The State of Student Governance in the Commonwealth

October 2016

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Foreword

Katherine Ellis, Director, Youth Division, Commonwealth Secretariat

It is a counter-intuitive reality that critical and wide-reaching decisions related to education policy and practice are often debated, developed and implemented with insufficient engagement or input by the most significant stakeholder group of all – students.

With this in mind, and following decisions made at the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM) in 2012, the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned this report on 'The State of Student Governance in the Commonwealth', a joint project by the Youth Division and Health and Education Unit.

The main aims of the project were to identify and explore:

* The existence of national student bodies and their role/effectiveness in the Commonwealth;

* The extent to which student-led institutions participate and contribute to education policy at national and regional levels;

* The main issues, challenges and opportunities facing national student bodies in the Commonwealth;

* Best practice approaches/strategies to engage students in decision making at national and regional levels;

* Policy recommendations on strengthening the role and involvement of student bodies in policy making.

The findings and recommendations contained in the report represent a tremendous opportunity to strengthen the student voice at local, national and international levels. The recommended actions will help tackle barriers and challenges to ensure that student organisations across the Commonwealth are active, engaged, influential and respected.

The report finds that 51 per cent of Commonwealth member countries do not have a national student organisation (NSO) of any kind. The recent establishment of the Commonwealth Students' Association (CSA) is therefore a timely and valuable chance to nurture the development of NSOs across all Commonwealth member countries. This is particularly vital at a time when education is becoming more interconnected and global.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, sets the global framework for development for the next 15 years. In it, the global community recognises that education is essential for the achievement of all 17 SDGs. For successful development, education, and the role of students in guiding and informing education policy and practice, must be taken seriously.

As recommended in the report, the Commonwealth Secretariat, together with our official student voice, the Commonwealth Students Association, will work to increase the number of NSOs across the Commonwealth, strengthen their effectiveness and sustainability, facilitate constructive intergenerational dialogue, and raise awareness of the essential role that NSOs can and should play globally, nationally and locally. This will be an important contribution to achieving the SDGs, especially SDG 4, to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

Foreword

Dr Joanna Nurse, Head, Health and Education Unit,
Commonwealth Secretariat

Youth development is a vital commitment within the Commonwealth Charter, which highlights that the future of the Commonwealth lies with the younger generation, and that supporting young people, including through education and learning, is integral to the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Specifically, the Secretariat aims to develop the capacity of institutions and enhance mechanisms for youth development across the Commonwealth, support young people to plan and operate youth-led activities, ultimately empowering them.

A key driver for realising these aims is the Commonwealth Students Association (CSA), established at the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Mauritius. Here, ministers of education recognised student governance as a valuable means for promoting student engagement with education and welcomed the establishment of the CSA, which represents student organisations nationally and across the Commonwealth. In so doing, the CSA can act as a mechanism to encourage student engagement and allow their voices to be heard and taken into account by decision makers within the education systems.

In recognition of the key role that student governance can play, at the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in The Bahamas (where the first CSA executive was elected) ministers committed to supporting and partnering with national student organisations (NSOs).

Yet, despite the significant progress made by NSOs within the Commonwealth, there is a need to better understand the main issues, challenges and opportunities and to identify any further action required.

Consequently, it is envisioned that this report will provide a baseline assessment on the state of student governance and of effective strategies to support initiatives of the CSA within the Commonwealth. It is also intended to encourage and enhance NSO development and improve awareness of student organisations.

It is our aim that this document, which identifies policy recommendations and outlines a framework for their implementation, will not only be of value to NSOs, but also to ministries, universities and the education sector as a whole.

I commend this report to you and hope that it will encourage more young people to participate in governance and take on leadership roles, including within student governance organisations. As it constructs their leadership experiences it will also pave the way for stronger links and partnerships between institutions and student bodies, and ultimately strengthen the voice of young people across the Commonwealth.

We give thanks to all those involved with the development of this report, and are greatly appreciative for their input. We are particularly grateful to the research team from the National Union of Students UK and those that contributed to the interview and research process, and very much look forward to seeing the realisation of a common vision and new pathway for NSOs.

Foreword

Joshua Griffith, Chairman, CSA Steering Committee

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has positioned quality education as one of 17 Global Goals adopted by World Leaders in September 2015 at the United Nations in New York. To date, however, the power of student organisations (whether national or local) to sustainably influence society at all levels remains understated, undervalued and too often goes unrealised.

This report on the State of Student Governance in the Commonwealth is a well-researched document and a must-read for all student organisations and education stakeholders within the Commonwealth and beyond.

Today's struggles for a quality education that is inclusive and accessible to all will be won through the perfect blend of continuous activism and lobbying with mass action when required, whilst being grounded on the principles of evidenced-based research.

An education itself is invaluable, and a report of this nature is instrumental to local, national and international development and has been long overdue.

The report correctly outlines the need for national student bodies to be engaged in decision making at the national level, coupled with the need for national student organisations (NSOs) to develop legitimate structures while ensuring they represent the concrete opinion of those they represent.

Today, the stark reality is that 51 per cent of Commonwealth member countries do not have an NSO of any kind. As discussed in Chapter 3 of the report, of the 53 Commonwealth member countries 5 have several NSOs, 21 have a single NSO and 27 do not have any.

National student bodies in the Commonwealth continue to face challenges in the areas of financial resources, reliance on volunteers, membership engagement and gaining status to legitimately represent student voices.

A report involving 140 student organisations and educational personnel is unprecedented in nature.

If education is to be taken seriously then all stakeholders must work towards sustainable and inclusive partnerships.

Applied knowledge is power. I sincerely hope that this report is not merely read and shelved but studied and continuously referenced for years to come.

Mr Mike Day and the National Union of Students team, along with all contributors to the final report, must be commended for a job well done

On behalf of the CSA Steering committee we welcome and endorse the Report on the State of Student Governance in the Commonwealth and encourage all concerned to immerse themselves in the wealth of critical information contained in this report.

Read to Lead.

Acknowledgements

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Acronyms

ACUI	Association of College Unions International
AGM	Annual general meeting
AISC	All-India Student Conference
AISF	All India Students' Federation
ANC	African National Congress
CCEM	Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIE	Confédération Internationale des Étudiants
CSA	Commonwealth Students' Association
CSC	Commonwealth Students' Congress
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ESIB	European Students' Information Bureau
ESU	European Students' Union
GNSO	Ghana National Students' Organisation
GNUS	Ghana National Union of Students
FEUQ	Fédération Étudiante Universitaire du Québec
HEI	Higher education institution
ISC	International Student Conference
IUS	International Union of Students
MEDSAR	Medical Students' Association of Rwanda
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSO	National student organisation
NUKS	National Union of Kenyan Students
NUS	National Union of Students
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
NUSUK	National Union of Students United Kingdom
RNSSO	Rwanda Nursing Sciences Students' Organisation
RNMU	Rwanda Nurses and Midwives Union
RPSA	Rwanda Pharmaceutical Students' Association
SFS	Swedish National Union of Students
SPARQS	Student Partnership in Quality Scotland
SRC	Student Representative Council
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UNEF	Union Nationale des Étudiants de France
USI	Union of Students in Ireland
USNSA	United States National Students Association
WESIB	Western European Students' Information Bureau

Executive Summary

The Commonwealth Education and Youth Secretariat, following decisions made at the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM), commissioned a report on the state of student governance in Commonwealth member countries. This report provides an analysis and evaluation of the current situation of the state of student governance in those countries. The research team (from the National Union of Students United Kingdom) has developed a set of principles and a suggested framework, which analyses different approaches to national student organisations (NSOs).

The objectives of the report will be:

- to research and present findings on the existence of national student bodies and their role/effectiveness in the Commonwealth;

- to research and present findings on the extent to which student-led institutions participate in and contribute to education policy at national and regional levels;

- to identify the main issues, challenges and opportunities facing national student bodies in the Commonwealth;

- to identify best practice approaches/strategies to engage students in decision-making at national and regional levels;

- to make policy recommendations on strengthening the role and involvement of student bodies to be considered by ministers, stakeholders and participants at the 19th CCEM.

The suggested framework includes the following elements:

- an established governing document that sets out the organisation's mission, governance and decision-making process and safeguards student leadership;

- open and transparent membership and student representation arrangements;

- adequate arrangements for financial sustainability, including an operating surplus, cash flow and reserves, with annual accounts reviewed by an external agency;

- a long-term or strategic plan detailing the objectives and operating plans of the organisation in advancing its mission and engaging students;

- a portfolio of opportunities and activities that students can initiate, shape and engage in to advance the interests and education of the organisation's members and to frame its policy and influence objectives;

- established modes of communication with students and an understanding of student priorities and interests in the national educational context;

- established relationships with relevant ministries or government departments with responsibility for education and other key stakeholders in education;

- the ability to draw on a base of research and evidence to inform and develop policy;

- cultural factors such as patterns of student political engagement, beliefs and values relating to the importance and mode of student voice in policy.

Background and context

A short **review of the historical background** of NSOs within the Commonwealth is presented to provide some context on how student organisations have developed, despite the limited availability of academic studies. The review shows that the idea of student representation has a long history. The vast majority of the institutions and student organisations that the research team have spoken to are based on a European/colonial model, which provides a common language to start addressing issues around student engagement and representation. Some student organisations trace their antecedents to formal debating societies, or the drive for student representation, while others have emerged from political, religious or regional/ethnic movements and may well be complementary to or closely linked to wider political struggles in a country. Many NSOs were integrally involved in their countries struggles for independence and continue to be engaged, although not always with the approval of their government regime. As a consequence many students and student organisations find their activities highly regulated, restricted or proscribed. The extent to which people think NSOs and student leaders should engage in political debate and activities varies between countries. This emerged as a significant debate during the research. There are numerous examples of student leaders who have gone on to provide leadership in wider civic society.

In addition to this wider political leadership role played by student leaders, there are numerous examples of students taking action to improve the academic quality and institutional arrangements their members experience. Student engagement in the design and quality of their education is a growing phenomenon. NSOs play a significant role in bringing local students' unions together and encouraging collaboration on extracurricular activities that enhance the overall academic experience and transferable skills of the students involved, thereby enhancing their employability. NSOs have also been at the forefront of arguing for social change, supporting the rights of women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, disabled students and minority ethnic students. Where student organisations are able to act as an umbrella group on behalf of member students' unions and are able to take part in debates on the development of tertiary education, there is greater scope for building a partnership model with the education sector and relevant ministries.

National student organisations have often been founded in a spirit of internationalism, co-operation and collectivism to achieve a greater good and to learn from each other. There is a strong impetus to co-operate at national, regional and international levels. International groups that have moved quickly to claim a

representative universality have not been successful; those that seek to co-operate, collaborate and share practice build a more solid foundation for mutual support among members. The foundation of the Commonwealth Students' Association (CSA) provides a tremendous opportunity to nurture the development of NSOs across all Commonwealth member countries.

Literature review

A brief literature review outlines some key points relating to academic discussion on the development of NSOs, representative structures and student engagement. **Student engagement** is defined as a process that is about developing the conditions at local and national levels through which students feel that their contribution to curriculum development and their learning experience is listened to, valued and acted upon with agreement. Student representatives are increasingly being involved in academic decision-making at local and national levels, the follow up groups for the European Higher Education Area Bologna Process being a good example. Student organisations can also act as pressure groups but their effectiveness depends on their ability to develop legitimate structures to ensure that what they say is firmly grounded in student opinion. Some people argue that more formal student structures can limit student activism; more successful NSOs are able to combine effective research and lobbying with mass action when required.

Many student organisations have to work hard on involving students in their structures. Those who are involved learn valuable life and employability skills and are rooted in democratic values. Too much association with national political structures can damage the credibility of a student organisation in the eyes of some students, especially if the NSO acts in an overtly partisan way. Where students' union membership is voluntary, NSOs are significantly weaker and can fall prey to one perspective. All-embracing student organisations place a responsibility on the members to ensure the organisation speaks in their name, and an equal responsibility on NSO leaders to act in a way that is acceptable to the majority of their members.

19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers

A draft of this report was initially presented at the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in The Bahamas, June 2015. A summary of the key points and the meetings attended by the research team is presented. NSOs have a long tradition of engagement at local, national and international levels from the mid-19th century onwards, and student engagement is increasingly seen as a critical tool in developing a more relevant and inclusive curriculum; students have a part to play in these developments. The student voice is seen as important and NSOs have the potential to act as partners in developing effective student engagement strategies. NSOs also have a good deal of potential power and influence through the collective action of their members in bringing pressure to bear on decision-makers, but also in supporting an experience of a democratic environment that sets a benchmark for wider society. How students see themselves and how decision-makers see them has an impact on how seriously the issues student representatives raise are treated and the overall attitude exhibited towards them by decision-makers. In some countries, students' unions have been increasingly politicised, and this can lead to a dampening of wider student participation, as the NSO may be seen as pushing one specific agenda. There are many different types and approaches to

NSOs and the extent to which they are seen as part of an educational sector/civic society. Whatever the style and approach, it is clear that involvement in an NSO can facilitate the development of transferable employability skills.

Current situation of national student organisations

The narrative and analysis of the desk research that the team conducted is contained in Chapter 3 of the report. Currently, 21 Commonwealth member countries have one NSO, 5 have several NSOs and 27 do not have any. This means that 51 per cent of Commonwealth member countries do not have an NSO of any kind.

Survey analysis

A survey was sent to over 140 student organisations to further understand the current structures of NSOs and to highlight areas for improvement. Seventy-six student organisations completed the survey. The responses can be broken down regionally: there were 19 responses from Africa, 12 from Asia, 35 from the Caribbean and the Americas, 8 from the Pacific and 2 from Europe.

Some common themes emerged from NSOs' responses. These were combined with consultations and feedback from government officials and education sector personnel who were interviewed as part of the process.

A **lack of resources** was consistently seen as a problem. There was inconsistent access to resources and many of the respondents saw this as inhibiting the growth and development of their NSO or local students' unions. Linked to the resources issues were concerns about a **reliance on volunteers**, with some noting that the paid full-time 'sabbatical' officer model utilised by some NSOs would be helpful. Growing membership and/or engaging members in **wider involvement** was seen as a priority but also a problem. Some national unions felt that they were not **valued by the government** of their country; if the student voice is not being effectively promoted or heard, that could lead to problems in the future. Linked to this point, there were some issues around **legal recognition** and the extent to which students are formally consulted on issues that affect them.

Interview analysis

A number of semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide further analysis of the effectiveness of NSOs in the Commonwealth, as well as to help develop a series of recommendations for future development. In total, 24 interviews were conducted with members of student organisations, ministries of education and experts who have knowledge of student organisations in the Commonwealth. The interviewees agreed that NSOs have the potential to be effective; however, many NSOs do not currently fulfil that potential. It was acknowledged there is not a global issue that does not affect students in one way or another, and NSOs are known for both campaigning activity and detailed policy input; one complements the other. Some of the most common barriers faced by NSOs are a lack of organisation and being treated in a tokenistic way by the authorities. There were concerns that students who get involved may do so to the detriment of their studies, and this in turn is a barrier to better organisation unless resources are made available to support students in taking sabbatical leave from their courses to focus on a full-time leadership role. The legitimacy of student policies are crucial; NSOs need to demonstrate that they are grounded in genuine student opinion through links with individual members or students' unions, and beyond that with course representatives. Other concerns raised were that some students might be seen as – or may actually

be – careerists, individualists who have taken a role only to curry favour for a future political post. This is why it is so important that NSO structures need to be robust and accountable. There is a danger that corruption could seep into the process. NSOs that take a strong party political line may be hampered or dismissed, but equally, if we want students to take leadership positions in the future, then having a political analysis is helpful.

Common challenges

By combining the findings of the NSO survey, structured interviews and the case studies presented, a set of common challenges have been identified, namely:

- a lack of resources;

- continuity and reliance on voluntary effort;

- membership engagement and growth;

- status of the NSO in the eyes of the government, sector, institution and wider public;

- reluctance to see NSOs as partners in the student engagement process, and the extent to which NSOs are consulted on relevant matters;

- legal status and the ability to effectively represent the authentic student voice;

- a paramount need for capacity building.

A common vision

To tackle some of the challenges and barriers identified, to build on current structures, to enhance those structures and to develop new NSOs where needed, a 'common vision' for NSOs in the Commonwealth is suggested, painting a picture of what the future could look like along with a set of aspirations to work towards. The maim elements were:

- NSOs will be seen as **active partners** rather than respondents in shaping education and youth policy at government, sector/agency and institutional levels.

- They will have **robust systems of governance** and democracy along with the ability to develop a sustainable NSO in which there are an adequate handover (continuity), learning and development opportunities, and mentorship support.

- They will have access to **adequate resources** and support. This may include professional staff support and full-time paid officers for a time-limited period, both of which will help address issues around continuity.

- They will have **active members** who will have access to information about what their NSO is doing on their behalf. They will represent the full **diversity** of their membership with gender-balanced committees and recognition of minority groups of students, which will recognise the total student demographic and will support their full engagement within the NSO.

- They will **facilitate and encourage** local student/students' union activity to enhance the overall student experience.

Recommendations

Having considered all of the evidence, the research and the response at 19th CCEM, this report presents a series of recommendations that, it is hoped, will help to tackle some of the barriers and challenges identified in the previous. The objective of these recommendations is to ensure that student organisations across the commonwealth are active, engaged, influential and respected.

1. Increase the number of NSOs in the Commonwealth

- Work with ministries and the education sector for funding and approval of NSOs and to develop an agreed definition of their role and purpose, covering those matters with an impact on the lives of students.

- Work with Institutional student organisations to develop NSOs or create them where needed using the activity model shown in section 5.1.2 below. The model suggests the range of activities that an NSO could engage with depending on local requirements and circumstances: capacity building, research, campaigns and influencing, communications and democracy. A checklist for each section is shown in **Appendix 4**.

- Strengthen or develop an existing umbrella organisation using the partnership model suggested in section 5.1.1, which explains that, to get the best out of any NSO and student engagement strategy, a partnership approach is essential, one of critical friendship. The same approach can also be applied with a higher education institution and can build a sense of belonging to the higher education community and beyond. Mutual learning and support, and general experience in democratic engagement, can be of great value in strengthening civic society.

- Consider an 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in' approach towards membership linked to a local agreement on membership fees where appropriate. This is linked to the responsibility of student leaders to communicate effectively and keep their members informed about what they are doing, while the same time it places a 'citizen' responsibility on student members to take part, keep themselves informed and hold their leaders to account.

- Utilise legal recognition to enhance partnership and the student voice.

2. Increase the effectiveness and sustainability of NSOs

- Develop a **framework** for NSOs, through the CSA, to help foster organisational development and facilitate a wider understanding of the role and purpose of an NSO and student representation in general.

- Develop a **benchmark** and set of indicators for high-quality student organisations, to ensure the quality, standards and overall effectiveness of an NSO. Section 5.2.2 describes a model based around an examination of three interlinked areas: governance, leadership and management; activities; and outcomes. The system seeks to monitor strategic planning and progress made towards agreed objectives.

- Link the guiding principles to the Commonwealth Secretariat's own three goals to help a shared understanding. **Commonwealth goal**: strong democracy, rule of law, promotion and protection of human rights and respect for diversity. **NSO guiding principles**: democratic and student-led organisation, operating within a clear legal framework, championing the rights of students within a society, and recognising and advocating on behalf of the diversity of students.

Commonwealth goal: inclusive growth and sustainable development. NSO guiding principles: clear plans for the future and having considered how it will meet its objectives in a sustainable way. Commonwealth goal: a well-connected and networked Commonwealth. NSO guiding principles: working closely with key decision-makers inside and outside government to improve education, and working collaboratively with students and other student organisations both in their own country and across the Commonwealth.

- Build capacity and support for organisational development by developing the provision of support by the CSA and its regional structure. This support will be sensitive to local contexts and circumstances (e.g. the potential differences between rural and urban environments) and the overall ability to participate in NSO democratic structures.

- Create learning and development opportunities by developing effective induction and handover support for elected officers, developing an online hub of resources, developing a tool kit for the creation and development of a new NSO, and creating communities of practice in which student leaders and the staff who support them can meet and exchange good practice. Free online training should be introduced where possible. CSA regional meetings and CCEMs provide great opportunities to do this. Stronger links could be made between volunteer roles, future career options and academic credit, to make elected roles more attractive.

- Develop consultancy and other support options by creating a pool of development consultants who could undertake specific assignments to help the development of an NSO. A brokerage model could be developed that operates on a mutual benefit basis.

- Build the research capacity of NSOs.

3. Raise the awareness of student organisations globally, nationally and locally

- Make governance structures and the documentation that underpins them widely available to their members.

- Harness the power of collaboration and promotion through the CSA.

Overall, the findings of this report and the suggested actions contained in the recommendations section represent a tremendous opportunity to strengthen the student voice at local, national and international levels. This is critical at a time when education is becoming more interconnected and global.

1. Introduction

The aim of this document is to expand upon the interim report on the state of student governance in the Commonwealth presented to the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) in Nassau, Bahamas. It will outline baseline information, case studies, discussion of relevant issues and policy recommendations in line with the stated objectives set for the research team. The report will include a suggested framework for the implementation of the policy recommendations and options for member countries to discuss and evaluate.

1.1 Terms of reference and objectives

The Education Section of the Health and Education Unit and the Youth Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned the National Union of Students United Kingdom (NUSUK) to produce a report assessing the state of student governance in Commonwealth member countries. The report is linked to the Secretariat's Strategic Plan (2013–2017) **Outcome 4: Youth**, 'Youth more integrated and valued in the political, policy decision and development processes'. Among a number of immediate outcomes, **Outcome 4.2** has as an objective 'Young people empowered and supported to participate meaningfully and to take forward youth-led initiatives'. The Secretariat's commitment 'to build the capacity of national, regional and institutional institutions and mechanisms in youth development and to empower young people to participate in development processes in accordance with the laws and regulations of member countries has resulted in the decision by the 18th CCEM to welcome the formation of the Commonwealth Students' Association (CSA). In doing this, ministers recognised the importance of student involvement, participation and contribution to education policy at national, regional and Commonwealth levels.

The information contained in this report and some of the conclusions reached will, it is hoped, start a series of debates that will serve to strengthen student/youth engagement and empowerment by creating a forum whereby support can be given to student-led bodies in the Commonwealth by member governments, the newly formed CSA and the Commonwealth Education and Youth Secretariat itself.

The objectives of the report will be:

- to research and present findings on the existence of national student bodies and their role/effectiveness in the Commonwealth;

- to research and present findings on the extent to which student-led institutions participate in and contribute to education policy at national and regional levels;

- to identify the main issues, challenges and opportunities facing national student bodies in the Commonwealth;

- to identify best practice approaches/ strategies to engage students in decision-making at national and regional levels;

- to make policy recommendations on strengthening the role and involvement of student bodies to be considered by ministers, stakeholders and participants at the 19th CCEM.

1.2 Research team

The contract to carry out the research was awarded to NUSUK. Founded in 1922, NUSUK has a mission to:

• promote, defend and extend the rights of students;

• champion and build strong students' unions.

The research team were drawn from different departments within the organisation:

• Mike Day, Director of Devolved Nations and Internationalism, NUSUK (Project Lead);

• Rebecca Maxwell Stuart, Consultant, National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland (Research Lead);

• Dr Debbie McVitty, Head of Policy, NUSUK (Policy Consultant);

• Dan Francis, Development Consultant, Strategic Support Unit, NUSUK (Capacity Building Consultant).

Throughout the project the team has been supported by Layne Robinson, Youth Development and Empowerment, Commonwealth Secretariat; Ram Sushil, Programmes Manager, Commonwealth Secretariat; Harriet Swanston, Francesca Danmole and Bhagya Ratnayake, Assistant Programme Officers, Commonwealth Secretariat; and Stanley G. Njoroge of the CSA, Outgoing Chairperson of the CSA. The team would also like to thank members of the Commonwealth Youth Forum present at the 19th CCEM, senior officials and ministers who took the time to speak with us and provide feedback and encouragement.

1.3 Methodology and approach

The research team has approached the project by developing, testing and refining a framework for strong national student-led bodies that includes issues around organisational sustainability, membership engagement and the ability to influence and engage in national education policy development. The team developed a common set of criteria and has used this as the basis for a short survey to a sample of NSOs and ministries. From this approach the team hopes that a clear picture will emerge of what an effective, student-led organisation looks like, where that effectiveness can be improved and what lessons can be learned from across the Commonwealth about effective ways to support student representation. Throughout the project the team has been mindful to be sensitive to cultural differences and to work with stakeholders to ensure that the approach has resonance across the varied Commonwealth national contexts. The framework includes the following measures:

• an established governing document that sets out the organisation's mission, governance and decision-making process and safeguards student leadership;

• open and transparent membership and student representation arrangements;

• adequate arrangements for financial sustainability, including an operating surplus, cash flow and reserves, with annual accounts reviewed by an external agency;

• a long-term or strategic plan detailing the objectives and operating plans of the organisation in advancing its mission and engaging students;

• a portfolio of opportunities and activities that students can initiate, shape and engage in to advance the interests and education of the organisation's members and to frame its policy and to influence objectives;

• established modes of communication with students and an understanding of student priorities and interests in the national educational context;

• established relationships with relevant ministries or government departments with responsibility for education and other key stakeholders in education;

• the ability to draw on a base of research and evidence to inform and develop policy;

• cultural factors such as patterns of student political engagement and beliefs and values relating to the importance and mode of student voice in policy formation.

We have an established relationship with the CSA and would like to further thank them for helping the team to access student organisations and leaders across the Commonwealth.

2. Background and Context

This chapter will provide some background discussion on the historical development of student-led organisations in Commonwealth countries. It will also examine relevant literature on student organisations, through a concise literature review. Finally, it will provide context for what happened at the 19th CCEM meeting, at which a first draft of this report was presented.

2.1 Historical development of student representation at a national level

Different approaches

There are two traditions of students' unions, both of which can be traced back to universities in the United Kingdom. The first tradition finds its origins in the Cambridge Union (founded 1815) and the Oxford Debating Society (founded 1823), which became the Oxford Union, the prime purpose of which was to organise debates on issues of the day. They were not seen as representative unions, nor did the organisations seek to take on an advocacy role. The word 'union', while perhaps more associated with 'trades unions', referred in this case to the unification of college debating societies and other activities. For many years the idea of a 'students' union' referred to the building that housed a range of extracurricular activities, as opposed to the Student Representative Council (SRC), which took on a representative role. With a few exceptions, this distinction has disappeared in UK universities and many students' unions carry out a dual role in providing opportunities for social activity and leisure and representing student views to the university and beyond.

Early development in the United Kingdom

Students' unions that sought to take on an advocacy role in UK universities emerged in the late 19th century in Scotland. In Scotland the idea that students had a role to play in the governance of the institution had a longer and stronger tradition, based on the position of a rector, elected by students, whose role it was, and is, to take up their concerns. The role finds its antecedents in the University of Bologna, Italy (founded in the 12th century), where in the early years of the university the rector was a student elected by his peers and the students themselves shaped the curriculum and engaged academics to lead it. This was in contrast to the University of Paris, where 'masters' came together to form a university and decided what students would learn. Scottish higher education was broadly based on the Italian model, while English higher education institutions (HEIs), including Oxford and Cambridge, based themselves on the French model.

As Scottish institutions evolved, the rector was rarely a student, but the rectorial elections, reintroduced in the mid-19th century, represented the first occasions in modern times when students elected someone to speak on their behalf. Candidates were often national figures with little time to involve themselves in the day-to-day minutiae of the university. It was to fill this gap that Robert Fitzroy Bell, a student at Edinburgh University, proposed the foundation of a 'Student Representative Council', following a trip to the University of Strassburg, where he came across a building that housed a *Studenten Ausschuss* (student committee) (Morgan 1933). Bell's idea proposed that students elect student representatives to channel student views to the university. By 1889 the concept had been exported to the other Scottish universities and, crucially, enshrined in law. The Universities Scotland Act 1889 (stated that there had to be an SRC in each university, with the right to make representations to the university court. The four SRCs formed

a national council and successfully lobbied for regulations that gave rights to receive revenue, to petition the Senate and to be consulted on any draft ordinances. This council met until 1935, when it evolved into the Scottish Union of Students (SUS) and took on a broader base of membership.

Developments in England and Wales moved at a slower pace. The University of Liverpool established a 'Guild' in 1892, the idea spread and by 1893 University College London had established a similar body, which was the first in England to receive official recognition from its institution (Bates and Ibbetson 1994). In 1900 the newly formed Birmingham Guild of Undergraduates was granted representation on the university court. By 1900 most HEIs in England and Wales had some form of student representative organisation. The constitutions of these bodies were recognised through the university articles of governance.

The next logical step was to create a national representative body and the aftermath of the First World War provided the catalyst for the creation of a national student union representative body, the National Union of Students (NUS). The French national union (Union Nationale des Étudiants de France, UNEF) called a meeting of national student organisations (NSOs) in Strasbourg in 1919. The UNEF proposal was to establish a Confédération Internationale des Étudiants (CIE), the purpose of which would be to bring together students, who were, it was assumed, destined to play a significant role in the future of their countries (National Union News 1923). The basis of membership of the CIE was one national union per country, so, to ensure students in England and Wales were represented, on 14 February 1922 the NUS came into being. Its founding president, Ivison S. Macadam, believed that 'if the students are co-operating today surely there is hope for tomorrow' (Youth and Universities 1922), which echoed his commitment to internationalism. In 1971 the NUS merged with the Scottish Union of Students to form the National Union of Students of the United Kingdom (NUSUK). At the same time it devolved policy-making powers to Wales and Northern Ireland.

Early establishment of student organisations in other Commonwealth countries

Student organisations within the Commonwealth range from the traditional debating societies and the SRC structures, which were very much based on those of UK universities, to grassroots organisations that, in the main, were formed to challenge colonial rule or as adjuncts to wider political movements. The idea of a union, similar in approach to those in Oxford and Cambridge, can be found at the University of Sydney in 1874; then other Australian institutions followed suit. Parallel developments can be seen at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, and at universities in South Africa. One of the first representative bodies in Africa was the Student Guild at Makerere University, Uganda.

In the early part of the 20th century, national representative bodies began to emerge in Australia (National Union of Australian Students), Canada (Canadian Union of Students and Union Générale des Étudiants du Québec), New Zealand (New Zealand University Students' Association) and South Africa (National Union of South African Students, NUSAS). For example, NUSAS was established (with support from the newly established NUS in England and Wales) in 1924, the purpose being to bring together students of both English and Afrikaner heritage. In July 1924 the NUS (England) hosted an 'Imperial Conference of Students', welcoming delegates from Canada, Australia, India, South Africa, Ireland, New Zealand and Trinidad. The conference discussed issues of concern to the 'Universities of the Empire' through a series of commissions. The overall purpose was outlined in the introduction to the programme by the Rt Hon. Viscount Cecil of Cherwood, the Honorary President of the host NUS: 'this conference which you are attending will be of the greatest value in promoting closer fellowship between students of your Universities and those of the Mother Country and that it will establish relations between them based on sympathy and mutual knowledge. It is not necessary to emphasise its importance in promoting a broad unity of thought and outlook amongst the young men and women who are now being trained in the Universities of the Empire and on whom the future will impose a large share of responsibility in the maintenance of our common civilisation and of our imperial unity' (Programme of the Imperial

Conference of Students, July 18–31, 1924, London and Cambridge). One of the commission sessions involved guidance on how to establish a national union of students as well agreements on mutual co-operation. In the long term, restrictions on finance prevented further meetings.

There has always been a strong tradition in India of students coming together to form student-led organisations, ranging from the purely cultural to the political. In 1911 a students' association was formed at the Banaras Hindu University, and promoted student welfare and debating. Another example was the Student Brotherhood, founded in 1889, which had a broader scope; it was formed in the Bombay area and focused on promoting cultural and social activities. The early 20th century saw the brotherhood taking issue with university authorities over their approach to marking examinations and in 1936 it galvanised 20,000 students to demonstrate against changes in English language requirements, which had been made more stringent, resulting in an increase in failures. The brotherhood also agreed a charter promoting freedom of speech and association, and demanded government recognition for student organisations based on self-government, promoting the benefits of student discipline and team work. The organisation died out in 1940, superseded by student organisations with greater national political support (Altbach 1965). These early students' unions and NSOs were seen as a source of support for students and, crucially, a training ground for the future, a place where students could develop transferable life skills and networks. Student leaders were increasingly involved in discussions and action against colonialism.

Supporting self-determination

In other parts of the then Empire, student organisations and movements were very much linked to the struggles for independence and/or political parties, and emerged in the years just before and after the Second World War. The All India Students' Federation, which was the student wing of the Indian Communist Party, was established in 1945. In the immediate post-war years there was another attempt to establish a new international student organisation to replace the discredited CIE. The International Union of Students (IUS) was established following a series of meetings in London and Prague in 1945–1946, although it soon became clear that the organisation was little

more than a tool of Soviet foreign policy. By 1951 NUSUK withdrew from the IUS and, working with the Swedish National Union of Students (Sveriges förenade studentkårer, SFS) and the United States National Students Association (USNSA) established an alternative organisation: The International Student Conference (ISC). In 1920 the All-India Student Conference (AISC) was created with the support of the Indian National Congress (Congress Party). The AISC was an attempt to create a movement that would encompass all students in India. The All India Students' Federation (AISF) held similar aspirations, and was very much linked to Gandhi's campaign of civil disobedience. Student leaders from across the spectrum supported the 'Quit India' movement, providing leadership especially when its leaders were imprisoned. The AISF came to be dominated by pro-Moscow Communists, so it was opposed by the AISC; both claimed to be the authentic voice of Indian students at meetings of the ISC and IUS. Once independence had been achieved, the AISC's role declined and the AISF focused more on student rights, tuition fee levels and lecturers' salaries (Altbach 1966). In 1950 the National Union of Students (India) was created by an alliance between Congress and various socialist groups; however, its close association with a political party led to suspicions on campus, with academic leaders believing that the organisation was manipulated by outside groups. This, along with the inability to raise sufficient funds, led to its demise in 1957. It was replaced in 1960 by the National Council of University Students in India, which also claimed to represent all Indian students, but was, in effect, an organisation of student leaders rather than student organisations. Some groups of students came together for specific purposes: Tamil students opposed the introduction of Hindi as the official language of India; similarly, in 1952 student activists in Bengal opposed the adoption of Urdu. Student groups also organised along religious lines. The Muslim Students' Union had been formed back in 1890 and provided support and opportunities for future leaders such as Muhammed Ali Jinnah. Student organisations are now, in the main, linked to political parties, religious groups or other movement and there is currently no umbrella organisation in India. Students' unions are active within universities and, where there are attempts to make links, they are mainly concerned with developing co-curricular activities. This pattern

of political alignment rather than 'universality' is also a feature of student organisations in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The influence of the supranational student bodies, the IUS and ISC, was strong and those countries fighting colonialism and seeking to assert their national autonomy joined both organisations, eager to seek support from any quarter. Examples include the National Union of Basutoland Students (based in Swaziland and Bechuanaland), established in 1959, and the National Union of Kenyan Students (NUKS), founded in 1964, which had originally been a university students' union based in University College, Kenya. NUKS took on a broader base of membership to include both secondary and tertiary students: a common practice among many newly established unions. Other examples include the National Union of Nigerian Students (1956), the Sierra Leone NUS (1964), the National Union of Tanganyika Students (1964), the National Union of Ugandan Students (1964), the Zanzibar Revolutionary Students Federation (1963) and the National Union of Zambian Students (1963). Both the IUS and the ISC developed strong anticolonial policies. Information about the situation of students and student organisations was published in the pages of World Student News (IUS) and The Student (ISC). Both publications did much to bring direct reports of colonial struggles to a wider audience. The ISC collapsed when it was revealed in 1967 that its main funder, the USNSA, was in receipt of funds from CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) conduits; the following year the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the crushing of the Prague Spring did much to discredit the IUS. Many student organisations opted instead to develop bilateral links with NSOs rather than be compromised. The development of NSOs was not exclusively set against a backdrop of Cold War tensions; it is worth looking at a summary of developments in a few countries to outline some of the different approaches to student organisation.

Cold War tensions, mixed with racial theories, had a strong impact on the further development of NUSAS, which, as we have seen, was founded to create stronger links between British and Afrikaner students. This aspiration faltered when NUSAS voted to admit the University of Fort Harare, a non-white university foundation, into membership as well as adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (much to the irritation of the Afrikaner minority). In 1948 the Afrikaner

students withdrew from NUSAS; dissatisfied with the more liberal position adopted by the majority of students, they adopted a more nationalist and what they termed 'pro-Christian' approach. NUSAS opposed the introduction of apartheid legislation and, as a consequence, people in leadership positions found themselves subject to restrictions and imprisonment. Students in the UK campaigned for scholarships and supported student leaders who had been expelled. The South African Students' Association was formed in 1961. Given the limited number of black students, its membership was small, but it had strong links with the African National Congress (ANC) and the increased apartheid repression led many student activists to actively support the armed struggle. The National Union of Rhodesian Students was active in supporting the Zimbabwean national movement against white majority rule. In 1966 students disrupted the graduation ceremony of the University of Rhodesia (Salisbury) and spoke out against government ministers who were present and who had been instrumental in creating apartheid laws and declaring the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). There were 31 arrests and several students were kept under house detention and their homes raided. May 1969 saw a week of protest by white and non-white students against the new constitution, which was framed to exclude the possibility of black majority rule. Student organisations were forced underground.

Many national student bodies found it difficult to establish themselves. The All Burma Federation of Students' Unions, founded in 1967, found itself proscribed by the then government. Other organisations fell foul of political dynamics in their country. Students were often at the forefront of campaigns for self-determination and an end to colonialism; however, even this principled position could prove difficult once a country had achieved independence. The Ghana National Students' Organisation (GNSO) was established by the Convention Party of Kwame Nkrumah, who had led his country to independence. It was set up as a rival to the Ghana National Union of Students (GNUS), which had objected to the removal of six academics from the University of Ghana by the Nkrumah government. A number of students were arrested and the university was shut for a month. The coup in 1966 saw Nkrumah's removal, the demise of the GNSO and the revival of the GNUS, which, having achieved its broader objectives, took on a focus

around student rights. Other organisations were encouraged but restricted in what they could do. The National Union of Hong Kong Students was very active on the welfare of students, clubs and activities, but any wider political engagement or comment was not allowed. In the divided island of Cyprus two organisations were created, one representing Greek students and the other representing the Turkish student population. Other small countries and territories saw representation developed through the major university institution. The Ceylon University Students' Federation was based on university faculties; a new organisation was created when it was agreed to take secondary schools and teacher training colleges into membership. Maltese national representation was based around the Royal University of Malta. The National Union of Singapore Students was an amalgamation of three university student councils; a shared Union House was opened in Singapore in 1963.

From the outset, once NSOs had been created there was a desire to meet together with other national bodies. Examples include the establishment of the Regional Union of West Indies Students (based in Jamaica), the West African Students' Association, the East African Students' Association, the Pan-African Students' Association (which held Congress meetings in Kampala in 1958, Tunis in 1959 and Nairobi in 1964) and the Western European Students' Information Bureau (WESIB), which was established in 1982. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, WESIB took on new members and became the European Students' Information Bureau (ESIB). Learning from the experience of trying to establish supranational student organisations, WESIB/ESIB sought to exchange ideas and good practice rather than agree a collective policy position. This approach changed only with the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by the Bologna Process and the need for there to be a collective student voice at a European level. In 2007 ESIB became the European Students' Union (ESU), taking on a greater advocacy role.

The idea of having an NSO that can channel the hopes and aspirations of the student body to decision-makers has not always been, and still is not always, accepted by decision-makers at a governmental level. The key legislation that regulates students' unions in the UK (Education Act 1994) started life as an attempt to restrict what students' unions could do and to destroy the NUS. Legislation introduced in Australia in 2006 has made the payment of membership fees, and membership of student organisations, voluntary. The organisations cover a full range of co-curricular activities, but the impact of voluntary membership has severely weakened national representation. Legislation to introduce voluntary membership in New Zealand has had similar consequences, although local student organisations were consulted through referenda. By contrast, membership of students' organisations in universities and colleges in Canada is still mandatory, with fees being used to develop organisational infrastructure. There are two NSOs, the Canadian Alliance of Students' Associations and the Canadian Federation of Students. In Quebec, French-speaking students are represented by the Fédération Étudiante Universitaire du Québec (FEUQ). Student government is based on provincial structure.

New developments

The student organisations that exist within Commonwealth countries are many and varied, and conform to the typology developed by Manja Klemenčič in her introduction to a special issue of the European Journal of Higher Education (2012a), 'Student Representation in Western Europe'. She summarises the types as follows:

- a neocorporatist model characterised by a small number of national representative bodies (intermediate) that complement each other or are geographically, functionally or geographically distinct, as opposed to more pluralist models in which there is more than one national body;

- NSOs that have some form of state recognition or link, some of which will have secure funding, in contrast to those (in a more pluralist model) that compete for resources and membership;

- NSOs that have been granted formal places within national governance structures, with some form of legislation underpinning the process, and those that have more informal relationships on an ad hoc basis;

- NSOs that are seen as 'decisive actors' in the process of educational development and those that act as a pressure group and seek to bring about change from the outside.

The model also seems to apply to student organisations in Africa, according to Student Representation in African Higher Education Governance (Luescher-Mamashela et al. 2015), even though the historical evolution of student organisations has been different, those of Africa and other parts of the Commonwealth having been shaped by their opposition to colonialism and by navigating national politics to ensure an effective student voice. An extra type suggests itself from the research conducted, especially in relation to smaller countries, particularly those in the Caribbean and Pacific, where the students' union or association of a university may also, de facto, play the role of a national organisation because it is the only student organisation in a position to take on the role.

Gerard DeGroot, in his introduction to Student Protest: The Sixties and After (1998), states that 'students are often at the cutting edge of social radicalism since they alone possess the sometimes volatile combination of youthful dynamism, naïve utopianism, disrespect for authority buoyant optimism and attraction to adventure, not to mention a surplus of spare time. They perceive themselves as the leaders of a future generation and are often over eager to thrust themselves into the task of reshaping their society' (DeGroot 1998, p. 4). He goes on to argue that in most cases students often fail to secure public sympathy, particularly if they are in receipt of public funds; their tactics can often be ridiculed and their campaigns are usually doomed to failure, but there is often a legacy that in the long run can bring about change. The students engaged in the struggle against apartheid, and those who sought to liberate their countries from colonial rule, did not see immediate success, but eventually what they hoped to achieve and what they believed became mainstream thinking. Student organisations often fell away after the immediate aftermath of a liberation struggle and only now are NSOs seeking closer engagement within the academy and in wider civic society. While student protest will always be a feature among a constituency keen to bring about change, models of student engagement and partnership are now providing scope for the student voice to be heard, often with the same objectives; effective NSOs are able to deploy both. The legacy of protest can often be built upon through partnership.

The role that student organisations can play in developing leadership skills that can in turn be of benefit to wider civic society is being examined more closely, as the literature review in the next section will highlight. The 18th CCEM welcomed the creation of the CSA as a new supranational organisation that, it is hoped, can help to foster the development of student-led organisations that can channel the needs and hopes of their student members into curriculum development and design; increased student mobility; the exchange of good practice; and the recognition that participating in a student-led democratic environment is a sound grounding in participation in society as a whole and an opportunity to develop skills in it.

Conclusions

This section has summarised some of the key developments relating to NSOs across the Commonwealth. Academic studies are limited. Further study of the origin and development of student organisations can only reveal more about the contribution that they can make to civic society. Further studies in this historical area will be of great benefit to an understanding of the past and a pointer to the future. There are a number of general conclusions we can reach from this brief historical review.

- The concept of student representation and taking account of the student voice has a long history within the overall history of further and higher education.

- Most universities and consequently their student representative structures are based on a European/colonial model.

- Some student organisations trace their antecedents to formal debating societies, or the drive for student representation, while others have emerged from political, religious or regional/ethnic movements and may well be complementary to or closely linked to wider political struggles in a country.

- A number of student organisations engage students at secondary as well as tertiary level.

- National student organisations have often been founded in a spirit of internationalism, co-operation and collectivism, to achieve a greater good and to learn from each other.

- Many NSOs were integrally involved in their countries' struggles for independence and continue to be engaged in the political dynamics of their country – not always with the approval of their government regime. As a consequence, many students and student organisations find their activities highly regulated, restricted or proscribed.

- The extent to which student organisations and student leaders should engage in political debate and activity varies between countries is constant debate, but those who do engage in it often go on to provide strong leadership in wider civic society.

- There are numerous examples of students taking action to improve the academic quality and institutional arrangements their members experience. Students' engagement in the design and quality of their education is a growing phenomenon.

- A number of significant leaders within the Commonwealth have emerged from the student movements and organisations within their countries, in which they gained experience.

- National student organisations have played a significant role in bringing local students' unions together and encouraging collaboration on extracurricular activities that enhance the overall academic experience and transferable skills of those students involved, thereby enhancing their employability.

- Where student organisations are able to act as an umbrella group on behalf of member students' unions and are able to take part in debates on the development of tertiary education, there is greater scope for building a partnership model.

- There is a strong impetus to co-operate at national, regional and international levels. International groups that have quickly claimed to be universally representative have not been successful; those that seek to co-operate, collaborate and share practice build a more solid foundation for mutual support among members.

The findings that follow in the next sections will outline the current state of student governance throughout the Commonwealth. The research goes on to learn from the collective experience of NSOs on ways to develop a partnership approach to enhancing the student experience and creating the leaders of the future.

2.2 Literature review

As part of the project on student governance in Commonwealth member countries, the team undertook a literature review to gain a sense of what is available and can be shared. The results are divided into:

- student engagement;

- student governance;

- national student organisations;

- international student organisations;

- regional literature.

Before looking in more detail at the available literature, it is worth examining the links between student representation, NSOs and the idea of student engagement. In 2003 key agencies in Scotland came together to develop a collectively agreed Student Engagement Framework for Scotland. Through an organisation called sparqs (student partnerships in quality Scotland), representatives from Scotland's universities, colleges, quality agencies and student organisations debated, discussed and agreed what they saw as five key elements of student engagement alongside six features that needed to be present for student engagement to be effective. The five key elements are:

- students feeling that they are part of a supportive institution;

- students engaging in their own learning;

- students working with their institution in shaping the direction of their learning;

- formal mechanisms for quality and governance;

- influencing the student experience at a national level.

For these elements to be effective, the sparqs framework indicates that the following conditions need to be nurtured within an institution:

- There needs to be a culture of engagement, where students are encouraged to take part in discussions.

- Students need to be seen as partners in the process of learning and the overall development of the institution.

- Institutions need to respond to and value the diversity of their student population.

- The contribution made by students needs to be valued, and seen to be so.

- There needs to be a constant focus on enhancing the quality of course provision and a willingness to embrace change.

- Creating a student engagement strategy needs appropriate resources and support.

In Scotland, course representatives speaking through their local students' union, who in turn bring student concerns to their national representative body (NUS Scotland), are seen as an important part of the student engagement process but not the only part. More recently the sector in Scotland has discussed and agreed a Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations in Scotland, which sets out an agreed set of aspirations and standards for students' associations in Scotland's colleges.

More detail on the sparqs Student Engagement Framework can be found at http://www.sparqs. ac.uk/culture.php?page=168

More detail on the Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations can be found at http://www. saframework.co.uk/

The interesting learning point from the Scottish experience is that the sector as a whole decided, very deliberately, not to define student engagement. Instead, it created a set of elements and features that could be utilised and adapted for local contexts. Similar initiatives are in process in Australia and Ireland. The next subsection looks at some of the wider academic debate around the concept of student engagement and attempts to define it.

2.2.1 Student engagement

The concept of student engagement is being more widely discussed within tertiary education circles. Trowler (2010) came to the conclusion, after conducting a thorough literature review on the idea, that student engagement is multi-faceted. In other words, the definition of the

term may vary depending on the audience. For example, in the USA student engagement is often associated with students who are involved with learning and teaching practices (Kuh 2008), while in the UK the expression is often used when talking about student involvement in governance and quality processes (van der Velden 2012). For the purpose of this research (given the caveat outlined in the introduction), a proposed definition by Bryson (2014, p. 14) seems most apt in articulating the most salient points relating to 'student engagement':

What a student brings to Higher Education in terms of goals, aspirations, values and beliefs and how these are shaped and mediated by their experience whilst a student. Student engagement is constructed and reconstructed through the lenses of the perceptions and identities held by students and the meaning and sense a student makes of their experiences and interactions.

This definition emphasises that student engagement is multi-faceted, since it is an 'outcome' and a 'process' in the students' experiences (ibid.). Thus it is difficult to pinpoint a precise definition of student engagement, as it will rely on the context of the situation and upon the individual student experience.

Another concept that is related to student engagement is that of student voice. Concerning student engagement at the macro level, Czerniawski and Kidd (2011) conclude that the student voice is radical, democratic and empowering. This vocal metaphor illustrates that students have the power to have their say in decision-making processes, but the important thing is to ensure that 'listening' to the student voice does not become tokenistic (Dunne and Zandstra 2011). This relates to Kahu (2013), who concluded from her research into the different dimensions of student engagement that all participants (the student, the teacher, the institution and the government) are responsible for improving student engagement. Overall, for students to be engaged and for the student voice to be authentic, a culture has to be created across an institution and beyond, to national representation, accepting that students have a role to play in discussions concerning their future.

2.2.2 Student governance

Student engagement is often related to the involvement of students within quality processes, particularly in terms of 'student governance'. However, to understand student governance, the context of higher education must be understood. Higher education governance, which often includes student participants, can be defined as the 'structures and processes through which institutional participants interact with and influence each other and communicate with the larger environment' (Birnbaum 1988, p. 4).

In Europe, student participation in higher education governance has been central to the Bologna Process since the Prague Communiqué, in 2001, in which the ministers affirmed that 'students are full members of the higher education community' (Bologna Process 2001, p.1). It has been found that students are represented in higher education governance across every European country (Bergan 2004). Klemenčič (2012b, p. 632) concluded that the emergence of greater student participation has been due to two policy developments: the Bologna Process (the EHEA), which promotes student mobility and is seeking to harmonise the European higher education sector; and the 'modernisation agenda for universities'. Yet, while student governments play a role in decision-making processes institutionally and nationally, co-decision rights are not yet common, argues Klemenčič (2014).

Student organisations are mentioned in the literature as 'pressure groups'; these can be defined as organisations 'whose members act together to influence public policy in order to promote their common interest' (Pross 1986, p. 11). Student organisations that are characterised as pressure groups are formally recognised to represent student interests at institutional or national levels of authority (Bégin-Caouette and Jones 2014). What is important to note, Pross (1986) argues, is that the power of pressure groups to influence significantly depends on their organisational capabilities (such as membership, resources and clear objectives). This means that, for student organisations to have a positive impact on student interests, they should have sufficient support and resources to develop.

While attention on higher education governance is increasing, there still seems to be relatively little discussion around student participation in these structures (Salter and Tapper 2002). Boland (2005, p. 110) emphasises that this needs to be re-addressed, and that student participation in shared governance of higher education institutions deserves 'greater critical attention, both in principle and in practice'.

The concept of student participation relating to democracy is abundant within the literature (Bergan 2003; Boland 2005; Dundar 2013; Englund 2002; Klemenčič 2012b; Lizzio and Wilson 2009). For example, Boland (2005) states that student participation in governance structures of HEIs is important to maintain democracy. Shared governance allows the students to be considered as citizens and key participants while expanding the civic right to education. To develop these citizenship skills and the overall democratic engagement in higher education, Bergan (2003) argues, students need to be encouraged to participate in governance structures and to feel that their contribution has an impact. Lizzio and Wilson (2009) supports this view by emphasising that students have valid experiences that can improve the quality and accountability of decision-making. However, some researchers disagree, making the case that the involvement of students in governance structures can limit the flexibility of the institution and foster a predisposition towards the status quo (Kezar and Eckel 2004).

Boland (2005) argues that the way in which students view their participation in governance, and how they are viewed by their partners, has significant implications for the nature, effectiveness and impact of their participation in shared governance. Therefore, how students perceive themselves and how other stakeholders view their participation will ultimately determine their effectiveness, and the results that they are able to achieve in decision-making processes.

2.2.3 National student organisations

While there is arguably less literature on NSOs than on institutional student organisations, what seems to be agreed among scholars is that NSOs are potentially powerful institutions that cannot be easily ignored by authorities (Altbach 2006; Klemenčič 2014; Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume 2014). Indeed, student protests and activism organised by national student bodies can often disrupt the work of HEIs, obstruct national

higher education reforms and exert pressure for alternative social change (Altbach 2006; Klemenčič 2014).

Focusing on leadership, Leuscher-Mamashela and Mugume (2014) argue that there are four different modes of associative action between student leaders and political parties: control, service, representation and participation. The authors note that a strong political influence has an impact on the autonomy of student organisations to represent student interests and therefore 'student politics for national politics in Africa must not be underestimated' (2014, p. 511).

2.2.4 Institutional student organisations

Student organisations are considered as 'governments', as illustrated by Klemenčič (2014, p.396): 'They effectively operate as "governments"; they present a system of rules, norms and institutions through which the student body within an institution or nation is organised.' Furthermore, Klemenčič (2012b) expresses the view that there is an increased professionalisation of student unions, a feature of which is a shift from their more political role to one of more entrepreneurial capacity, whereby the organisation performs an advisory function for quality assurance and delivering services to students. The author believes that this transformation is weakening formal student participation (e.g. decision-making powers in institutional governance bodies) and strengthening informal student participation through work related to enhancing the student experience.

A small number of students serve as representatives at institutions; Bergan (2003) suggests that this is a result of 'democratic fatigue', as students are focusing predominantly on passing their studies, and leaving little room to engage in additional institutional opportunities (Boland 2005). However, Englund (2002) argues that HEIs prepare students for domestic citizenship, and therefore active participation in decision-making processes within the HEI will counteract such fatigue because it will contribute to the preparation of students for their future role as democratic citizens and as members of civil society (Boland 2005; McGinn and Epstein 1999).

In Africa, student organisations are often called students' guilds, student unions or SRCs. Student organisations in African universities centre on three core functions. The first is to represent student

interests in institutional and national governance structures; the second is to provide political and social activities for students and student organisations, including involvement in running services such as residences or sports facilities; and the third is to provide welfare services to students, including academic, personal and administrative assistance, counselling and financial assistance (Ojo 1995; Hall and Symes 2000; Lutaakome et al. 2005; Luescher 2009). Student organisations finance their activities from membership fees and levies, grants from the associated university and fund-raising activities (Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume 2014).

2.2.5 Regional literature

In Canada, the development of student organisations has been well documented by Bégin-Caouette and Jones (2014), who detail four major changes since the Second World War. The first is the evolution of the student–university relationship, which shifted from paternalistic university policies, under which student organisations were often directed by the HEI, to the independence of autonomous student bodies that became legally incorporated as not-for-profit organisations. Second, mandatory membership fees (paid for by the students or included as part of the tuition fee) were set out in law to ensure significant financial resources to student organisations. These fees have allowed the organisations to provide a range of member services including the capacity to support full-time elected officials at larger institutions. The third shift was the increase in student representation on university governance boards. In Canada, students now constitute, on average, 16 per cent of all university senate members (Pennock et al. 2012). Finally, there was the creation of umbrella student organisations that represent university-level student organisation's interests in federal and provincial policy discussions, including discussions about tuition fees, since these are set at provincial level in Canada. What is clear in these four changes in the past 70 years is that student advocacy has increased in Canada, with the result that student organisations are developing into pressure groups (Pross 1986).

It has been well documented that student participation in politics has been an important feature in Africa (Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume 2014; Munene 2003). Rather than the focus on student organisations that is often seen

in developed countries, studies on student politics in Africa have focused on the relationship between the students and political discourse, as opposed to institutionalised forms of student representation (Munene 2003). Furthermore, Munene argues that, because of the expansion, diversification and privatisation of African higher education, alongside the growth and increased diversity of institutional student organisations, these developments may serve to 'limit the scope and impact of student activism' (2003, p. 124). This suggests that a unified approach would increase the power of student organisations, but student activism is going in the opposite direction: there are too many opposing opinions, so they lack any coherence.

A recent study by Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume (2014) analysed student activism in several large African countries including Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. What they found was that the input and impact of students in national politics varied depending on the relationship between student leaders and political parties. Indeed, in some countries, such as Tanzania, there is a blanket ban on students engaging in any party-political activities.

In Australia, membership of student organisations is not mandatory. This more contractual relationship has resulted in the depoliticisation of student organisations, as summarised by Rochford (2014). This reconceptualisation of student unionism is aligned with the neoliberal agenda, according to Rochford, in so far as it supports the process of disengaging universities from public criticism and instead embraces more commercial forms of governance. This fits with Kezar and Eckel's (2004) opinion that student involvement creates limitations within HEIs. However, if we take the view that student engagement, including participation in student organisations, is beneficial to democratic society overall, the mandatory decline of these organisations raises questions of purpose and who can be seen as the key beneficiary in the higher education sector.

2.2.6 Some Conclusions from the Literature Review

This brief literature review identifies some key points relating to the development of NSOs and representative structures.

- Student engagement is about developing the conditions at local and national levels that enable students to feel that their contribution to curriculum development and their learning experience are listened to, valued and acted upon with agreement.

- Student representatives are increasingly being involved in academic decision-making at local and national levels, the follow-up groups for the EHEA Bologna Process being a good example.

- Student organisations can act as pressure groups but their effectiveness depends on their ability to develop legitimate structures to ensure that what they say is firmly grounded in student opinion.

- It can be argued that more formal student structures can limit student activism. More successful NSOs are able to combine effective research and lobbying with mass action when required.

- Many student organisations have to work hard on involving students in their structures. Those who are involved learn valuable life and employability skills and are rooted in democracy.

- Too much association with national political structures can damage the credibility of a student organisation in the eyes of some students.

- Where student union membership is voluntary, NSOs are significantly weaker and can fall prey to one perspective. All-embracing student organisations place a responsibility on the students to ensure that the organisation speaks in their name.

The next section will outline the reception that the interim report on student governance received at the 19th CCEM in Nassau, The Bahamas.

2.3 Report from the 19th Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting, Nassau, The Bahamas, 22–25 June 2015

A first draft and summary of the report into the 'state of student governance' was presented to three meetings that took place at the 19th CCEM. The purpose of this was to discuss the initial findings and check some of the conclusions. Participation in the event enabled the research team to gain greater insight into the aspirations and concerns of those seeking to amplify the student voice in Commonwealth member countries. The draft report was presented to three meetings:

• Youth Forum/Commonwealth Students Forum (Monday 22 June 2015);

• Senior Officials Meeting (Tuesday 23 June 2015);

• Ministers Meeting (Thursday 25 June 2015).

2.3.1 Youth Forum/Commonwealth Students Forum

The Youth Forum is one of the parallel forums that provide opportunities for the wider Commonwealth education community to meet, network and exchange ideas. These ideas can then be communicated to ministers and officials present. In 2015 the purpose of the forum was to see the inaugural meeting of the Commonwealth Students' Congress (CSC, the sovereign body of the CSA), which, it is hoped, will have a key role in taking forward the recommendations of this report and empowering students throughout the Commonwealth to develop effective representative structures. The idea behind developing a student-focused forum, as distinct from the broader concept of youth, was developed at the 18th CCEM, in Mauritius. A call was made for student leaders from across the Commonwealth to gather to make recommendations on current issues in education and, given that the theme of the Commonwealth in 2015 was 'Young People at the Heart of the Commonwealth', it was seen as especially fitting.

Members of the forum were able to explore and exchange ideas on how to amplify the student voice and develop effective representative structures at local, regional and national levels to contribute to the overall development of education and wider society. The role and purpose of the CSA and of the CSC meeting were confirmed. The CSC was designed to:

• contribute to education policy in the Commonwealth;

• interact with other stakeholders, including key policy-makers, on critical issues relating to education;

• formally establish the CSA by ratifying the constitution, electing the first executive officers and agreeing the general strategic priorities;

• promote cultural exchange and co-operation between student leaders.

The report on the state of student governance was one of the key inputs for the meeting. The initial findings and conclusions were presented by Mr Mike Day, who had been engaged to lead the research project (he currently works as the Director of Devolved Nations and Internationalism for NUSUK). The report is also linked to one of the main expected outcomes of the forums: to strengthen the work of the CSA and national students' associations across the Commonwealth as well as contributing to the global student agenda. The assembled delegates welcomed the report. Questions and feedback focused on:

• how to generate sufficient resources – the lack of predictable sources of income;

• the contribution that student organisations could play in enhancing the employability of their members, as well as the issue of unemployment;

• links with other youth organisation;

• how to gain access to decision-makers and the extent to which student views might be taken seriously – some delegates noted that they faced some legal restrictions on their activities.

Feedback from the discussions took some of the key themes and provided helpful context to further develop the report:

- the role and contribution of students in development;

- enhancing performance outcomes in education;

- students and professional mobility in the Commonwealth;

- effective pathways to high-quality education;

- boosting productivity through high-quality education and training;

- respect and understanding in education.

A running theme throughout all the discussions among the student representatives was a belief that effective student representation had the potential to make a significant contribution to the quality of the educational experience as a whole. Through partnership and participation, it was felt that students would experience a greater ownership of their programme of study and at the same time develop vital skills in citizenship that would, in the long run, be of great benefit to the overall development of civic society.

Unfortunately, visa problems and other circumstances prevented the formal inauguration of the CSA, so another steering committee was elected. Significant progress was made on developing the constitution along with a renewed commitment to take the organisation forward.

The final communiqué or 'Nassau Declaration' (The Commonwealth 2015, p.3), however, acknowledged the enhanced role of the CSA: 'Ministers acknowledge the important role that can be played by appropriate cooperation and collaborative national student associations, and commit to supporting and partnering with such bodies to ensure a student voice in education policy, and fit-for-purpose education. Ministers also endorse a name change for the CCEM Youth Forum to the Commonwealth Students Forum, and commit to supporting young student delegates to attend'.

Section 4 of the final communiqué recognised the positive role that key partners bring to the CCEM, and welcomed the growing voice and engagement of youth, teachers, civil society and other stakeholders. In section 14, ministers recognised the potential of learners and youth to act as agents of social change and peace-building, and agreed to continue to support policies and programmes in schools that actively engage pupils

in building conflict resolution skills, tolerance, respect and social inclusion, as a way of preventing school-based violence and extremism. They supported Commonwealth action, including in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in keeping with the report *Civil Paths to Peace: Report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding* (The Commonwealth 2008).

Ministers also reaffirmed the key role that entrepreneurship education plays in promoting unique and valuable life skills, as well as career pathways, and expressed their commitment to the enhancement of curricula at all levels of education to strengthen entrepreneurship programmes and skill development.

2.3.2 Senior officials' meeting

A similar presentation on the 'state of student governance in the Commonwealth' was presented to the senior officials by Mike Day. The presentation generated a number of questions and there was significant interest in the findings and discussions around the ideas contained within the report. Key points made were:

- questions around resources and funding;

- the extent to which student organisations should be engaged in the political dynamics of a country;

- the role that student organisations can play in relation to entrepreneurship;

- the role that students can play in educational quality.

2.3.3 Ministers' meeting

The report was presented to Commonwealth education ministers on 25 June 2015. Like the senior officials, ministers were keen to explore the role that student organisations could play in developing the employability skills of students. Ministers from some countries expressed concerns about the extent to which student organisations engaged in both debate and action around national politics, and some suggested that this was inappropriate.

2.3.4 Conclusion

Any plans to develop and enhance the role of national organisations need to be grounded in overall future plans for national development, and linked to the needs and aspirations of students, especially in relation to the quality of education, employability and entrepreneurship. Any national organisation needs to be legitimate and credible in its democratic structures, because this in turn enhances the credibility of the NSO with both students and decision-makers.

2.4 Summary of key points from Chapter 2

The following key themes were explored in Chapter 2.

- The Commonwealth Education and Youth Secretariat, following decisions made at 18th CCEM, commissioned a report on the state of student governance.

- The research team (from NUSUK) has developed a set of principles and a framework within which to analyse different approaches to NSOs.

- Ministers at the 18th CCEM recognised the importance of student participation and engagement in the development of both education and wider civic society; the 19th CCEM reiterated these views, welcomed the initial report and commented upon it.

- Student organisations have a long tradition of engagement at local and national levels from the mid-19th century onwards.

- Student engagement is seen as a critical tool in developing a relevant curriculum; students have a part of play in these developments. The student voice is seen as important.

- National student organisations have a good deal of potential power and influence.

- How students see themselves and how decision-makers see them have an impact on how seriously they are treated.

- In some countries, students' unions have been increasingly professionalised, and this can lead to a dampening of active student participation.

- There are many different types of and approaches to NSOs, and there is great variety in the extent to which they are seen as part of an educational sector/civic society or more internally focused.

- Activism within a students' organisation can facilitate the development of transferable employability skills.

3. Key Findings and Recommendations

This chapter will present the research findings on the state of student organisations across the Commonwealth. The research was conducted initially by developing and circulating a quantitative survey to known student organisations in Commonwealth countries. It was then followed up with a series of interviews with a selection of those organisations. The analysis presented in section 3.1 will detail the various findings of the survey. Section 3.2 will present the interview findings. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were then conducted with stakeholders, experts and representatives of ministries to get a sense of, and analyse, their perspectives on the effectiveness of student organisations. These are analysed in section 3.3. Four case studies are also presented in section 3.4, which provide examples of where student organisations have implemented effective change for students. The results of these findings, for both survey and interviews, will be developed into an analysis of common challenges and a suggested framework in Chapter 4.

3.1 National student organisations in the Commonwealth

Desk research was conducted to find out how many countries in the Commonwealth had NSOs. The criteria to determine if a country had an NSO were as follows:

- An umbrella organisation that represented students and student organisations within a country was considered to be an NSO. If there were several HEIs and each had its own institutional student organisation, these were not considered.

- Student organisations that represented students in the only HEI within a country were also treated as NSOs. The student organisations in the Seychelles and Malta are good examples of this type.

As the desk research mainly consisted of using existing databases and web searches in English, the researchers acknowledge that there may well be many more student organisations that were missed, and of course many more that may play a national role in advocating a specific political, religious or regional ideology but do not claim to represent all students in a particular country.

Currently, there are 21 countries that do have an NSO, 5 that have several NSOs and 27 that do not have an NSO. This indicates that 51 per cent of Commonwealth member countries do not have an NSO of any kind.

A full list of Commonwealth countries with and without NSOs can be found in Appendix 1.

Figure 3.1 Respondents by region

In which region of the Commonwealth is your organisation based?

- Africa
- Asia
- Caribbean and Americas
- Europe
- Pacific
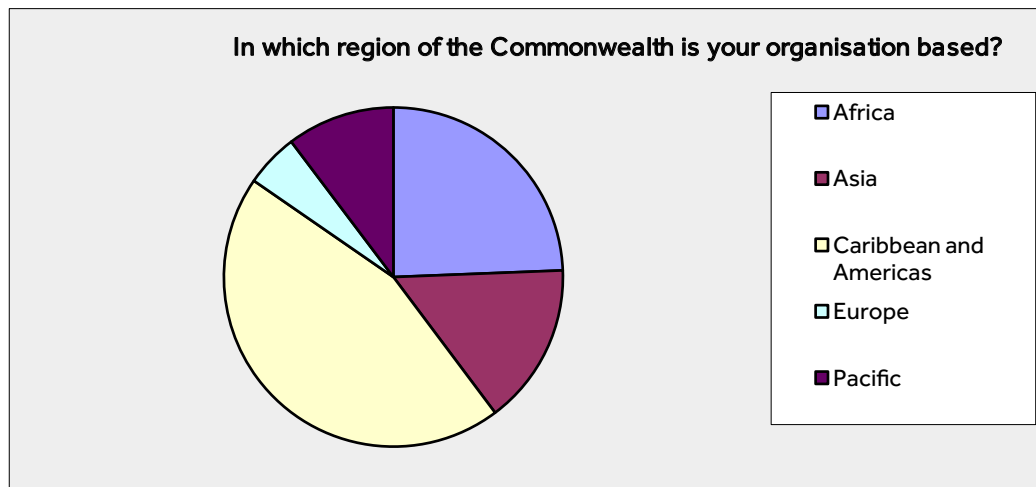
3.2 Survey overview

To understand the current state of student organisations in the Commonwealth, an in-depth survey was developed. The purpose of the survey was to provide an overview of these institutions from the perspective of representatives of student organisations. The survey that was circulated can be found in Appendix 3. The findings presented in each section will be broken down according to the Commonwealth regions in order to highlight the diversity of student organisations in different regions.

Over 140 student organisations throughout the Commonwealth were contacted using email, phone calls and Facebook. In total, we received responses from 76 student organisations, a return of 55 per cent. These consisted of national and institutional student organisations. There were 19 responses from Africa; 12 from Asia; 35 from the Caribbean and Americas; 8 from the Pacific; and 2 from Europe. Figure 3.1 provides a visual breakdown of the respondents from different regions in the Commonwealth.

3.2.1 Cultural factors

An important element of understanding student organisations was to examine the cultural factors relating to how the organisation was run. This included questions to establish when the NSO was established, if the organisation saw itself as having a national scope to its work and if student organisations existed as a result of or were regulated by its country's laws.

Age of student organisation

The survey showed that the most recent student organisations were established in the Africa region. The majority responded that their organisations had been established after 2000. In comparison, in the Caribbean and Americas region the majority of respondents indicated that their student organisations were established between 1963 and 1989. The student organisations in the Asia region were established later than that, the majority between 1978 and 1999. The foundation dates for Pacific student organisations varied: over 40 per cent believed their organisation was established in the 1920s, while the remainder were after 1974. The oldest sector was the Europe region, with both student organisations noting that they were established before the 1930s.

National scope

The respondents were asked if they believed their student organisation had a national scope. This was defined as meaning that their work and representation was focused on representing students at a national level. Those student organisations that indicated that they did not have a national scope were working more at an institutional level or perhaps regionally.

In total, over 80 per cent of the student organisations indicated that they had some form of national scope within their country. This means that they could be classified as an NSO. However, over 55 per cent of Pacific student organisations believed that they did not have national scope, while in comparison over 70 per cent in the rest

of the regions responded that they did. Many of the respondents from the Pacific region were representatives from a single HEI within their country. The survey did not tease out whether or not some might see themselves as having a de facto national role while others were focused on institutional matters.

Political organisation

One question that was important to ask was if the respondents saw their student organisation as political. However, it is worth noting that the term 'political' can be interpreted in various ways; for example, one student organisation may believe it is political because it is connected to a political party, while another student organisation may determine that it is political because it is involved in lobbying and policy-making. However, we believed it was still important to understand whether a student organisation believed it was political or not. The researchers take the view that, for student representatives to have an impact on the education policy of a country, they have to use political skills of lobbying, influencing and campaigning to bring about the change they wish to see that, in their view, will be of benefit to students and the country as a whole. Acting in this 'political' way is not the same as being aligned with a political party. When respondents said they were not political we have taken the view that they meant they were not organisationally politically aligned, as most of them indicated they were involved in the political process of talking to their governments and ministries.

The majority of student organisations (70 per cent), from across the Commonwealth, believed they were not organisationally political. Similar figures were revealed when the answers were broken down by region, except Europe, where the two respondents believed that they acted in a political way.

Since there was no follow-up question on how the respondents defined 'being political', it is difficult to analyse what the above response means, but anecdotally and through examining the responses to questions around activity we believe we are safe in making the assumptions we have made.

Similar student organisations in country

The survey asked student organisations if there were other organisations with similar scopes to theirs that were based in their country. This shed interesting light on the circumstances, as, in total, over 85 per cent said there were organisations with similar scopes in their country. These were mainly organisations that represented secondary school students or broader youth organisations that would inevitably have some overlap in membership with an NSO. The majority of respondents from all regions indicated that there were similar organisations with national scope but these were not necessarily exclusively student organisations. The analysis of student organisations in the Commonwealth in section 3.1 indicated that only 9 per cent of countries had more than one NSO. While the research team considers student organisations and youth organisations to be separate entities, it has to be acknowledged that there are bound to be similarities in their aims and objectives, advocating on behalf of students and young people more broadly.

Student organisations in the law

The last question dealing with cultural factors was 'Is the existence of student organisations set out in law?' The responses were more varied. In total, 58 per cent of student organisations responded 'yes'. The two most noteworthy regions were the Caribbean and Americas, where 55 per cent of respondents said that student organisations were not set out in law, and Africa, where over 85 per cent said that student organisations were set out in law. This highlights some significant differences between regions.

3.2.2 Governance

The next section of the survey sought to understand the governance processes of student organisations across the Commonwealth. These questions were designed to help understand the overarching framework of the organisation and how it sustained effective processes.

Legal status

Respondents were asked what the legal status of the student organisation was. This was a multiple-choice question: the options were non-governmental organisation (NGO), government department, political party, charity, university department, independent organisation with ties to a specific university and other. In total, 51 per cent considered themselves to be NGOs, followed by university departments (22 per cent) and

independent organisations with ties to a specific university (20 per cent). None of the respondents considered the student organisation to be a political party.

The Asia region and the Pacific region were almost equally split between NGOs and independent organisations with ties to a specific university. In the Caribbean and Americas and in Africa it was more varied: NGOs were again the most prevalent organisational form, at over 50 per cent, but there were numerous instances of student organisations being classified as university departments, independent organisations with ties to a specific country or government departments. In Europe, one considered itself an NGO and the other considered itself a charity.

Membership organisation

The student organisation representatives were asked if their organisation was representative, either consisting of individual students or acting as an umbrella organisation for a number of local student organisations. In total, 91 per cent of the respondents believed that their organisations represented either individuals or organisations.

There were a small number of instances where the student organisation members consisted of both individual students and student organisations. Following on from this question, the respondents were asked to specify who their members were, whether their members were individual students or student organisations. In total, over 66 per cent answered that individual students were their members. This number fell to 59 per cent when the data were restricted to NSOs. In the Pacific and Europe regions there was an equal divide between membership being individual students and student organisations. The other regions had similar proportions to the Commonwealth as a whole.

The respondents were then asked to answer the following question: 'what is your membership as a percentage of the national total of eligible members?' The regional responses showed some variation. Africa, Europe and the Pacific reported membership levels of 60–100 per cent. In the Caribbean and Americas over 35 per cent of respondents believed their membership was less than 29 per cent of eligible members. For the Asia region the responses were more diverse, with 30 per cent answering between 90 and 100 per cent of eligible members, 30 per cent answering

between 40 and 59 per cent of eligible members, and 30 per cent answering fewer than 9 per cent of eligible members.

Governing documentation

The respondents were asked 'Does your organisation have a governing document which sets out decision making processes?' Over 85 per cent of respondents across the Commonwealth said 'yes', while 11 per cent said 'to some extent' and only one respondent said 'no'. This shows that the majority of student organisations have a constitution of some kind that determines the decision-making processes.

Purpose of organisation

The representatives were asked what the purpose of their organisation was. Respondents were asked to choose from a menu of 'purposes' those that they felt were appropriate to their organisation. The total percentage has also been provided for each answer:

- offering advice and guidance to student (61%);

- advocating on behalf of individual students (71%);

- developing local student organisations (39%);

- campaigning for students nationally (45%);

- campaigning for students locally (35%);

- developing policy in the interests of students (65%);

- delivering services to students e.g. discounts, travel etc. (43%);

- delivering services to local student organisations (29%).

There were regional differences in the most and least popular purposes. In Africa and Asia, the most popular purposes were 'offering advice and guidance to students' and 'advocating on behalf of individual students'. The least popular in the Africa region were 'delivering services to local student organisations' and 'campaigning for students nationally'. In Asia, none of the respondents selected 'delivering services to local student organisations' and only one selected 'developing local student organisations'. In the Caribbean and Americas, the most popular responses were

'advocating on behalf of individual students' and 'developing policy in the interests of students', while the least popular were similar to those in Asia and Africa. In Europe, all of the responses were selected. In the Pacific, the responses were varied, as all selected 'campaigning for students nationally', with the second most popular being 'developing policy in the interest of students'. This assertion appears to contradict the responses analysed in section 3.2.1, where Pacific student organisations indicated they did not have a national scope. This may be because elected officers may find themselves primarily focused on the internal business of representing their members within their institution but may, when required, provide input at a national level. Much may well depend on the immediate experience of the respondent.

This shows that there the purposes of student organisations vary between regions. The most significant differences are between Africa and the Pacific, as a low number of African student organisations chose 'campaigning for students nationally' while all Pacific student organisations selected this purpose. There is consensus that the most important are offering advice to students and advocacy, while only a few student organisations in the Commonwealth deliver services either to students or to student organisations.

Respondents were then asked if the selected purposes were set out in a written document. A total of 71 per cent replied 'yes', 24 per cent replied 'to some extent' and only 5 per cent replied 'no'. This shows that, while decision-making processes are set out in documentation, fewer student organisations have their purposes outlined in that documentation. It is presumed that the variation could relate to ad hoc purposes that the student organisations adopt infrequently, or have just started offering to their memberships.

Leadership and direction of organisation

The next question in the survey related to the direction and leadership of student organisations and where it came from. Respondents were asked to choose several of the following responses relating to the nature of leadership: did it come from the membership, from elected officers within the organisation, from elected officials aligned to a political party, from the government/ministry or from a university?

Over 70 per cent of the total respondents answered that the leadership and direction of their organisation came from elected officers within the organisation. Almost 40 per cent also said that the leadership and direction came from the membership. In the Caribbean and Americas and in the Pacific, around 15 per cent of respondents said that leadership and direction came from the government/ministry and/or from a university. The rest of the regions said leadership came mainly from a combination of the membership (individual or student organisation) and nationally elected officers, or from within the organisation as the main areas in which they received their leadership and direction.

3.2.3 Membership and decision-making

This section of the survey related to how democratic student organisations are, and how the membership is involved within the student organisation. The survey respondents were asked if the following definition applied to their organisation: 'A democratic student organisation is autonomous and free from coercion, it has appropriate lines of accountability and governance structures in place. All members will have the opportunity to influence the priorities, decisions and actions of the organisation and will be able to hold their elected officers to account'. In total, 85 per cent of respondents believed that this definition applied to their organisation, with the remaining 15 per cent replying 'to some extent'. None believed that this definition did not reflect their student organisation. Unfortunately, there was not a follow-up question to ask the respondents who marked 'to some extent' to elaborate on areas where they believed they fell short of the definition.

Membership contribution to decision-making

The respondents were asked to outline the ways in which their membership contributed to decision-making. They were asked to select some options from the following list: annual general meeting (AGM), individual meetings, Facebook, Twitter, other social media, online platforms, the organisation's website, newsletters, telephone calls and fax. The most popular methods were the AGM (74 per cent), individual meetings (74 per cent) and Facebook (72 per cent). The least used methods were fax (1 respondent), Twitter (20 per cent) and online platforms (30 per cent). Looking at the data on a

Figure 3.2 Membership involved in decision-making, by region
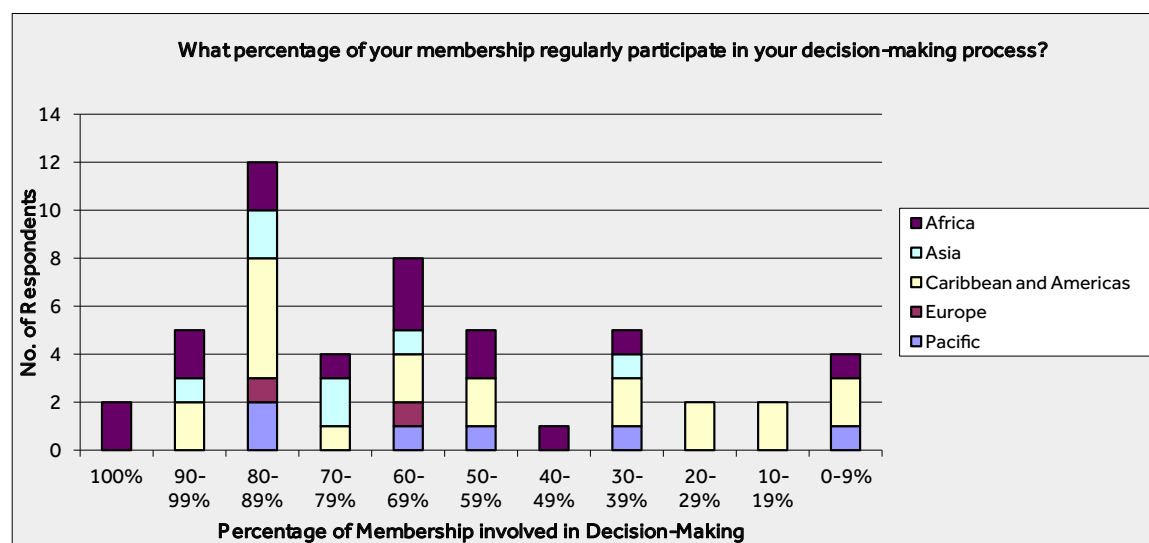
regional basis, the results were similar, although telephone calls were also well utilised in Africa and in the Caribbean and Americas. This shows that there are a range of ways that the membership can be involved with decision-making, which new technology can only enhance.

The survey participants were then asked to comment on the percentage of their membership that regularly participates in the organisations' decision-making processes. The responses were extremely varied, as shown in Figure 3.2.

3.2.4 Sustainability

This section of the survey examined the sustainability of the student organisations, particularly in relation to financial matters.

Funding of student organisation

This question pertained to how student organisations are funded. The respondents were asked to select the sources of funding that applied to them: membership fees from individual students, membership fees from student organisations, university grants, government funding, political party funding, donations from individuals, sponsorship from commercial businesses. Other sources that respondents mentioned were fundraising, research contracts and marketing-related funding such as advertising in the student organisation's magazine/newsletter. In total, the most common sources of funding were membership fees, sponsorship and donations from individuals. Only 20 per cent of the respondents

received government funding, and none received funding from political parties. Resources were then allocated to the range of activities described in subsection 3.2.2.

Management of financial issues

The respondents were asked an open-ended question on how and in what ways financial issues are managed. There were a total of 34 responses. The most common method of managing financial matters was through an internal committee within the student organisation and/or overseen by an elected official such as a treasurer. Other responses included management through the AGM, external accountants, trustee boards and quarterly to annual audits.

Management of risk issues

Alongside financial management, there was an open-ended question on how and in what ways risk issues are managed. There were a total of 28 valid responses. The management of risk issues is varied; the majority of respondents mentioned management of risk through their executive committee or an audit committee. Several noted that financial transactions are countersigned by at least two signatories. Additionally, five of the respondents made mention that risk management was explicitly stated through policies and/or within their constitution.

Management of legal issues

An open-ended question was also asked on how and in what ways legal issues were managed. There were a total of 32 valid responses. Nineteen of the responses said that they sought external legal advice, with several noting that they tried to find pro-bono assistance. Other methods included having legal issues overseen by an internal committee or elected officials, with university or government assistance. It is interesting to note that one respondent, from the Caribbean and Americas, said 'we have an Advisory Board made up of Law students and other capable persons.' This is a unique way of utilising members who have expertise in their subject areas for the management of the student organisation.

Audits

The survey also asked if the organisation performed audits of any kind. Out of 80 survey participants, only 45 answered this question. Over 70 per cent of the total number of respondents answering this question said 'yes', just under 20 per cent answered 'to some extent' and 11 per cent answered 'no'. In terms of regions, 25% of respondents in Asia said no, but all in Europe and Pacific (that answered the question) said either 'yes' or 'to some extent'.

Changes to improve effectiveness of student organisation

The last question of this section on sustainability was an open-ended question asking the respondents to list up to three key changes that would significantly improve their organisation. There were 35 valid responses to this. The most frequently noted change related to greater financial and resource support; this included more grants, office space and salaries/stipends for elected student officers. The second most often noted change was an increase in membership involvement; this also related to improved methods of communication with the membership as well as an increase in members. The third most often noted change was an increase in capacity building to improve the effectiveness of the student organisation. Other responses included having extra staff support (several making specific reference to financial or legal staff), greater recognition of the student organisation within their country, networking with

other student organisations and external agencies, more autonomy and improved democratic and accountability procedures.

3.2.5 Planning

The next section of the survey related to how the student organisation develops plans, particularly long-term plans to help their effectiveness. Respondents were asked to select as many of the following options as applied to their situation. The total response percentage is also provided:

- We have an agreed organisation-wide document that outlines our vision and purpose (69%).

- We have an agreed organisation-wide document that outlines our organisation-wide goals (49%).

- We have an agreed document, which outlines our areas of work (49%).

- We have agreed plans for some areas of our work but not others (13%).

- Our plans relate to specific issues and causes (36%).

- We have plans that last for a number of years (22%).

- Our plans are not time bound (22%).

- We plan on an annual basis (62%).

- We respond as matters arise (47%).

In terms of regional analysis, from the Caribbean and Americas, Europe and the Pacific there were similar responses to the total response noted above. In Africa, over 72 per cent of student organisation plan on an annual basis, while only 9 per cent make plans that last for a number of years. This indicates that student organisations in Africa do not have well-established long-term plans, which may have an influence on the longevity of the organisation. It may also indicate that the sector is too unstable for long-term plans to be made. No Asian student organisation selected 'we have agreed plans for some areas of our work but not others' and only 22 per cent mentioned that they responded to matters as they arose. This indicates that student organisations in the Asia region have rigid, comprehensive plans but do little ad hoc work, which may limit their ability to respond to changing situations.

Monitoring of progress

Following on from the question on how student organisations made long-term plans, respondents were asked how progress is monitored against the agreed plans. Respondents could select from the following statements. The total response percentage is also provided:

- We have a board with responsibility for monitoring performance (43%).

- We have a democratic council (or similar democratic means), which reviews progress (43%).

- Our un-elected staff/volunteers review progress against goals (25%).

- Our elected students review and monitor goals (52%).

- We are regulated by an external organisation or agency (2%).

- We do not monitor plans or progress (2%).

- Not applicable (7%).

Most of the regions had similar results to the total. However, in the Pacific, 50 per cent of respondents stated that plans were monitored by unelected staff/volunteers. In Africa, none of the respondents had a board with responsibility for monitoring performance, yet 64 per cent indicated that elected students monitored plans.

3.2.6 Range of opportunities

The section of the survey pertained to the range of opportunities and services that NSOs offer their membership. The first question asked the respondents to select as many as applicable of the following opportunities and services (the total percentage is provided beside each): welfare (61%), academic support (66%), clubs and societies (48%), student representation (89%), sports (46%), distribution of grants and funding to students (34%), commercial operations (18%), support services for member organisations (45%), insurance (7%), travel (25%), student discounts (34%), environmental (39%).

The most significant results of the regional analysis were the following. Both European respondents provide grants, commercial operations, support services for their membership organisations, and student discounts and environmental services for

their wider student membership. In Africa, only 18 per cent of respondents said that they provided support services for their member organisations, in contrast to the Pacific, in which over 83 per cent of NSOs provided support services. The only NSOs that offered insurance services were based in the Caribbean and Americas, although one European respondent had previously done so.

Activities that reflect the needs of members

The next question asked of respondents was 'How and in what ways do you know these activities reflect the needs of members?' The respondents were asked to select from the following responses:

- We undertake member research on their needs (56%).

- We engage members in decision-making (81%).

- We base our activities on trends in engagement (40%).

- We receive feedback from services (60%).

- We base our services on democratic decisions (51%).

- We do not know how these activities reflect the needs of our members (1%).

There were two significant findings that varied between regions. The first was that only 9 per cent of respondents from Africa based their activities on trends in engagement. The second finding was that in Asia only 25 per cent of the student organisations based their services on democratic decisions.

3.2.7 Communications

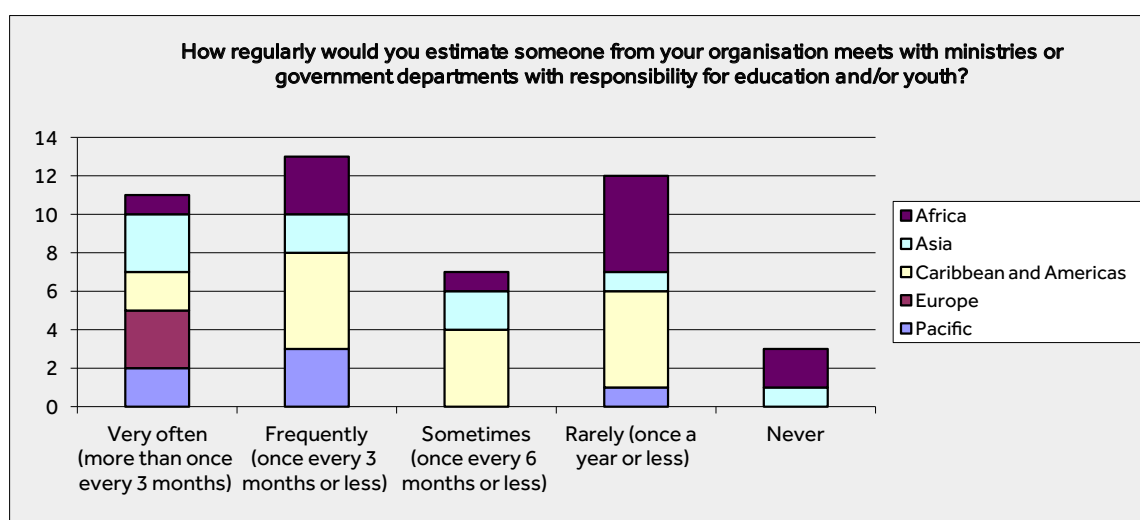This section was related to how NSOs communicate with their membership and vice versa.

Communicating with membership

The first question of this section asked the respondents how and in what ways their organisations communicated with their members. The respondents were asked to select from a predetermined list of various communication methods. The most common ways in which student organisations in the Commonwealth communicate

Figure 3.3 Student organisations' engagement with government departments/ministries

How regularly would you estimate someone from your organisation meets with ministries or government departments with responsibility for education and/or youth?

Legend:
- Africa
- Asia
- Caribbean and Americas
- Europe
- Pacific

Categories: Very often (more than once every 3 months), Frequently (once every 3 months or less), Sometimes (once every 6 months or less), Rarely (once a year or less), Never

with their members were email (93%), face-to-face meetings (86%) and Facebook (70%). The least common was Twitter, with only 23%.

Membership and other stakeholders communicating with student organisation

The respondents were then asked what methods their members and stakeholders they worked with used to communicate with the student organisation. The results were very similar to the methods used for membership communication, as the top methods were email (93%), face-to-face meetings (86%), and Facebook (70%). The least common were Twitter (23%) and post (25%).

Involving members

The respondents were then asked an open-ended question: 'In what ways does your organisation involve members to bring about positive changes for students?' There were 31 valid responses. One example provided was:

We often organise training, workshops and summits on subjects that relate to career development, student engagement in development practice and democratic processes, leadership and accountability, environmental sustainability, ICT and Social Media. We also do provide useful youth information to students such as scholarships, internships, conferences etc. We've partnered with international youth organisations to get students engaged in summer camps, youth exchanges and volunteering work.

The main methods for involving students included meetings with the members and holding conferences/forums/seminars in which the participants could help direct the work of the organisation to help the organisation make the case for positive changes for students. Six of the respondents mentioned undertaking research, particularly in obtaining feedback around the work that the organisation does so that they can adapt their work appropriately.

3.2.8 Relationship with key stakeholders

Following on from communication, the next section of the survey was used to analyse the organisation's relationship with key stakeholders. The respondents were asked the following question with a link to a Likert scale: 'Is the organisation seen as a valued source of student opinion by government and the education sector decision makers?' While 47 per cent of the respondents marked 'Agree' to 'Strongly agree', only 18 per cent disagreed to various extents. In terms of regional analysis, the responses were generally positive; only 25 per cent in Asia and in the Caribbean and Americas disagreed to some extent that the organisation is seen as a valued source of student opinion by government and other stakeholders.

Meetings with government

Respondents were then asked how regularly they met with ministries or government departments with responsibility for education and/or youth. Some 24 per cent responded that they met with

government departments more than once every three months and 28 per cent said they met once every three months or less often. For less frequent activity, 15 per cent of respondents met with government departments once every six months or less often, and 7 per cent of respondents indicated that they never met with ministries or government departments.

In Africa, 42 per cent of the respondents met with government departments rarely (once a year or less often), while 17 per cent never meet with government departments. In Europe there is constant engagement, as student organisations meet with ministries/government departments more than once every three months. Figure 3.3 provides a breakdown of the regional answers.

Examples of student organisations' influencing legislation or policy

Respondents were asked if they were able to offer an example of a time when their organisation had influenced legislation or the policy of their government. A total of 22 respondents were able to provide an example; a few of these are listed below:

- Our lobbying around the difficulty in making the transition between being a student and a beneficiary resulted in significant improvements. Our learner panel feedback resulted in massive improvements in the service provided by StudyLink, our agency that provides living support loans and allowances. We lobbied all but the ruling party to adopt a 'First in Family Scholarship' programme going into the last election. (Pacific)

- In 2008 there was a crises in neighbouring Equatorial Guinea and Cameroonians were being partriated [sic] back home. This spurred up some sentiments leading to the intimidation of foreign students and threats on their lives. Our Union had to intervene promptly and sensitised the entire members not to react negatively. This action was commended by some quarters and media. (Africa)

- We recently had industrial action involving both students and lecturers against the academic board and the adminstration of the Universities. The [student organisation] was at the helm of this revolution and stood as middle man between the Unions and the

Administration of the University. The [student organisation] was also responsible for the return of lecturers to their classrooms after one month of industrial action. (Caribbean and Americas)

- When we recently opposed fee hikes and asked the government to put up a properly regulated student loan scheme. As of now a students loan bill has been passed by Parliament. (Africa)

- The Guild of Students recently successfully advocated for the Government to offer financial assistance in the form of bursaries to students. (Caribbean and Americas)

- Members of our organisation assisted with the policy framework for the no-user fee policy for health care in the country. We also assisted with the policy for the no-tuition fees at secondary institutions of learning. (Caribbean and Americas)

- The government has twice tried to introduce university fee deregulation. We have twice actively campaigned to prevent this. Commissioning research and producing a report to emphasise our argument, giving evidence to parliament select committees, teaming up with other unions/student bodies to form a national campaign to target cross benches in the senate to prevent the legislation passing. This has worked on two occasions in the last year. (Pacific)

- Our organisation and various other youth groups took to the street to demand free education up to tertiary level. The protest triggered public discussion as to the viability of free education in the country – an issue that was never discussed before. Eventually, the Opposition coalition adopted our recommendation for a free education in their manifesto prior to the last General Election two years ago. They ultimately won the majority popular vote for the first time in the country's history but failed to form the government for not winning enough seats in the federal legislature. (Asia)

3.2.9   Evidence and research

This section of the survey asked questions on whether or not student organisations undertake research to inform decision-making and how they know when they are effective.

Research to inform policy

The respondents were asked if their organisation undertook research to inform policy. In total, 57 per cent said 'yes', 23 per cent said 'to some extent' and 20 per cent said 'no'. This shows that, while almost 80 per cent undertake some research to inform policy, there is still opportunity to improve this. Only the student organisations in Europe and the Pacific exclusively said 'yes' to this question; responses from the other regions varied.

Effectiveness of organisations' activities

The last question was 'How do you know when your organisation's activities are effective?' Respondents were asked to select as many as they felt appropriate out of the following statements:

- We undertake research in order to establish how our work has impacted on members (62%).

- Our members tell us what the issues are (84%).

- We compare progress with measures set out in our plans (64%).

- We know we are effective when students behave in a certain way (40%).

- We know we are effective when students engage with our work (57%).

- We know we are effective when members affiliate (40%).

- We do not know if we are effective or not (1%).

There was little significant difference when comparing regions.

3.2.10 Summary of key findings from surveys

A summary of the key findings from the survey are:

- Fifty-one per cent of Commonwealth countries do not have a formal NSO.

- Fifty-five per cent of the NSOs surveyed responded.

- Cultural factors have an impact on the development of students' organisations.

- The newest NSOs can be found in Africa.

- Eighty per cent of NSOs indicated they have a national scope.

- Seventy per cent of NSOs believed that they were not aligned to a political party and saw themselves as non-political.

- Fifty-eight per cent said that some level of legislation regulated their NSO; in Africa this increased to 85 per cent.

- NGO is the most popular legal form for NSOs.

- Ninety-one per cent saw themselves as individual membership organisations; there is a significant variation in the number of members.

- Eighty-five per cent have agreed governance documents.

- The most popular roles named are advocating on behalf of students, developing policy, and advice and guidance, but there is some variation from region to region.

- Seventy per cent said the leadership of the NSO came from the elected student leaders; 40 per cent said directly from students.

- Eighty-five per cent believed that their members were able to influence the direction of the NSO.

- Membership fees were not seen as a reliable source of funding, but it was the most common.

- Risk, finance, audits and legal matters are managed with the advice of external experts in most cases.

- The key changes that would help the development of NSOs across the Commonwealth are identified as:

  - greater financial and resource support;

  - increase in membership involvement;

  - support for capacity building;

  - professional staff support;

  - greater recognition;

  - autonomy and greater democratic participation procedures.

- Sixty-nine per cent of NSOs have a clear mission and a governing document.

- Accountability mechanisms vary, from direct meetings of members to a smaller board.

- Student representation, welfare and academic support were seen as the main range of opportunities for students.

- Eighty-one per cent of NSOs said that they engaged their membership in decision-making.

- The most common communication methods with both students and stakeholders were face to face, committee meetings and Facebook.

- Forty-seven per cent of NSOs felt they had a good relationship with the sector.

- Twenty-four per cent of NSOs met with government departments at least every three months.

- Nearly half of the respondents were able to provide an example of how they had influenced the direction of policy.

- Fifty-seven per cent used research to inform their campaigns.

3.3 Interview analysis

3.3.1 Introduction

To develop a series of recommendations and further analysis on the effectiveness of NSOs in the Commonwealth, a number of semi-structured interviews were conducted. In total, 24 interviews took place with members of student organisations, ministries of education and experts who have knowledge of student organisations in the Commonwealth. All interviewees were provided with information that related to this research project. Participants were also reassured that they would be kept anonymous. The interviews took place either in person or over Skype and lasted, on average, between 20 and 30 minutes each.

A semi-structured interview approach was chosen for this study because it prevented pigeon-holing the responses, and gave the interviewees the opportunity to discuss aspects of student organisations that were most relevant to them. The interviews were designed for the purpose of understanding the various views related to

the effectiveness of student organisations, their perceptions of the power of the student voice and what can be done to enhance the work of student organisations across the Commonwealth.

All interviews were audiorecorded using a voice recorder application on a mobile phone. Alongside this, additional notes were taken during each interview. After the interviews were conducted, they were then transcribed and coded using qualitative analysis software, MAXQDA. By coding the interviews this helped to present the following findings, and allowed the information to be collated into a presentable format.

3.3.2 Effectiveness of student organisations

There was a consensus among the respondents that student organisations, both local and national, have the potential to be extremely effective. NSOs are well recognised for two distinct areas of work. The first is protests and campaigning publicly on various matters including tuition fees, gender equality, and wrongful imprisonment of students and academic staff. The second area of work is providing input into policy discussions institutionally, regionally or nationally. Several experts highlighted that there needs to be a balance between these two areas of work, to ensure the effectiveness of student organisations; for example:

I think the most appropriate way is always a balanced way, so just getting strikes and demonstrations is not productive. But just doing the policy input by writing drafts, commenting of drafts from higher education and government structures is not effective, so you need to have both sides at the same time.

In terms of national engagement of NSOs with governments and ministries, the majority of interviewees agreed on the importance of their involvement at a national level. A representative of a ministry of education in Africa welcomed the idea of greater involvement of students at national level, while a representative of a ministry in the Pacific said:

I think it is important for government to hear the voice of students and learner, I think we have the tools for that but it is just adjusting to the new environment.

The comment about the 'new environment' reflects the continuous developments of higher education systems in seeking to facilitate the voice of students. The majority of respondents believed

that the power of collective student organisations could be enhanced further. There was recognition among the experts that, because of the diverse nature of education systems in the Commonwealth, sometimes there was not an effective platform for students to engage. One expert from Africa mentioned that national student engagement was often ad hoc, as there were no formalised structures in place in some countries.

Furthermore, there was discussion of why student organisations may not be effective. Two reasons were given. First, student organisations are considered not sufficiently organised to play a significant role in shaping education in their country. The second reason was that student organisations face barriers from other stakeholders such as academics, politicians or the system as a whole. One expert from the Caribbean and Americas region mentioned that student participation at a national level is 'tokenistic', as students are not considered key stakeholders and decisions are often already made or far advanced before they are consulted. Another expert supported this statement by saying that often students are patronised at national level, as they are frequently considered immature or inexperienced in such high-level discussions. However, the expert went on to say:

I think it would be a lost opportunity of the university sectors in these countries that they haven't done more to consolidate students' perspectives and to bring them into their thinking and planning.

This quote highlights a view taken by a majority of interviewees, who recognised the potential importance of NSOs but noted that there was often a gap between the sector and NSOs, hindering their ability to work together.

3.3.3 Challenges student organisations face

The previous subsection touched upon the challenges that NSOs face in terms of the lack of space for the student voice to be raised within policy discussions. Within the data, six other challenges were identified:

- a negative perception of the NSO or student representation in general from other stakeholders in the education sector or within the government;

- the inability to clearly articulate the student case or inexperience in working at a governmental level;

- the lack of resources to be able to conduct research, communicate effectively with members or employ specialists in certain areas;

- being representative or legitimate in the eyes of stakeholders and being able to claim to genuinely represent student opinion;

- the individualism of student leaders concerned perhaps with their own futures rather than the greater good of the student body;

- student leaders' necessarily short time in office, which militates against building on experience and is disruptive of continuity.

It is important to note that, while these six challenges are addressed separately, they are connected intrinsically to the diverse nature of student organisations.

Negative perception from other stakeholders

During the interviews, it became clear that there could sometimes be misconceptions around NSOs and what they do. At least half of the respondents mentioned that there is a lack of awareness of what the NSOs do, which can be a problem when trying to make a case on behalf of students when representing them to decision-makers. NSO leaders can be considered 'rabble-rousers' and the sector may feel threatened by them. This proves a challenge for NSOs not only in the sector but also with the general public, because, if NSOs are perceived negatively, this will limit the amount of support and work that they can do, not least because a politician will not feel any need to do so if the public are hostile to the student cause.

Lack of capability to articulate

Another challenge that student organisations face is the lack of skills and experience in lobbying and attending formal meetings; further, they may lack the ability to succinctly articulate the issues. This manifested itself as student leaders coming to meetings unprepared, not preparing

short briefings or not researching topics relating to their campaigns. As one expert from the Commonwealth argued:

It's a different question from asking whether young people can, you're asking whether they do and I'm saying that it depends on the situation. I absolutely believe that they can, they have a lot to offer but oftentimes circumstances don't allow that voice to be heard based on content and based on substance.

Lack of resources

Linked to the challenge of articulating the student case is that of resources: NSOs lack resources to mobilise and provide a cohesive voice in decision-making within the tertiary education sector. The main resources that student organisations lack are finances, facilities and time. The lack of time will be further discussed in a later section, but a representative from an NSO in the Pacific summarised the link between lacking the other two main resources and being unable to articulate issues in the following excerpt:

We can and do influence policy through being sensible, in terms of having an evidence-base for the things that we are about through working with the government agencies which are developing policies. [However] those things rely on organisation and structure. You need to have a resourced central organisation that has the capacity to do research, you need to be connected to students' associations and for them to be strong in terms of their links to students.

This links with a rising concern across the Commonwealth tertiary sector as public funding is reduced and universities, student organisations (local and national) and other agencies compete for limited resources. This is particularly acute in developing countries, where there are questions about where NSOs can find adequate resources to build up the infrastructure around the student voice. What is clear from the interviews is that NSOs make an important contribution to the sector and to wider civic society, so a key question to ask is how these organisations can be supported to develop and be sustainable.

Short cycle of students

This challenge reflects the short life-cycle of students in terms of the time from when they enter tertiary education to when they leave. This has a

significant impact on student organisations, whose student leaders usually take office for no more than two years and then a new student leader is elected or appointed. This proves a challenge, as the organisational memory is rather short, which means that new student leaders may spend a good deal of time getting up to speed on continuing campaigns without a full understanding of where the issue has got to and what has been tried in the past. Furthermore, as the life-cycle of students is quite short and they have numerous commitments such as studying, working and family life, this means that the opportunity to become involved in any NSO may be very limited:

Students are not students throughout their life, so that is a short span of time. Three or four years are a long time in the life of a student. Their immediate sort of issue, concern, is jobs; their own career progression and they want a qualification. So whether they want to be involved in student movements is always a question.

One expert who was also an academic in the Americas argued that he would not encourage students to become involved in student organisations, as this engagement and the time spent on it may be detrimental to their coursework. What this shows is that, without sufficient support and resources, student leaders will find it a challenge to prioritise and provide effective input into the work of the NSO while juggling with external commitments. By contrast, some institutions seek to reward student representatives with credit points for participation in student representation and other co-curricular activities.

Representativeness

One of the major challenges that was revealed during the interviews was the topic of how representative NSOs are. If there is not a unified student organisation at institutional or national level, stakeholders will question whether the organisation speaks for the entire student body. One expert said that when there are several student organisations it can be difficult to decide which student body to consult as speaking on behalf of the students. This is particularly apparent in large countries that have several student organisations, such as Canada or India, where it can be difficult for outsiders as well as students to see which NSO represents their interests. This also relates to the awareness and perception of what NSOs do,

because if the student movement is fragmented then this does not help to build credibility with members or potential members.

It is also interesting to note that only two of the respondents mentioned postgraduate, mature and further education students. This is significant, as students are often defined as school-leavers who are below the age of 25, yet a large percentage of tertiary education students are mature. NSOs should typically represent the voice of all students unless their constitution explicitly states otherwise. This highlights that stereotypical judgements are often made about NSOs without considering the diversity of student populations.

Individualism of student leaders

A couple of the respondents questioned whether student leaders work to represent the entire membership of their organisation or they are more individualistic. For example, one expert from the Pacific suggested the following:

I think the other point I was making before about whether the leadership is invested in the responsibility of representing students or in their own political careers can actually have a huge impact on how effective they are as an organisation, as well.

This challenge suggests the lack of training and capacity building for student leaders across the Commonwealth. They need a space where they can develop their leadership skills. It also relates to outsiders' perception of the effectiveness of NSOs and the difficulties that student representatives have in being perceived as individuals rather than as spokespersons for the collective student organisation.

3.3.4 Influencing policy

There was common agreement that student organisations have a powerful role to play in influencing and adding value to policy. There was a significant amount of discussion about the extent to which NSOs should be involved in policy discussions within the education sector but also in other areas as well. As one expert emphasised, 'there is no global issue that is not affecting the lives of students'. Another respondent illustrated the range of policy areas that NSOs can usefully contribute to:

There are students as students if you like, and then students as a voice. Say for example in a number of countries, education reforms are going on and the students are as likely to have an interest in those education reforms as anybody else has and so their views, if they go out on the street or if they write to the papers or if they lobby, or whatever they do, they're attempting to influence policy and that might be around anything directly affecting them in terms of education policy or it might be around social entrepreneurship or it might be around social issues.

Furthermore, a significant number of interviewees highlighted their belief that the student voice should be heard alongside other stakeholders when it comes to policy development. An expert from the Caribbean stressed that, when education matters were discussed, all stakeholders should be consulted, including students and teachers. This emphasises the need for a partnership approach within the education sector, as the knowledge and experiences of students need to be included within policy developments alongside other key stakeholders. Overall it was concluded that input from the voice of students is important for the effectiveness of policies:

When [students] participate in any sort of development process the outcome is always much better than when they are not part of that.

3.3.5 Political focus of student organisations

The interviews also elicited a considerable amount of discussion on political activities in and by student organisations. The majority of respondents believed that any political alignment of NSOs was a hindrance to their credibility, as their arguments would be coloured by their specific political affiliation rather than by the collective student body, which may have a broader range of political views. One representative of a ministry in Asia commented on NSOs that were formally politically aligned:

Right now [students] are so emotional, they are either pro-government or pro-opposition and they are not mature enough in that sense to evaluate information and because of those tendencies the Ministry and universities may not take them seriously in their opinions, in whatever opinion they are going to express because of their inclination towards certain parties.

A few of the interviewees also mentioned that student leaders' prospects after graduating are on occasions linked to political parties. The respondents felt that this was not entirely negative, but, if student leaders have aligned themselves to a political party during their time within the student organisation, there can be potential links to corruption and other activities that can compromise a healthy civic society. Some other experts expressed the view that students, as voters and active citizens, are potentially powerful in terms of having their voice heard by politicians; however, that voice can be weakened, as typically elections see a low turnout among student voters.

Considering the information presented in the interviews, it is apparent that the majority of interviewees believe that involving party politics within NSOs reduces their effectiveness. Despite this, several recognised that party political student organisations can be very effective. In addition, a few noted that, given the very nature of student organisations as advocates and active in policy development, it is difficult to split the party politics of the student leaders from the political influence that student organisations have. For example, one representative from an international organisation explained:

Student movements have been engaged in a lot of political things. I mean like they have been at the forefront of so many struggles in so many countries. If you look at some of the countries, the student leaders virtually led those protests [in the Arab Spring]. Even in Greece the student movement was very strong and they actually changed the whole political discourse around the austerity issue. So I think we need to give a spin where member governments are more positive about the role and contribution of students and not them being very political and pushing one agenda.

3.3.6 Summary of key points from stakeholder interviews

- Student organisations have the potential to be effective but many NSOs do not reach that potential currently. Every global issue has an impact on students in one way or another.

- National student organisations are known for both campaigning activity and detailed policy input; one complements the other.

- Barriers to effective student organisations include lack of organisation and being treated in a tokenistic way by the authorities.

- Students who get involved may do so to the detriment of their studies, and this in turn is a barrier to better organisation unless resources are made available to support students full time in a sabbatical from their course.

- The legitimacy of student policies is crucial. NSOs need to demonstrate that they are grounded in genuine student opinion.

- Some students might be seen as – or may actually be – careerists, individualists who have taken a role only to promote favour for a future political post. This is why NSO structures need to be robust and accountable. There is a danger that corruption could seep into the process.

- Student organisations that take a strong political line may be hampered or dismissed – but equally, if we want students to take leadership positions in the future, then having a political analysis is helpful.

3.4 Regional case studies

Alongside the survey and interviews, several case studies were collected from NSOs to provide in-depth detail of how student organisations can be effective in promoting change for students. The cases presented below represent those NSOs that provided a response.

3.4.1 Case study: Rwanda Nursing Sciences Students' Organisation (Africa region)

What were the issues/priorities that the students' organisation needed to address?

During the Keep Rwanda an Ebola Free Country campaign, RNSSO [Rwanda Nursing Sciences Students' Organisation] wished to address civic society about Ebola epidemic awareness, prevention and available management system for that outbreak, which was becoming a tragedy in western Africa. We wished to demonstrate on a national level all about the health sciences students' mental and physical efforts with which we are ready and stand by to apply in case the Ebola epidemic outbreak could invade our country, Rwanda. We wished to show our government the

real image of hardworking and patriotic future health care professionals in training today. We wished also to mobilise all health sciences students and our partner universities to bring together all contributions to prepare the community for the epidemic before it could reach our country, Rwanda.

How were students involved?

Students were involved in the event. As it was a national-level concern, RNSSO National Committee met our Ministry of Health, planning for the Keep Rwanda an Ebola Free Country RNSSO national event, providing health education materials related to Ebola. RNSSO students met the University of Rwanda officers, provided the campus main halls. RNSSO students met a representative of Rwanda Nurses and Midwives Union (RNMU). Students used T-shirts, banners and posters. RNSSO mobilised all our 10 school-level committees and invited other health sciences students' organisations including Rwanda Pharmaceutical Students' Association (RPSA), Medical Students' Association of Rwanda (MEDSAR), etc. We conducted a health education walk throughout Kigali City on 23 November 2015. Students conducted public lectures followed by one month of community visits to teach how the Ebola epidemic spreads and prevention measures. Our 10 RNSSO school-level committee members visited the communities around 10 universities and schools, giving out posters and explaining the Ebola epidemic, prevention and management.

What challenges did the student organisation face? How were these resolved?

The challenges met included the fact that our theme, 'Keep Rwanda an Ebola Free Country', prevented us from internationalising our RNSSO event, and it became a national-level event only. Lack of financial support kept our organisation from becoming better known internationally, as private media refused to come to pick up information to broadcast on their TV channels, requesting from us much money that we could not afford. Time was limited by our studies, as we could not visit communities daily. We arranged community visits during weekends only. This challenge hindered our students from reaching many houses and the limited time did not allow a long stay with a family to deal with all questions, misunderstandings and so on.

We failed to conduct another such Ebola epidemic awareness national event, or research for further assessment of our community's level of understanding of the knowledge acquired after our students delivered health education in the community, because of limited budget and limited time.

Some challenges were solved, such as meeting different RNSSO partners to request financial support to stabilise our budget; for example, RNMU provided some money. To internationalise our RNSSO event we tried to post the pictures of the event on our Facebook pages, Twitter etc. On the side of limited time, we preferred to extend the event for the whole of one month by keeping our used banners hung everywhere on gates of our partner universities/schools; posters were kept hung in different community centres, including the health centres; and our students continued to put on their T-shirts that contained the message of Keeping Rwanda an Ebola Free Country until today, so we are still advertising that event.

What was the overall outcome?

The overall outcome: we got enough time to socialise with our Ministry of Health, students enjoyed networking with other students from different universities from different corners of Rwanda, and nursing, medical, and pharmaceutical students got time to network. Community awareness about the Ebola epidemic increased. That event is a special record for our RNSSO and has made our organisation more respected by our government. During the event, we met the Minister of Health; we met the Mayor of Kigali City to request permission to conduct the health education walk; we met the National Traffic Police assisting us during the walk; we met the Executive Committee of RNMU, who provided financial assistance; we met the Principal of the University of Rwanda, who granted us the use of the main campus's main hall to deliver public lectures; we made friendships with companies and restaurants, which today are giving us products at cheap prices as we become their long-time clients; and there were many other outcomes.

3.4.2 Case study: KAAVISH programme in Pakistan (Asia region)

What were the issues/priorities that needed to be addressed?

Unemployment is a most pressing development challenge for Pakistan. In fact, Pakistan is stuck in a vicious cycle of unemployment because every year more than a million graduates enter the job market while new jobs are not being produced at the same rate because of a lack of entrepreneurial education and less interest among youngsters in starting their own ventures. This is because entrepreneurship in Pakistan is always associated with business studies, while other students from different domains (such as engineering, computer sciences etc.) are not given the taste of entrepreneurial zeal and because of this major problem our education system only produces job seekers instead of job creators.

In this regard, GADE Foundation has launched its flagship entrepreneurial training programme for students, with the name of 'KAAVISH', to create an enterprising culture among young men and women by encouraging qualities such as initiative, innovation, creativity and risk taking. The programme aims to raise their awareness of the opportunities and challenges of entrepreneurship and self-employment, and give them a better understanding of the role that young people can take in shaping their futures, as well as that of their country, by being entrepreneurial in their working lives and careers. The objectives of programme are summarised as:

- creating awareness of enterprise and self-employment as a career option for young people;

- developing positive attitudes towards sustainable enterprise, self-employment and social entrepreneurship;

- providing knowledge and practice about the desirable attributes for starting and operating a successful enterprise;

- preparing students to become job creators rather than job seekers through improved understanding of business.

How were students involved?

KAAVISH is a highly innovative and student-led project for entrepreneurial education in Pakistan, based on its structure, stakeholders and implementation process. In order to effectively achieve project objectives with minimal resources, all major stakeholders (academia, the corporate sector and the government) were effectively engaged.

26 university chapters were established to organise the activities at grassroots level in universities and an ambassadors council was created with student members from each chapter as ambassadors.

At the first phase, members of the ambassadors council were trained as trainers with extensive training about entrepreneurship, leadership development and motivation. Moreover, they were also taken to corporate offices such as Chambers of Commerce and Industry and meeting were arranged with successful corporate icons to make them familiar with corporate culture.

At the next level, they organised training and corporate visits under the auspices of their university chapters for the students of their respective universities.

What challenges did the programme face? How were these resolved?

KAAVISH needed enormous resources to achieve great success with strong impact. So we identified our potential stakeholders (corporate sector, academia and government) and the challenge was to satisfy all of them. Therefore, it was important to identify their needs. For the companies, we achieved this by researching existing projects and matching them to our vision. We were then able to communicate this to the government to demonstrate KAAVISH as a viable route to help them boost the employment opportunities in Pakistan. During our meetings with stakeholders, we talked about how our vision aligned with the national vision and we identified an opportunity for long-term growth.

As a result we were successful in securing full support from all stakeholders and implementing the project as a private–public partnership. For instance, the government offered logistics and moral support while the corporate sector provided

financial resources. Academia allowed us to establish university chapters to reach the maximum number of students.

What was the overall outcome?

KAAVISH was a remarkable success, as, within the short period of two years, 4,200 students have been trained so far, with 40 per cent women participation. More than 500 business plans have been registered by university students who have taken entrepreneurial education from the KAAVISH programme and 128 start-ups have been initiated.

The model has proven very successful to generate social support from within the community to provide entrepreneurial education and create an enterprising culture.

The perception about the prevailing problems in the society has been changed in all 4,200 students who have been trained so far, and today they are more enthusiastic and encouraged to solve their problems through entrepreneurial techniques.

Moreover, 40 per cent women participation is also a big achievement because under-representation of women in the economy is another key problem of Pakistan. Women are a major part of the population but only 21 per cent of them are actively working, so in reality an already weak economy is burdened with a big chunk of inactive population. In this regard, KAAVISH has had a double impact.

3.4.3 Case study: National Union of Students UK and Union of Students in Ireland (Europe region)

What were the issues/priorities that the students' organisation needed to address?

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the growth of sectarian tensions in Northern Ireland that eventually led to the re-introduction of direct rule by Westminster and the deployment of troops into the region by the UK government. This in turn led to a violent period involving the British Army, local police forces and paramilitary organisations. Students were affected in the same way as the general population, and some students and academics were killed during the period known as 'the troubles'. At the same time student organisations were taking positions on the conflict on both sides of the divide between those that wished to united the island of Ireland and those that wished to remain

associated with the United Kingdom. This resulted in students' unions joining either NUSUK or the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), thus perpetuating sectarian division and dividing the student movement as well.

How were students involved?

Student leaders from NUSUK and USI decided that students needed to be part of any solution for the future, and that to perpetuate sectarian divisions would reduce opportunities and lead to students leaving Northern Ireland altogether. A bilateral agreement was reached between 1972 and 1975, which defined ways in which both NUSUK and USI would co-operate for peace, while at the same time not needing to compromise deeply held beliefs. A joint membership scheme was developed in which students' unions were required to join both national unions; to leave one was to leave both. A joint organisation, NUS-USI, was created to represent students in Northern Ireland and to co-ordinate student participation in NUSUK and USI.

Funding was sought for a community-building programme and for over 20 years student-led conferences and events were held that brought people together. Most students indicated that until the events they had not met or at least not spent much time with someone from a different religious community. Both organisations took a strong stand against violence.

What challenges did the student organisation face? How were these resolved?

There were, of course, political tensions between student leaders which needed to be resolved, leading to times when the whole agreement was under threat: in particular, times when one of the partner organisations appeared to side with the aims and objectives of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Positions taken by NUSUK and USI through their own democratic conferences also led to a strong media focus that put the agreements under strain. In each case the commitment to maintaining dialogue prevailed.

What was the overall outcome?

The outcome was to have a long-term impact. Through the collaborative approach to events, generations of student leaders and their student members directly experienced cross-border/-community co-operation. These same students went on to serve in industry, the media, trade unions, academia, politics (local and national) and the third sector, carrying with them a positive experience of collaboration and a set of values focused on the future development of civic society in Northern Ireland. In 2012 the bilateral agreement celebrated its 40th anniversary. An event to celebrate this milestone was held in Stormont, the home of the Northern Ireland Assembly; politicians from Sinn Féin to the Ulster Unionist Party paid tribute to the positive role that students had played in bringing about peace and how their actions had contributed to creating the conditions in which a peaceful settlement could be agreed. The tensions still linger and students in Northern Ireland continue to work with NUSUK and USI to create a positive future in which their academic skills can be utilised to build a stronger, more prosperous society that benefits everyone in the region.

3.4.4 Case study: UniTED (Africa region)

What were the issues/priorities that the organisation needed to address?

We believe that the world's greatest problem is that people are not able to relate to one another on the simplest level of mutual human respect and dignity. This problem is itself the sum of two others: people valuing socially constructed boundaries – such as class, traditions and nationality – over a shared humanity; and the failure to meet the real, fundamental needs of humans, meaning that they are denied basic human dignities.

The result is a vicious circle: by failing to relate with our fellow humans, we fail to respond to others' needs; consequently people lack basic dignities, so it becomes less possible to form authentic relationships with them, and so we care even less about their suffering. Even when we do respond to people's needs through giving to charities, more often than not this actually reinforces the socially constructed boundaries between the giver and the recipient, reinforcing the circle for the next need on the list…

What is needed is a dualistic approach, which not only aims to meet the needs of people, but also deconstructs the boundaries that challenge the belief in the common dignity of mankind. So we create boundary-defying, global relationships between students, which are centred on meeting common needs.

How were students involved?

Our goals are two-fold: to connect students, internationally; and to strengthen their social action, locally. This can be neatly broken down into the following targets: more students, leading more social change, more effectively, and more relationally, as global citizens. Our work can be split into three areas: organising campuses, strengthening projects and uniting students internationally. On campuses, UniTED groups become the focal point for student social action. Led by a team of two to seven pioneering student organisers, they:

- map all the student projects on campus;

- make projects' activities know to as many students as possible;

- connect both projects and students with the wider UniTED community.

Where possible, UniTED supplements this work through programmes to strengthen student projects. We:

- provide one-to-one consulting sessions;

- network students with wider civil society;

- organise training, conferences and fundraisers.

Globally, each UniTED group is partnered with a sister group on a different continent to support each other in organising their campuses and create more individual collaborations on projects to form global citizens. UniTED also uses our website to link students, anywhere in the world, who wish to volunteer to student projects, creating international collaborations both in person and remotely.

What challenges did the organisation face? How were these resolved?

We learnt several crucial lessons from our pilot group at Makerere and its partnership with Oxford. First, work with teams of students, not individuals. Projects run by individuals were much more likely to fail to reach their goals, as the student would have other commitments, had nobody to hold them accountable to the planned activities, and could get demotivated quickly. We now advise all students to work in teams and will give personalised support to individuals' projects only in exceptional circumstances.

Second, outline the purpose of any international collaboration from the start. Several of our initial collaborations were set up as experiments, rather than having particular tasks that the project managers had in mind for the international volunteers to do remotely. The result was often prolonged meetings with little tangible output and no long-term relationships. More successful partnerships were on a hand-washing campaign, which needed research on similar campaigns around the world, and connecting two groups of lawyers to provide legal aid.

Finally, have a plan for beyond the year/graduation. Several projects completely shut down when their leaders graduated, despite having decent ideas. Other groups were set back by poor communication between the old and new student leaders. Had all the projects planned properly, they could have communicated their visions to new leadership or simply allocated their time better while the originators were still in control.

What was the overall outcome?

UniTED was created in 2013 from a partnership between students from Oxford and Makerere universities. In September 2013, a pilot programme was launched at Makerere University to establish the most effective way to both support projects around campus and create international partnerships. By summer 2014, the model of UniTED groups was established and spread to six other universities around Uganda. At the start of 2015, UniTED opened up applications to create UniTED groups and volunteer on projects anywhere in the world.

A snapshot of results follows:

- Currently, UniTED has a network of almost 3,000 students and 106 projects at eight universities.

- 23 students have gone on exchanges between Makerere and Oxford (15 from Makerere; 8 from Oxford) and there have been 7 in-depth collaborations on projects from climate change mitigation to a hand-washing campaign.

- 500 students attended our Innovating Change conference at Makerere in February 2014.

- Two projects were successfully supported, reaching the 2014 Global Social Entrepreneurships Competition's finals in Seattle, USA.

- Overwhelmingly positive testimonies from students: 'I have gained new friendships as well as essential skills' – Tyra, Oxford; 'UniTED has given so much hope to student projects' – Sadam, Makerere.
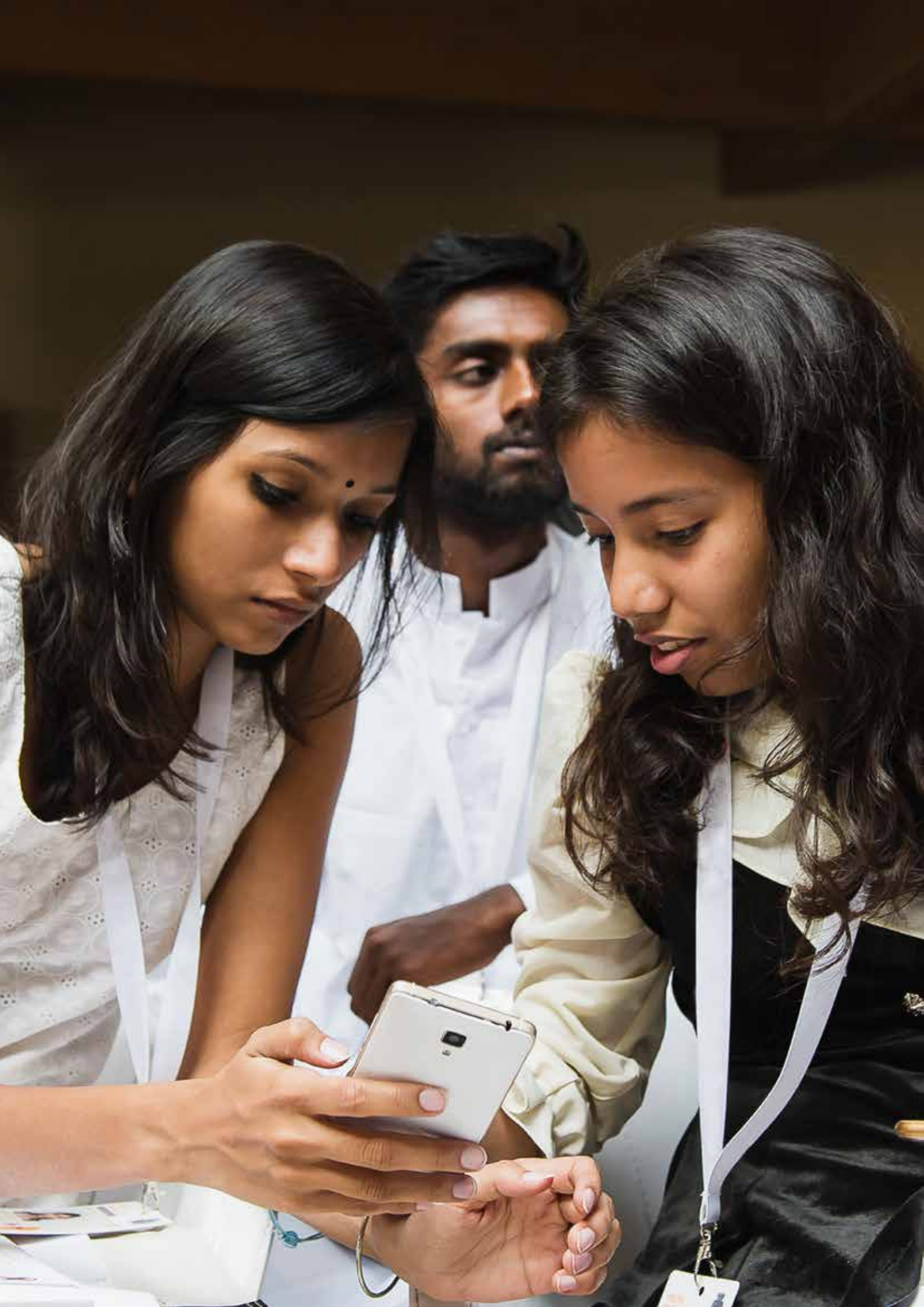
4. The Vision for National Student Organisations

This chapter summarises the common themes that were discovered through the analysis of the surveys and interviews. We will then propose a vision of where we believe NSOs could be in the future and what they could be doing. Developing a vision of this sort will, it is hoped, trigger discussions on what any new, developed or enhanced NSO might look and feel like. The recommendations in the following chapter will help support NSOs to reach this vision.

4.1 Common themes

From the survey feedback, the interviews and the case studies, some common themes have emerged about issues facing NSOs:

- A lack of resources was seen as a consistent problem, and inconsistent access was seen as an inhibitor to the growth and development of student organisations.

- Linked to the resources issues were concerns about a reliance on volunteers, with some noting that the paid full-time 'sabbatical' officer model utilised by some NSOs would be helpful.

- Growing membership and/or engaging members in wider involvement was seen as a challenge that NSOs had not been able to address fully.

- Some NSOs felt that their input was not valued by the government of their country. If the student voice is not being effectively promoted or heard, that could lead to problems in the future.

- Linked to the previous point, there were some issues around legal recognition and the formal extent to which students are involved in consultations on issues that affect them.

- Stakeholders believe that the collective student voice, through student organisations, has a high potential.

However, student organisations face several significant challenges, including political standing, infrastructure and the need for capacity building.

4.2 Towards a common vision

It is recognised that each national or local student organisation will need to forge its own path. By working with other agencies, it is hoped that it can provide effective, autonomous and valued input into the development of the curriculum and the services/situation of students. The following vision attempts to describe a potential future if student efforts to develop or create an NSO are supported and developed.

4.2.1 They will be working in partnership

National student organisation representatives will be **supported to participate in committees that affect education** and consulted about all aspects of the student experience, both academic and non-academic, in a spirit of partnership and co-operation, at both university and government level. They will be involved in curriculum co-creation projects and initiatives. Sector organisations and governments will understand and **value the role of the student representatives** and the structures that support them. Academic staff and HEI leaders will recognise the value in promoting the wider engagement of students and will encourage those students who volunteer for these roles. Government departments will accept NSOs

as **critical friends** that may, from time to time, disagree with government policy and may through campaigning seek to influence or change a decision. They will be free from external coercion. Educational decision-makers will value and use critical feedback, and NSOs will play a crucial role in developing the education sector. In addition to seeking partnership within their own country NSOs will seek to engage with, learn from and work on mutual objectives with similar organisations in other countries, particularly around areas that require a global response.

4.2.2 They will have robust systems of governance and democracy

National students' organisations will have **constitutions** agreed by their members (whether individuals or local student organisations) and these documents will be widely available so that how members can set the direction of the organisation is clear to all. It will be recognised that any student organisation will need help from time to time to be able to make the democratic aspirations expressed in its constitution a reality; this might be from umbrella organisations such as the CSA or from agencies within the specific country. The constitution will outline the rules and regulations for the **free and fair election** of officers of the organisation. There will be contested elections that not only provide an experience in citizenship and engagement but will also raise the profile of the NSO itself and will demonstrate that students are fully engaged in the future of their countries.

Students' organisations will strengthen their **governance structures**, possibly seeking a stronger legal status that sets out both rights and responsibilities. The **democratic processes** of any NSO will be legitimate and will be accessible to the full range of student and youth members, whatever the student's programme of study, location, circumstances or gender. Decision-making and consultative processes led by the NSO will be linked to an effective consultative system linked to the democratic structures of local students' unions backed up and informed by their class representative systems. Robust democratic systems will ensure that concerns presented to government education departments and the sector as a whole will be based on credible and legitimate deliberation.

Where there is positive enabling legislation that supports student representation, student organisations should be **legally compliant**. All NSOs will **have long-term plans** that set the overall direction of the organisation while at the same time accommodating short-term objectives set by annually elected officers.

4.2.3 They will have access to adequate resources and support

Every NSO will have access to an appropriate number of elected officers who can act in a **full-time** capacity, remunerated while taking a break from their studies, allowing them to focus on their role and make sure that the student voice is heard by decision-makers at a national level as well as providing the necessary leadership to encourage wider engagement and consult with members in an appropriate way.

Elected student officers will be working alongside a **professional staff team** whose key focus is the future development and continuity of the organisation. At a minimum, elected officers will have administrative support to ensure the organisation can fulfil its governance obligations, alongside strong policy and development support to give advice that empowers officers and backs up their representative role. These members of staff will have access to continuous professional development services based on nationally agreed standards of practice and will be committed to supporting a student-led organisation.

Elected officers will have access to **learning and development opportunities**, enhancing their skills to represent their members effectively. They will participate in networks with their peers from other organisations within their country and beyond, to exchange and develop good practice. Student organisations in the same geographical vicinity will co-operate with each other and share resources.

National student organisations will have a well-developed **handover programme** for the annual changeover of officers; these processes, alongside the support of professional staff, will ensure a vital level of continuity for the organisation. NSOs will receive an **adequate source of revenue** provided by membership affiliation and/or government/sector grants to cover their salary and infrastructure costs as well as a range of activities agreed by the student

members. The members, through democratic processes, will agree the annual expenditure in a budget.

4.2.4 They will have active members

National student organisations will represent and be reflective of their diverse membership; **disadvantaged and minority groups** of students will participate in NSO structures. Committees and structures will be gender balanced. Students will receive **information** about the role and purpose of the NSO they can join or are part of, at the point of registering to be a student. Ways in which to actively contribute to the work of an NSO will be readily available and students will be encouraged to be fully engaged, not only by their peers but also by their lecturers and others engaged in the education sector. The NSO will be visible and its student union members will understand the range of services provided and will be eager to join and take part.

4.2.5 They will facilitate and encourage local student activity

Energetic processes for students to participate and have their voice heard are seen as the key **to improving teaching and learning**. Local students' organisations will be key players in the development and nurturing of the **student academic community**; there will be social space and the opportunity to engage in co-curricular activities and sports; students will be able to produce their own publications as well as using social media and a web presence to enhance engagement and accountability linking them with each other, their national student representatives and international structures.

5. Recommendations: a Framework for the Future

There are numerous examples of approaches and strategies that have worked throughout the Commonwealth. Of course not every solution will find resonance or relevance everywhere. This chapter suggests discussions that could take place between governments, the education sector, student and youth organisations, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the CSA on strategies that could be employed to enhance the effectiveness of NSOs across the Commonwealth. The creation of the CSA is a positive step forward that, it is hoped, can facilitate mutual help and support for student organisations in the Commonwealth. The objective of these recommendations is to ensure that NSOs across the commonwealth are active, engaged, influential and respected. Underlying this is the aspiration that they should be legitimate, representative and democratic organisations that not only are beneficial for students during their period of study but also inculcate values and behaviours that will bring benefit to civic society and its development in the long term. It is recommended that three key aims be considered:

1. increase the number of NSOs in the Commonwealth;

2. increase the effectiveness of NSOs in the Commonwealth;

3. raise the awareness of student organisations globally, nationally and locally.

These aims will contribute to the enhancement of further and higher education in the Commonwealth. We will examine each aim in turn.

5.1 Increase the number of NSOs in the Commonwealth

Student organisations can make a significant contribution to civic society as well as the aims and objectives of the Commonwealth itself. NSOs operating within the Commonwealth can make a significant contribution to creating more equal, democratic societies as well as the overall cohesion and connectivity of the Commonwealth itself.

5.1.1 Work with ministries and the education sector for funding and approval of NSOs

There needs to be an agreed understanding of the role and purpose of any NSO. NSOs are more likely to attract support and funding if their purpose is seen as a critical part of any system of further and higher education. One way of approaching this may be to develop a mutually agreed charter that would outline an agreed set of principles of what they exist to do as well as defining what the organisation's relationship is to its government, the education sector and other decision-makers in general. Any charter needs to be flexible and not overly prescriptive and could be linked to an overall organisational development framework.

Figure 5.1 Students as partners in the academic and national community?
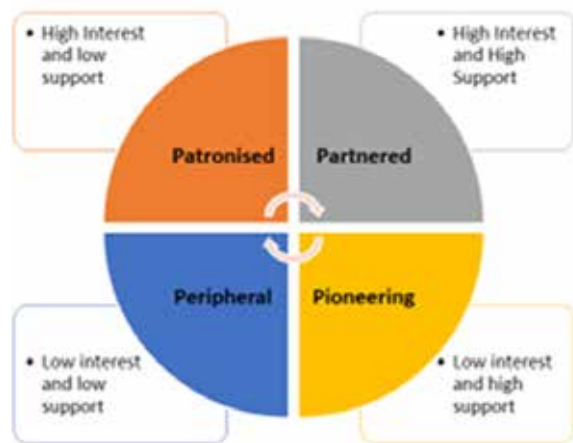
Similar sorts of agreement need to exist at a local level to ensure that rectors value and, where required, act on the opinions of students. Student representatives need to be present at all levels of an institution. At both national and local levels it is recommended that the approach be one of partnership.

Figure 5.1 is based on an essay by Peter Cadogan (1998), who for over 30 years served at a senior level in students' unions in the United Kingdom: the model that he developed enables student leaders, students and stakeholders to analyse and map where their NSO currently is and where they might wish to be in the future.

Peripheral: the institution/government provides little support and it views the students' organisation as marginal to its overall purpose and mission.

Patronised: the institution/government takes a stance of minimising the dis-benefits and requires an involvement in the governance of the students' organisation out of all proportion to its purpose.

Pioneering: the institution/government provides support but distances itself on the basis that the students' organisation fulfils a useful role but if it runs into problems then it is on its own.

Partnered: the institution regards the student organisation as key in terms of its strategic intent. The interaction between the students' organisation and the institution/government produces a positive force for development.

The left-hand side of the diagram depends very much on the attitude of an individual institution and/or government and sector organisations. If they are dismissive or if they seek to control then they will not get the best feedback and insight from student leaders. The right-hand side of the diagram, again, is in the gift of the authorities but at the same time it is up to any student organisations to seize the opportunities and decide the kind of relationship they wish to build in order to achieve their aims of making student lives, and the education system they study within, better.

Figure 5.2 Linking local and national development
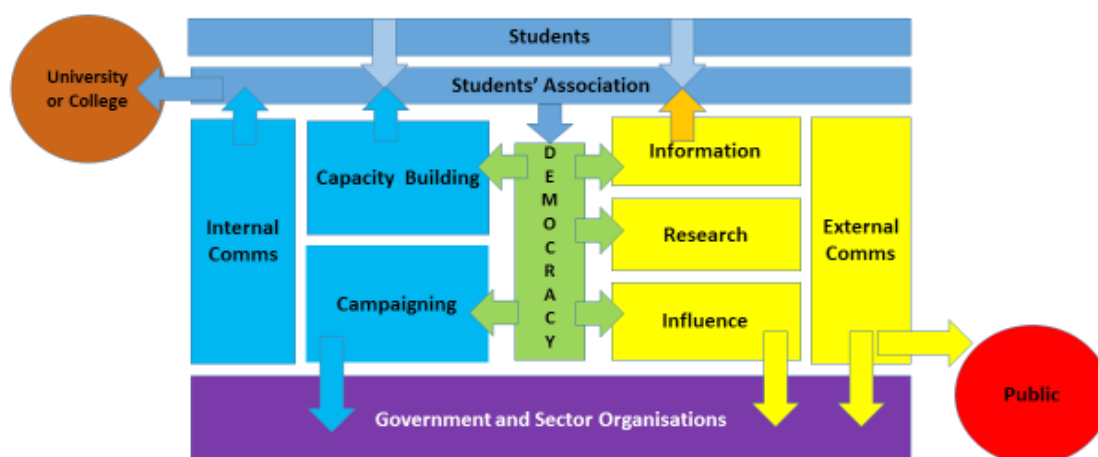
5.1.2 Work with institutional student organisations to develop national student organisations and membership

Any NSO would derive its legitimacy from its members, whether that be local/regional student organisations or individual student members. Figure 5.2 describes the way in which local student organisations can be linked to a national organisation and the typical kinds of activities and support a national organisation can provide.

At the top of the diagram are the students, who should be the key focus of any NSO. Individual students may find it difficult to approach their university or college about any problems or issues (educational or personal) they may be facing; they may also need an infrastructure that allows them to meet together, socialise, establish clubs and societies of shared interest, play sport and generate a sense of belonging and loyalty to their institution. To facilitate this, students' associations or unions have often been created, run by and for their member students and playing a central role in the life of the institution. Any NSO needs to do two things:

- provide support for local student organisations and their officers;

- act on behalf of their members in presenting student issues and concerns to national decision-makers.

Typically, therefore, an NSO will engage in:

- **Capacity building:** it will support local student organisations by providing constitutional and legal advice, training and development events for student leaders, advice on organisational development and, at times, mediation and support when there may be tensions within the student body.

- **Research:** student concerns and aspirations for change need to be based on evidence and genuine deeply held feelings from the student body. Such research underpins advice and information that an NSO might give to a local students' organisation, or papers and policy discussions any NSO might have with government, sector organisations and other national decision-makers as part of its overall influencing work.

- **Campaigning:** there will be times when students feel they need to back up the representative work carried out by an NSO by creating greater awareness of an issue among the student body and the wider public, or making the case for a change of policy that they believe will benefit students and make their lives better.

- **Communications (internal and external):** it is crucial that any NSO have robust communication structures so that its members are able to influence policy development and are clear about where, when and how they can engage in debate and discussion with their peers. They also need to be aware of the range of services any NSO might provide.

- **Democracy:** central to the diagram is the democratic control and overview of all the NSO's activities. The views expressed at a national level need to be clearly linked to debate and discussion at a local level (class, course and faculty representatives are a vital part of this process). If local democracy is robust and representative, then this in turn enhances the legitimacy of any NSO.

All of this requires a positive environment in which to flourish, with responsibilities and actions for student organisations, stakeholders and government departments. Investment and support in NSOs are not just of benefit for students; they build an experience of active citizenship and help develop values that students and student leaders will take with them in their future careers. Some of those student leaders will assume leadership positions across a range of disciplines; indeed many Commonwealth leaders today began their careers as student leaders.

It is important to note that a checklist has been designed for effective NSOs (see Appendix 4). This checklist has been created to help student organisations and stakeholders identify areas of best practice and areas for improvement. The researchers wish to stress that this checklist has been designed to support the diagram in Figure 5.2 and that there may be areas or examples not covered, as it is important to understand the differences in contexts and cultures within the Commonwealth.

5.1.3 Strengthen or develop an umbrella organisation

There is always a tension in the way in which student organisations define their political approach, and the position that a student organisation takes can be welcome or otherwise to government and other decision-makers. Coming to any sort of position is, of course, political but it is not necessarily party political. A number of student organisations have formal links with political parties in their countries; they will, no doubt, be consulted by their parent party on matters of policy relating to students and young people and if that party comes into power then the ideas generated may well find their way into legislation. Of course the obverse of this is that party-aligned student organisations can be dismissed by a government of a different political persuasion. Umbrella organisations that seek to represent students' unions on a local level will engage with internal debate but will also be in a position to represent a unified voice to decision-makers, having come to a collective view. It would be worthwhile for the key stakeholders in member countries to discuss how any umbrella organisation could be made stronger, or indeed if it is feasible to create one.

5.1.4 Consider an 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in' system of membership

A system that requires students to opt in will struggle to maximise the potential membership that could form part of the organisation, and a good deal of energy can be spent just keeping up the numbers. Of course it can be argued that if an organisation is well run and effective then students will wish to join, but if there is a constant focus on resourcing the organisation then it makes it that much harder to focus on making the organisation more attractive and can detract from representing student views at a governmental level. The provision of university funds to students' organisations at a local level and a consistent source of income from members for NSOs can help to create a level playing field in which members have a choice about the extent of their involvement in the students' union, much as they have a choice about how they might involve themselves in their local community, local and national politics. Organisations that rely on those who can afford to join or who have a particular motive for joining may miss out on being able to fully represent the student voice. Relying only on those who can afford it creates further stratification and could well be counter to values around equality and diversity. There are a couple of examples of automatic membership and funding arrangements being removed through legislation, in Australia and New Zealand. Of course automatic membership does not imply the automatic engagement of student members. That has to be worked on; students need to be kept informed of debates and given every

opportunity to intervene in the policy development of the NSO. In that sense an NSO or indeed a local student organisation is like local government: citizens are entitled to vote and take part – or not – as they see fit or as they are motivated; they pay their taxes for collective benefits and again can take action with others if they feel resources are not being allocated in a fair way. It is suggested that the experience of the student movement in which students are invited to take responsibility for their 'community' is an experience and set of life skills that will transfer to wider civic society in the future. Student leaders, the sector and government agencies have a responsibility to promote this way of working and thinking.

5.1.5 Utilise legal recognition to enhance partnership and the student voice

Legislation that seeks to restrict what NSOs and their national representatives can discuss, or limits the action they can take to highlight student concerns, will not foster a sense of partnership and co-operation in the long term. On the positive side, NSOs can play a valuable role in the development of an effective education system through representation to government, quality assurance bodies and other sector stakeholders, and legislation that recognises that will, it is hoped, create a positive environment and culture in which students can play their full part as co-creators of knowledge, and channel student issues and concerns to those who are in a position to do something about them. Recognition is better than restriction.

5.2 Increase the effectiveness and sustainability of national student organisations in the Commonwealth

The report has demonstrated that there is considerable variation in capacity and organisational strength throughout the international student movement. Commonwealth countries are no exception. Some NSOs employ many staff, have agreed long-term sustainable plans and have well-established governance arrangements while others are entirely voluntary organisations, with few formal structures or processes. This section explores options for developing an agreed framework for organisational development and mechanisms by which to support new NSOs to emerge or provide a developmental focus for NSOs to enhance their existing capacity.

5.2.1 Develop a framework for national student organisations

It is recommended that the CSA work with its member organisations to establish a development framework for NSOs that is underpinned by a set of guiding principles.

This framework should be designed to provide a practical tool to support organisational development for NSOs. The framework could also help ministries of education to understand the role of these organisations and support their growth. Such operating principles, guiding development frameworks and quality marks are not alien concepts to the student movement. We offer some established examples below.

5.2.2 Develop a benchmark for high-quality student organisations

It is proposed that a benchmark tool be created to assess and develop student organisations in the Commonwealth. A similar tool has been developed by NUSUK. In 2013 NUSUK launched a new quality framework (Quality Students' Unions) to ensure the quality, standards and overall effectiveness of its member student organisations. This quality mark works as a single management tool that interlocks with, and complements, relevant standards and codes that already exist within the student movement, as well as in the charitable and education sectors. To meet the minimum standards and be considered an accredited students' organisation, an organisation will need to be compliant with both its statutory obligations and accepted best practice. Self-evaluation drives self-reflection and planning, which are both fundamental parts of the annual cycle of every organisation. As a result, the quality mark will become an intrinsic part of a union's annual cycle rather than an 'add on'. Quality Students' Unions measures the performance of the student organisation in relation to the following three core areas, detailed in Figure 5.3:

- **Governance, leadership and management:** how the organisation manages, plans, controls and monitors its activities. Threshold standards are set in line with good practice and statutory requirements that will not vary greatly from one union to another.

- **Activities:** how well the organisation does what it sets out to do, how well the union aligns its activities to the needs of its members and how effective these activities are.

- **Outcomes:** the positive impacts the organisation has on its members. Outcomes will be linked to the work of the Impact Project, which is currently being undertaken as part of the wider work of NUSUK Charitable Services.

Figure 5.3 Three core areas of student organisations' performance

Critically, these core areas are interdependent; for example, a student organisation that has very strong governance, leadership and management and very strong activities will invariably have very strong outcomes. Performance in any two of the core areas will essentially predict the performance in the third. This interdependency should enable organisations to use these three core areas to effectively and accurately analyse their own performance and let them be accredited with a high level of confidence. Each of these core areas is further broken down into a series of components, which detail different aspects of a successful student organisation:

- governance, leadership and management
    - strategic planning
    - relationships and partnerships
    - governance
    - democracy
    - people;
- activities
    - communication
    - services
    - participation
    - representation and campaigning;
- outcomes
    - review and evaluation
    - context.

Further details and examples can be found at NUSUK Quality Students' Unions, http://qualitystudentsunions.org.uk/ 2013.

In 2008, the ESU published a Students' Union Development Handbook as part of a process of building a stronger student movement. This document focused on the role and function of the student movement at an international level. The ESU argued that student organisations are more closely akin to social movements than NGOs and used this as a basis to suggest a range of areas where students' organisations, both local and national, could learn from each other in order to be more effective. The work was underpinned by four key pillars of the student movement: representativeness, openness, democracy and independence.

- **Representativeness:** this was defined as how far the student movement bodies reflect the formal characteristics of the student population and derived mainly from formal structural and political organisations. Indicators include total numbers of students involved in electoral process, regional balance of participation, and balance between types of institution.

- **Openness:** the ESU considered accessibly of students' organisations critical for the maintenance of an effective, powerful and legitimate student movement. Socio-economic background, race, sexual or political orientation, gender and religious belief were all identified as key factors that accessibility had to address. The ESU also argued that formal equality is unlikely to be sufficient and that often empowerment policies play an important role in ensuring accessibility and openness.

- **Democracy:** both elections and decision-making processes indicate democracy. The ESU expressed the view that, regardless of structure, students' organisations must be grounded in the popular vote. It identified the importance of pluralism in decision-making, accountability and active student participation.

- **Independence:** the ESU defined this pillar as 'the absence of mainstreaming influence in representation and the democratic processes'. While it is clear that students' organisations operate within the academic community, elections and democratic processes must be carried out with no interference from the authorities so

that unions can legitimately participate through their own chosen representatives. Regulations endorsing independent student elections contribute greatly to the successful 'interdependent role' of unions.

More on the model described by ESU can be found by consulting *Oye, Jungblut and Chachava (eds) The European Students' Union, The Student Union Development Handbook, 2008*.

5.2.3 Develop a framework for student organisations

The NUSUK and ESU approach to student organisations development offer precedence for frameworks as a tool for student organisational development at both national and international levels. The huge variation in capacity revealed by this report indicates that there may be value in establishing a sufficiently a clear framework to provide a roadmap for national student organisational development across the Commonwealth. It would clearly be important not to be overly prescriptive in the development of a framework, so adopting a principle-based approach would most likely be the most appropriate approach to allow flexibility in size, scale, financial arrangements and cultural context. Clearly the development of any framework would need to involve representatives from NSOs. We would certainly recommend establishing a diverse group of representatives from a range of countries to feed into the process remotely. The CSA structures may allow this within their normal cycle of business. Sections of future meetings of the CSC could also be allocated to developmental and training sessions for the student leaders present, about the principles of any framework.

One possible starting point for a framework could be the Commonwealth Secretariat's own three goals, which appear to translate well in underpinning any framework for student organisations. This is illustrated below:

- **Commonwealth goal:** strong democracy, rule of law, promotion and protection of human rights and respect for diversity. NSO guiding principles: democratic and student-led organisation, operating within a clear legal framework, championing the rights of students within a society, and recognising and advocating on behalf of the diversity of students.

- **Commonwealth goal:** inclusive growth and sustainable development. NSO guiding principles: clear plans for the future and having considered how it will meet its objectives in a sustainable way.

- **Commonwealth goal:** a well-connected and networked Commonwealth. NSO guiding principles: working closely with key decision-makers inside and outside government to improve education, and working collaboratively with students and other student organisations both in their own country and across the Commonwealth.

In addition, a set of principles was established in order to formulate the research basis for this project. The questions used throughout this research piece could also be adapted and accompanied by criteria as a starting point for the NSO's framework.

5.2.4 Build capacity and support for organisational development

With the creation of the CSA there is a tremendous opportunity to provide a strong focus on capacity building and development in which student organisation members help each other out by sharing documents, policy approaches, innovative ideas and being able to meet together. Just about all the respondents to the survey indicated that there was a real appetite for this type of activity. Having access to a CSA hub with a document library and the opportunity to ask questions and to evaluate ideas in an online space would be of great value, as would periodic networking meetings, probably on a regional basis. In addition to the Commonwealth regions themselves there are other umbrella networks with which member countries can co-operate. The fraught history of developing international student organisations has shown that focusing on collaboration and sharing good practice in the first instance can be highly productive.

To support the organisational development and capacity of NSOs against a framework as described above, it is advised that a set of resources and programmes be developed and coordinated centrally. In this section we set out a range of work programmes, which would help ensure strong and sustainable student organisations for the future. Each of these approaches would require a different level of financial resource and all would require central co-ordination, most probably by the CSA

acting through its regional structures. Such an approach would require a commitment of staff time (or consultancy) to manage programmes and coordinate the support that would be essential. Again, the recently established CSA would appear to be an appropriate body to host this capacity given its role as an umbrella body and its connection to member organisations. A range of funding options, including grants, membership fees and 'pay for use' approaches, would need to be considered in order to ensure this approach was itself sustainable. However, we have tried to demonstrate that costs for development work can be kept to a minimum provided there is a commitment to sharing best practice, expertise and time in the spirit of international collectivism between NSOs within the Commonwealth.

5.2.5 Create learning and development opportunities

Learning and development for the people involved (elected student officers, volunteers and support staff) is critical for developing effective NSOs. There are two elements: induction and support for national officers; and shared practice and learning.

Induction and handover support for national officers

This research has highlighted the importance of an effective handover and induction between elected student leaders. Planning a clear handover process and inducting officers so that they clearly understand their roles and responsibilities is critical in determining both how effective the NSO is in working with decision-makers and also how sustainable the organisation itself is likely to be in the future. Based on the responses to the ideas posed in this report and consideration of the Commonwealth goals, we have been able to identify the following knowledge and skill areas, which would appear to be consistently required by elected students leaders across the Commonwealth:

knowledge:

1.   national political context, key decision-makers, influences and drivers of policy

2.   education policy, historical context and in-depth analysis of the current situation

3.   national student movement, cultural and historical context as well as current processes for decision-making and operational setup

4. knowledge of effective students' organisations, e.g. democracy, sustainability, handover, purpose and relationship with institutions and governments

5. knowledge and understanding of the Commonwealth and the role of the CSA;

skills:

1. personal leadership and values

2. being an effective representative, understanding the diversity of the student membership

3. ability to make connections and build networks

4. ability to influence and campaign at a national level.

While some of the knowledge and skill areas which student officers require in order to excel in their roles will be context- and country-specific, others are likely to be consistent for student leaders from right across the Commonwealth. It is therefore possible to develop tools and programmes centrally, which can provide some level of support and consistency in induction of elected officers. Of the skills and knowledge areas identified above, it is likely that knowledge areas 1–3 would vary considerably between contexts and therefore would be best delivered by national organisations at a local level. Areas 4–7 are principles rather than context-based and therefore more likely to be relatively consistent across all Commonwealth member countries and possibly delivered on a collective basis.

Below are some options for how skills and knowledge areas could be delivered in practice:

• guidance and induction documents available online;

• training materials delivered locally;

• online training modules for engagement;

• a centrally run leadership development programme;

• staff development options – possibly through regional providers.

Teach For All is an example of an international membership organisation that offers this type of international leadership development programme.

Shared practice and learning

This research has demonstrated the sheer breadth and variety of NSOs across the Commonwealth. It is recommended that consideration be given to capitalising on this diversity of these skills in the interests of development, through:

• a shared online hub;

• a development tool kit;

• communities of practice;

• mentoring programmes.

Each one is described in turn.

Shared online hub: developing a shared online hub, forum and updates section would be an extremely simple way of sharing practice and guidance for NSOs. It could be a hosting site to which all national organisations are able to both submit and access developmental materials such as thought pieces, best practice stories and other resources that all relate back to the development framework discussed in the previous section. This user-generated content approach has the potential to be broadly self-sustaining and cost relatively little. Yet such sites take time to establish. As regularly updated relevant content would be key, this approach would require centrally organised promotion and editorial oversight. The same hub could provide opportunities for online learning, webinars and an online assessment tool as described in section 5.2.2. The hub could also form a repository of learning and development materials that can be used and adapted to suit a local context.

Development tool kit: this report has shown that 51 per cent of Commonwealth countries do not have an NSO. Developing a tool kit of advice and guidance for those seeking to establish one may further encourage and foster the development of such organisations. The tool kit would cover issues around membership models; financing and making the case for resources; governance; constitutional and legal guidance; making the case for an NSO; stakeholder engagement; capacity building; training and development; communications and how to utilise modern technology to the maximum effect; membership engagement; volunteer management and co-ordination; developing an influencing and public affairs strategy; and establishing an office or centre of communication.

Communities of practice: the development of communities of practice around particular issues is another approach that may help to support shared learning and expertise between organisations. Communities of practice are groups of people who come together because of a shared interest or issue. The approach has been adopted and implemented successfully by the Association of College Unions International (ACUI) for everything from marketing to sustainability. While the approach is largely self-organising, with staff and volunteers from different organisations agreeing to meet (virtually) to discuss particular issues on a regular basis, some level of central coordination is essential to service the meetings.

Mentoring programme: the establishment of an international mentoring programme that matches student organisation staff and officers throughout the Commonwealth could also be considered as an option for knowledge sharing and capacity building across the movement. Clearly any such relationships would need to be facilitated online, to avoid prohibitive travel costs, but with the provision of guidance and training on how to get the most out of the relationship it could prove to be a valuable process.

5.2.6 Develop consultancy and other support options

Pool of development consultants

Another option to consider is the development of a pool of consultants, either freelance or staff experts from existing Commonwealth student organisations, who could be tasked with undertaking distinct development projects that support capacity building at a national level. This pool would need to be co-ordinated centrally and vetted. It is suggested that a 'pairing' of an established NSO from outside a region partnered with an established region could help provide these sort of interventions. Consultants could be required to undertake assignments with tasks that may include:

- support for establishing NSOs (using the tool kit model outlined in 5.2.5.2);

- overseeing or developing the democratic processes of a student organisation;

- provision of technical or specialist support for policy, strategy or resource development;

- undertaking research and analysis, leading to the production of publications for a national organisation;

- support with particular projects or campaigns.

Brokerage of support for mutual benefit

A less formal approach, which may help complement the ideas outlined above, may be the development of a formal brokerage scheme. National organisations that assess themselves as strong against the principles and frameworks discussed above (outlined in section 5.2.2) could be invited to share their expertise or experience with other national organisations. Such sharing of skills could take place through staff secondment, visits or structured remote support. In exchange for offering support they too would become eligible to receive similar support through brokerage. Rather than charging for this type of support, it would be an exchange of mutual benefit. This model is best co-ordinated centrally and ideally facilitated at a regional level. This would require some staff capacity to co-ordinate and could be funded at least in part by a small administration fee for each brokerage.

5.2.7 Building the research capacity of national student organisations

To be able to influence decision-makers at all levels, NSOs need to invest in, or receive support for, research development. This will allow them to analyse policy initiatives and react to potential new legislation and enable them to proactively develop a policy position that commands widespread student support and can be submitted for discussions with decision-makers. This suggests that any national body needs to be able to recruit professional staff who can provide continuity and ensure the sustainability of the organisation if resources allow. Another option would be to build a network of student researchers who are prepared to volunteer their time.

5.3 Raise the awareness of student organisations globally, nationally and locally

For student organisations to be effective, students need to know how they can influence and shape the direction of their national/local organisation. At the same time, being seen to have a legitimate

role in influencing government and sector decisions will also help to boost the profile of student representation as a whole.

5.3.1 Making governance structures and the documentation that underpins them widely available

Democratic organisations will work only if all members have the ability to access the decision-making structures and feel that, whatever the outcome, they have had a fair opportunity to influence the direction and position of the organisation. The rules, regulations, articles and other documents relating to the governance of the organisation need to be freely and widely available online and, when requested, in printed format. It is also the responsibility of student organisations to proactively keep their membership informed about activities they are engaged in. Linked to this, the accountability structures need to be robust so that members can call their officers to account and engage in an open dialogue on an agreed way forward. The key to all of this is legitimacy. For a student organisation to be of value, its democratic structures must be credible.

5.3.2 Harnessing the power of collaboration and promotion through the Commonwealth Students' Association

As stated above, the newly formed CSA could help to promote many of these discussions and raise the profile of its member national unions. For example, it could host a governance hub on its website that contained up-to-date governance documents from all its members as well as spaces to discuss and develop new approaches. In the longer term, the CSA could develop a set of common standards (perhaps in line with the vision in Chapter 4) that could in time form a developmental tool that would allow NSOs to benchmark the quality of their activities against similar organisations within the Commonwealth family. The support of the Commonwealth Education and Youth team, the appetite for greater co-operation and the recognition that all countries will be developing ever closer educational links make this the right time to enhance the scope and potential of national student representation in developing the active engaged citizens of the future.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1: List of national student organisations in the Commonwealth

Country	Region	National student organisation
Botswana	Africa	Botswana Student Network
Cameroon	Africa	No
Ghana	Africa	National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS)
Kenya	Africa	No
Lesotho	Africa	Lesotho National Union of Students
Malawi	Africa	No
Mauritius	Africa	Mauritius Union of Students Council
Mozambique	Africa	Associaçao dos Estudantes Universitarios de Moçambique
Namibia	Africa	Namibian National Students' Organisation (NANSO)
Nigeria	Africa	National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS)
Rwanda	Africa	No
Seychelles	Africa	University of Seychelles Students Union
Sierra Leone	Africa	National Union of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS)
South Africa	Africa	South African Students Congress
Swaziland	Africa	Swaziland National Union of Students
Uganda	Africa	Uganda National Students Association (UNSA)
United Republic of Tanzania	Africa	Tanzania Higher Learning Institutes Students Organisation (TAHLISO)
Zambia	Africa	Zambia National Students Union
Bangladesh	Asia	Bangladesh Students Association
		Bangladesh Student Union
		National Federation of Youth Organisations in Bangladesh (NFYOB)
Brunei Darussalam	Asia	No
India	Asia	Students Islamic Organisation of India
		Students Federation of India
		National Students' Union of India
		Muslim Students Federation
		Indian National Student Organisation
Malaysia	Asia	No
Maldives	Asia	Maldives National University Student Union

Country	Region	National student organisation
Pakistan	Asia	Peoples Students Federation (PSF)
		Pakistan Student Association
		Pakistan Crescent Youth Organisation (PCYO)
		Islami Jamiat Talaba (IJT)
		Anjuman Talaba-e- Islam
		All Pakistan Youth Federation (APYF)
		All Pakistan Muttahida Student Organization (APMSO)/Muttahida Quaumi Movement
		All Pakistan Mohajir Students Organisations (APMSO)
Singapore	Asia	No
Sri Lanka	Asia	No
Antigua and Barbuda	Caribbean and Americas	No
The Bahamas	Caribbean and Americas	No
Barbados	Caribbean and Americas	No
Belize	Caribbean and Americas	No
Canada	Caribbean and Americas	Canadian Federation of Students (CFS)
		Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA)
Dominica	Caribbean and Americas	No
Grenada	Caribbean and Americas	No
Guyana	Caribbean and Americas	No
Jamaica	Caribbean and Americas	Jamaica Union of Tertiary Students
St Kitts and Nevis	Caribbean and Americas	No
St Lucia	Caribbean and Americas	No
St Vincent and the Grenadines	Caribbean and Americas	No
Trinidad and Tobago	Caribbean and Americas	No
Republic of Cyprus	Europe	Pagkypria Omospondia Foititikon Enoseon
Malta	Europe	Kunsill Studenti Universitarji
United Kingdom	Europe	National Union of Students UK

Country	Region	National student organisation
Australia	Pacific	National Union of Australian University Students
		Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA)
		Council of International Students Australia (CISA)
		National Association of Australian University Colleges (NAAUC)
Fiji Islands	Pacific	No
Kiribati	Pacific	No
Nauru	Pacific	No
New Zealand	Pacific	New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA)
Papua New Guinea	Pacific	No
Samoa	Pacific	No
Solomon Islands	Pacific	Solomon Islands Students Association
Tonga	Pacific	No
Tuvalu	Pacific	No
Vanuatu	Pacific	No

Appendix 2: List of interviewees by country and type

Below is an abbreviated table of the interviewees. In order to keep the interviewees anonymous, only their country and their type of expertise is provided.

Number	Country	Type
1	Australia	Expert
2	Kenya	Expert
3	Canada	Expert
4	Tanzania	Expert
5	Malaysia	Expert
6	UK/Malawi	Expert
7	UK/Nigeria	Expert
8	UK/Mexico	Expert
9	UK/Jamaica	Expert
10	UK/Fiji	Expert
11	UK	Expert
12	UK	Expert
13	UK	Expert
14	UK	Expert
15	UK	Expert
16	UK	Expert
17	UK	Expert
18	Canada	Expert
19	UK	Expert
20	New Zealand	Expert/SU
21	Germany	Expert/SU
22	New Zealand	Ministry
23	Tanzania	Ministry
24	Kenya	SU

Appendix 3: Questions asked in the survey

They survey circulated to student organisations asked the following questions:

1. Which region of the Commonwealth is your organisation based?

2. Which country is your organisation based in?

3. Please state the name of your organisation?

4. When was your organisation established?

5. Does your organisation have national scope?

6. Would you describe your organisation as being political?

7. Are there other organisations with similar scope in your country whose focus is students?

8. Is the existence of student organisations set out in law?

9. What is your organisations legal status?

10. Are you a membership organisation (i.e. your members are individual students or you are an umbrella organisation for a number of student organisations)?

11. If yes, who are your members?

12. If yes, what is your membership as a percentage of the national total of eligible members?

13. Does your organisation have a governing document which sets out decision making processes?

14. What is the purpose of your organisation?

15. Is this set out in a written document?

16. Where does the direction and leadership of the organisation come from?

17. "A democratic student organisation is autonomous and free from coercion, it has appropriate lines of accountability and governance structures in place. All members have an opportunity to influence the priorities, decisions and actions of the organisation and will be able to hold their elected officers to account" Does this definition apply to your organisation?

18. How and in what ways do members receive information in order that they contribute to decision making?

19. What percentage of your membership regularly participate in your decision making processes?

20. How and from where is your organisation funded?

21. How and in what ways are finance issues managed?

22. How and it what ways are risk issues managed?

23. How and in what ways are legal issues managed?

24. Does your organisation perform audits of any kind?

25. What changes (max.3) would significantly improve your organisation?

26. How and in what ways does your organisation make long-term plans?

27. How is progress monitored against plans?

28. Can you describe the range of opportunities and services you offer to your members?

29. How and in what ways do you know these activities reflect the needs of members?

30. How and in what ways do you communicate with your members?

31. How do members and other stakeholders communicate with you?

32. In what ways does your organisation involve members to bring about positive changes for students?

33. Is the organisation seen as a valued source of student opinion by government and education decision makers?

34. How regularly would you estimate someone from your organisation meets with ministries or government departments with responsibility for education, and/or youth?

35. Are you able to offer an example of a time when your organisation has influenced legislation or the policy of government or a political party?

36. If possible, please explain or given an example to illustrate your answer?

37. Does your organisation undertake research to inform your policy?

38. How do you know when your organisations activities are effective?

Appendix 4: Checklist for effective national student organisations

This checklist is in support of Figure 5.2, under the recommendation 'Work with institutional student organisations to develop national student organisations and membership'. This checklist has been created to help student organisations and stakeholders identify areas of best practice and areas for improvement. The researchers wish to stress that this checklist has been designed to support the above diagram and that there may be areas or examples not covered, as it is important to understand the differences of contexts and cultures within the Commonwealth.

Capacity

- The NSO is able to lead or facilitate officer development programmes that provide training for elected officers and volunteers.

- Student organisations are able to access advice and guidance on democratic structures, staffing and organisational development support from (or facilitated by) the NSO.

- The NSO is able to support its members to provide effective representatives both internally within the institution and externally to national bodies.

- Student leaders have a clear view of the individual and collective benefits of taking on a leadership role.

- Opportunities to contribute and to become more widely involved in the NSO are widely promoted and local officers encouraged to contribute at a national level.

Campaigning

- The right of students to campaign locally, regionally and nationally on behalf of its members is recognised and supported by the government, decision-makers and wider society.

- Volunteers and activists have access to developmental events that look at ways they can influence public opinion and civic life in their country. The NSO seeks to empower local student groups to take up issues of concern to them.

Communications (internal and external)

- Student organisations/members are kept up to date with the activities of the NSO through regular mailings, web presence and social media.

- The NSO communicates agreed policies and student opinion through the national media and other outlets.

- The NSO has access to the requisite communication tools.

- The NSO proactively reaches out to its members and seek to engage them in the activities and governance of the organisation.

- National student representatives make themselves available for accountability and scrutiny by their members.

- The NSO ensures that it is in regular contact with its members and that there is a clear communication plan for the organisation.

- The NSO has clearly designated headquarters or centres at which it can be contacted and officers/volunteers can work.

- The NSO has systems to seek and evaluable feedback and opinions from students, as well as systems that can evaluate its overall impact in wider society. Members are able to explain what the NSO does on their behalf and how they can direct its overall work.

Democracy/governance

- There are a series of written constitutional and governance documents for the NSO, freely available to members, that describe how members can have input into the collective NSO's policy development. These procedures are reviewed at agreed intervals to take account of new developments and good practice.

- Student needs and aspirations are debated openly and contribute to the policy development process. The members are at the heart of the democratic process.

- There is a long-term strategic plan for the NSO, agreed by the members of that organisation, that can accommodate changes in policy and manifesto pledges made by elected officers. The plan relates directly to the needs of its members, both current and future.

- The NSO has a clear statement outlining its fundamental purpose linked to an inspiring vision and agreed mission (outlined in the strategic plan).

- An annual report outlining the organisation's impact is circulated to its members.

- The student representative body has full-time paid officers who are able to devote their time to channelling student opinion to decision-makers.

- The NSO has robust election systems that enable candidates to get their message across and are seen as free and fair. All members are empowered to vote and are able to make a considered judgement about whom to vote for. There is a clear procedure for removing elected officers from office if required.

- The NSO is a student-led body, open, transparent and accountable to its members, and they are able to influence the political, financial and strategic direction of the NSO.

- All elected student representatives are able to access training and development to develop the essential knowledge, skills and confidence to carry out their roles and provide effective leadership. There is an agreed induction programme.

- The NSO is able to attend international meetings to develop and exchange ideas and good practice, through the CSA and other relevant bodies.

- The NSO has access to or will proactively seek external advice and guidance and can utilise independent guidance for elections, legal compliance and financial scrutiny.

- The NSO has access to a regular source of income through agreed membership fees, government grants and funding from other bodies. Where feasible, the NSO is able to engage in fundraising for additional activities.

- A budget outlining projected income and expenditure is presented to the membership annually, as are audited accounts for the past financial year.

- There are clear financial procedures with safeguards to ensure the proper stewardship of resources.

Research

- The student representative body has sufficient infrastructure to enable it to employ research staff to support the elected student representatives.

- The student representative body is able to back up its policy statements and submissions with evidence of student opinion.

- Student leaders have access to the necessary information to enable them to brief and support their members as well as participate in national policy development.

Information

- The NSO is able to provide background information and useful guides to elected representatives in its member students' unions.

- Research, briefings and statistics that explain current policy developments are produced in an accessible format for students' unions/members.

Influence

- Government ministers and sector officials regularly explain the extent to which they value the input and participation of students. Student feedback is seen as important and the NSO is seen as a 'critical friend' at a national level.

- Student representatives are able to secure regular meetings with a country's education minister and officials in the ministry. The NSO is constantly developing its relationships with the government and other decision-makers on behalf of and for the benefit of their members.

- Government respects the autonomy and supports the accountability of the NSO.

- Student organisations are seen as important partners within universities and colleges.

- There are formal mechanisms for student representatives to have input into legislation that has an impact on their educational experience, and there is evidence of their input.

- There is legislation that states that student representative bodies should be consulted about matters that have an impact on their experience.

- There are other, more informal, opportunities for decision-makers and student representatives to exchange views and ideas.

- Student representatives are engaged with sector agencies focused on education, youth and employment.

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