

Governments commit to support and invest in higher education to aid Covid recovery

Submitted by: BlueSky Education

Thursday, 28 April 2022

Commonwealth Education Ministers have agreed the urgency for ensuring access to quality education globally for all, to support a recovery from Covid and a sustainable future for the Commonwealth.

The commitment was given at the 21st Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) following recommendations from the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU).

It is the first time that Commonwealth Education Ministers have directly recognised the essential role that higher education plays in sustainable development and the need to increase financing that ensures greater access to a better quality of global higher education for all.

Higher education systems face significant challenges. This was a clarion call in the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta's, opening address during which he said that "while sustained basic education reforms in many of our countries are creating a solid foundation to strengthen the education-work linkage, the higher education system is in crisis in this regard". Ministers committed to addressing the challenges of growing demand, limited resources, and a lack of relevance to national development needs.

During the meeting recommendations from the ACU were presented by Professor Francis Aduol, Vice Chancellor, Technical University of Kenya, and by Professor Stephen Kiama, Vice-Chancellor, University of Nairobi, and Chair, ACU East and Southern Africa Regional Committee. They focused on the contribution that universities make to sustainable development and the recovery, supporting the conference theme.

The final Ministerial Statement endorses a number of the ACU policy proposals, such as ensuring equitable access to higher education, addressing the digital divide, and recognising higher education's role in all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In commending the statement to Ministers, the ACU were thanked for their role in contributing to the communique.

Dr Joanna Newman, Secretary General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities said:

"Higher education is vital to sustainable development and will be essential in realising an economic and social recovery from the pandemic worldwide. I am immensely pleased that Education Ministers have recognised this critical role universities play and committed to take action to further support and strengthen this contribution.

These commitments lay the foundations to bring about real change through the power of higher education, and we must now work together to ensure no learner is left behind and our universities are supported to realise the full potential of their role in driving development.

I am delighted that Ministers also demonstrated their commitment to further strengthen the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan and support more individuals to experience the transformative opportunities of international mobility and make a difference to sustainable development through their work."

Prof Kiama presented on the progress of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP). Administered by the ACU, the CSFP has enabled more than 38'000 students from across the Commonwealth to access international study since 1959, many of whom have gone on to transform their communities, societies, and nations.

During an intervention from the UK Government, a representative sought to actively encourage other Commonwealth governments to consider supporting the program and to help build capacity in higher education across the Commonwealth.

As the only representative body for higher education in the Commonwealth, the ACU represented not only Commonwealth but also global higher education stakeholders in Nairobi during the hybrid event, speaking on behalf of The International Association of Universities (IAU) and The Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF).

The trio collectively represent more than 2,000 higher education institutions from across all continents and have agreed a formal partnership to strengthen the representation of universities on the global stage, including at CCEM.

The outcomes secured by the ACU at 21CCEM will feed into discussions at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, to be held in Rwanda in June 2022, where the ACU will again present on the priorities for higher education.

/ENDS

More information on the ACU's policy recommendations can be found <https://www.acu.ac.uk/21CCEM/>

CCEM took place in Nairobi, Kenya, between 27-28 April. The conference theme was 'rethinking education for innovation, growth and sustainability post-Covid-19'.

For more information, contact Katie Hurley, BlueSky Education, khurley@bluesky-pr.com