

15th Conference of Commonwealth Ministers of Education
Session 7 – Teachers Recruitment, Retention and Development Issues

11:30 am - 1:00 pm

Recorder: Roli Degazon-Johnson

Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon welcomed Ministers to the session.

Minister Ivan Lewis, Chair, opened the discussion indicating that recruitment, retention and continuous development of teachers was essential. He recognised that there were many different problems related to the issue and that Commonwealth countries were addressing the matter in different ways. He indicated that DSG Cox, Minister Mario Michel and Steve Sinnott, convenor of the Commonwealth Teachers Grouping would speak, after which the floor would be open for all Ministers to make contributions.

DSG Cox: Recognised and acknowledged of the Commonwealth as a mechanism for addressing global problems. Proposed that a working group should take forward to the output of the session. He indicated that the morning's discussions would provide guidance from Ministers for the working group. In respect of this proposed working group, Ministers would be asked to address:

- Timing of the working group's task,
- Terms of references for the group
- Other Issues which ministers may wish to have addressed

DSG Cox also advised that Ministers of Health adopted the Commonwealth Health Code of Practice which is available in the conference and obtainable through the website of the Secretariat. It was recommended to the working group to assist with their efforts

(St Lucia): I have been asked to make a short presentation to debate the issue of teacher recruitment. This initiative followed the convening of a meeting in July 2002 in Barbados. This meeting, out of which came the Savannah Accord, called upon Ministries of Education of the 32 small states members of the Commonwealth to (outlined Protocol development and research on "Teacher Loss" - see Savannah Accord and Teacher Loss report). The draft protocol had been produced and the Pan-Commonwealth research concluded. The Protocol was further reviewed by a meeting of small states ministers in the Seychelles meeting in March of this year.

The Protocol recognises that quality and effectiveness in education can be measured by the pivotal role played by teachers. The World Bank report has recognised that teachers have a profound impact on education systems. The Minister outlined Protocols A, B and the Annex which asked developing countries to embark on sound HRM practices. The Minister continued:

- Recruitment agencies have been contracted by schools to recruit teachers
- The reports of teachers testify to the abuses carried out by these recruitment agencies.
- The purpose of the protocol is to provide ethical recruiting practices for businesses involved in recruiting teachers.

In summary:

“We do not wish our teachers to be recruited by developed countries. In my own country 75% of the education budget is utilised for teacher remuneration. Yet we cannot compete with developed countries that are able to offer our teachers higher salaries. We cannot expect our teachers to remain in our countries but we do expect developed countries to compensate us. We believe this position to be fair, reasonable and logical. We urge it upon our countries.

Steve Sinnott (Commonwealth Teachers Grouping): Indicated that as Deputy Secretary General of the National Union of Teachers for England and Wales, he had noted since the 13CCEM in Botswana in 1997, many ministers pointed out that they had been teachers. He called on ministers present to recall their history in this respect. He shared with ministers the content of a letter received from a teacher recruited from India which outlined a life of hunger, since being recruited to the United Kingdom, in which she “sitting and weeping”, as she was now out of a job.

He noted that:

“No one could wish to respond without compassion to that statement. I have never come across a case of such gross exploitation, by stopping work permits being granted for that kind of recruitment.” He added that unethical practices have been conducted in other parts of the Commonwealth.

Sinnott proposed:

- Properly organized and arranged procedures enabling teachers to move between different Commonwealth countries,
- That procedures be devised to enable the creation of development assistance programmes so that all countries in the Commonwealth can be benefited.

He concluded:

- “When developing countries are targeted to provide teachers this cannot be defended. That vulnerable economies and education systems striving to meet the 2015 objectives should lose their teachers cannot be defended. That teaching forces in vulnerable economies are targeted by developed countries to satisfy their requirements to the loss of these countries cannot be defended.

In closing, Sinnott asked the conference to remember the significant and special problems of small states, referring colleagues to a statement drafted by the Consortium for Commonwealth Education, which attempts to take into account the interests and concerns of developed and developing countries. The statement proposes that the principles of mutuality, equity, transparency and fairness should prevail. He proposed that:

- Commonwealth teachers will welcome any work to re-cast the Protocol. We do request that a seat or two should be held for representatives of Commonwealth teachers.

Peter Peacock, (Scotland):

Recent experiences in Scotland regarding the recruitment and retention of teachers were presented:

- Good teachers enable our young people to inspire and to widen their horizons.

- In the United Kingdom we take different approaches to address the matter in each of the countries of the UK. Scotland addresses not only recruitment but also retention.
- There are subject shortages in Maths and Science.
- The UK is looking for new and different strategies to attract teachers into the profession.
- In his part of Scotland a distance learning mechanism to enable professional development and teacher training has been introduced.
- They have made salaries competitive as part of the domestic challenge.

He continued:

“We guarantee teaching places to all graduates within the first three years. We are reviewing our teacher education process so that the continuation of professional development is part of the teacher’s life. We have introduced a chartered teachers programme enabling teachers to make more of an income by offering them continued professional development. We are trying to remove the administrative problems of teaching, allowing them to concentrate on their professional tasks.

The Scottish Executive neither employs or recruits teachers, nor does it use a recruitment agency to recruit teachers, but supports the working policy initiative.

(South Africa): Stated:

“We have now taken 25 minutes for a formal presentation. We cannot discuss this matter in 15 minutes. If one looks at the document summarising “Teacher Loss in the Commonwealth” 4,702 teachers were recruited from South Africa. White South African teachers are recruited to the suburban areas of the developed countries. The black teachers are sent to the inner cities of these countries. The problem is not only about small countries but large countries as well. South Africa offers 100% support for teacher’s union participation in this process. He continued:

- “Many of us do not believe that the Geneva rules (Health Code) are strong enough.
- I did not know that in the United Kingdom, recruited teachers are tax-exempt.
- There appears to be an assumption that the state should not interfere in the right to mobility. Immigration laws grow hot and cold. Some recruited teachers are asked to go back to their country at the end of one term.
- I have heard it said that that recruitment of teachers should be part of the WTO. Those rules are about services and we must make it clear that the WTO rules have no relationship with the recruitment of teachers.
- Many of the smaller countries ask that we do not wait for three years for this matter to be addressed.
- We propose a code of conduct, and I propose that we keep lawyers far away.
- Let us have a code of conduct with an ethical and moral basis, as otherwise there can be no symmetry between source and receiving countries.
- I propose that we have an interim position, with a larger analysis of the draft protocol. South Africa will be pleased to serve on this working group.

(Jamaica): Expressed appreciation to the St Lucia Minister for his input and for the support of larger countries. She continued:

“In Jamaica, the head hunters appear, their actions are clandestine. Just when it was thought that the teaching cohort was settled for the academic year, your teachers are recruited without your knowledge. There has to be some kind of adherence to a principle, so that the numbers of people who are recruited are made known to us. We lose our best teachers. The average recruited teacher has between 5 and 10 years experience. It cannot be correct that they are taken away. The timing and the record of who is recruiting should be considered.

We are now counterpoising retention as against recruitment. The truth of the matter is we cannot ever compete with developed countries. In my country we increased our teacher's salaries by between 25% to 80%. Now salaries of our teachers end up using 95% of the education budget. We cannot speak about competitive salaries. It is a vicious circle; we will never be able to make it more attractive if you continue to take away our teachers.

I met with teachers recruited in New York, who were asking their government to enable them to stay permanently. If they have to, then you have to help us pay to train more. Let us become offshore training facilities for developed countries. You have a shortage in London of 2,500 teachers and because of the demographic profile this will increase. Since you need them and we need them, let us satisfy both of our requirements.”

(Mauritius): Stated that:

“We cannot retain our teachers, because they are migrating and most of them are the best trained and skilled. Obviously having to train new categories of persons presupposes a major loss. The fact that all countries are facing this problem, will tell you that this does not guarantee a sound basis for our students future.

We realise that this is a problem affecting a number of countries. We need to do something. We cannot afford to wait for three years. We want concrete action from a working group of which Mauritius wishes to be a part. We wish this to be done before the end of 2004 at which time there must be a review by a ministerial action group. We must have something concrete by the end of 2004.”

(Samoa): Stated that:

“My comments will be focused on the outcome of the senior officials meeting. I would like to see a recommendation from the DSG for a time frame to organize what should be put forward. My concern is how is this organization going to respond to these issues. Ultimately this is affecting all of our education systems. The problem imposed by our teachers and their mobility is affecting all of us.”

(Seychelles): Stated:

“ I support all comments and proposals made by my colleague ministers and advance these ideas:

- The senior officials meeting has agreed to set up a working group which should be chaired by a senior official from the Commonwealth Secretariat. The issue is an urgent one and the DSG should chair that working group.
- Use a formula that was agreed upon by COL when we were discussing the Virtual University with Ministers drawn from the regions of African, Caribbean, Pacific and Indian

Ocean countries. The document must be submitted to the Secretary General. We need to have the involvement of the DSG of the Secretariat.”

(Papua New Guinea): Stated:

“My contribution will be very brief. I support the concern on the subject of recruitment and retention of teachers. Teachers are professionals. Each government should provide an incentive to retain teachers. If we do not provide salaries we will lose the teachers, I view that teachers are professionals and each government must try to retain teachers.”

(Canada): Stated that:

“The Canadian perspective is on preparing effective teachers. We met a month ago at a province called Newfoundland. More data and statistics are needed across Canada, ensuring that we continue to provide information on teacher preparation to all countries. CIDA and the Canadian teachers work with their colleagues in other countries. In the Newfoundland meeting there was encouragement to move beyond provinces for teacher mobility. We understand the difficulty that many countries are facing.

Canada supports the proposal that working committee be set up to examine all the ramifications of the education system. Appropriate time frames must be established. A mechanism must be established so that all Commonwealth countries may be enabled to contribute.”

(Gambia): Stated that:

“There are lots of other injustices that are being dealt with. For those of use who have been here longer, we have a sense of frustration. Talking about closing the gap..... How do we begin to deliver and achieve the level playing field? We turn a blind eye on the violation of certain rights and here are unethical things happening which continue to cause this divide. I think that the end of 2004 is a very long way off. Let us not go though all these procedural arrangements that never end.

Where are the teachers to make 2005 happen? The root of the problem should be found in some form of regulation. Where are the voices of ministers of education at trade meeting and meetings of finance ministers? The multilateral agencies must be brought together. Let us talk about some kind of Roundtable and let them see the injustices. We are only seeing the tip of the iceberg. Professor Sen has left us with a lot to read between the lines. We will never close the gap.”

British Overseas Territories (Cayman): Asked that

“Cognisance be taken about engaging the interest of the Untied Sates as it is from that area that the poaching also takes place. The city of New York is among the biggest recruiters. We will need the support of the developed countries of the Commonwealth to address the issue of the United States in the recruitment processors. They are the greatest poachers.”

(New Zealand): Stated that:

“We have suffered acute loss of teachers over the last five years, but there has been a reversal in the last two years. We got New Zealand’s teachers to come back because of increasing salaries and sponsoring their return. I have a good group of teachers who are making a resounding contribution to the school system.”

He requested to:

“Make a few comments on the one part that there has not been enthusiastic discussion on. The Commonwealth is exceptionally poor at sharing good practice in this area. I have been sharing with ministerial colleagues the good things that we have been doing to professionally develop teachers. I have been sharing some of the research that has surprised me on the difference that individual teachers make to the classroom. Socio economic research has shown that issues such as class distinctions can be overcome by the teachers. The evidence is that they can make a difference.”

(Namibia): Stated:

I am a teacher on sabbatical as a minister. If you are employed by somebody you are supposed to give notice. I gave one months notice. I think there is something wrong somewhere why teachers abscond. Teachers are paid by public money and are employed by public agencies. How can a public agency be involved in the process of absconding teachers? Commonwealth governments must adopt the principal so that when you are moving teachers it must have recognition by governments, so that the other governments know what is happening. This will also protect the teacher from exploitation.”

(Ghana): Stated:

“The issues are very critical. You are telling us about the South African situation. Hence we may lose teachers to South Africa. We must make it our responsibility to achieve results here and now.”

(Kiribati): Stated:

“ We have the problem of retaining our teachers at secondary level. They leave the profession for other jobs. We are finding it difficult to find replacements for these teachers. At the primary level we have teachers shortages because of resource constraints. We are embarking with our governments on this problem our situation is different to international perspectives. We are concerned about promoting the gender balance between males and females. Mainly female teachers are attracted.

We would welcome information from countries about motivating our male teachers to join the teaching profession. Our teachers are well treated in our education budget. We are considering a review of our teacher’s benefits from the system. We hope that we will be able to encourage that area of the teaching profession. Kiribati supports the initiative to encourage the inclusion of different groups around the Commonwealth, by communicating at ministerial level toward promoting the status of teachers.”

The Chair acknowledging the significant strength of feeling outlined the following proposal:

- Establishment of a working group comprising senior officials from any country which indicates its interest in the issue
- The working group should be chaired by the Deputy Secretary General
- An interim report should be prepared by September 2004
- There should be teacher's union representation on the working group.
- The report will be discussed and agreed upon by an ad hoc group of ministers and should cover – mobility, recruitment, retention, development and the impact of the teacher in closing the gap and the sharing of good practice.

Further there needs to be more of an evidence base – the impact of the pedagogy of teacher on the child – the power of teaching.

(New Zealand): Added that “ the first part of the process should be shorter to have consultation with ministerial colleagues using ICT for CHOGM 2003”

(Jamaica) Intervened stating:

“Recruitment is the problem we are looking at? Mobility seems to come under a different kind of rubric. Senior officials are going to address recruitment.”

(South Africa): Stated that “the focus should be entirely on Recruitment. That is the basis for the discussion taking place. CHOGM has not taken into account the agendas of the developing countries until now. Some of us will come to London if necessary.”

(Gambia): Stated: “I have two points. First, put education on the agenda. Let us start talking and be able to communicate that our development hinges squarely on how we tackle the education issue. From this meeting we must ensure that the words form part of the communiqué to the heads of government meeting. Do we need another 10 months? Let us raise the profile so that we are there when the positions are being made. We are looking at the most important resource, yet talking until next year September. What would be the outcome of the working group report to ministers?”

(Barbados): Stated: “I am concerned about the clutter. The most critical issue is Recruitment. Let us keep it simple and achievable. Ensure that each country around this table has available sufficient teachers to teach their children. We need a fast coach rather than a slow coach.”

(Samoa): Stated: “I refer you to the documentation sent to us. The genesis of this issue began in the Caribbean and to be true to that preparation we have to follow this through.”

The Chair revised his earlier proposal stating that: “ I believe that we miss the fact that we deal only with Recruitment. However, a clear priority focus on recruitment will be the working group terms of reference within the time scale. The working group initial report should be ready for next April 2004. Final consultation with an ad hoc ministerial grouping should be in September 2004.”