



House of Commons – House of Lords

Council for Education
in the
Commonwealth
PROGRESS
and **CHALLENGE**
2007-2008

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PROGRESS and CHALLENGE

Report of the Executive Chair 2007 / 8

The constant challenge for the Council is to find more effective ways to support Commonwealth education, both its range and its quality. Board members have taken up the challenge again and achieved another excellent year's programme. It has involved participation in Commonwealth conferences, advocacy at Westminster, memorable lectures and valued research, together with preparation for future years.

Activities were planned mindful of the priorities set for the Council at the last AGM:

1) -- to make a substantive contribution to the main Commonwealth conferences: Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (17 CCEM in Malaysia 2009), Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs in Uganda 2007, and Trinidad and Tobago 2009) and the Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5 in London 2008)

2) -- to strengthen our links with the British Parliament and Government, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth High Commissions and also civil society groups in the UK with similar educational aims.

3) -- to promote education about the Commonwealth among all groups of learning.

Progress in meeting the overall challenge is difficult to measure. Set against our priority areas, our work has not been uniform. However I am confident the Council has made a positive impact this year, sometimes as I will indicate in unexpected ways.

A full account of the year's activities is well documented by Kees Maxey in the Hon. Secretary's Report and details have been posted as they occurred on our website www.cecomm.org.uk. We owe Kees a debt of gratitude for his endless dedication and special contribution in sharing information via e-mail, the website and hard copy.

Especially significant events

We began this time last year on a high with the annual conference entitled, 'Islam and the education of women and girls in the Commonwealth'. The quality of the preparation, the contributions of five Muslim women speakers and the input of delegates, led to the Commonwealth Foundation commissioning a report of the conference and using a section within their submission, 'Engaging with Faith', presented at CHOGM in Kampala.

It was largely due to Rosemary Preston's untiring commitment that the conference proceeded. The report is a tribute to her, and the Muslim women speakers who gave us new insights into the very varied worlds of Islamic education.

The Council's more direct contributions to the Kampala CHOGM were made through the Statement, written by Peter Williams and colleagues, and through our four delegates. Peter attended as Hon. Secretary of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education, and convened a well attended workshop.

Educational progress and challenge since independence was the central theme of two CEC lectures. The first was given by Dr. Kwame Akyeampong, now at Sussex University, formerly Director at the Institute of Education, University of the Cape Coast. He gave a comprehensive review of education in Ghana over the past 50 years and set out clearly the challenges that lie ahead. Dr Akyeampong later gave the lecture in Accra

For the Gladwyn Lecture we invited Prof. Krishna Kumar, Director of the National Council for Educational Research and Training in Delhi, to reflect on education in India over the past 60 years. Those who planned and helped to fund the visit were richly rewarded. Prof. Kumar shared a deep insight into India's past educational development, and then emphasised the importance of education to meet calamities faced not just by India but afflicting the world.

The low point in the year came with the announcement in March in Parliament, from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, that as from 2009 the funding (£2.05 million) of Commonwealth scholarships to the eight most developed countries, would end. The apparent failure of the Government to appreciate the significance of these scholarships to the Commonwealth has caused deep disquiet amongst Commonwealth bodies, the universities involved and former scholars.

CEC members are working with representatives from the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission UK and others to ensure that well informed briefings reach those who may influence the Government. The FCO decision was an unwelcome catalyst for extending links with Parliamentarians and promoting education about the Commonwealth!

Appreciation

As a small organisation, with no paid staff and no office, we depend on our membership for credibility and funding. A sincere thank you to all members for your involvement.

My admiration for CEC's Board members continues to grow, and I extend to each one of them my deepest appreciation. Peter Williams and John Oxenham, our two deputy Executive Chairpersons, deserve special thanks. They are exceptionally gifted and committed people who, given also their extensive educational work in the Commonwealth, are formidable advocates for CEC's cause. They chair our two main committees, write/edit reports, and represent CEC extensively.

Essential to the working of CEC are the contributions of our secretary and treasurer, Kees Maxey and Richard Mawditt. They are excellent, we are grateful to them both. Kees calmly and efficiently keeps CEC running smoothly and updates our increasingly valuable website. Our thanks to Preeti Chandra who at the beginning of the year offered to help Kees, but all too soon had to return to India. We urgently need an assistant secretary do please get in touch if you are interested.

Richard continues to keep our finances in good order, and to improve the financial processes of the committees.

Alba de Souza, Thelma Henderson and Mo Sibbons have faithfully serviced the committees. Our thanks to them, also to Balasubramanyam Chandramohan the projects secretary and John Alexander the new membership secretary. Rosemary Preston's work on last year's annual conference persisted until recently with the completion of the report. We value her vision and determination. Also appreciated are the regular reports we receive from Geoffrey Hulme from the Knowledge Aid in Sierra Leone Project, and the important liaison work Martin Kenyon achieves with Parliament.

Two Board members are standing down this year, Deryn Holland and Felicity Binns. They have served CEC and other Commonwealth bodies steadfastly over many years. Our grateful thanks to them both. We hope to welcome them back onto the Board soon.

Our Parliamentary base remains dependent on our Patrons in the Lords and our Parliamentary Chairpersons in the Commons. Baroness Chalker stood down this year, due to extended work overseas, we wrote thanking her for her contributions. She has not yet been replaced. Lord Judd and Lord Thomson continue to give us great support. In the Commons the MPs, Tim Boswell, Simon Hughes and Sally Keeble, have responded positively to an increased number of requests to speak, chair CEC meetings and table written questions in the House. In their busy schedule this is greatly valued.

The support we receive from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Royal Commonwealth Society and the British Council is also gratefully acknowledged. Their interest, collaboration and financial help in different ways during the year are very much appreciated.

50th Anniversary -- 2009

Planning is underway to ensure that next year we pay tribute to those who founded and developed the Council, and that we strengthen CEC for the coming years. 2009 is also the 50th. Anniversary of CCEM,, to be held in Malaysia, and the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. We hope that together we can make our mark.

Details of events and planned publications will reach members as soon as possible, as will details of a one off fund, in support of a Commonwealth education project. Please encourage others to join in these activities. The best outcome of our anniversary year will be to see greater progress towards improved education across the Commonwealth.