



House of Commons – House of Lords

**Council for Education in
the
Commonwealth**

**Annual Report
of the Honorary Secretary
on Activities in 2007/08**

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Introduction

The year under review included the biannual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, which took place in November 2007 in Kampala, Uganda. It was also the sixtieth anniversary of the independence of India and the fiftieth of Ghana – both of which were celebrated by the Council with meetings in Parliament. The other activities of the Council included a major conference on the education of Islamic girls and women as well as a joint meeting on pastoralist and nomadic education, an issue of the Commonwealth Education News, the continued development of CEC’s website, the work of Knowledge Aid for Sierra Leone and meetings with government ministers.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), Kampala November 2007

Education is only one theme among many discussed by the Heads of Government – but through the efforts of civil society including the Council for Education in the Commonwealth, it has remained an important element of the meeting.

As is its practice, the Council made a submission to the Heads of Government before the meeting, covering the following five points:

- Educational encounter and exchange
- Exchange and work experience in the Commonwealth
- Networking resources for learning to realise human potential
- 50 years of Commonwealth educational cooperation
- Enabling Civil Society

Before the official CHOGM, the Commonwealth Peoples Forum, with the considerable support of the Commonwealth Foundation, was held and a message was presented to the Heads of Government at the beginning of their meeting. The CEC sent a delegation of four members to the CPF and CHOGM who joined with other members of the Consortium for Commonwealth Education which ran a two day seminar under the heading of “Education for Transformation” under the leadership of Peter Williams. The seminar was attended by over 60 people from many parts of the Commonwealth. A keynote address was given by the Hon Geraldine Namirembe Bitamazire, MP, the Ugandan Minister for Education and Sport. She also attended almost the whole meeting along with one of her deputy ministers and several senior officials. The

message from this seminar supported the broader aims of the Education for All goals as set out in Dakar. It was concerned with the continued gender imbalance in many Commonwealth countries, the need to approach education holistically and the need to provide a relevant and quality education. Only in this way would the Education for All aims and the Millennium Development Goals be attained. The final Kampala communiqué from CHOGM “reaffirmed the fundamental role played by education in facilitating social and economic transformation. [The Heads of Government] commended the efforts made by Commonwealth countries in seeking to achieve the MDGs of universal primary education (UPE) and the elimination of inequity in education, particularly gender inequity. They affirmed the need to prioritise support to member countries at risk of not achieving the education MDGs. Heads [of Government] supported the invitation of Education Ministers to increase public spending on education at all levels to facilitate achievement of the MDGs and develop effective school curricula to complement the implementation of UPE.”

Conferences and Meetings

A major aspect of the work of CEC is to provide a platform for the discussion of important educational issues. Each year, the Council holds a conference, in conjunction with its AGM. This year the subject of the conference was “Islam and the Education of Women and Girls in the Commonwealth” The main contributors were Shaheen Sardar Ali, Fatimah Kelleher, Haleh Afshar along with Kasturi Sen, Maria Jaschok, John Oxenham, Oley Dibba-Wadda, Azim Nanji, Basil Mustafa, Fauzia Ahmad, Elizabeth-Claire Mikkelsen, Richard Bourne and Andrew Firmin. The main Chair of the conference was Baroness Pola Uddin of Bethnal Green and Tower Hamlets. In her introduction, she said: "We mustn't allow ourselves to be bogged down by only talking about the distinctions between the poor and the rich, the deprived and the included, and between one and another faith community, as if all lead parallel and different lives. Such language only seeks to divide. It does nothing to reduce degradation or encourage the cooperation required everywhere to build confidence and empowerment. Only with time and extensive education will women resolve these situations, working in harmony together across communities, countries and world regions."

A full report of the conference has been produced by Rosemary Preston with Fauzia Ahmad and John Oxenham. The whole project was supported by the British Council (for the conference) and the Commonwealth Foundation (for the preparation and production of the report).

The Council joined with the education department of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Pastoral and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa in a seminar on “Educating Nomadic and Pastoralist Children”. Four papers were given:

Ali Ismail Mohamed (PENHA) “Why Pastoralist Children do not go to School” A personal view from a pastoralist background
Dr. Alba de Souza (CEC) "Reaching nomadic populations in Africa" A report on the conference in Garissa, Kenya, June 2006
Florence Malinga (Commonwealth Secretariat) “ Moving on from Garissa” What has happened since the Garissa conference
Fatimah Kelleher (Commonwealth Secretariat) “Education for nomads in south Asia”

These papers were followed by general discussion on how to deal with the very low proportion of nomadic children in education. Ann Keeling from the Secretariat closed the meeting by commenting: “There are about 70 million children within the Commonwealth who are not in education, either primary or secondary, and this meeting is part of the final push for Education for All. However ... this must not be in violation of their identity – not at the expense of their other rights.”

This year’s annual Gladwyn Lecture was given by Prof. Krishna Kumar, Director of the National Council for Educational Research and Training, Delhi, India. Prof. Kumar said that the three major challenges which faced India at independence were:

1. Will India hold together?
2. Will India remain democratic?
3. Will India overcome poverty?

They remain important. Poverty remains a major issue – and education has played a significant – if somewhat silent – role in shaping India’s answer to these three questions. In developing his theme, he ended by saying that the greatest challenge facing India was that of finding and training a sufficiently large body of teachers to negotiate the two main

calamities afflicting humanity – the use of violence to solve problems and the destruction of the natural environment. Dr. Marie Lall of the Institute of Education made a response. Both papers are on the Council’s website.

The fiftieth anniversary of the independence of Ghana was celebrated by a lecture given by Dr. Kwame Akyeampong, Centre for International Education, University of Sussex and the former Director of the Institute of Education, University of the Cape Coast. Ghana’s education was traced from independence through the ups and downs of the intervening years until today. He described the reforms which were introduced in 2000. He finally outlined the new challenges facing Ghana as it strives to make education a major contributor to its development aspirations. His paper is on the Council’s website.

The Council was addressed by Mr. Ransford Smith, the Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth on “Reflections from Kampala. Reporting on the 2007 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting”. This was the latest in a series of report back meetings on CHOGMs. The meeting was well attended, particularly by representatives from a number of High Commissions.

Reports

As noted above, the report arising from the conference on “Islam and the education of girls and women” was completed. At present, it is only available in electronic form but is due to be printed for wider distribution.

The report on the Maltese study tour which took place in 2005 just before the CHOGM there was completed and is available on the website. This report details the visits made, lessons learnt and the generous hospitality of the Maltese Ministry of Education and of the colleges and schools visited by Council members.

A report on the seminar on “Educating Nomadic and Pastoralist Children” is being prepared in co-operation with the Secretariat.

Policy Issues

The education department’s International Strategy was finally published during the year after some pressure from our parliamentarians. With the formation of the Departments for Innovation, Universities and Skills

(DIUS) and for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), there was some concern about the future of the international office. However this will continue on a shared basis between the two ministries.

At the very end of the period under review, the Council was dismayed when the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs announced, with no consultation, that it had been decided to stop funding the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan for students from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Malta, Cyprus, Bahamas, Brunei Darussalam and Singapore. This cut accompanied a significant reduction in the Chevening scholarships. The expressed reason for cutting the Commonwealth Scholarships showed a complete lack of understanding of the purpose of these scholarships which is to contribute to supporting the relationship between countries based on a common heritage and a common commitment to democratic values and the rule of law. It is not an overseas aid programme. Such relationship building is just as relevant to developed as to poorer countries. The campaign to oppose this cut is continuing.

Knowledge Aid for Sierra Leone

Experience in 2006-7 suggested that a change of emphasis was necessary. Downloading and customising of teaching materials for the benefit of schools across Sierra Leone would continue but there would be a new emphasis on teaching computer and Internet access skills at KASL-managed Information and Computer Technology (ICT) learning centres. Teaching resources would be concentrated on a few ICT learning centres that could be given high-speed Internet access. Two models were explored: one a fixed centre in which learners come to the computers and the other a mobile centre in which computers are taken to the learners. The Management Board decided to make a start with a fixed centre in central Freetown, using capital funds provided by the UK Support Group. A senior executive officer, Mr Aubrey Nat Jones was appointed to take charge of the development. Preparatory work continued throughout 2007-8 and a new centre with assured power-supply was ready to receive pupils by the beginning of 2008-9. It was formally launched by the Minister of Education on 27 April 2008.

The capital cost was £24,000, of which the UK Support Group contributed £18,000 from its reserve. The cost was higher than planned

because the contractor selected to provide solar power proved unsatisfactory and had to be replaced. This made it necessary to reduce the initial number of computers to ten, but the local branch of Plan International was impressed by the planned development and the contribution it can make to its own plans to develop links between schools in Freetown and in the UK. It is ready to contribute up to £30,000 to bring the first centre to its planned size and to develop two other centres in Freetown. There are some detailed problems to resolve but the prospects are encouraging.

External Relations

CEC continues to be an active member of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education with Peter Williams as its Honorary Secretary. As noted above, the Council delegates joined with others in the Commonwealth Peoples Forum in November 2007 in Kampala. The CEC receives the Consortium's Calendar of Commonwealth Education Dates and puts it onto its website, with a regular three monthly update. The British Council is an important supporter of the CEC, not just through its hosting of the Council's AGM and Annual Conference but also because of a common interest in education. The Association of Commonwealth Universities has provided, along with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, meeting places for our Governing Board and for a number of its committees when we cannot use Marlborough House. The Royal Commonwealth Society is an important partner both because of the arrangement for preferential and attractive membership rates for the Commonwealth Club and also because of our joint commitment to the Commonwealth. Our association with the London Institute of Education allows members of the CEC to join its reference library at no charge. As a corporate member of the UK Forum for International Education and Training, we have been involved in its meetings and its biennial Oxford Conferences on Education and Development.

Our most important partners is the Commonwealth Secretariat and its Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD) headed by Ann Keeling and with the Education Section under Henry Kaluba. We have benefited from the "Commonwealth Collaborative Partnership" education newsletter. The Council has found the relationship very helpful and productive to its work.

We must record that the Secretariat has lost two very close and important friends – Don McKinnon, the Secretary General and Ann Keeling, head of the STPD. Don is going to a well earned retirement, while Ann is going to a job in the British Government. We thank them both for their very important contributions to the work of the Secretariat and we send them our good wishes for the future. We welcome as the new Secretary General, Mr. Kamelash Sharma and as the new head of the STPD, Caroline Pontefract. We wish them well and will do all we can to give them support in their new work.

CEC has also been a regular participant in the bi-annual consultative meetings with Civil Society called jointly by the Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation.

These relationships are of the essence of the CEC – and they bring great value to its work.

Website and regular publications

The Council's website (www.cecomm.org.uk) has continued to grow in content. The text of most of the lectures given to the Council have been placed on the website, plus the report from the Annual Conference. The memorandum to the Heads of Government and many of the various documents which came out of the CHOGM are on the website. Other relevant papers and news items are finding their way to the site. The number of per week is around 150 visits. Some of these come from the continents of Africa and Asia.

The Hon. Secretary circulates to those members who have informed him of their email address information about CEC's programme as well as other Commonwealth educational matters.

Only one Commonwealth Education News was produced this year – mainly due to the lack of an editor. The position is open to any member who is interested in this important job.

Organisation and membership

Our Patrons and Joint Parliamentary Chairpersons, along with their staff, have responded positively to the demands we have made on them. We are very grateful to all of them. We were very sorry that Baroness Chalker felt that she was unable to continue as one of our Patrons. We

have enjoyed and benefited greatly from her support and advice to the Council and we wish her the best as she continues her work in Africa.

The CEC has no paid staff of its own – so it has bought administrative support from the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers (LECT). Our legal base has also been in Commonwealth House with LECT, which has circulated papers for the Governing Board, AGM and the one newsletter issued this year. We also made use of LECT’s meeting room on two occasions. However LECT has now merged with the Cf BT – and has moved to Reading. At the moment, Commonwealth House is only occupied by the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council while the future of the premises is decided. We are very grateful to CYEC for forwarding any Council correspondence to the Hon. Secretary. LECT’s service has been very helpful to CEC and has greatly eased the burden of major mailings. It is not clear what the future of Commonwealth House is but it remains our official address in the interim.

The Board held its regular three meetings during the year – though the middle meeting took place in November instead of January. The Board has three committees which report directly to it. - the Finance and General Purposes Committee, the Policy, Strategy and Public Affairs Committee and the Programmes, Projects and Communications Committee. The Board leaves the detailed work to its committees and deals itself with broader policy matters. The Board is very grateful to the observers from government departments or other relevant NGOs who make some very valuable contributions to the Council’s work both at its meetings and in other ways.

The finances of the Council, administered by Prof. Richard Mawditt, are stabilising, as can be seen in the accounts presented along with this report. The financial discipline which he has introduced has been of great benefit to the work of the Council.

John Alexander has taken over responsibility for dealing with membership and our relationship with the Charities Aid Foundation. We still get a few mail returns – but at an acceptable level. We have a total of 148 ordinary members, 15 corporate members and 14 honorary members. In addition all of the High Commissions are honorary members. As with the other honorary member, they have full voting rights. We have the

email addresses of about half of our members – but we need to have more as this allows more rapid communication about CEC and other Commonwealth education matters. We will not let anyone else have these addresses.

Conclusion

It is with sadness that we record the death of Richard Hornby who, as an MP, was one of the founding members of the Council in 1959. We recognise the vision of MPs in those early days in founding the Council with a base in Parliament. This has made CEC remarkably effective in approaching governments.

Deryn Holland and Flic Binns have both decided not to stand for re-election this year – while both intend to remain active members. We have benefited greatly from their professional and human contributions. We look forward to the new members to the Board and what they will bring.

