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## COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL

18 August 2010

Dear John,

### Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group

I have pleasure in writing on behalf of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to invite your organisation to make a written submission concerning the impact, networks and profile of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth has changed over time as the membership has expanded and the global context has altered. At their 2009 summit, Commonwealth Heads of Government recognised the need for further review and reform. They called for the,

“...creation of an Eminent Persons Group to undertake an examination of options for reform in order to bring the Commonwealth's many institutions into a stronger and more effective framework of cooperation and partnership.”

At its first meeting this month, the Eminent Persons Group decided to seek the written views of all Commonwealth civil society and professional organisations, as well as those of a number of distinguished personalities. Your views would be much appreciated drawing on the attached questionnaire.

It is requested that your comments are kindly focused and as brief as possible in order to assist the group's deliberations.

**Sir John Daniel**

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Please send your submission, with the attached cover sheet, to Daisy Cooper, Secretary-General's Office, Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London, SW1Y 5HX, or by email to [d.cooper@commonwealth.int](mailto:d.cooper@commonwealth.int) by Wednesday 22 September 2010.

Look forward to some  
pointers from you,  
Best regards,  
dsd

**Kamalesh Sharma**

Sir John Daniel  
Commonwealth of Learning  
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COMMONWEALTH  
SECRETARIAT

Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group

Questionnaire to Commonwealth organisations

The Eminent Persons Group was established by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their summit in November 2009. The Group met at Marlborough House, London, from 19 to 20 July 2010. It is scheduled to meet again in October 2010 and March 2011 before reporting to leaders at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), to take place in Perth in October 2011.

The Group's goals are to sharpen the impact, strengthen the networks, and raise the profile of the Commonwealth.

At its first meeting, the Eminent Persons Group decided to seek the written views of all Commonwealth civil society and professional organisations, through the offices of the Secretary-General, inviting comments from the particular viewpoint of those organisations.

You are kindly invited to submit a completed questionnaire to Daisy Cooper, Secretary-General's Office, Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London, SW1Y 5HX, UK, or electronically to [d.cooper@commonwealth.int](mailto:d.cooper@commonwealth.int) by Wednesday 22 September 2010.

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Sharpen impact

1. Values-based organisation. The EPG recognises that the *Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles* signals strongly the Commonwealth's purpose as a values-based organisation, and is exploring how Commonwealth activities and networks could be directed towards upholding and supporting more effectively its values and principles and the moral authority deriving from them. What practical measures do you think could help to do this?
2. Commonwealth strengths. Which key strengths of the Commonwealth do you utilise in your work?
3. Financial resources. The EPG has discussed the levels of financial resources available to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation and the Commonwealth Secretariat's assessed budget, as well as to the Foundation and COL. What are your views on this?

### Strengthen networks

4. Interaction with inter-governmental Commonwealth. What is your experience of interacting with the inter-governmental Commonwealth (the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth of Learning) and what changes would you like to see in this regard?
5. Ministerial Meetings. There are reforms in hand to strengthen the value and relevance of Ministerial meetings. Given the time constraints for dialogue at CHOGMs and Ministerial Meetings, one suggestion is to establish alternatively structured and dedicated exchanges between civil society members and a geographical and otherwise representative group of Ministers with reports being submitted to CHOGM for consideration and action. What are your views on this?
6. Interaction between Commonwealth organisations. What is your experience of interaction with other non-governmental Commonwealth organisations, and what changes would you like to see in this regard?
7. Strategic partnerships. The Secretariat pursues strategic partnerships, including with diverse partners outside the Commonwealth in order to advance the Commonwealth's fundamental values. What partnerships do you think the inter-governmental bodies could pursue, and what lessons have you learned from your organisation's strategic partnerships?

### Raise profile

8. Profile. The EPG discussed ways in which the profile of the Commonwealth can be strengthened building on the organisation's core and unique strengths. In your view, what measures might be taken to raise the Commonwealth's profile?
9. Media resources. What challenges do you face in raising your own organisation's profile, and what support, training or resources (if any) do you think could be provided or shared?
10. Chairperson-in-Office. The Chairperson-in-Office has a remit to host CHOGM and to promote the Commonwealth in other international organisations and arenas. The Head of the Commonwealth and the Secretary-General are others who have leadership and profile-raising roles. What changes or enhancements might be envisaged?
11. Member governments. What practical steps could member governments take to raise the profile of the Commonwealth association?

### Other

12. General remarks. Please provide any general comments or specific recommendations that you would like to share with the Eminent Persons Group.

Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group

Response to “Questionnaire to Commonwealth organisations”

From  
Sir John Daniel  
President and CEO  
Commonwealth of Learning

Disclaimer

Given the time constraints (the request arrived in Vancouver on August 27) this is a personal submission rather than a corporate position agreed by COL. I have not had time to consult members of my Board of Governors and I am not aware if the EPG has approached them separately.

**SHARPEN IMPACT**

1. Values-based organisation

Scholars say that the notion of the Commonwealth as a values-based organisation is rather more recent than the Commonwealth itself. This may explain why the behaviour of some members often seems at odds with those values. The best way to reinforce the notion would be for the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to be more robust. I appreciate, however, that quiet persuasion in private may sometimes produce more change than public mudslinging and sanctions.

Sanctions and suspensions from membership in the Commonwealth are always difficult for Commonwealth humanitarian organisations. Officially no assistance is to be given to a country due to actions of its Government or Governmental pretenders, but this restriction can further disadvantage the people of the country who are often in even more need of support and assistance.

2. Commonwealth strengths used in COL’s work

- Widespread use of the English language
- Similar legislative, parliamentary and governmental systems
- Similarity in educational structures, history, values and attitudes
- Relative informality (easy to approach Ministers, etc.)
- Reservoir of goodwill
- Developing countries generally value their membership in the Commonwealth
- (Weakness: more difficult to obtain funding from external sources when focus is only on the Commonwealth)

### 3. Financial resources

Relying on voluntary financial contributions from governments for most of the budget is a good system for COL. It keeps us focused on giving value to Member States and allows much easier adjustments than assessed contributions.

COL urges that the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation be managed in a much more open and transparent manner and treated as its name implies: as a fund that all Commonwealth IGOs can apply to in support of technical cooperation. At present the CFTC gives the impression of being a private fund of the Governance Division of ComSec that is used, *inter alia*, to compensate for shortfalls in ComSec budgets.

## **STRENGTHEN NETWORKS**

### 4. Interaction with inter-governmental Commonwealth

Since COL is an interested party I will not comment, except to say that it would be good to sharpen mandates in education, possibly with ComSec focussing on the organisation of meetings of Education Ministers and COL focussing on technical support.

### 5. Ministerial meetings

COL is content with the present arrangements as far as IGOs are concerned. It is important that there continue to be a mechanism for COL to present a report on its work and seek approval of its new Three-Year Plan from Ministers of Education every three years. Naturally, we would like to have more time with Ministers, but so does every organisation. It does seem, however, that ComSec's control over the meeting agendas skews the content somewhat.

We realise that the interaction between civil society and ministers could be improved but have no suggestions for this.

### 6. Interaction between Commonwealth organisations.

COL is content with its interaction with the other IGOs, ComSec and the Commonwealth Foundation (except for the opacity of the CFTC mentioned above). We would like to have more interaction with Commonwealth NGOs but since they are nearly all based in London this is difficult. Specialist COL staff tend to focus on interaction with their fellow IGOs during their visits to London and many of our in-country initiatives involve local NGOs. A determined effort to make the Commonwealth organisations less London-centric would be helpful. If various Commonwealth governments could offer even very modest support for setting up secretariats of Commonwealth associations in their countries this could happen quite fast.

### 7. Strategic partnerships

Again, this is really a question for those outside the IGOs to comment on. COL has a multitude of partnerships at the local level. At the global level its main long-term and successful partnership is with UNESCO, but we hope to raise the partnership with ComSec to the same level of effectiveness.

## **RAISE PROFILE**

### 8. Profile

COL focuses on keeping up its profile with Member States through regular communication with Government Ministers/Ministries, institutions, and stakeholder organisations, and through its network of Focal Points. We also prepare regular country-by-country reports. Obviously we benefit if the Commonwealth as a whole has a good profile. We consider that the Commonwealth Secretariat website has improved substantially in recent times and we encourage continuing attention to the youth of the Commonwealth.

### 9. Media resources

We rely heavily on our website and mass e-mailing and this works well for us. COL has good design capability which we regularly share with the Secretariat and the Foundation (e.g. design of display stands at CCEM, CHOGM). Exposure in mass media (which is time consuming and expensive, with limited results) is not as important to us as developing a reputation among stakeholders for being a responsive, effective and quality partner. We have managed to be quite successful in the latter.

However, COL would benefit from increased public awareness and recognition of the value of the Commonwealth in general.

### 10. Chairperson-in-Office

The Chairperson-in-Office is well nigh invisible in Vancouver. We believe that HM the Queen and, particularly, the Secretary-General are the figureheads that count. The Secretary-General has the unenviable task of giving the Commonwealth profile without upsetting sensitive governments. Introducing a system of Commonwealth Goodwill Ambassadors on the UNESCO model would be helpful.

Raising the profile of the Chairperson-in-Office might, however, help demonstrate a further vitality of the organisation, but then this could change the role of the Secretary-General. And the S-G, as in all intergovernmental S-Gs, provides an important apolitical perspective, expertise and credibility.

### 11. Member Governments

Member governments could take an active role in making the Commonwealth more polycentric. I don't propose that new Commonwealth IGOs be invented for them to host, but I believe that for very little money the distribution of the Commonwealth Associations and NGOs could be substantially decentralised. A few examples exist already.

Member governments could remember to include reference to the Commonwealth, as appropriate, in public presentations by officials.

Identifying inter-Commonwealth missions as "High Commissions" is a nice touch and, although it confuses some, it is a tradition that has entrenched itself very well.

September 2010