

Case Study – Scottish Executive (15th CCEM)

Q: What was the challenge?

The Scottish Executive was hosting the 15th Commonwealth Education Ministers Conference in Edinburgh, a complex project involving over 40 organisations in the design, planning and delivery. For the first time, 250 young people from the Commonwealth were attending the Youth Summit to link up into the Ministers' decision making. In addition, there was a parallel symposium of education specialists run by the British Council, who brought a diverse range of professionals working in the world of education together to provide advice and insights to the Ministers. How could we facilitate a successful partnership between these three parallel gatherings and the Commonwealth Secretariat, Scottish Government, the UK Minister for Education and his department, Northern Ireland and Wales?

Q: How did we work together?

We encouraged people to create a collective vision of what could be possible. We created an opportunity for people to be clear on the range of different purposes and outcomes for the Conference early in the planning and adapted to new purposes and outcomes as they arose. Testing and building understanding in this way enabled a number of highly effective innovations, including the decision to include the successful Youth Summit. Our partnership approach extended beyond the planning and preparation, as we led the facilitation of the Youth Summit throughout, facilitated large meetings for the Commonwealth Ministers Conference, mediated behind-the-scenes issues and led the process for the writing of the powerful communiqué that the Ministers signed up to at the end of the event. As external facilitators in all these diverse roles, we were able to provide fresh perspectives on current issues and discussions and enable people to think differently to work effectively with the diversity.

Q: Did the outcome meet expectations?

- The Commonwealth Secretariat saw the Conference as its most successful and effective in involving the diverse range of organisations and individuals to work together and a role model for guiding future Governments
- The exceptional strengths, experience and ideas of everyone involved were drawn on at every opportunity and challenging issues and conversations were addressed and resolved honourably
- This created a way of working that enabled people to take the initiative to make decisions and make things happen during the Conference
- This enabled Ministers, NGOs, Youth, educationalists and the other participants to address and agree upon key outcomes from the Conference and to create its overall success
- The team received the Scottish Executive Excellence Award for this work and the Project Manager was given an OBE.

Q: What did the Scottish Executive learn from the relationship with Questions of Difference?

That complex partnership can produce successful results on budget and on time when the relationships between individuals and organisations are prioritised. The importance of open, innovative and creative facilitation that quickly recognised critical issues, listened to people, held that anything was possible and created balanced discussions that kept moving forward and led to good decision-making.