



**COMMONWEALTH POLICY STUDIES UNIT: POLICY BRIEF NO. 21**

**2006 Commonwealth Education Ministers' Meeting:**

**Policy Brief**

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## **Policy brief for the Commonwealth Education Ministers' Meeting, 11-14 December, 2006, Cape Town, South Africa**

### **Executive Summary**

The aim this year is to produce a Cape Town Communiqué, promoting access to quality education “for the good of all” and looking at a number of key issues: trends and patterns in access; participation and retention; defining what quality means; achieving access to quality education for everyone; financing education in low income countries; and how to make changes. This year, there are four elements of the meeting: the Ministerial conference; an inaugural Teachers' Forum; a Youth Forum; and a Stakeholders' Forum. A key idea at the 2000 Halifax meeting was to bring together consortia to take each topic forward. This approach was developed at the 2003 meeting in Edinburgh, and is reflected in the 2006 Cape Town agenda and parallel symposia.

### **Executive Summary**

#### **1 Status, representation, recent meetings**

#### **2 Record for policy**

#### **3 Agenda for 2006 meeting**

#### **4 Comments on numbered agenda items**

#### **5 Interaction with other bodies**

#### **6 Other issues**

## **Author, Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, acknowledgments**

### **1 Status, representation, recent meetings**

Education Ministers have had a theme for each of their conferences for the last 30 years. The theme of the 15th CCEM, "Access and Achievement: Closing the Gap", highlighted the concern with expanding access to education and bridging inequalities of educational achievement. There are about 45 million children of primary school age who are not currently enrolled in low-income Commonwealth countries (about 45 per cent of the global total). The 2006 Cape Town meeting focuses attention on what happens to learners once they are enrolled in education, with its theme: "Access to Quality Education: For the Good of All".

Ministers will explore the theme through debates on the following key issues: trends and patterns in access; participation and retention; defining quality; achieving access to quality education for all; financing education in low income countries; and approaches to change. These issues will guide discussions in all four elements of the 16<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting: the Ministerial Conference, The Teachers Forum, The Youth Forum and The Stakeholders Forum. While focusing on its own theme, the conference in Cape Town will build on the agreements and decisions taken in the earlier CCEM meetings in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2003, Halifax, Nova Scotia in 2000 and in Gaborone, Botswana, in 1997.

The 2006 meeting is co-hosted by the Department of Education in South Africa, under the leadership of the Minister of Education Mrs Naledi Pandor, MP. Following the Department's large-scale reforms, the education landscape in South Africa has changed significantly. Racial integration of schools and gender equity are on-going projects in schools with visible achievements. A new curriculum for schools is being implemented. Just over 50 per cent of the students in higher education are now women and close to 75 per cent are black students.

The conference issues paper calls for a less instrumental approach to what quality means. It states, "In seeking to determine whether or not education is of quality, it is important to move beyond testing of sets of cognitive skills, towards a more complex understanding of what education entails." Factors bearing on quality include the curriculum-in-use, teacher professionalism, the language of teaching and learning, and inclusiveness of learning (both access and participation). "Improving access and quality entails addressing a mix of interrelated factors over time and in context. These include: open and distance learning (ODL), multi-grade classrooms, and private contributions to education." Ministers are seeking to conclude the conference with a Cape Town Communiqué, which will summarise the key priorities in addressing access to quality education and set targets for implementation.

### **2 Record for policy**

The Education Programme within the Commonwealth Secretariat is relatively small, with six professional staff including the Head of the Section. Combined with the Health

Section, the Education Section merged with Gender to form the Social Transformation Programmes Division. This structure was accepted in 2003. In 2005, Ann Keeling, formerly with the Department for International Development in the UK, took over the role as Director of STPD from a Canadian, Nancy Spence.

In 2003 the 15<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Ministers' Meeting adopted an Edinburgh Action Plan. This identified six areas, in line with the Millennium Development Goals, where the Commonwealth would work to meet the following challenges: achieving universal primary education (UPE); eliminating gender disparities in education; improving quality in education; using distance learning to overcome barriers; supporting education in difficult circumstances; and mitigating the effects of HIV/AIDS on education systems. Hence the Commonwealth has been specifically committed to raising the quality of education for three years already. Ministers called for a series of concrete steps and initiatives in several areas, across which progress can be reported.

One recommendation was to create an award for Best Practice, in each of the six action areas across the Commonwealth, as a means to share knowledge. The first of these awards will be presented at the 16CCEM's closing ceremony. Ministers at Edinburgh also wanted to include teachers' organisations in their meetings, seeing them as necessary for the solution of educational problems. Hence a new addition to a CCEM programme is the inaugural Commonwealth Teachers' Forum. Practising teachers, and members of teachers' organisations, will present Commonwealth Education Ministers with their perspective on issues relating to Access to Quality Education. This may not be the same as that of Ministers and officials.

HIV/AIDS will continue to be an important theme at this year's conference. It is estimated that 60 per cent of the world's sufferers are resident in Commonwealth countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia. The impact on children, families and the teaching profession has been severe. In 2004, Education Ministers from small Commonwealth states issued the Stoke Rochford Statement on HIV/AIDS and Education to "acknowledge the responsibility of each of us and of our education ministries to develop and sustain a clear role for education within national, regional and global efforts."

Commonwealth Heads of Government, at their 2005 meeting in Malta, "affirmed the centrality of education to development and democracy, as it provides the foundation for realising broader Commonwealth political, economic and social objectives." Heads of Government also "noted the call by Commonwealth Education Ministers for implementation of the 2004 Protocol for the Recruitment of Commonwealth teachers" and "requested the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) to assist member countries in further developing expertise in the areas of quality assurance mechanisms for open and distance learning, developing criteria for opening and operating distance learning programmes, accreditation of open and distance learning programmes and undertaking trans-border education."

After 2003, workshops were held on each of the six Edinburgh action items, tasked with making additional recommendations. Here, there is room for continued progress and ministers are likely to take up discussions of some of these issues. The workshop on supporting education in difficult circumstances (8 January 2005) came up with 11 recommendations, including the creation of a skills syllabus, research to learn from experience (post 2004 Tsunami and hurricanes) to develop educational programmes, and collaboration with media personnel (an often untapped resource).

Recommendations from the workshop on improving quality in education (24 January 2005) included: programmes to strengthen collection, analysis, and dissemination of data for quality improvement and creation of a series of short guides on aspects of quality improvement. With respect to mitigating the effects of HIV/AIDS (18 January 2005) recommendations were to explore multi-grade teaching, trauma counselling, and guidelines for head teachers on HIV/AIDS management. Further recommendations were research into peer group education and the designation of a Commonwealth Spokesman on HIV/AIDS. The workshop on using open and distance learning (13 December 2004) developed specific recommendations for the Commonwealth Secretariat, given that the CoL is a pan-Commonwealth organisation already focused on this issue. The workshop on eliminating gender disparities in education (4 December 2004) recommended the development of a gender empowerment indicator for education, incorporating human rights indicators of gender disparities.

The agenda for Ministers in Cape Town is the result of consultation between the Secretariat, the host government and other Education Ministries.

### **3 Agenda for 2006**

The provisional draft agenda, which may be confirmed or amended on the eve of the conference, is:

#### **Pre-meetings (Monday, 11 December)**

The Meeting of Senior Education Officials will take place beginning at 08.30. In addition, UNESCO/OECD will have a breakfast presentation for Ministers / Heads of Delegation to discuss guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education. Senior Officials will meet to discuss the adoption of the agenda and governance issues, as well as to receive presentations from the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth of Learning, Association of Commonwealth Universities, Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowship Plan, and Commonwealth Institute/Commonwealth Centre for Education. A discussion of the draft communiqué and action plan will conclude the meeting.

#### **Opening ceremony (19.00) in the ICC Auditorium**

With Ministers, delegates of the Stakeholders' Forum, Youth Forum, Teachers' Forum, and invited guests. The opening ceremony will include a cultural performance and addresses from dignitaries including:

- The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth – Hon Don McKinnon
- Minister of Education, South Africa – Hon Naledi Pandor

- Brief message from a representative each of the Stakeholders' Forum, the Youth Forum, and Teachers' Forum

### **1. Opening Session and Keynote Address (09.00 on Tuesday, 12 December) in the ICC Auditorium**

The joint opening session with Stakeholders, Teachers, and Youth Forum delegates will include:

- Welcome and introduction of the Keynote Speaker by Hon Don McKinnon
- Keynote address by Professor Mahmood Mamdani, Herbert Lehman Professor of Government and Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University
- Responses from Hon Naledi Pandor, Minister of Education of South Africa and one additional minister to be determined.

### **2. Plenary sessions**

Business will begin with the election of a chair, approval of the agenda, timetable and procedures, and a report from the Senior Officials Meeting by Mr Duncan Hindle, Director General of the Department of Education of South Africa. Presentations from 15CCEM – 16CCEM will follow from:

- Ann Keeling, Director of the Social Transformation Programmes Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat
- Sir John Daniel, CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning
- John Rowatt of the Association of Commonwealth Universities

Following the meeting, Ministers will be joined at their tables for lunch by delegates from the Youth Forum.

### **3. Ministerial Committee on the theme of Education “For the Good of All” (14.00 on Tuesday, 12 December)**

Ministers will break into 4 working groups to discuss the following two topics:

- For the Good of All: The Non-State Sector
- For the Good of All: Equity

Observers and representatives of the Stakeholder Forum may attend and contribute as invited by the chair.

### **4. Plenary on the theme Education “For the Good of All**

During the Plenary, chairs of the roundtables will present a summary of each group's deliberations to the plenary.

### **5. Plenary on the theme of Access to Education (09.00 on Wednesday, 13 December)**

Presentations will be made on the following topics:

- EFA and MDGs: A Global Perspective and CW Performance, by Steve Packer, Consultant to the Commonwealth Secretariat
- Sustainability of UPE: Lessons from the Past, by the Commonwealth Consortium for Education
- Increasing Access to Secondary Education, by the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE)

## **6. Ministerial Committees**

Ministers will break into four working groups to discuss the following topics:

- Quality and the Teaching Profession
- Quality in a Globalised World

## **7. Presentation of Statements by Stakeholders' Forum, Youth Forum and Teachers' Forum**

Presentations from each of the groups will be made, followed by a plenary discussion led by 2 two Ministerial discussants.

## **8. Plenary on "Quality" including report back from committees**

## **9. Presentations of their workplans by the Commonwealth Secretariat , Commonwealth of Learning, Association of Commonwealth Universities, and the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (08.00 on Thursday, 14 December)**

## **10. Drafting and approval of Cape Town Communiqué and Action Plan, and message to Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM )**

## **Closing Ceremony and presentation of Awards in Commonwealth Education Good Practice**

## **Press Conference and lunch**

## **4 Comments on numbered agenda items**

1. The opening session, with a keynote address by Professor Mahmood Mamdani, Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University, is likely to focus on the different dimensions of quality in education. The goal of "access to quality education: for the good of all" has a well-established history, and follows from a series of statements and goals, dating back to when the goal of achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) was put on the agenda in 1948. The Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (1990) added that the improvement of quality was important, and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) affirmed that quality was at the heart of education.

Three parallel symposia will be held alongside the Minister's meeting: the Youth Summit, Teachers' Forum, and Stakeholders' Forum. The success of the first parallel Youth Summit led Ministers to determine that every future CCEM will have a parallel Youth Summit after delegates concluded that young peoples themselves should be involved directly in the development of education systems, by participating in Youth Councils, and taking part in the selection of teachers and in the design and evaluation of resource materials and the curriculum. For the 2006 Ministers' meeting, two young people (one of each gender) were invited from each Commonwealth country by the

Commonwealth Secretariat to attend the Youth Forum. Young people will once again have a chance to debate issues and contribute to the Ministerial statement.

The inaugural Commonwealth Teachers' Forum is a significant new addition. A minimum of two teacher delegates (one of each gender) has been invited from each Commonwealth country by the Commonwealth Secretariat. This Forum will meet in the same venue as the Ministers' Conference and will include a full day's programme on Robben Island. The output of this Forum, and its future direction, will involve some interesting discussion.

The Commonwealth Stakeholders' Forum aims to address practical and technical aspects of the topics discussed by Education Ministers. It will have four sub-themes: increasing access to quality education; globalisation; development and quality education; the right to quality education; and resourcing/ financing of quality education. Gender issues, HIV/AIDS, and public/private partnerships, will also feature. It is being organised this year by the respected Centre for Educational Policy Development (CEPD) in Johannesburg and is open to fee-paying representatives from Commonwealth academic institutions, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector. Conclusions will be forwarded to the Ministers Conference for consideration in the Cape Town Communiqué.

2. The first plenary on the issues set before the conference will allow Ministers to set their own priorities. Issues are chosen to enable every government to participate in its own way. Presentations on activities between 15CCEM and 16CCEM will be given by the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth of Learning, and the Association of Commonwealth Universities.

At the Edinburgh meeting it was decided that the Commonwealth Of Learning (COL) should take leadership of a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), an idea conceived by Ministers at the Halifax 2000 meeting. Its vision is to offer opportunities for expanded access to education, teacher training and upgrading, and which may also benefit other regions and states of the Commonwealth. In 2003, Mr Lewis Perinbam took on responsibilities as Chair of the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL). In June 2004, the Presidency of the CoL was taken on by Sir John Daniel, former Vice-Chancellor of the UK Open University and former Assistant-Director General for Education at UNESCO. The COL's 2003-2006 three-year plan was approved in Edinburgh, and progress is underway. VUSSC member countries have met on two occasions. They signed a Letter of Intent and their Singapore Statement, reaffirming their commitment to the collaborative development of free content resources for education – a proposal originally made in the Briggs Report which led to CoL. In August 2006, Ministers met to discuss the content of the site, some of which can now be found at [www.wikieducator.org/VUSSC](http://www.wikieducator.org/VUSSC). Ministers are likely to discuss future funding sources, the identification of which was tasked to both the CoL and Commonwealth Secretariat.

3.4. Ministers will break into working groups to discuss the role of the non-state section and equity “for the good of all” before a plenary session. The issue of gender equality is likely to be highlighted, as well as potential for further co-operation with civil society and

NGOs.

5. The session on “Access to Education” will include presentations on EFA and the MDGs, the sustainability of UPE, and increasing access to secondary education. A consequence of success in approaching UPE is that greater numbers of children will seek secondary school places, and in some countries the output of the primary school system may triple before 2015. Secondary schooling is typically four to six times as expensive as primary schooling in subSaharan Africa and South Asia in terms of public costs per child. In some countries this ratio exceeds 10:1. Although Commonwealth countries have experienced relatively low rates of population growth below 2 per cent, this is important to consider for educational financing and planning. At 3 per cent growth the total number of children doubles every 24 years, while at 1 per cent this happens over 70 years.

The Commonwealth Consortium for Education may address points raised during their pre-CCEM working conference on the topic of “the Power of Partnerships: Strength of Friends.” The conference will review the large array of school and college partnerships which now exist, and examine their contribution to learning and to awareness of the Commonwealth. CREATE is a new organisation, set up in January 2006 and co-ordinated from the Centre for International Education at the University of Sussex, which wants to increase access to education for children between 5 and 15 years. Even where primary gross enrolment rates exceed 100 per cent, fewer than 20 per cent may go on to lower secondary school. CREATE is in the process of developing country analytic reviews of Bangladesh, India, Ghana, and South Africa.

6. Ministers in Edinburgh noted the importance of co-ordinating policies on teacher supply and identifying interventions to attract and retain teachers in areas of difficulty. They also recommended aiming to achieve a better distribution of male and female teachers within the Commonwealth. A critical issue discussed at the Edinburgh meeting, during a seventh session, was the issue of cross-country teacher recruitment as an urgent issue to address in “closing the gap”. Although this was an issue of contention at the 2003 meeting, it is unlikely to be a hot issue at 16CCEM, particularly given the international support and recognition that has developed over the last three years. As the World Bank put it, ‘teachers’ interaction with learners is the axis on which educational quality turns’, and the issue of teacher recruitment will be addressed in Cape Town, as reflected in the agenda and the parallel inaugural Teachers’ Forum.

Concern about Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment dates back to July 2002, when Ministers of Education and their representatives from eight Caribbean countries met at the Savannah Hotel in Barbados to address the problem of teacher loss and recruitment in small states. In their Savannah Accord, they called upon the Commonwealth Ministers of Education in general, and 32 Ministers of Education of Small States in particular, to develop a draft protocol and code of practice for the recruitment of teachers in the Commonwealth. In June 2003, following extensive review by divisions within the Commonwealth Secretariat and by legal counsel to the Commonwealth Teachers’ Group, a draft protocol was circulated to all Ministers of Education. In July, the Protocol was published by the Commonwealth Secretariat, and in September a report was published on

a study of teacher loss in the Commonwealth to inform the discussion at 15CCEM. A working group on this issue was established in Edinburgh, chaired by the then Deputy Secretary-General, Winston Cox, to develop appropriate and ethical codes of conduct.

The working group concluded its work on schedule and in September 2004 a Protocol for the Recruitment of Commonwealth Teachers was endorsed by all of its member states in Stoke Rochford, UK. The Protocol has since been endorsed by the Organization of American States and UNESCO by a resolution brought to the floor in October 2005. The ILO has cited it as a Best Practice in Migration and Development and the Commonwealth Heads of Government noted it in December 2005. In 2006, Education International called upon ILO to use it as a good practice beyond the Commonwealth. In October, a letter of agreement was signed by the Commonwealth Secretariat and International Labour Organisation to work together to advance the status and protection of teachers in the interest of quality of education.

7. Statements will be presented by the Stakeholders Forum, Youth Forum, and inaugural Teachers' Forum. Recommendations from the Youth Forum were made in each of the six action areas in Edinburgh, and acknowledged the important role of young people in the fight against HIV/AIDS. They launched a strong appeal to Ministers to take new steps to involve the youth in education programmes and create an international Commonwealth Education Day on which every school can raise "the profile of education and raise resources to go into a central fund" to help peer education initiatives. Ministers will be interested to know how these plans might be developing within member states. The Teachers' Forum is likely to address in detail the adoption and dissemination of the Commonwealth Teacher Protocol, and continued activities to raise awareness of this important document. The National Union of Teachers in the UK, Education International, and other teacher unions throughout the Commonwealth have played an important role in the progress achieved since this topic was raised at Edinburgh.

8. The conference issues paper recognises several problems in raising the quality of education for all students. First, education systems are shaped by state policies, reflecting national and local resources and priorities. Conditions of work of teachers, curriculum content, and funding allocations are crucial in determining access and quality. But these are enacted at national, not international, level. Second, school systems are linked into cultures and political economies in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. "For example, while education may be important in preparing young people for the labour market, it cannot create jobs. While it may be important for social cohesion, it does not bring about human rights and democracy. While unequal education certainly plays a role in perpetuating social inequalities, there is no evidence that education brings about social equality. While effective schools are better places for student learning than poorly functioning schools, home background has a greater influence than schools on students' life chances. Broader social patterns are not functionally linked to education – though education certainly contributes to and reflects them." Third, education is delivered in local sites, but in multiple institutions and contexts. National systems do not always mesh coherently with the inner-workings of classrooms. Also, the ideals of global conventions may have little connection with what happens in the daily practices of teachers and

learners in their schools. Fourth, access to education involves supply and provision, but it also involves demand, influenced by cultural and contextual factors.

Statements of goals about achieving EFA are not likely to achieve their intended results without consideration of local contexts, including supply and demand, resources, cultural practices and local opportunities. "It is a truism to state that issues of access to quality education for the good of all cannot be separated from countries' overall social and economic development." According to the DfID/HM Treasury (UK), it is estimated that up to \$10 billion a year of additional external support will be needed globally to universalise primary education.

9. In Edinburgh, Ministers endorsed the proposal of the Commonwealth Institute to establish a Centre for Commonwealth Education in partnership with the University of Cambridge and welcomed a £1.25m private donation to the centre for carrying out some of its activities. In January 2005, the Centre was established within the Faculty of Education at the University to serve educational needs across the Commonwealth, especially in the fields of primary and secondary education. The present working partners of the Centre are located in the UK and four Commonwealth developing countries. The Centre is currently headed by Professor Christopher Colcough. Meanwhile, there has been much controversy over the present Trustees' request to demolish their listed architectural showplace in Holland Park, described by experts as the second most important post-1945 building in London .

Notable progress has been made with the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. In 2003, the original target of 14 scholarship host countries was met when Malta agree to fund a Fellowship. The Association of Commonwealth Universities continues to act as the Secretariat of the Plan. A new initiative of the ACU was its inaugural PR, Marketing and Communications Network conference held in July to discuss the role of PR within the global higher education marketplace.

10. The Commonwealth Education Good Practice Awards programme was agreed by Education Ministers in October 2003 to recognise good and promising practices identified in member countries in the Six Action Areas which emanated from 15CCEM in Edinburgh. The first round of Education Good Practice Awards will be presented at the 16CCEM Closing ceremony. A short-list was determined in mid-2006 and the finalists will be determined just prior to 16CCEM in December.

A jury of education specialists representative of the diversity of the Commonwealth selected Good Practices, which demonstrated six criteria: relevance; measurable impact and effect; sustainability; efficiency and effectiveness; community participation and contribution; and replication. For this first round of the programme, the Commonwealth Education Section received technical assistance and support from the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) who co-ordinate a highly acclaimed Innovation Awards programme for the Commonwealth public sector.

## **5 Interactions with other bodies**

Traditionally, the Education Ministers have observers and guest from bodies such as the World Bank, Unicef, and UNESCO. The 15CCEM, once again, highlighted the important of partnerships in carrying out the Action Plan. At this year's meeting, UNESCO and OECD will hold a meeting to address specific issues outside the Ministers programme and to discuss guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education. Ministers will also have occasion to meet directly with teacher delegates and business leaders at lunches held during the conference.

Ministers will no doubt be interested in the progress of the Education For All - FastTrack Initiative, which Ministers regarded as an important effort to ensure that the Dakar commitments are adhered to by the international community. In January 2006, UNICEF, a civil society organisation, and a developing country education minister were added as rotating members to the Steering Committee.

## **6 Other issues**

One concern, which Ministers may raise, is the poor awareness of young people of the existence and role of the Commonwealth. This theme has been raised at the last three Ministerial meetings. The challenge remains how best to situate the modern Commonwealth in a crowded school curriculum. In the UK, for example, citizenship studies of the national curriculum now address the roles of the UN, EU, and the Commonwealth, but specific mention of the Commonwealth and UN might go. The perceived role of the Commonwealth within the 53 member states does vary widely, and although the colonial experiences brought experiences and interests that are not always compatible, the shared framework of language, laws and learning is a basis for networking and understanding. The Commonwealth connects young people's opportunities in a changing world, where conflicts threaten global social cohesion. Youth CHOGMs, Commonwealth Clubs in schools are among the initiatives which Ministers could helpfully endorse.

Another issue is how better to organise future meetings and activities. Ministers at Edinburgh recommended that the Commonwealth establish a tri-lateral approach through regional meetings to bring together people from finance, labour, and education to address issues such as child labour and poverty. In the area of open and distance learning, a call was made to Ministers of Trade and Education to consult with each other since trade negotiations under GATS are rarely informed by the perspectives of educators. The UN Global Compact initiative, which brings together UN agencies, labour and civil society to support universal environmental and social principles, does include HIV/AIDS and labour on its agenda, but not specifically education.

## **Author, Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, acknowledgements**

*Kimberly Ochs is Research Fellow at the University of Oxford Department of Educational Studies, where she completed her doctoral work in 2005. Her report “Teaching at Risk” (2003) was commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat education section to inform the discussion of the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol at the 15th CCEM. CPSU output is publicly available on the website: [www.cpsu.org.uk](http://www.cpsu.org.uk). The author would like to thank all those who helped her in preparing the document.*