reduction depending on the number of years of study completed with extra bonuses for working in Nova Scotia after graduation.

 The Northwest Territories has developed a dual response to the problems of losing their graduates to the south and ensuring access to employment after graduation. In order to

continue postsecondary education, most NWT students have to travel to the southern provinces – and have received government support for tuition, travel and living expenses. However, they often did not return to the north. The new program offers an internship program that guarantees one year's employment in government or private industry, and the results so far are promising.

A working group of provincial, territorial and federal officials was established under the auspices of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, to provide an in-depth policy review of financial assistance to students in Canada. The group is currently developing recommendations of potential fiscal, tax and other policy reforms.

Networks and Cooperation

Inter-institutional and governmental co-operation have widened access for many learners. A pan-Canadian project, Campus Canada, is an alliance that has developed over the past three years to provide services related to student mobility and access. Campus Connection is a portal established by Industry Canada to promote Canada's on-line higher learning opportunities. Complementing the portal are a number of partnerships, such as the Canadian Virtual University with 13 universities working together to provide programs and courses, increase access, collaborate on new program development, and research and respond to international opportunities. Together they provide 250 programs through the Internet or distance education. The Canadian Virtual College Consortium involves seven institutions in delivering on-line programs with reduced residency requirements and shared development. Also part of the alliance is the Canadian Learning Bank. The alliance is working to provide prior learning assessment, credit recognition, and credit banking.

Several provinces have also developed their own networks. A recent initiative, Campus Saskatchewan, is a partnership directed and managed by its members to support the development and advancement of inter-institutional initiatives for the use of technology-enhanced learning. The goals include an increase in the availability of courses and programs that respond to student demands and to provincial social and economic needs, the removal of barriers so that students can complete programs by taking courses from more than one member institution in Saskatchewan, the provision of advice and counselling, study support, and library services, and the development of other cooperative arrangements.

Manitoba has established a Northern Adult Learning Network to create distributed community-based learning and training opportunities. This includes: a University College of the North to improve access to postsecondary education in northern and remote areas of the province; postsecondary learning opportunities through Campus Manitoba and Inter-Universities North; and community-based delivery of adult programming, including apprenticeship upgrade training, adult literacy programs, adult learning centres and, in some cases, postsecondary education. One specific initiative with Manitoba Hydro aims to prepare northern First Nation and Aboriginal communities for employment related to the construction of two new hydroelectric generating stations.

New community-based training centres, with multi-faceted education and training partnerships, will facilitate long-term capacity building.

Contact North/Contact Nord in Ontario is a bilingual distance education and training network established in 1986 to increase access to courses and programs offered by colleges, universities, secondary schools, and other educational providers to the residents of northern Ontario. In 2001-02, Contact North/Contact Nord served almost 13,000 students through a network of 145 distance education and training access centres in more than 100 communities — 40 are in First Nation communities, 80 have no other postsecondary presence, and 22 can only be reached by air. Learners are linked with other learners and the instructor through audio, video, and computer conferencing, and audiographics.

Since 1968, the Université du Québec has been serving students all over Quebec through its network of ten institutions in large urban centres and small cities, complemented since 1972 by the Télé-université with its focus on distance education. Supported by a full-range of technology – from the Internet to print – and an extensive research program, the Télé-université is one of a large number of Canadian postsecondary institutions that provide distance education as a necessary and effective alternative to face-to-face instruction. Distance education often involves cooperation as in, for example, the Réseau d'enseignement francophone à distance, which provides information and supports collaboration among its members in seven provinces, who are interested in the promotion and development of distance education in French.

Transferability among institutions enhances both access and success. British Columbia has both community colleges providing one- and two-year diplomas and university colleges and institutes providing these diplomas as well as a limited number of university degrees. Most institutions offer various forms of co-operative education combining working and learning, an attractive option for many adults, and all colleges and university colleges offer Adult Basic Education. Colleges and university colleges also tend to have special programs for specific groups, such as social assistance recipients and Aboriginal students. From the inception of BC community colleges 25 years ago, one overarching idea was to develop comprehensive institutions. As a result, students can more readily drop in and out of college as their circumstances permit, since transferability agreements allow them to accumulate credits from several institutions; a process of program laddering helps students who leave to re-enter a college and continue up an educational ladder. Transfer to universities is also possible, governed by a series of transfer agreements.

Training, Literacy and Adult Education

Flexibility, collaboration and funding have all been part of closing the gap in training and adult education. In 1994, New Brunswick began a program called Competitive, Recognized and Educated Workforce, established by means of fiscal incentives from the government and partnerships among the employer and/or union, Literacy New Brunswick

Inc and the government. The project features free training, in either French or English, at work sites or convenient locations, with programs including academic upgrading, computer training, skills development, and other options, as well as class times, program length, and training schedules tailored to meet the needs of the learners and employers. This award-winning initiative continues to grow, with 143 programs established since its inception.

The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Program has seen a doubling of enrolment in the last six years. In order to build more flexibility and accessibility into the system, Nova Scotia introduced part-time study, adjusted the delivery structures and implemented Internet delivery. All courses can be taken via the Internet, in a classroom, or though a blending of the two systems. This approach has contributed to the significant increase in the number of apprentices both entering and completing programs.

Yukon has responded to limited access to training in professions through the provision of para-professional training that allows adults to enter a field or speciality and progress to higher levels. This laddered approach to education enables adults to maintain work and family obligations while working towards professional credentials in some of Yukon's under-resourced professions. In addition, apprenticeship and pre-employment training is incorporated into Yukon Government capital construction projects in communities so that local residents can acquire training that is not normally available locally and can work at the same time.

Nova Scotia has developed a response that seeks to pay attention to issues of accessibility, marginalized groups, and supply and demand while offering a relevant and coordinated approach to program delivery for literacy, adult basic education, and secondary school completion programs for adults. The Department of Education has created seven Regional Planning Teams as a formal forum for the key stakeholders to work collaboratively in the provision of services in rural areas. In a model of co-operation, the teams include community organizations, colleges, school boards, representatives from Human Resource Development Canada and the provincial departments of Community Services and Education.

In May 2002, Quebec announced its first policy statement on adult and continuing education, accompanied by an action plan with a commitment to $450 million over five years. The goal is to increase the number of those registered in adult education by 33,000, with improved services for support and counselling, tools for the recognition of new skills, and a program of loans for part-time studies.

Providing the Necessary Information

The lack of information can derail the best educational efforts. CanLearn Interactive is a one-stop Web-based resource that provides information, products and services to help Canadians decide what and where to study and how to cover the costs of their education at home or abroad with information about Canada Student Loans, Canadian scholarships,

study grants, and programs offered jointly by Canada and some of the provinces. Each province and territory offers a similar on-line information service, as well as counselling at the educational institutions and other community locations. For example, Alberta's new Accessibility Communications Framework enhances students' awareness of postsecondary program opportunities and student assistance options and targets disadvantaged students, particularly Aboriginals and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Inclusion

The concept of inclusion in education encompasses minority language groups, students with special needs, and those disadvantaged by location, educational level, health, and gender.

Aboriginal Education

As noted in an OECD country review of adult learning, in Canada, as in other countries with large Aboriginal populations, the inclusion of Aboriginal groups in education is a subject of primary concern. In the 2001 census, just over 1.3 million people reported having at least some Aboriginal ancestry, representing about 4.4 per cent of the total population. Aboriginals in Canada have the lowest incomes, the highest rates of poverty, the highest rates of dropping out of formal education, the lowest overall educational attainments and the worst health indicators of any group. When educational officials discuss the most challenging problems they face, Aboriginal inclusion in education is among the first they mention. Across Canada, unique and responsive programs and services have been developed.

Nunavut was created in April 1999 as the result of a comprehensive Land Claims Agreement. The population of about 29,000 is located in 25 communities spread over about two million square kilometres in the north east of Canada. The population is 83 per cent Inuit. Retention rates for secondary school completion are about 50 per cent, with a graduation rate of 25 per cent. Within this challenging context, the Department of Education has a mandate to produce bilingual graduates – Inuktitut and English - in an education system that is culturally relevant.

With these goals in mind, a Language of Instruction Initiative was launched in 2002 with $6 million a year for the next ten years for teacher training, resource production, and curriculum development. The task is unique to Nunavut, as they have to do all the Inuktitut language curriculum and resource development and most of the teacher training. And the oral legends, stories and history must be recorded to become part of this curriculum. A broad Nunavut Labour Market Training Strategy is also being developed that includes a number of tools that support inclusion, such as approaches to Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition, developing an Adult High School Diploma, improving career information and guidance services in schools and for adults, and determining partners, funding, and stakeholder roles.

The Northwest Territories has eight official languages and in order to stimulate the retention of Aboriginal languages is now providing Aboriginal curriculum for the schools, language immersion programs, and funding for six language groups to address grass roots issues. Teacher education is offered at three campuses in NWT and the joint delivery of a Bachelor of Education is being planned with the University of Saskatchewan. The belief is that northern-trained teachers will not only be reflective of

the people they serve, but will help alleviate the drastic turnover of teachers in northern communities.

Under agreement with Alberta, both Nunavut and the Northwest Territories have approval to use the Alberta Program of Study and provincial examinations, as and where appropriate.

Yukon has a population of 30,000, with one urban and 16 rural communities. The traditional territories of 14 First Nations lie within Yukon, and a First Nation population of 7,800 people or 26 per cent of the population. The Yukon Native Language Centre (YNLC) is a training and research facility that provides a range of linguistic and education services to Yukon First Nations and to the general public. The Council of Yukon Indians, now the Council of Yukon First Nations, began the project in 1977, with continuous funding by the Government of Yukon. YNLC offers training and certification for Yukon Aboriginal Teachers, with staff and Elders developing and teaching the courses. In addition, YNLC develops teaching and learning materials for all Yukon Aboriginal groups, including a curriculum guide, language lesson booklets and tapes, dictionaries and reference materials, and most recently, interactive computer materials and a CD. Working with Elders, YNLC documents Yukon native traditions, oral history and personal and place names. At the elementary and secondary school level, the Department of Education in Yukon follows the BC curriculum with 20 per cent of the curriculum designed for local relevance. The First Nations Curriculum project emphasizes Yukon First Nations culture and language, including class fish camps, Elders and artists in the school and storytelling, all of which are integrated with appropriate aspects of the core curriculum.

Among the provincial initiatives in education for Aboriginal people, the New Brunswick Community College (NBCC) has designed a Seat Allocation Policy for the Aboriginal community. In its regular programs all across the province, NBCC reserves up to 200 training seats annually for Aboriginal students. In addition, NBCC offers customized training initiatives to meet the specific training needs of Aboriginal communities, such as the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Initiative with reimbursements to employers who hire an Aboriginal apprentice.

The First Nations University of Canada (FNUC), also known as the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, federated with the University of Regina, has a special status as an Aboriginal college, the first Aboriginal-run university college in the country. FNUC was established by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, with funding from the province as well as the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. The College offers university programs with degrees awarded by the University of Regina, as well as one and two-year certificates. The programs focus on preparing individuals to work with Aboriginal populations and with issues on reserves. Courses and programs include social work, public administration, Aboriginal linguistics, Aboriginal communication arts for journalists focused on Aboriginal issues, Aboriginal fine arts, teacher education, English, nursing, and science, focusing on First Nations health issues like alcoholism, depression, and nutrition. The staff is 75 per cent First Nations or Métis; the students are about 80

per cent First Nations, with most of the rest Métis. The college has developed a distinctively Aboriginal pedagogy, focusing on aspects of tribal culture and holistic approaches to learning, incorporating traditional practices.

Other specialized institutions also serve the diverse Aboriginal population, including the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, under First Nations' control, which is the primary technical training institution for First Nations' people in the province. The Gabriel Dumont Institute is the only Métis-controlled institution of its kind in Canada, offering cultural resources and programs. Affiliated with the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), it delivers technical, vocational and basic education programs as well as undertaking needs assessment and providing counseling services to support Métis people in gaining access to and successfully completing SIAST programs.

In order to facilitate increased Aboriginal secondary school completion and transition to postsecondary education, Manitoba allocates over $5.5 million for school divisions to offer locally developed programs that target academic success for Aboriginal students. Additionally, Aboriginal perspectives have been integrated into the elementary and secondary school curriculum, and many new university programs have been introduced that are targeted to Aboriginal students.

In 1999, Alberta Learning initiated a review and an extensive policy consultation process involving over 5,000 participants, which set the foundation for the development of the *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* released in 2002. Initiatives reflecting the themes of the *Framework* include a program to increase Aboriginal participation in apprenticeship programs, a school dedicated to the needs of Aboriginal secondary school students, funding for the Rainbow Spirit Project involving teacher professional development, development of curricular resources and exposure to Aboriginal culture, as well as projects to further the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in all subject areas and the implementation of Aboriginal Studies curriculum in provincial schools.

In a cooperative effort aimed at the elementary and secondary schools, *The Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs, Kindergarten to Grade 12*, was developed through the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education in 2000. The curriculum guidelines are based in Aboriginal traditions and ways of knowing and interacting with the world, with the lead taken by Aboriginal educators and Elders in the development of the principles, procedures and assessment practices.

Students with Special Needs

Students with special needs are served in a variety of ways across the country. In 1999, the Alberta government, as part of the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative, implemented the Student Health Initiative (SHI) to improve access to and enhance the

provision of integrated health and related support services for children with special health needs so that they can participate fully in education programs and be successful at learning. SHI was developed to permit school authorities, regional health authorities, child and family service authorities, the Alberta Mental Health Board, and other stakeholders to more effectively support the over 70,000 students with special health needs, including physical disabilities, development disabilities, neurological disorders, sensory impairments, medical conditions and/or emotional and behavioural disabilities. Students, teachers and parents have seen the benefits of this integrated system with its enhanced funding and focus.

Alberta Learning also works with agencies and other provinces to develop material to guide work with students with diverse learning needs such as *Programming for Students with Special Needs* and *Teaching Students with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome*. Specialists are available, at a subsidized rate, in the areas of sensory-impaired, multi-handicapped, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and severe communication disorder. The Réseau provincial d'adaptation scolaire serves francophone students.

In the area of support services, the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education is committed to two interrelated models which guide the development and delivery of supports and services to children with special needs. *The Model for Coordination of Service to Children and Youth* is an interdepartmental framework designed to ensure the coordination of service delivery, especially through the Individual Support Services Planning process (ISSP). When a child is identified as having a need or being at risk, the ISSP process brings the child/youth, parents and all other service providers together to ensure seamless planning and delivery of service in school, at home and in the community. A database of information on those receiving supports or identified as at risk, gathered through individual child/youth profiles, enables analysis of the province-wide capacity to address these needs and identifies gaps in service provision on a regional basis. *Pathways to Programming and Graduation* enables teachers to tailor curriculum to meet the individual strengths and needs of all students by providing the framework for an ISSP team to implement the accommodations and supports a student needs and to describe the curriculum modifications and any additional programming needed. The *Pathways* model has resulted in an increased comfort level for teachers in programming for all children, including those with special needs, and an increased awareness and clarity for parents around the specifics of their child's program.

Within Manitoba, inclusion is embraced as a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe. As an outcome of a 1999 province-wide *Special Education Review*, Manitoba has enacted legislation to ensure that all students in public schools receive appropriate education programming in accordance with their unique needs.

As part of the new provincial Autism Strategy, Prince Edward Island has established model classes in school areas that are experiencing a high incidence of Autism Spectrum Disorder. This strategy allows for economies of scale in the delivery of services and, at

the same time, provides teachers with the opportunity to garner experience in the delivery of programs to children with this syndrome.

To address an increasing need for support services to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Newfoundland and Labrador hired consultants to provide professional development and individual consultative service to teachers and other professionals. They offer programming, resources, intervention ideas, and in-service training. The Department of Education holds summer institutes and has compiled a handbook entitled *Teaching Students with Autism: A Resource Guide*.

In 2003, the Ontario Ministry of Education published *Pathways for Success: Sample Timetables for Supporting Students at Risk* to assist school boards, principals, and teachers in developing programs to meet the needs of students in their schools who may be at risk of not completing the requirements for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. The sample timetables in the document illustrate ways in which a variety of support strategies and program options can be integrated into programs for students at risk. The Ontario government has provided additional funding to support programs that will benefit students who need extra help in reading, writing and mathematics and in their transition from school to the workplace and to college or university. Funding to support special education has also been increased by the Ontario government..

School safety and high-risk or disruptive students receive carefully-designed responses as well. New Brunswick has reached a drop-out rate of below three per cent in both the anglophone and francophone school systems by identifying and working with high-risk students to give them every chance of completing their diploma, with initiatives such as alternative school settings, summer schooling, mentoring and tutoring, and youth apprenticeship programs.

The Nova Scotia Department of Education has launched a pilot project to meet the needs of severely disruptive students — those who are at high risk of being suspended, have been suspended or expelled from their schools. The project brings together mental health, community service, justice and education professionals to provide intensive behavioural support and to keep the students in touch with their schools and their communities.

In a response to concerns with bullying in the schools, the Nova Scotia Department of Education received a report from students, which included perspectives from victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, with recommendations on interventions by government and by students. A new code of conduct was implemented in schools in 2002 that states the context for a safe and productive learning environment by outlining expected behaviour in schools.

Language and Literacy Education

With two official languages, Canada is concerned with education in both English and French. For many years, pan-Canadian and international assessments have indicated that

the performance of francophone students in minority language settings requires special attention. In most provinces and territories, recent assessments consistently show that minority francophone 13- and 16- year-old students performed less well overall than their anglophone counterparts across Canada, their performance also being lower than their counterparts in Quebec. Studies have already shown that these results are not exclusively attributable to teaching and learning issues, but are also affected by socio-cultural and economic issues. These students need to acquire the skills necessary to an increased and effective use of French as a language of instruction, as well as the socio-cultural skills to use the language as a tool for learning, communication and self-realization. A report, commissioned by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, that identifies a number of possible areas for concrete interventions to support teaching and learning for francophone minority language students will be released in the next few months, along with a resource kit for teachers of French in minority settings from kindergarten through grade two.

The French Language Postsecondary Education program in Ontario is provided in co-operation with the federal government for two particular programs. The first provides funding to Ontario's two French-language colleges and five bilingual universities for activities aimed at increasing participation and retention of francophone students. In the second program, the Colleges receive funding in recognition of the increased costs of providing education in a minority language for such activities as program development, production of learning resources, professional development, and development of alternative modes of delivery. The Universities receive the funding as special grants targeted to education, medicine, deaf students, and distance learning.

The education of those who speak neither English nor French is also a key concern. A May 2003 symposium held in Montreal, *Dessine-moi une école*, brought together 450 educators, policy makers and administrators to share best practices and innovations in the integration of students who are recent immigrants and the teaching of mutual respect and understanding. A video, *Écoles en action*, featured successful projects.

Those who lack basic literacy skills are also given opportunities to move into wider educational opportunities. The Literacy Action Committee in Yukon supports literacy projects that include the production of literacy books with simultaneous translations in First Nation and English languages, homework clubs connecting the school and the family, and family- and workplace-based literacy and computer literacy that include learning opportunities for people with disabilities. There is also a special program to provide experiential trades training for girls and women to increase awareness of careers in the trades.

Ontario provides a Literacy and Basic Skills service, in over 300 sites around the province, to assist learners in developing and achieving goals related to further education or training, employment, or greater independence. To ensure that the literacy needs of learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are addressed, four streams are supported for deaf, anglophone, francophone and First Nation learners. AlphaRoute is a

web-based, interactive, distance-learning environment for the use of literacy and basic skills learners and agencies, for all four target groups.

Alberta supports a broad range of adult English as a Second Language (ESL) programming, delivered through a wide network of public institutions, not-for-profit agencies and private providers. Alberta joins the federal government and the governments of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia in supporting the application of Canadian Language Benchmarks in adult English as a Second Language programming across the country. The Benchmarks are a descriptive scale of communicative proficiency in ESL, expressed as reference points, providing a framework for learning and teaching, for planning and developing curricula and for assessing the outcomes.

Achievement

According to the 2001 census, the number of Canadians aged 25 and over with university, college or trade credentials grew by 39 per cent from 1996. The proportion of the total adult population with university degrees was 20 per cent; another 16 per cent had college diplomas; and the proportion with a trade certificate was 12 per cent. When comparisons were made in 2000 measuring the population between 25 and 64 years of age, Canada, with 41 per cent of the population having either a college or university education, was the highest of the OECD countries.

Attendance at the elementary level is almost 100 per cent and about 90 per cent of students begin the final year of secondary school, with 80 per cent of students graduating.

Canada has a highly educated population but the ministries and departments of education also realize that improvements can be made. Higher numbers of students can be encouraged to attend postsecondary education, the quality of the learning needs to be continuously monitored and improved, the knowledge and skills that are tested and recognized can be expanded, and the schools and education itself must be accountable to the public.

Participation in International Tests

International and pan-Canadian assessment tools have helped to define comparative achievement levels. Canada participates in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, the international assessment of the skills and knowledge of 15-year-olds. With attention to reading, mathematics and science, the reports provide ongoing results that can be compared internationally. In 2000, the primary focus was on reading. Over 30,000 students took part in Canada, so that the results could be considered at the provincial level. The OECD results show that Canada's performance rank was among the top countries in the study, and that the gap in performance between the highest-scoring and lowest-scoring students was narrow compared to most other participating countries. Similarly, Canada was among the six countries where the performance gap between students from higher socio-economic levels and those from lower socio-economic levels was narrow. In particular, Saskatchewan had the second smallest gap between the achievement levels of low and high socio-economic status students in the world – second only to Japan. In the more detailed analysis focused on the pan-Canadian results, considerable variance in overall performance among provinces is revealed as well as some gender differences in reading assessment, favouring girls, and under-performance by francophone minority-language students in some provinces.

Pan-Canadian Achievement Measures

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) has conducted achievement tests since 1993. The School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) is a pan-Canadian

program of cyclical assessments of student achievement in mathematics, reading and writing, and science. The provinces and territories designed SAIP to complement the existing assessments in each jurisdiction and provide Canada-wide data on achievement levels of 13- and 16- year olds. More recently, CMEC began to collect information on the context of the learning, specifically the factors in a student's environment that affect the level of achievement.

In April 2003, the ministers of education of the provinces and territories announced the development of a major streamlined and forward-looking assessment program aimed at improving learning. The new Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) will initially assess student performance in the core subjects of reading, mathematics and science. It is designed so that other subjects, such as second languages, the arts, and information and communications technologies can be added as the need arises. PCAP will replace the School Achievement Indicators Program and will preserve the wealth of data gathered through SAIP.

PCAP enables the assessment of the performance of the education systems in Canada but also dovetails with the important international assessments being done through the OECD. By integrating existing testing programs, PCAP greatly eases the testing burden on schools. It will also enable provinces and territories to improve their assessments and to validate their results by comparing them to both the pan-Canadian and international results, all of which will be communicated to learners, parents and schools, and the Canadian public.

Public Accountability

Reflecting this accountability at the provincial and territorial level, the commitment of the individual schools and boards to improving student achievement is demonstrated by their openness to the public in each jurisdiction.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education has broadened the communication of school boards with their communities through the institution of accountability contracts as the measure of the boards' commitment to and results in improving student achievement. Reflecting the unique characteristics, priorities and needs of each district, the boards established goals based on: results from classroom, school and district assessments; provincial exam results; school completion and graduation rates; grade-to-grade transition rates; the achievement of Aboriginal students; the achievement of special education students; human and social development and safety issues; and the results of parent, staff and student satisfaction surveys. The annual results from each school and board are available to the public on-line.

The satisfaction surveys in British Columbia began in 2002 and encompass achievement, safety, and human and social development issues. They were administered in grades four and seven in elementary school and grades ten and twelve in secondary school. Reflecting the diversity of the school population, the parent surveys were available on the

Ministry web site in 15 languages - English, French, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and both Simplified and Traditional Chinese.

In 2000, the Quebec Ministry of Education adopted measures to translate its commitment to success into concrete action by asking all elementary and secondary schools to draw up and implement success plans. As a result, each school now has clear and measurable goals with respect to student achievement and has determined the means by which it means to attain these goals. Each school has also identified ways of measuring the results of its plan on a regular basis in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The plans cover a three-year period with annual updates. The colleges have also prepared and shared their plans for success including actions, strategies, measures, challenges and targets groups.

School Improvement Initiatives

Along with its program of public accountability for all its schools, Alberta Learning has implemented the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, which achieves continuous improvement to student learning through encouraging teachers, parents, and the community to work collaboratively to introduce innovation and creative initiatives that reflect the unique needs and circumstances within school jurisdictions. Funding of more than $200 million over three years has allowed the development of hundreds of projects. In 2003, Alberta renewed this funding framework and introduced the *Pillars of Funding Framework* with flexibility, accountability and funding as the pillars. The *Framework* provides flexibility for the school jurisdictions in how funding allocations are used and it places increased emphasis on local accountability for results.

As in the Alberta example above, other provinces have made reallocations of resources among schools to support the goals of student attainment. A recent review of the education system in Prince Edward Island (PEI) revealed that the number of students in school would decline dramatically over the next five years, with the result that, in five years, PEI would need 140 fewer teachers. But it is recognized that the allocation of teachers based on class size has the greatest sustainable impact on student outcomes, especially in the early grades. Consequently, the PEI Department of Education will be maintaining these 140 teacher positions and adding others, as well as providing other teachers who provide specialized education inside and outside the classroom.

Similarly, the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education brought in a new teacher allocation formula in 2000. The new allocation method assumes that all schools must be able to offer a program sufficient to ensure that specific student outcomes under all categories of the province's *Essential Graduation Learnings* are met. This model enables schools and school districts to accommodate their own unique needs in program delivery and school organization. The result has been more generous allocation of teachers to elementary education and to smaller rural schools. In 2001-2002, the pupil teacher ratio for urban schools was 15.3 to 1, while rural schools had an average of 12.0 to 1. In addition, there is a School Profile system on the web with comparative data on

schools across the province and effectiveness experts have been hired to review each of the schools to see how effectively and appropriately they are delivering programs.

Learning Achievement Measures

The methods by which students are measured and the competencies that are measured are also under revision. *Quality Schools, High Results*, a comprehensive policy statement for New Brunswick schools as part of a *Quality Learning Agenda* from early childhood through to adult learning, focuses strongly on raising academic achievement and excellence, improving quality teaching and ensuring greater accountability of the school system to students and parents. The initial emphasis will be on early literacy with the target that 90 per cent of grade two (early elementary) students will have the ability to read at grade level or above. The program to achieve this will start with an assessment of each child entering kindergarten to determine who will require reading intervention, complemented by newly-designed intervention programs and a reading test for the end of grade two. In recognition of two areas requiring special attention, strategies will be developed to improve literacy achievement levels of boys and overall achievement levels of Aboriginal students throughout their education.

Two of the cornerstones of Nova Scotia's *Learning for Life* plan are quality and accountability. In addition to exit exams for the final year of secondary school in language arts, science and mathematics to be implemented in 2003- 2004 school year, Nova Scotia is expanding its provincial student assessments to include literacy and mathematics at the grade six and grade nine levels. The *Minister's Annual Report to Parents* communicates the performance of Nova Scotia students as indicated through provincial, national and international assessments.

In Manitoba, several strategies are being developed to smooth transitions from secondary to postsecondary education or to work by providing new ways of presenting and measuring achievements, including an employability skills credential and a skills portfolio for all senior secondary school students. Already available are the challenge for credit option within the secondary and postsecondary systems and the opportunity for senior secondary students to take courses that provide them with dual secondary school and college or university credit.

Through the Aboriginal Learner Data Collection Initiative, Alberta will be better able to evaluate how well the leaning system is meeting the needs of Aboriginal learners in order to improve programs and services. A voluntary Aboriginal ancestry question will be added to registration forms in schools, colleges and universities.

Newfoundland and Labrador uses criterion-referenced tests in language arts and mathematics in grades three, six and nine, with science added in grade nine and French included at grades six and nine. Both the successes and the instructional gaps are analyzed with subsequent action plans developed to improve achievement, for planning, and for professional development needs.

Achievement can also be measured on a wider basis as demonstrated in a small community in Yukon which showed success with a literacy program that involved the whole community, while improving student outcomes and making families a larger part of their children's education. By linking literacy to working with families at home to provide homework assistance and tutoring, the benefits were felt by the learners, teachers, families and the community as a whole.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

For adult learners, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) can be a very important tool for measuring their levels of achievement and learning as it focuses on what they know and can do, regardless of the source of the learning. The PLAR systems in Canada recognize both informal learning and prior formal schooling. In some universities, there are special admissions programs for older adults that recognize dimensions of experience. However, the most common form of PLAR recognizes prior formal schooling, rather than informal learning or experience. For example, universities usually allow credit for certain community colleges courses.

In some cases there have been efforts to systematize PLAR. The British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education has developed and distributed guidelines on PLAR for use by its public postsecondary institutions, and allocates several PLAR enhancement grants annually. Public institutions also receive small amounts of block funding to support PLAR coordinators and/or professional development activities that promote PLAR.

Some licensing and certification bodies such as the Professional Fish Harvester Certification Board in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Professional Engineers of Ontario and the Canadian Technology Human Resources Board use PLAR to evaluate the knowledge and skills of applicants wishing to enter their professions, whether they are from different provinces and territories or newcomers to Canada.

In New Brunswick, the community college system is in the process of further developing its Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition services to recognize learning acquired in the workplace or other learning institutions. This will allow more people (especially those in rural areas with traditional resource-based industries) whose educational levels may not be sufficient for participation in workplace training, to access continuous learning and to take advantage of opportunities to upgrade their skills and acquire new ones.

In Ontario, PLAR for mature students working towards the Ontario Secondary School Diploma will be implemented in February 2004. Mature students will be able to challenge course credits and receive equivalent credits based on transcripts and other appropriate documentation of learning that has taken place through courses, programs and work experience.

Manitoba is developing a multi-faceted approach to Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition in industry, and at universities, colleges, secondary schools and adult learning centres, thereby including all the levels of the educational stakeholders.

At Nunavut Arctic College, a College Placement Package has been developed so that the academic level of mature students with inadequate formal credits can be assessed. If the candidate does not qualify for the chosen program, college preparatory and adult basic education programs are available. Students may also request transfer credits and challenge credits. Similar to other jurisdictions in Canada, a secondary school equivalency diploma can be achieved through the General Education Development Program.

International Credential Recognition

Achievement measures are also important for the international recognition. For example, the Alberta International Qualifications Assessment Service issues certificates that compare educational credentials from other countries to educational standards in Alberta and other Canadian provinces. The assessment certificates streamline the integration of individuals with international education into the workforce, educational institutions and professional licensing. Currently, the International Qualifications Assessment Service is used by over 20 postsecondary institutions and 39 professional licensing bodies within Alberta and across Canada.

The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) collects, organizes, and distributes information, and acts as a pan-Canadian clearing house and referral service to support the recognition and portability of Canadian and international educational and occupational qualifications. The CICIC database covers more than 800 professional organizations, with data for recognizing academic and occupational credentials in different Canadian jurisdictions, although CICIC does not itself grant equivalencies or assess credentials. In 2003, all provincially mandated credential evaluation services became members of the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services. With CICIC playing a coordinating role, the Alliance members are from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec.

Halifax Statement of Education

At the 14th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, held in 2000 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Ministers agreed to pursue the nine-point action plan presented in *Education for Our Common Future: The Halifax Statement on Education in the Commonwealth*.

In preparation for the 15th Conference, every participating Commonwealth country has been asked to consider the advancements that have been made in the areas in the Halifax Statement on Education that are most relevant to their context. Highlighting progress and success on the points from the Halifax Statement of Education that are most reflective of education in Canada, this review presents best practices and policy developments from each of the 13 educational jurisdictions.

Several of the priorities outlined at Halifax are core values in education in all the provinces and territories in Canada. The annual plans and long-term policy statements of each of the departments and ministries of education include strategies, funding, action plans, and assessment measures in relation to such issues as teacher training and professional development and information and communications technologies (ICT) in education. They may be presented as goals in themselves or as integral parts of enhancements in the education systems. The departmental, ministerial and school board annual reports then record progress toward the goals.

For example, the policy document, *Learning for Life,* released in 2002 by the Department of Education in Nova Scotia sets out current and planned public school educational initiatives under seven themes — the early years, basics first, success for all students, quality teaching, informed, involved parents, safe schools, healthy students, and accountability to taxpayers. The plan focuses provincial resources where improvements are most needed.

Manitoba's Kindergarten to Senior 4 Education Agenda for Student Success equally reflects the themes of the Halifax Statement and of the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers with its priorities of improving outcomes, especially for less successful learners, strengthening links among schools, families and communities, improving professional learning opportunities for educators, and strengthening pathways among secondary schools, postsecondary education and work.

Information And Communication Technologies

Canada has long been a leader in innovative applications of information and communication technologies (ICT) to learning and one of the most important lessons from this experience has been well understood. The successful integration of technology in education must combine: an efficient and reliable infrastructure and equipment base; dependable and, with the Internet, high-speed delivery; relevant, high-quality and

inclusive content and curriculum-relevant software; training for teachers, students, administrators; timely and competent technical support; and sufficient funding to maintain and update all parts of this equation. The examples of successes and progress since Halifax demonstrate the application of this principle.

Integrating Technology and Learning

Alberta Learning provides one example of the integration of technology, with all its essential components, into the learning system. The provincial broadband network called SuperNet will provide all of Alberta's communities, schools, postsecondary institutions, and libraries with affordable access to a high-speed network by 2004. This is linked with programs that provide lifelong learning by offering learning resources to students, parents and teachers, along with both the funding for the purchase of computers, upgrades, instructional software and networking components in schools, and the professional development opportunities on-line for teachers and administrators. The implementation of the ICT curriculum has been completed in the schools and the goal now is to incorporate ICT outcomes into core curriculum areas such as language arts and science. Alberta Learning has also worked with publishers to develop e-textbooks and selected science textbooks, with multimedia enhancements, are available over the Internet.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education has also made a commitment to bridge the digital divide by extending high-speed, broadband Internet access to every community in BC as part of an action plan to bolster rural schools. As well, rural school districts and regions will be funded to pilot electronic learning and develop models that can be used across the province.

Officially launched in 2002 with the Ministry of Education as program leader, the Villages branchés du Québec (Connectivity for Quebec's Communities) provides government assistance to school boards, municipalities, regional county municipalities and private education institutions who work in partnership with each other and, optimally, with the telecommunications industry, to equip every Quebec region with a broadband communication network through fibre optics, satellite or other technologies. These broadband networks will serve as a basis for a wide range of customized distance education, continuing education, occupational training, and educational support for preschool, elementary, and secondary students. In outlying areas where significant population decline is expected to continue until 2010, the optimization of education resources and services through new technologies will be a key factor in educational quality and reform

To meet the ever-increasing educational needs of the small anglophone communities scattered throughout Quebec, a three-year project has been launched to set up a state-of-the-art infrastructure in technology and to produce courses and educational content for dissemination to all the schools on the network. The teachers in the participating school boards will use a collaborative approach to develop the courses. Once established, this

educational network will be made available for socio-economic and cultural development.

The Government of Nunavut has benefited from the Industry Canada *Computers for Schools Program* in which refurbished computers are donated for use in classrooms, libraries and Community Access Program sites. The computers are donated by governments and private sector sources and are refurbished by volunteers, with the first Nunavut workshop in refurbishing the computers being offered to the students in Iqaluit's Inukshuk High School in partnership with students at a secondary school in Prince Edward Island. The computers are delivered to the schools through a massive effort of co-operation and voluntary service by public and private organizations that provide shipping, air freight, equipment, and even lab coats. And the computers are already being well used in collaborative learning projects initiated, designed and implemented by teachers and students, resulting in the creation of web sites that are relevant to the curriculum and focus on activities carried out using the Internet. With funding from the *SchoolNet GrassRoots Program*, schools across Nunavut have produced almost 50 different web sites.

In response to its geographic and demographic challenges, Newfoundland and Labrador has been innovative in finding solutions to the programming needs of students and professional development needs of teachers in the province. Since 1986, distance education has been offered through teleconference and print materials. In 2002, the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI) was launched to deliver on-line learning to elementary and secondary students. In the 2002-2003 school year, the Department of Education offered 18 secondary school courses on-line to 74 sites across Newfoundland and Labrador, with plans to triple the courses offered by 2005. CDLI courses are also offered to students in hospital or studying at home, and to adult learners for completion of secondary school certification, literacy programs, and adult basic education. The Department has recently reached an agreement with technology companies that will provide a network to connect the schools and provide bandwidth speeds up to 20 times the current levels.

In Saskatchewan, the province's E-Learning Network proved to be a successful method of course delivery for the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College in its provision of University of Regina credit courses in televised format to over 100 sites throughout the province. Students watched courses in Cree, Educational Psychology, English and Linguistics on a television monitor and interacted with the classroom instructor by telephone, fax and the Internet. After successfully reaching almost 400 registrants in 2002, the program was extended and expanded. The full E-Learning Network uses a variety of technologies to deliver over 40 postsecondary and ten secondary classes annually to over 230 classrooms in more than 200 communities.

In 2001, the New Brunswick Department of Education undertook a project to install broadband technology in all public schools and Community Access Centres located in schools in order to provide high speed connectivity to the Internet. The project is expected to be completed in 2003. The increased bandwidth provides the opportunity to

offer teacher-facilitated courses on-line, with a total of 32 courses available to secondary school students in September 2003. As part of the *Quality Learning Agenda*, the Department has committed to offer 60 courses on-line by 2005 providing small, rural schools with a broader range of courses. Over 140 technology mentors have been trained to assist teachers in areas where technology can support teaching and learning. The goal is 205 technology mentors in schools by 2005.

Content Collaboration

In some cases, the technology is in place and what is needed is content relevant to a particular user group. In one example, a partnership among Ontario's French-language school boards illustrates collaboration in using limited resources to deliver high-quality programming. All 12 French-language school boards share course content and delivery through video conferencing and the Internet. In 2000, the school boards and the Centre franco-ontarien de ressources pédagogiques launched the Service d'apprentissage médiatisé franco-ontarien (SAMFO) project that provides accessible e-learning services to all French-language students in the province. SAMFO coordinates the production and sharing of secondary school courses, as well as the appropriate training of French-language teachers. The courses can be delivered in a number of ways — self-directed mediated e-learning, group-mediated e-learning, and Internet-only e-learning. Ontario is working with other provinces on additional course development.

In 2000, the Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment formed an alliance with the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) in Alberta for the delivery of on-line learning to schools throughout the NWT. The CBE provides the Alberta Curricula courses, instructors, and training for NWT teachers. (Course development is now taking place in the North as well.) Courses are offered in schools with a trained teacher facilitator present, as this has been the most successful delivery model. This electronic learning initiative has proven to be of particular benefit in the Department's strategy of extending grades in community schools and closing down students residences, with the added advantages of more flexibility in course delivery and expanded course offerings in secondary schools.

SchoolNet's Network of Innovative Schools (NIS), a project from Industry Canada and the Canadian Association of School Administrators, recognizes and funds elementary and secondary schools that innovate using information and communications technology in meaningful and imaginative ways to improve learning. In 2002, Carcross Community School in Yukon was one of the smallest schools named to the NIS. Their projects included the launching of a school radio station, with the students researching, writing, editing, and broadcasting programming for their community. The station has become an integral part of the curriculum at all levels of the elementary school. As well, they have developed a school website that has won awards for its Yukon history content, including information on community history and Elders.

Extending Access

In other situations, the infrastructure must first be put in place and supported to provide access to content and training. In Cyber-Schools Manitoba, a three-year program will provide all Manitoba elementary and secondary school students with an e-mail account to facilitate their capacity to communicate, conduct research and use technology to complete assignments.

The Nova Scotia Department of Education is responsible for administering EDnet, a Wide Area Network providing educational and related organizations with cost-effective data communications for connection to the Internet, distance education, and administrative computer applications. With the recent expansion of the network, there are about 630 sites including public schools, community college sites, and public libraries. All schools are connected to EDnet, giving all students and teachers access to a provincial web-mail system.

In Prince Edward Island, the strategic plan was the essential first step. In 2001, the Department of Education released the document entitled *Communications and Information Technology in the Public School System Strategic Plan*. The Plan outlines intended results in use of technologies in the learning process, use of technologies as part of the curriculum, development of infrastructure and services, human resource development, accessibility and equity in programs and services, increased leadership in ICT, and improved planning and management. The process of developing the plan was broadly collaborative, with public meetings, a web site for public input and feedback, and intensive communications with the school system.

New Horizons

At the same time, new applications and tools are being developed and tested. A pilot project was launched in 2002 to test the value of integrating handheld wireless-enabled PDAs (personal digital assistants) into the learning process, specifically in accounting. Public-private collaboration was central to the project, with involvement by McGraw Hill Companies, Inc. and McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., Bell Mobility, Blackboard, Hewlett-Packard, Avaya, Cap Gemini Ernest & Young, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, and Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology in Ontario. The key finding of the extensive evaluation of the project is that the students and instructors recommended that the colleges continue to explore the potential of wireless networks and devices for teaching and learning and for providing college services.

In 2003, eduSourceCanada received funding that will allow it to take a leadership role in promoting on-line learning. eduSourceCanada is a consortium of learning institutions, universities, and private sector partners who will create the first pan-Canadian bilingual test bed on linked, interoperable learning object repositories. A repository differs from standard web materials by providing teachers, students and parents with information that is structured and organized to facilitate the finding and use of learning materials

regardless of their source location. The project will be accessible to all Canadians, including those with disabilities.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada has recently announced plans to develop a pan-Canadian, on-line learning portal that will link provincial and territorial jurisdictions. Digital content will be shared through bilateral and multilateral agreements among the jurisdictions and, possibly, with a broader spectrum of stakeholders across Canada.

Seminars on information and communication technologies in education have played a large part in the sharing of ideas and best practices. For example, a seminar co-sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) was held in April 2002 on the topic of *Future Challenges in Education and ICT: Policy, Planning and Practices*. Representatives from 21 OECD countries attended, along with senior education officials and experts on ICT from Canada. In addition to presentations by experts, representatives from every country spoke about their country's experience in the use of ICT for learning. Following this, the fourth Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda Symposium on *Information, Technology and Learning* was held. Participants had the opportunity to share their ideas, comments and questions in response to research presentations on issues such as the integration of ICT in the classroom, teaching and technology, quality and effectiveness and equity.

Scholarships, Fellowships And Exchange Schemes

The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF) is a private, independent organization established by the Canadian Parliament in 1998 with a ten-year mandate to improve access to postsecondary education. The Foundation's $2.5-billion endowment is directed primarily towards providing approximately $289 million per year in grants to undergraduate students in Canada with financial need. The first bursaries were distributed in January 2000 to over 90,000 postsecondary students who demonstrated the greatest financial need.

Additionally, there are Millennium Excellence Awards based on academic merit, community involvement, leadership, and innovation.

The research program of the CMSF provides ongoing analysis of the central question "Does Money Matter?" by exploring the effect that financial aid has in broadening the choices of young people in an effort to measure whether or not student assistance "works." Key questions include the degree to which money affects decisions regarding postsecondary education, if money matters equally for everyone, and how money changes behaviour.

For example, a 2002 study *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada* did show that a decade of rapid rises in tuition fees and student loan borrowing has not reduced overall accessibility in the postsecondary education system. But equality of access remains a challenge with regard to universities where tuition fees and academic requirements are higher and financial reasons are still the largest single explanation for not going on to postsecondary education from the students' point of view. (Interestingly, financial reasons are not primary in decisions for discontinuing studies.) Colleges are nearly perfectly equitable in terms of income groups as young Canadians from high-, middle-, and low-income groups are equally likely to attend.

In an effort to determine some of the economic bottlenecks at the university level, the 2003 report *Assessing Canada's Student Aid Need Assessment Policies* found that insufficient maximum assistance limits impact, particularly on those with high costs such as students from rural areas, those with dependents, and those with lower socio-economic backgrounds. Another study in 2003, *Making Ends Meet*, showed that 70 per cent of students finance their education through debt and that government expectations of levels of family support for the costs of their children's education are unrealistic.

As discussed above in the section on ACCESS, provinces and territories are implementing their own strategies to reduce student debt load and costs, as well as working with the federal government to find solutions.

Commonwealth Values Education

Canadian policy-makers, researchers and teachers at all levels continue to develop citizenship education curricula and to integrate peace, human rights and global education into school programs. In the 90's, the Ontario Human Rights Commission developed *Teaching Human Rights in Ontario* as an educational package. More recently, both the Atlantic Provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador) and the Western Canadian Provinces and Territories (British Columbia, Yukon, Alberta, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Nunavut) have implemented revised curriculum for social studies that incorporates the Commonwealth values.

In the *Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 9* completed by the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education in 2002, the role of social studies is defined in part as "to help students…to become active and responsible citizens, engaged in the practice of democratic ideals." Specific goals emphasize that students will: understand their rights and responsibilities in order to participate fully in society; value the diversity, respect the dignity, and support the equality of all human beings; and develop a sense of social compassion, fairness and justice. The introduction of this curriculum also involves teacher training and development and the provision of resources and tools specific to the student needs and level.

The *Atlantic Canada Education Foundation Essential Graduation Learnings* explicitly includes citizenship as an area in which secondary school graduates must demonstrate the knowledge, skills and attitudes to assess social, cultural, economic, and environmental interdependence in a local and global context, with special attention to human rights, discrimination, and sustainable development. This document is prepared by the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation. Citizenship education is also a component of the *Foundation for Atlantic Canada Social Studies Curriculum*.

An extensive report prepared in 2001 for the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada in collaboration with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO provides extensive detail on citizenship, peace, human rights, and global education initiatives of the provinces and territories, the government of Canada, universities, colleges, and non-governmental organizations. In addition, the report, entitled *Education for Peace, Human Rights, Democracy, International Understanding and Tolerance: Report of Canada*, includes information on teacher training, education of vulnerable groups, education by, for, and about Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, and educational resources available on these themes.

Among the activities highlighted, *Education à citoyenneté dans une perspective planétaire (Citizenship Education in a Global Perspective)*, is a Quebec project which focuses on introducing curriculum and training in the areas of international understanding and solidarity, and education for peace, rights and democracy, environmental responsibility, sustainable development, and intercultural understanding. Developed by

Cégep International, an organization of 22 Quebec colleges, this program has now been implemented in 14 colleges.

The major conclusion of the CMEC/UNESCO report is that in the period under study, from 1995 on, the most noticeable trend has been a much higher level of integration of the themes of peace, democracy, human rights, international understanding, and tolerance in both formal and non-formal education programs in Canada. It is clear that this trend is continuing.

Teacher Training And Professional Development

The training of teachers is the core of a successful education system — and this training continues throughout their professional lives. Each province and territory strives to maximize the quality of the education of teachers during their preliminary training and in response to all the changes and challenges that they meet during their careers.

Pre-Service Training

The pre-service training of teachers is continually being reviewed and improved. In a 1997 document, *A New Direction for Success*, the Ministry of Education in Quebec included among its priority areas "intensifying the reform of vocational and technical education". The resulting changes to vocational education have now been harmonized with changes to be made in the training of vocational education teachers. The 2002 publication, *Teacher Training in Vocational Education—Orientations—Professional Competencies,* defines the orientations for vocational education, the core competencies student teachers are expected to have acquired by the end of their training, and a training plan specifically designed for the vocational education sector. The plan is, in part, an adaptation of *Teacher Training—Orientation—Professional Competencies*, released in 2001, which addressed the general education sector.

As part of the *Quality Learning Agenda 2002 Policy Statement on K - 12*, the New Brunswick Department of Education pledged to promote quality teaching and to ensure strong school leadership. Teachers will be provided with an additional 2 days per year of in-service training on curriculum and will have increased access to professional development through on-line training. For school leaders, the principal certification requirements will be reviewed to ensure that principals and vice-principals are well equipped to supply strong leadership, with a subsequent development of a plan to address the training needs of principals and vice-principals, tailored to local needs.

In concert with provincial faculties of education and education partners, Alberta Learning assessed the efficacy of provincial teacher education programs and beginning teachers' professional development opportunities. Information was gathered from recent graduates, school principals and recently permanently certified Alberta graduates with at least two years teaching experience. A report of the findings is expected to be released late in 2003.

In British Columbia's *Rural Achievement Action Plan*, announced in May 2003, the government laid out plans to develop a forgivable student loan program for students enrolled in teacher education programs, provided that they teach for five years in under-serviced communities. In a further program development, the University of Northern British Columbia launched a teacher education program in September 2002 to prepare teachers for teaching in rural and remote areas of the province.

Yukon teacher training is responding to similar needs as those in British Columbia. Ensuring that people of Aboriginal ancestry are well prepared to fill teaching positions and promoting their increased participation in the territory's education system are major goals of the Yukon Native Teacher Education Program. This four-year University of Regina Bachelor of Education degree in elementary education, offered at Yukon College, provides students of Aboriginal ancestry with abundant classroom experience, often in their home community. Both secondary school graduates and mature students are eligible for admission.

The Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Program (SUNTEP) and the Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) promote access to postsecondary teacher education and training for Aboriginal people in a culturally sensitive environment. SUNTEP offers training for Aboriginal residents of three urban centers and NORTEP serves the north of the province.

The transition from being in a classroom to teaching in one can be extremely stressful. The Northwest Territories has introduced a Teacher Induction Program to help new and beginning teachers become competent and effective professionals in the classroom and develop an understanding of the local school, community, and cultures. The Program aims at improving teacher performance, recruiting and retaining teachers, promoting the personal and professional well-being of the new teachers, and transmitting the culture of the system to the teachers. The Induction Program begins with pre-orientation done largely through print and electronic materials. Orientation follows, through which the professional, environmental, and personal aspects of the new experience are transmitted in the community or region of the new school. Finally, systematic, sustained support offers formal mentoring with a trained professional mentor who is also a Northern teacher, teacher networks, observation of exemplary teachers, resource files and personnel, and school team planning and team teaching. All of these approaches have been shown by research to lead to teacher retention and to positively effect long-term performance.

Professional Development

The expectations for teachers in the classroom have been changing in response to the needs of the communities, and training can be crucial in helping the teachers adapt, provide new services, and master new skills. The Department of Education in Prince Edward Island has recognized the new challenges facing teachers today, including students with literacy difficulties, students requiring special education services, new roles in career counselling, and classrooms with increasing cultural diversity and second language issues. To better fill ensuing professional development needs, partnerships have been arranged between the University of Prince Edward Island and universities in two neighbouring provinces to provide appropriate courses and programs.

As part of the Strategic Literacy Plan, *Words to Live By*, the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education has undertaken, since 2000, substantial professional

development in the teaching of reading, writing and oral communication. This sustained professional development program was provided to every elementary teacher and focused on how to teach reading and writing using a new language arts curriculum geared to the individual literacy needs of elementary school children.   And in recognition of the need for ongoing support, reading specialists were hired for each of the province's ten English-language school boards to work directly in the area of early literacy by providing support at the classroom level.

As part of Nova Scotia's focus on student achievement in literacy, a number of initiatives such as *Active Young Readers and Writers in Action*, are being implemented to improve reading and writing. To assist and support teachers, significant in-service education has and will continue to be provided.

The Ontario Professional Learning Program is part of a comprehensive set of initiatives to support teaching excellence. The Program provides a consistent province-wide framework that guarantees that Ontario teachers have a minimum level of upgrading in key topics, such as student assessment and the use of technology. Certified teachers are required to complete 14 professional learning courses of at least five hours each over every five-year cycle of their careers in order to maintain their professional certification. Teachers plan their own programs by taking courses that suit their particular needs. Among the seven core areas in which teachers must take at least one course in each cycle are curriculum knowledge, special education, teaching strategies and classroom management. Eligible courses are approved by the College of Teachers, and school boards and professional associations have been given funds to develop additional on-line and face-to-face courses.

Job satisfaction and training can be closely related.   In response to the high numbers of retiring teachers and the fact that, across Canada, between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of teachers leave their jobs within the first five years, Alberta recently published responsive strategies that school boards can implement, *Promising Practices in Teacher Recruitment and Retention*. Central to these strategies are opportunities for professional development.

The Contribution of Technology

Technology often plays a central role in delivering professional training. The Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation is currently preparing professional development modules and resources for delivery via its multiple course delivery mechanisms. In addition, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association is partnering with the province's university and the Department of Education in the development and delivery of professional development programs through a Virtual Teacher centre – a web-based professional development centre for educators at all levels. As a result of this partnership, educators have the option of participating in professional development activities with colleagues from different schools and communities without the cost and time associated with extensive travel.

Manitoba's new Strategic Technology-Assisted Professional Learning Environment (STAPLE) will provide teachers with interactive learning experience, allow time for practice in the classroom, accommodate the ability to reflect on promising practices, and offer collaboration and mentoring opportunities with other professionals in Manitoba. The STAPLE pilot tested a delivery model with grade five teachers from October 2002 to March 2003 and grade seven pilot teachers will be on-line from September 2003 to February 2004.

Sharing Experiences

Training can also be provided through intensive workshops and conferences. For example, the Department of Education in Nova Scotia hosted a two-day event on human rights in education. Through lectures and workshops, sharing experience, and access to new resources, teachers gain insights on how to make human rights an integral part of classroom learning.

To take a fresh look at all the issues of teacher education, the third Pan-Canadian Educational Research Agenda Program Symposium was held in 2001 on *Teacher Education/Educator Training: Current Trends and Future Directions*. Fifteen research groups from both academia and government looked at the roles of teacher training, supply and demand, leadership, and indicators of success.

Concluding Remarks

The two sections of this paper have addressed the issue of "Closing the Gap" – the over-riding theme of the 15th Conference of the Commonwealth Ministers of Education – the first through a detailed look at the topics of Access, Inclusion and Achievement and the second through addressing particular aspects of education and how they have been enhanced since the Halifax Statement of Education. The successes, solutions, policies and the ongoing challenges of each of Canada's thirteen educational jurisdictions demonstrate the high importance that educators, governments and the citizens of Canada place on their education systems.

Providing access is a crucial challenge for educators given the realities of Canada's geography and populations patterns. Responses have been found through technology, cooperation between institutions and jurisdictions, financial support for students, and the design of specific programs that reflect the communities they serve. At all levels of education, high levels of provision and attendance have been achieved – but continued efforts are necessary to ensure equitable access.

The issue of inclusion encompasses not only access to education, but access to education that is appropriate, that respects and includes the lives, the realities, the history, and the aspirations of the learners. Education strives to be inclusive of all our citizens with particular attention to Aboriginal populations, students with special needs, and language proficiency, especially in the official languages, French and English. Every educational jurisdiction is increasing funding and programs in these critical areas so that all Canadians are a part of the learning system.

The third component of *Closing the Gap* is achievement – ensuring that education results in graduates who are prepared for the world of today and tomorrow. The measures of achievement extend throughout the educational system - from the international and pan-Canadian proficiency tests, to reports on the performance of school boards and individual schools, to new methods for measuring student performance. The recognition that education is a public trust and that everyone is a stakeholder in the system has been reflected in a shared accountability for achievement.

Reflecting the principles of the Halifax Statement of Education, educators across Canada continue to improve and innovate. Information and communications technologies are central to closing the gap in education and so high priority is given to their integration into education at all levels. Education is also about being part of the world and so each jurisdiction has curriculum that teaches the values of justice, democracy and social responsibility at the elementary, secondary, postsecondary levels. Ensuring that postsecondary education is affordable involves the federal, provincial, territorial governments in on-going efforts to support learners and reduce debt. Teacher training and professional development have evolved to reflect the new opportunities and challenges of the classroom. The provision of education is constantly changing and improving in order to close the gaps and provide an accessible, inclusive system that fosters achievement and success in learning and in life.

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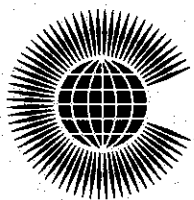
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ACCESS, INCLUSION
AND ACHIEVEMENT:
CLOSING THE GAPS
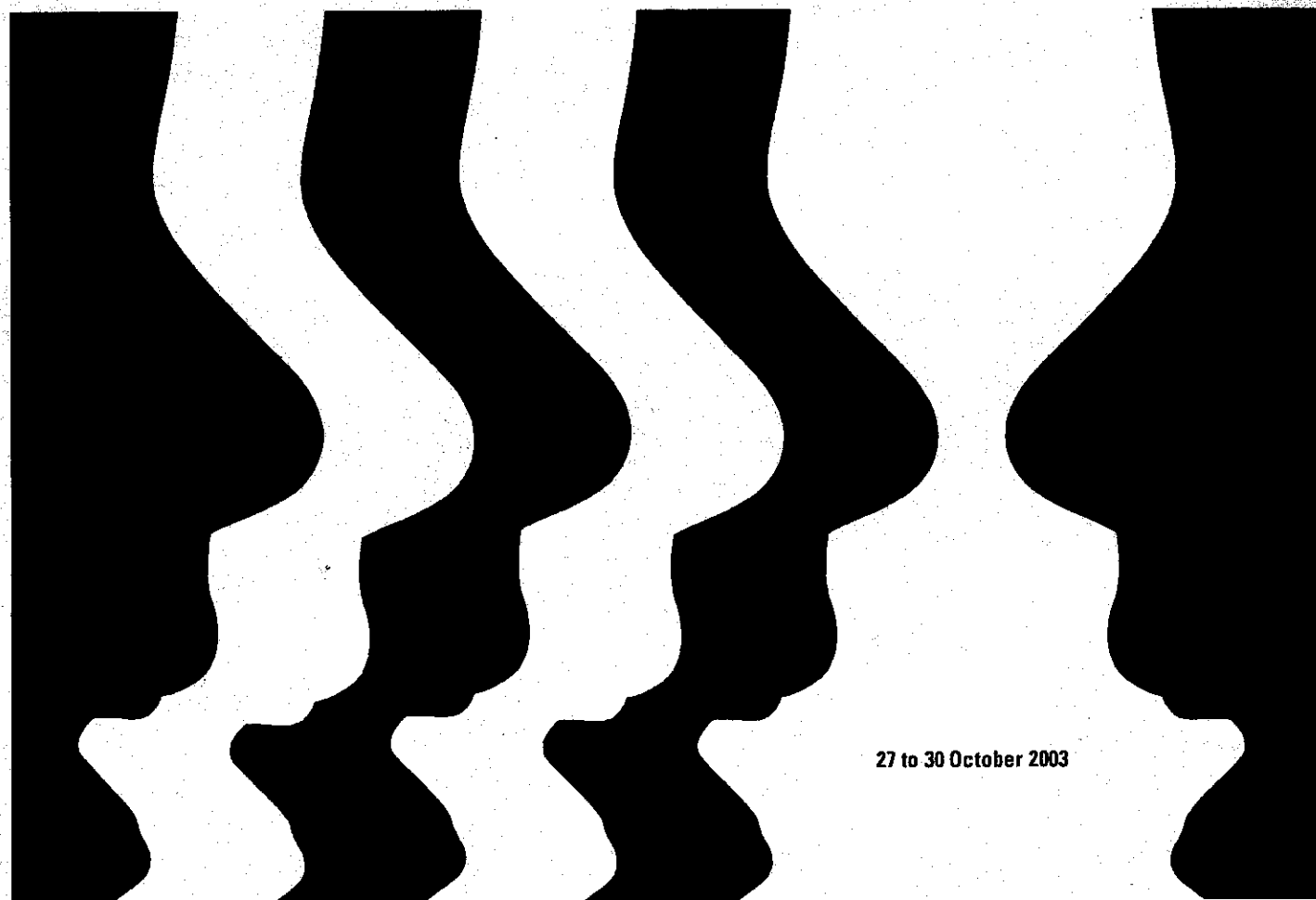
Concept Paper

27 to 30 October 2003

ACCESS, INCLUSION AND ACHIEVEMENT: CLOSING THE GAPS

Concept Paper

Preamble

1.　The Halifax Statement "Education for our Common Future" issued at 14CCEM in November 2000 charted a way forward for Commonwealth education co-operation. It identified nine substantive areas for programme work by Commonwealth agencies in the short term, and sketched out some of the principles and priorities that should underlie educational development in the longer term. The task in Edinburgh is to review progress on work so far undertaken (a report is being prepared by the Secretariat), but more importantly to build on the positive start made at Halifax by developing and deepening the thinking underlying the longer-term vision enunciated there and putting implementation flesh on the conceptual bones.

2.　The 15CCEM theme "Access, inclusion, achievement - closing the gap" appropriately encapsulates contemporary Commonwealth agendas for education development. Commonwealth countries are pledged collectively, as members of the international community and of the Commonwealth association, to attainment of the Millennium Development Goals of attaining gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving quality basic education for all by 2015. At the same time, at national level each Commonwealth government is committed to its electorate to provide all its citizens with access to education of reasonable quality, as and when resources and other circumstances permit. National education plans attempt to apply the principles of access, inclusion and achievement to secondary and tertiary education (including technical and vocational training) as well as to the basic level; and this paper follows their example by assuming that the Conference theme applies to all levels of the education system.

3.　The Edinburgh theme is therefore rooted in the Halifax Statement. The principle of *access* for all is at the core of that document which starts by

proclaiming Ministers' belief in "...the right of everyone to education. All persons have a right of access to lifelong learning by every appropriate means with full opportunity regardless of gender, race, colour, age, socio-economic status, physical and other disabilities or geographic location" (Para.1). The principle of *inclusion* was equally central to Ministers' thinking as is evident from their insistence that "the Commonwealth should ensure that gender concerns.........will be mainstreamed into all programmes and activities, as should issues of poverty and inclusion" (Para. 5).

4.　The Halifax Statement was less direct on the subject of *achievement*. There are several references to achievement (by countries and the international community) of universal access. But reference to educational achievement by individual learners is muted and has to be regarded as implicit in repeated references to the need for 'quality education' (Para. 2).

5.　Each of the three concepts of access, inclusion and achievement in relation to education can usefully be discussed separately, but there are important inter-relationships amongst them. While 'access' connotes a desirable good, the idea of 'inclusion' carries with it a suggestion of deliberate and positive action to ensure the realisation of access for all kinds and conditions of learners. Inclusion makes a reality of the principle of access. The same is true in a sense of 'achievement'. Access to/and inclusion in an education system in which people attend schools or enrol in education courses but fail to learn, are more or less meaningless. Conversely, it is only in a very limited sense that a school or education system can be described as high-achieving if its recruitment is on a very restricted base which fails to reflect the diverse composition of the population it is supposed to be serving. It is also true that possibilities of access to further levels of education can provide a spur to achievement at a student's existing level. Thus it is commonly observed that the 'dead-end' primary or secondary

school programme from which nobody in recent memory has succeeded in reaching the next level has difficulty in recruiting or retaining pupils. Technical and vocational training programmes are sometimes demotivating for the same reason of lack of flexible access to further education.

6.   This paper will explore the concepts of access, inclusion and achievement in education and will identify measures needed to give them greater reality, narrowing the gap between where countries stand today and where they would like to be. It will consider gaps in matters of access, inclusion and achievement within countries (between genders, social classes, schools and districts, for example); between member countries of the Commonwealth; and, briefly, between the Commonwealth as a whole and the rest of the international community. It will explore the resources available to the Commonwealth as attempts are made to close these gaps and will point to some of the steps that might form part of a Commonwealth strategy to promote access, inclusion and achievement in education.

Access, Inclusion and Achievement

Access

7.   There are many dimensions to the issue of educational access and impediments to it:

- *Rules of entry*: are schools and education courses open to all "regardless of gender, race, colour, age, socio-economic status, physical and other disabilities or geographic location" or do the rules of entry unduly restrict opportunity to enrol?
- *Education structures*: are there barriers to transfer and promotion which restrict the routes by which it is possible say to qualify as a plumber or to enter a university?
- *Geography*: are schools and education programmes well spread and within physical reach of potential learners (safe travelling distances etc)?
- *Finance and economics*: is entry to education affordable by would-be learners in terms of direct costs (fees, ancillaries like books uniforms and transport) and on indirect costs of committing time that might otherwise be used for earning? Does

education offer the prospect of improved means of earning a livelihood by imparting economically useful knowledge and skills?
- *Culture and society*: are the content, organisation, staffing of education programmes congenial and compatible with the learner's values and culture?
- *Language*: can learners study in their own mother tongue (language)?

8.   Clearly access is partly a matter of education supply and school mapping, but also a matter of encouraging and stimulating demand.

Gaps in access and approaches to closing them at national level

9.   Each country needs to ask itself where the main access bottlenecks lie in particular national situations - e.g. at primary, secondary or tertiary levels. Is the Ministry's perception that lack of supply (school places, reflecting availability of buildings and teachers) is the main bottleneck, or is it failure of learners to take up available places?

10.   Most Commonwealth countries experience gaps in access, even at primary education level. The 2002 Global Monitoring Report on Education for All lists more than half (28) Commonwealth countries as not having supplied net enrolment ratio data. Of the remainder 14 had 90-100% of their children enrolled, 5 were at the 70-90% level, five more had 50-70% and two had less than 50%. Sometimes national education statistics show a **gross** enrolment ratio of 100% or more, but even so many children may be denied access by their personal circumstances. Even in industrialised countries a few children slip through the net, perhaps because their parents and homes are constantly on the move or as a result of them playing truant: and even Canada and the United Kingdom, for example, register a GER of under 100%. In less developed countries many factors account for 'marginalised' children not being in school. Some live too far away to attend daily; some are nomads; many have caring responsibilities or economic tasks in the household economy; there are those who cannot afford the cost of schooling; others are sick or disabled.

11.   The data quoted in the paragraph above are averages. Average figures can conceal a wide

variation between schools and districts, or between children of different socio-economic groups and religions, and between urban and rural environments.

12. Action to close the gaps in access, between the existing national enrolment level and the target ratio (universality in the case of basic education), and between different sub-groups in the population, could include the many measures explored in international discussion of access issues including EFA. The following list is not intended to be in any way exhaustive:

- A first priority is to improve data-reporting on both population and education enrolment.
- Careful analysis of access for different population groups.
- Assessment of whether and where the main problem is failures of supply or deficits on the demand side.
- In case of inadequacies of supply, review the possibilities of increasing the share of education in national budgets and explore other options (co-operation with non-government providers, recourse to international aid etc.)
- On the demand side, consider ways to promote demand by making education opportunities more attractive and accessible to learners. This could well involve modification of curricula, loosening rigidities in education structures, adopting new and flexible means of delivering education including distance and part-time education, abolition or reduction of fees etc. Measures should be adapted to the needs of the different 'target groups' that are finding access a problem.
- Particular attention should be paid to the gender dimensions of access and to the acute problems of education access for members of families affected by HIV/AIDS or by violence and armed conflict.

Inclusion

13. There is increasing awareness of, and respect for, diversity in populations and cultures and a recognition of the importance of catering in social provision for the interests and needs of minority and marginal groups with their own different values and lifestyles.

14. Inclusiveness in education would imply that provision caters for the particular learning needs of individuals and groups according to their situation and capacity in terms of e.g. age, gender, education level, language, physical health, geographical location etc. This is easily supported as a general principle but is quite problematic when translated into policy and practice. In organisational and economic terms it is far less costly to provide a 'standard package' than to offer a variety of options for different population groups or to make special provision for minority needs and preferences.

15. One has only to look to the school level, for example and to ask whom head teachers may be permitted to exclude from enrolment. Are schools and colleges in practice excluding, and is it reasonable for them to do so, some or all of the following categories?

- those who have not paid tuition or exam fees?
- those who don't come in school uniform?
- those of a different religion from the majority in the school?
- girls who are pregnant or married?
- those guilty of bad behaviour in school or with criminal records outside school?
- those who are deemed too old?
- those who are physically disabled and cannot easily manage without special physical modification of buildings and premises?
- those with debilitating health conditions, even where they are non-infectious like HIV/AIDS?
- non-citizens, who may not be taxpayers, and their children?

16. There is room for considerable discussion and debate on whether or not it is reasonable to ask schools to adjust their programmes to admit some of these non-standard categories of pupils. Circumstances will differ according to the scale of the minority to be catered for, size of school, resources available and other factors. In general,

professional and public opinion in many countries is moving towards 'inclusion' in these circumstances, believing that that it is better for disadvantaged and minority-group pupils to be educated alongside their peers, and that it is also beneficial for the education of the majority that they should learn to empathise with the problems and needs of minorities. Against this, has to be weighed the argument that it is sometimes possible to make superior provision in specialised institutions, and that in extreme cases the cost of disruption of the majority's education outweighs the benefits of social inclusion. Parents generally tend to support expulsion from school of disruptive influences or those suspected of immoral behaviour.

17.   Distinctions can appropriately be drawn between inclusive provision to be made at individual school level, and provision by the education system as a whole. Whether or not it is deemed appropriate and practicable to incorporate special-category pupils in regular schools/programmes, it is important that the system itself is 'inclusive' in character and is making the necessary provision to cater for the education needs of the whole population including minorities. But compromises will be necessary as, for example, multilingual societies are aware. It may be not be economic or practicable to provide a full range of school texts in mother tongues that are spoken by 1% or 3% of the total school population.

18.   The extent to which diversity should be so far recognised as to have formal institutionalisation is a thorny question. Does recognition and celebration of diversity mean separate streams and schools for different sets of learners, or does it mean acknowledging differences in comprehensively inclusive institutions? There are special responsibilities on education systems that permit or encourage differentiated sub-systems (e.g. separate faith-based schools, separate schools by language of instruction, or 'special' schools for disabled/ special-aptitude/ outstandingly able pupils). In those circumstances pursuit of the goal of inclusion requires such systems to address the challenge of creating an integrated education structure that allows ease of transfer between different parts of the system, avoiding either built-in privilege or built-in disadvantage for those who find themselves on special tracks. The issue of integrating Koranic schools with the mainstream primary-education

system is one that many African and Asian Commonwealth countries are addressing as a matter of priority, for example. There is also considerable experience of a rather different kind among Commonwealth countries in operating preparatory programmes to assist candidates to qualify for entry to tertiary education, and in developing credit recognition and equivalence arrangements allowing onward progression for students enrolled in streams parallel to the mainstream.

Gaps in inclusion and approaches to closing them at national level

19.   By definition, policies of inclusion are gap-closing policies. National strategies for inclusive education could beneficially contain the following elements:

- Identification of groups in society with low levels of participation in education and exploration of the reasons in each case
- A focus on the school curriculum and language policy to ensure that the cultures and values of different groups are fully represented and positively presented, with no hint of adverse stereotyping.
- Special attention to promoting the values of inter-cultural education in teacher education programmes.
- Measures of affirmative action to ensure that different groups in society are represented among students and teachers at all levels of education.
- Due attention to provision of a safe and secure learning environment with adequate provision of sanitary facilities, separate toilets etc.
- Extra resources for schools asked to make special provision to cater for pupils with special educational needs including war and other orphans, disabled students, those traumatised by experiences of conflict, those suffering from chronic health conditions.
- Clear guidelines to schools on their admission policies; and on acceptable reasons for exclusion from school, complemented by arrangements to help the excluded to continue their education.

- Codes of conduct for teachers in relation to their personal behaviour and administration of discipline.

- Experimentation and innovation to assist those who are committed to extending their education but are unable to attend on a full-time basis.

- Development of open and flexible education structures providing opportunities for progression and transfer for students enrolled in any part of the education system.

Achievement

20. Education is expensive in terms both of the money spent on it and of the time devoted to it by learners, teachers and administrators. These large investments have to be justified in terms of their end-products. School attendance by itself, even universal basic education, could hardly be considered beneficial if learning was minimal because of the poor quality of the inputs to education and of uninspiring educational processes. The notion of educational achievement is closely tied up with the quality of provision. It is not difficult to recognise an unsatisfactory education system from the low quality of the inputs (buildings, teachers, materials, equipment, furniture), the poverty of the education process, consequent failure to attract pupils and retain them to the final grade, seriously high failure rates on end-course assessments.

21. The outputs of education can be assessed in terms of the extent to which the capabilities of individual learners are increased, as well as of the beneficial effects to society from the enhanced knowledge and skills that individuals acquire and from their changed attitudes and behaviours.

22. The instruments most commonly used to assess learning — end-of-cycle examinations — are important yardsticks for measuring some of the outputs of the education system in a reasonably objective way. In most education systems there is a very wide variation in the measured performance that these examinations reveal.

23. These instruments have a number of intrinsic limitations, however, arising from the fact that they tend to be mainly written examinations sat by individuals. They measure just some important cognitive skills - and it is well known that some exams are better designed than others to test higher cognitive proficiencies - but tend not to assess attitudes and values and are often deficient in assessing abilities to apply knowledge to concrete situations. They do not cover important social skills such as the ability to work co-operatively with others. Where the examination process is narrow, it has the unfortunate effect of devaluing certain forms of excellence and achievement, simply because they are not susceptible to inexpensive mass testing.

24. There are many dangers in using the results of these examinations to measure the efficacy of education. Some of the efficiency indices commonly applied to education systems attribute no value at all to learning by those who drop out early, or narrowly fail the final exam, and so they are at best a crude indicator of the output of the education system and are liable to underestimate it. Moreover the use of examination results league tables to compare schools and districts often takes no account of the fact that pupils do not start on the level: it is really the 'value added' by the school in each case that should be measured, not the level of final attainment alone. The United Kingdom is one of the Commonwealth countries that has recently introduced measures of 'value added' to its education assessment system.

25. It is also the case that examinations do not measure any achievement education systems may claim in building healthier societies and a better world. In Halifax, Ministers stressed the importance of education in Commonwealth values, but most education systems do not attempt to analyse the degree of their own success or failure in promoting these. In today's world, education for tolerance and peace, respect for other cultures and faiths, may be among the most important of the achievements to which education systems should aspire.

26. Recognition of the difficulty of measurement does not mean that measured gaps in achievement are meaningless or that efforts should not be made to refine the specification of outputs from education and to devise appropriate instruments to assess progress. This is an area of rich potential for co-operation by Commonwealth countries through, for example, the recently created Association of Commonwealth Examination and Accreditation Bodies.

Gaps in achievement and approaches to closing them at national level

27. Evidence from many Commonwealth countries suggests that expectation of education policymakers about standards of attainment are not being met. Low levels of performance and achievement are encountered even among those who have competed the education cycle. There is a wide spread of performance between schools, partly reflecting differences in student intake. It is worthy of note that inequality within countries is not a phenomenon associated exclusively with under-development. In some of the wealthiest Commonwealth countries there are manifestations of large variations in education opportunity and achievement, with significant proportions of those who have completed ten or twelve years of education still being functionally illiterate and innumerate on leaving school.

28. Elements of national strategies to address achievement gaps might include:

- Regular national reporting on the proportion of pupils successfully acquiring key skills.
- Strategies for supporting the wider social purposes of education and support of those successfully pursuing them.
- A switch of focus from inputs to education and enrolment, and increased concentration on educational outcomes.
- Monitoring of school performance and 'value added' and follow-up/support/advisory services for schools in need.
- Fairer resource allocation systems for distribution of funds and qualified teachers between districts and schools.
- Induction and support for teachers and head teachers in the task of implementing school improvement.
- In the cognitive domain of learning, redesigning examinations to test the acquisition of higher cognitive skills.
- Validation of a wider range of skills and competencies acquired through the learning process.
- Use of records of students' achievement to monitor student learning progress.

- Campaigns to reduce student drop-out and encourage retention/ continuation.

Gaps in Education: a Commonwealth Challenge

29. The gaps in access, inclusion and achievement found in national education systems are mirrored in international data showing very different levels of education provision among Commonwealth member countries. In part these reflect different historical circumstances, different demographic situations, and different resource bases. Some countries have been able to provide education for all their children and young people up to the age of 16, while others are struggling to enrol half of the 12- and 13-year olds. Some countries can enrol 30-50% of their young people in tertiary education while the equivalent figure elsewhere in the Commonwealth is 1% or 2%.

30. It is noteworthy that education under-provision is not synonymous with poverty, for some low-income countries have managed to mobilise national efforts and made great strides in attainment of education for all. Very different proportions of national GDP are invested in education by different countries. The quality of education leadership, the efficiency in the use of resources and the distribution of expenditure between levels of education (especially the proportion going to high-cost tertiary provision) are all factors having a major impact on access to education for the majority.

31. Comparisons between Commonwealth countries and non-Commonwealth countries in relation to Education for All present a mixed picture. On the one hand a large proportion of Commonwealth countries has reached near-universality of basic-education enrolment. The recent Global Monitoring Report on EFA lists 15 Commonwealth countries among the 50 that have achieved universal primary education by 2000. As against this, 14 of the 41 countries that had actually moved further away from the EFA goals since 1990 were Commonwealth countries: these included six countries with a net enrolment ratio below 80% and 'at serious risk' of not achieving the EFA goals by 2015, while eight countries were 'at risk' of not doing so. Among Commonwealth countries that had made progress towards the goals since 1990 three Commonwealth countries were nevertheless assessed as having a low chance of achieving one or more of

the goals by the target date. The Commonwealth profile looks even more gloomy when account is taken of global numbers out of school. Four high population countries of the Commonwealth - Bangladesh, India, Nigeria and Pakistan - account for about two thirds of the world's out-of-school children. [Even if the statistical basis for some of these forecasts must remain rather uncertain for the moment, there are potentially major concerns with this Commonwealth profile.]

32. Commonwealth Ministers in their Halifax Statement have committed themselves to according a high priority to the Global Campaign for Education for All and the Commonwealth Secretariat is devoting many of its resources to realisation of EFA as one of the Millennium Development Goals. The recent creation by the UK of the Commonwealth Education Fund is an important contribution to mobilising efforts. The final section of this paper contains further indications of the way in which Commonwealth resources may be used to narrow the gaps in education access, inclusion and achievement.

33. One area where parallel effort is needed is in bridging the Digital Divide, given the important role that ICTs have for the new Knowledge Economy and as means of furthering education access and building human capacity. It is clear that such initiatives as Imfundo and the new Connectivity Africa offer potenially major avenues for greater institutional access and inclusion.

Commonwealth Resources in Education

34. In addressing the challenges of promoting access, inclusion and achievement, the Commonwealth has certain intrinsic advantages as well as a substantial infrastructure of institutions, programmes and experience.

35. The nature of the Commonwealth means that it is particularly well placed to make a constructive contribution to the debate on the issues addressed in this paper. The Commonwealth is an association built on the principle of inclusion, being composed of member states from every continent that are diverse in geographical and population size, culture and creed, and level of prosperity. All but the smallest member countries are multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multilingual societies.

36. Among the advantages that the Commonwealth possesses are its commitment to a common set of values. These include democracy and transparency, respect for different cultures and traditions, tolerance and the upholding of human rights, conciliation in the settlement of disputes. To these may be added certain commonalities in education institutions and practices, and the invaluable asset of the shared use of English as a means of international communication and in most countries as the language of government and study in tertiary education.

37. Reflecting these values, Commonwealth countries have developed a participatory culture of co-operation and exchange, based on informality and mutuality and working on the principle that all, even the smallest states, have something of value to share with their partners. Most countries contribute to the Fund for Technical Co-operation and the Commonwealth of Learning, even though the basis of subscription is voluntary.

38. A rich array of institutional mechanisms exists to further education co-operation. It includes most notably

- Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers of which that in Edinburgh is the 15th in a series starting in Oxford 44 years ago in 1959. These provide a platform for developing Commonwealth positions on international issues, and for exchange of experience, and a mechanism for giving direction to the Secretariat's work and many co-operative programmes.
- The Commonwealth Secretariat with its Education Section (presently part of the Social Transformation Programmes Division) acts in support of Ministers and carries out their mandates. The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) is the Commonwealth's own instrument for mobilising capacity-building resources in support of priority programmes.
- The Commonwealth of Learning based in Vancouver and focusing on co-operation in distance and open learning has been a pioneer in assisting member countries to exploit the potential of distance education

for extending access and strengthening quality of education.

- The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan has been the vehicle through which 25,000 Scholars, originating in all countries of the Commonwealth, have been enabled to acquire new knowledge and skills on another Commonwealth country for the benefit of development in their own.

- The Commonwealth Institute has focused on promoting education and information about the Commonwealth and is now switching its emphasis to the development of school education in Commonwealth developing countries through a new Centre for Commonwealth Education in Cambridge.

- A host of pan-Commonwealth voluntary organisations, ranging from the Association of Commonwealth Universities with 500 members to smaller professional groups with specialised interests, many of them grouped in the new Commonwealth Consortium for Education.

39. Beyond this range of multilateral institutions and programmes are the substantial bilateral aid programmes of both industrialised and developing Commonwealth countries, and a range of international non-government organisations committed to strengthening education provision in member countries. A significant new initiative involving partnership between bilateral assistance and NGOs is the Commonwealth Education Fund, with a capital of between £10m and £30m, established by the UK Government with the purpose of mobilising public opinion and action in support of Education for All in 17 Commonwealth developing countries.

Commonwealth Strategies for Closing the Gaps

39. How can the Commonwealth's constellation of institutions and its unique assets be used to narrow, and eventually to close, the gaps in education access, inclusion and achievement?

40. A first imperative is to develop a sense of common strategic purpose among the

Commonwealth's own institutions. The good work that is being done by individual Commonwealth bodies, official and unofficial, can give every appearance of fragmentation and disconnection. Some progress has been made on the side of intergovernmental organisations through the creation of the Co-ordinating Committee of Commonwealth Agencies (CCCA). This has been mirrored to some extent by the Commonwealth professional and voluntary organisations that have come together to form the Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCfE). The further step is now needed for the CCCA and CCfE to develop the modalities of working together so as to produce greater synergy in following through the priorities to be set by 15CCEM.

41. This should be matched by sharing country experience of co-operation between government and the voluntary sector in education. If the gaps are to be closed, government efforts will need to be supplemented and complemented by the voluntary and private sectors, including community organisations, professional associations, faith-based groups, trade unions, charitable agencies and private companies. Guidelines, including the necessary safeguards for the public interest, should be established for such co-operation. The new Commonwealth Education Fund represents an important new initiative in combining voluntary sector strengths with those of government.

42. The priorities set by Ministers would usefully be reflected in awards in the Education sector made under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan and in the work of the Commonwealth Institute's proposed Centre for Commonwealth Education in Cambridge.

43. A priority for Commonwealth action, in co-operation with others, is improvement of the data base on education access and achievement available nationally and internationally. Availing themselves of CFTC funds, bilateral assistance and other resources, countries could mutually assist one another in developing the capacity of statistics and planning units in Ministries of Education (and in appropriate cases at provincial and district level also) to collect, analyse and disseminate pertinent information. With help from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, member countries could also share and further

develop expertise in devising and applying indicators for monitoring progress in the areas of educational access, inclusion and achievement.

44. The Commonwealth Secretariat's Education Section has a potentially key role in assisting countries to share good practice and innovative solutions to common problems, and in accessing resources from within the Commonwealth and beyond. In many of the areas addressed by this paper there is scope for joint work on developing instruments and guidelines on which education administrators can draw and to develop approaches to 'benchmarking' the performance of education systems and institutions.

45. The association of education staff with health and gender professionals in its Social Transformation Programmes Division gives the Secretariat a strategic advantage in addressing issues of access and inclusion. This is true in relation to the gender dimension of education enrolment, on which access for girls and women is the predominant concern, but which also raises issues in some countries of male under-performance and disenchantment with school. It is also the case in regard to HIV/AIDS which poses a growing threat to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and causes untold suffering for pupils and their families in many Commonwealth member countries, especially in Southern Africa. Commonwealth initiatives to address the role of education in combating HIV/ AIDS and to help teachers, pupils and schools to handle the issues in a sympathetic and supportive way would be timely. The same combination of preventive and restorative action is apposite in relation to pupils and school systems traumatised by violence and civil conflict.

46. Teachers play a key role in realising the goals of education access, inclusion and achievement. The Commonwealth Secretariat has pioneered important work on teacher management and support, addressing the key issues of teacher status and morale and teacher professionalism. Teacher recruitment, retention, deployment and professional development are central issues for every education system. A new phenomenon arising from the trends towards global markets for professional skills is the growing international mobility of teachers, sometimes with the active encouragement of industrialised countries

which are suffering shortages. Mobility of teachers between Commonwealth countries brings many advantages, but safeguards such as those sought through the recent Savannah Accord are necessary if gaps are not to widen. This is an issue which the Commonwealth is particularly well equipped to address, and its capacity to do will be enhanced by the anticipated formation of a Commonwealth grouping of teacher associations.

47. Many of the same issues that apply to the international mobility of school teachers are pertinent also to teachers and research staff in higher education. There is the possibility of impending shortages in English-speaking industrialised countries where academic salaries have fallen behind those with similar levels of qualifications in other forms of employment. The already fragile stocks of tertiary education teachers in some developing-country university and college systems could be seriously eroded by widening of the remuneration gaps across national borders. This threat of intensified academic brain drain deserves attention.

48. Commonwealth teacher mobility, properly orchestrated, is part of a wider pattern of Commonwealth exchanges in education which include student exchanges and twinning or linking arrangements between towns, schools, colleges and education authorities. They represent one way of bridging gaps and forging partnerships between member countries and extending opportunities for access. To the extent that scholarships and awards are available, the constraints on access from high tuition fees and living costs can be mitigated making mobility and exchange more feasible. There remains a challenge to the whole Commonwealth community of diversifying the patterns of education flow amongst member states. A new thrust is required to expand the availability of Commonwealth Scholarships tenable in developing countries and to enhance their capacity to attract students from abroad. This would enrich their education systems and provide valuable foreign exchange.

49. The new phenomenon of globalisation is reflected in the education sector by the development of borderless tertiary education provision. This may take the form of offshore and satellite campuses of metropolitan universities; it can involve franchising of programmes; or may be through courses offered

trans-nationally using modern communication technologies. Discussion in the GATS about opening up competition in education services is relevant to this and offers both opportunities and threats. It is a subject worthy of deep study and reflection by Commonwealth governments who may need advice on its possible implications. The Halifax Statement drew attention to the need to safeguard students, and the integrity of national education provision, against unscrupulous exploitation by a minority of international providers.

50. In general, distance learning has tremendous potential in extending access and inclusion in education, and can also be a vehicle for improving education quality by the wider dissemination of excellent materials and teaching. It is an invaluable resource in narrowing gaps and reducing the isolation of learners, whether in Commonwealth small states or elsewhere. The Commonwealth has particularly deep experience in the use of distance learning provision to extend education opportunity, with the Commonwealth of Learning in the vanguard of co-operative efforts. The Edinburgh Conference can point the way for the Commonwealth to build on this potential.