



Commonwealth Higher Education Stakeholder Group's submission to The Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers.

This submission represents the views of Commonwealth Higher Education stakeholders, following a consultation conducted by the Association of Commonwealth Universities with university leaders from across the Commonwealth.

Overarching higher education recommendations to the CCEM

1. Access to quality higher education should be available to all those who would benefit and all students, regardless of gender, should be supported with the means and mechanisms to participate, complete their education, and succeed. Equality of access and inclusion must consider necessary adjustments for disability and representation from disadvantaged or under-represented groups. In the context of the digital transition predicated by the pandemic, special attention should be given to enabling internet connectivity, hardware, and infrastructure including electricity access.
2. Higher education is vital to sustainable development and universities must be recognised for the critical role they play within the Commonwealth education ecosystem, and their ability to contribute positively towards all aspects of economic and social development and the successful realisation of all 17 of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Commonwealth Governments must ensure that the appropriate resources are made available for high quality tertiary education systems to thrive.

Thematic recommendations

Theme 1: Lessons learned from COVID-19 mitigation and recovery strategies.

1. Widen access to higher education and lifelong learning by supporting digital transformation initiatives in universities. Commit to addressing the prevailing digital divide through funding, financing and public-private partnerships; including investing in digital means and enabling internet connectivity, hardware, and infrastructure including electricity access.
2. Increase funding for higher education, in recognition of its vital contribution to society and as an effective means for supporting an education-led economic and social recovery from the pandemic worldwide.

Theme 2: Rethinking education for decent work and employability

1. Support innovations in pedagogy and teaching and learning that develop critical skillsets relevant to national development priorities and well-rounded and civic-minded graduates equipped to respond to a changing world. Invest in and encourage digital literacy, the development of soft skills and green skills, and entrepreneurial education.
2. Invest in lifelong learning and adult education to meet the anticipated need for ongoing upskilling and reskilling to meet the evolving demands of the world of work.



Theme 3: Redefining learning spaces: multiple pathways and flexible approaches.

1. Support higher education institutions to develop and maintain partnerships, pedagogy, and scale up to transition to blended learning through investing in initiatives such as The Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL)¹ - enabling quality, accessible and affordable teaching at scale.
2. Commit to expanding opportunities to access international mobility, in recognition of the economic and social value of capable, culturally agile and internationally connected change-makers. This could include through increased investment in capacity building, such as split-site² and distance PHD and doctoral scholarships and fellowships; through philanthropy; and investing in and enabling new forms of virtual mobility.
3. Learning from the pandemic, bring university leaders, telecommunications companies, and global employers together to create innovative solutions to widen access to higher education through digital and blended higher education.

Theme 4: Financing of education including innovative financing

1. Commit to meeting international benchmarks of spending on education from primary through to tertiary, either 15% - 20% of national public expenditure or 4-6% of National Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
2. Increase investment in quality higher education in recognition of the role of higher education in realising a sustainable recovery and supporting progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
3. Explore innovations in financing higher education that maintain and encourage high quality and inclusive education. Such approaches should be underpinned by policy frameworks and regulatory safeguards.
4. Commit to innovative funding for the full economic cost of research, in recognition of the importance of university-led research for finding solutions to global challenges and realising sustainable development.

Theme 5: Education for sustainability and a peaceful, cohesive Commonwealth.

1. Underline the contribution higher education makes to tackling entrenched global challenges and realising all of the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – through research, teaching, and community engagement. Higher education-led partnerships should be recognised as an effective model that adds value to the investment of international donors and funders.
2. Support the investment of university-led research and teaching solutions to develop new knowledge and partnerships including through collaborative research consortiums and fellowships.
3. Work together to support displaced students and staff and invest in addressing barriers to education for refugees and displaced people.

¹ Funded by the Government of the United Kingdom, PEBL East Africa convened 23 East African universities and technical partners based in the UK and Canada under a unique partnership designed to rapidly scale up capacity for blended learning design and delivery <https://www.acu.ac.uk/get-involved/pebl/>. A similar project, PEBL West Africa, now being funded by the Australian Government and rolled out across 10 Universities in Ghana and Nigeria.

² Split-site fellowships provide access to facilities, equipment, and expertise for high-quality doctoral candidates who may not otherwise afford to study abroad. They also support collaboration and partnerships between universities.