



House of Commons – House of Lords

**Council for Education in
the
Commonwealth**

**Annual Report
of the Honorary Secretary
on Activities in 2008/09**

Commonwealth House • 7 Lion Yard • Tremadoc Road • London SW4 7NQ
Tel. & Fax 01277 212357 • www.cecomm.org.uk • E: secretariat@cecomm.org.uk

Patrons: Lord Judd of Portsea • Lord McNally of Blackpool
Joint Parliamentary Chairpersons: Tim Boswell MP • Simon Hughes MP • Sally Keeble MP

Registered Charity No 1091704 Company limited by guarantee No 4391999

CEC Governing Board Members 2008/09

Patrons

Lord Judd of Portsea

Lord Thomson of Monifieth (until October 2008)

Lord McNally of Blackpool

Joint Parliamentary Chairpersons

Tim Boswell MP,

Simon Hughes MP,

Sally Keeble MP

Executive Chairperson

Valerie Davey (to June 2010)

Deputy Executive Chairpersons

John Oxenham (to June 2011), Peter Williams (to June 2009)

Honorary Treasurer

Richard Mawditt OBE(to June 2011)

Honorary Secretary

Kees Maxey (to June 2011)

Secretaries

Balasubramanyam Chandramohan, Projects Secretary (to June 2010)

John Alexander, Membership Secretary (resigned June 2009)

Parliamentary Liaison Officer

Martin Kenyon (to June 2010)

Other Governing Board Members

Roselle Antoine (to June 2010)

Casmir Chanda (to June 2010)

Alba de Souza (to June 2011)

Thelma Henderson (to June 2011)

Geoffrey Hulme, CB (to June 2010)

Jonathan Jenkins (to June 2009)

Neil Kemp (to June 2011)

Rosemary Preston (to June 2009)

Mark Robinson (to June 2010)

Maureen (Mo) Sibbons (to June 2009)

Annual Report 2008/09

For the period 1st. April 2008 to 31st. March 2009

Introduction

2008/09 was a busy year – with meetings, with campaigns, with following up on the previous year’s activities and preparing for the next year. These went along with regular activities such as the Commonwealth Education News, distribution by email of educational news relevant to the Commonwealth, the work of Knowledge Aid to Sierra Leone and the meetings of the Governing Board and its committees. However during the year, there were no major Commonwealth meetings such as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) or the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM).

Lord Thomson of Monifieth

With the death of George Thomson, the Council lost one of its founder members and latterly, a patron. He continued his involvement in the Council the rest of his life. He was committed to the Commonwealth throughout his political life – and gave enormous support to the CEC. In the early days of the Council, he chaired its Executive Committee. More recently, he sponsored meetings in the House of Lords. In between, he was the last Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs – before the Commonwealth Office was subsumed into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and one of the UK’s first two European Commissioners. The Council will miss him, his sense of humour and his humanity.

Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan

At the end of the previous year, the Council had been dismayed by the decision of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to stop funding Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships for students from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Malta, Cyprus, Bahamas, Brunei Darussalam and Singapore. A significant reduction in the Chevening scholarships accompanied this cut. Under the leadership of the CEC, with the support of a campaign committee, a campaign was started to question and oppose this decision. Among the actions which were taken (not all initiated by CEC) were a 10 Downing Street petition (which gained 1,988 signatures), a whole series of Questions in the House of Com-

mons and the House of Lords, an Early Day motion in the House of Commons, a debate in the House of Lords, a high profile meeting hosted by the Royal Commonwealth Society with CEC support, a letter to the Times newspaper signed by 60 very eminent people from all parts of the Commonwealth and the briefing of High Commissions as well as parliamentarians by the Council. There were a number of articles in the press, both in the UK as well as in the affected Commonwealth countries. The several responses of the FCO demonstrated that the original decision had been taken without any real understanding of the aim of the scholarship scheme – and without realising the level of opposition that it would arouse. However the decision by the FCO stands. Instead the former Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) decided to take over partial responsibility for a reduced programme, in cooperation with the receiving universities. A sum of £800,000 over two years has been provided by the DIUS to be administered by the UK Commonwealth Scholarship Commission to cover 50% of the funding for students from the eight countries affected. The other 50% has been pledged by the universities where the student will be studying. (Almost all of the universities in Britain offered to meet this contribution for any students who went to study with them.) The continuation of these Commonwealth scholarships is important as the purpose of the programme is to support the exchange of young people, at the start of their careers, between member countries of the Commonwealth.

Conferences and Meetings

A major part of the work of the Council is to provide a platform for the discussion of educational issues as they relate to the Commonwealth. Each year the Council holds a conference in conjunction with its AGM. This year, the subject of the June conference was: “A Commonwealth for Young People: What Future – What Learning”. The Council was delighted to have the new Secretary General of the Commonwealth, H.E. Kamalesh Sharma, to open the conference in one of his first public appearances. With 60% of the population of the Commonwealth under 30 years of age, the needs and the voice of youth must be heard. Mr. Sharma impressed us with his commitment to education as a Commonwealth priority. Then Layne Robinson, Programme Officer of the Commonwealth Youth Programme, outlined the issues which face young

people as well as what they can bring to society because, as he said, they “are assets, not liabilities”.

Professor Sugatra Mitra, from the University of Newcastle, described the use of computers in both India and the UK as a means of self learning. Susanna Darch, of the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, involved all of those attending in a dialogue on the problem of communication between the generations – and the use of jargon as a secret language. Then four young people were introduced by Helen Jones from the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council. They were Daniella de Bono, from Malta, Mo Adefeso from Nigeria, Richard O’Donnell from the UK and Abubakarr Messeh-Kamara from Sierra Leone. Together they gave an impressive vision of what the youth of the Commonwealth looked forward to as a result of their education.

In December, the 2008 Gladwyn Lecture was given by the Rt. Hon. Lord Kinnock of Bedwellty – who is also the chairman of the British Council. His subject was “Education and Culture in International Relations”. In a well attended meeting in the House of Lords, Neil Kinnock outlined the needs of a globalising world where change is taking place at a greater rate each year. At the same time, the basic need is still that we should listen **to** each and not just simply talk **at** each other.

In November, Dr. Harsha Aturupane, Senior Economist, Human Development Unit, South Asia Region of the World Bank gave a survey of education in Sri Lanka since its independence 60 years previously. He described how highly education was valued so that despite the problems the country faced, the proportion of children who were able to benefit from education was high. The text of his very well attended lecture was published by the World Bank as a working paper.

The Council took advantage of the visit of Hon. Ms. Simone Testa de Comarmond, Chair of the Commonwealth Foundation and of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) to the UK in March 2009 to invite her to speak on “Barriers to girls’ education in Africa: FAWE’s successful intervention”. This meeting took place in association with the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Sec-

retariat. Though organised at the last minute, the meeting was well attended. Ms. Comarmond described the way in which the many chapters of FAWE in different parts of Africa campaigned for girls' education and in some places, initiated it.

In February a meeting was held in Manchester University at the invitation of its Institute of Development Policy and Management. The main topic was "The British Council, the Commonwealth and Education", led by members of the British Council. The meeting was targeted at those living in the Manchester area, and was a worthwhile event.

A joint meeting was held with the Royal Commonwealth Society in connection with the campaign about the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan referred to above. The three speakers were Sir George Bain, originally from Canada, Germaine Greer from Australia – both of whom came to the UK to study and Alistair Niven, from the UK who went to study in Ghana – all of them under the CSFP scheme. They described the importance of their experience, how it had affected their understanding of the Commonwealth and how it had pointed them in a new direction in the UK.

Reports

The report of the conference held at the 2007 AGM entitled "Islam and the Education of Women and Girls in the Commonwealth" was produced as a joint publication of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Council. It is available to members of the CEC – and indeed to any one else who is interested. Copies have been fairly well distributed but some are still available from the Honorary Secretary.

External Relations

CEC continues to be an active member of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education with Peter Williams as its Honorary Secretary. The CEC receives the Consortium's Calendar of Commonwealth Education Dates and puts it onto its website, with a regular three monthly up date. 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. Our contact over the

years has been Helena Sharp. She has now moved to another position in the British Council after giving CEC very warm and effective support. We are looking forward to working with Anne Weidemann who has taken over Helena's liaison duties. When we cannot use Marlborough House, 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. 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. We have also supported and advertised the meeting UKFIET holds annually with the UK National Commission for UNESCO on the Global Monitoring Report on progress being made internationally on the Education for All goals. Our most important partner is the Commonwealth Secretariat and its Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD) headed by Caroline Pontefract and with the Education Section under Henry Kaluba. The Council has found the relationship very helpful and productive to its 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.

Knowledge Aid for Sierra Leone

In 2008, Knowledge Aid for Sierra Leone (KASL) began to implement the change of emphasis decided on in 2007 and referred to in last year's annual report. Downloading and customising of teaching materials for the benefit of schools across Sierra Leone is to continue but there will be a new emphasis on teaching computer and Internet access skills at

KASL- managed ICT learning centres. Teaching resources are to be concentrated on a few ICT learning centres that can 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.

Preparatory work was completed in early 2008. The first students began courses in March and during the summer the centre was brought up to full capacity (with assistance from the Sierra Leone branch of Plan International). The Minister of Education, who formally opened the centre, declared his strong support, although, since Sierra Leone, remains one of the world's poorest countries, he has not been able to do as much as he would have liked. KASL local management has however managed to meet the running costs of the project from local finance (Ministry subvention, supplemented by voluntary donations and contributions from students), and, after the initial launch support, it has not had to seek help from the UK Support Group.

If the aim of local sustainability can be maintained for the current project, part of Support Group's contingency balance (currently £8,238) will be available for expansion. The Group has waited to see how demand and the financial situation developed before taking a decision on expansion and the linked question of whether there should be a further UK appeal for funds.

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 those from the Annual Conference. Other relevant papers and news items are finding their way to the site. The number of visits per week is around 1,200 – which is about eight times more than last year. 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.

The Council was down to one patron (Lord Judd) for several months after the death of Lord Thomson. Frank Judd has however has been very committed in his support for the Council. In March 2009, we were delighted that Lord McNally of Blackpool agreed to replace Lord Thomson. We continue to search for one more new patron from the House of Lords to fill the last gap.

The Council has no paid staff of its own. As reported last year, we have remained with our legal base at Commonwealth House. The CYEC has continued to forward any correspondence from there to the Honorary Secretary. We are very grateful for this important service. The future of Commonwealth House has still not been resolved and the Council will continue to use it as its official address. In the mean time, major mailings have been contracted out to an agency local to the Hon. Secretary.

The Board held its regular three meetings during the year. One meeting took place in July (shortly after the AGM) with the main purpose of appointing the officers and deciding the membership of the three main committees. The other two meetings are in November and then in March/April – this last in parliament. 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 and 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.

The Council depends on its individual membership for more than one reason. The finances of the CEC – giving it a solid base for its core expenses – are provided by the subscriptions of its individual members, both personal and corporate. The work of the Council, both core administration but also the most important educational research, policy making and advocating and other aspects of education in the Commonwealth are all done by its members, mostly on a voluntary basis. The Council has a total of 90 ordinary members, 8 corporate or institutional members and 20 honorary members. In addition, all of the High Commissions based in the UK are honorary members. All honorary members (both individual and corporate) have full voting rights.

The email addresses of over half of our members are held by the Council. It would help the Council greatly if more members offered their email addresses. We use these addresses to circulate information both specifically for the Council (such as meetings) and other educational material from, for example, UNESCO, which might be of interest to our members. These email addresses are not and will not be given to any other organisation.

John Alexander has decided not to continue as the Membership Secretary and resigned from the Board at the end of the year.

Our membership numbers this year are significantly lower than the previous year. This is a matter of some concern and the Governing Board is taking it up.

Conclusion

It is with sadness that we record the death in September 2008 of Dennis Chisman – a long standing member who was also a leading member of the Commonwealth Association of Science Technology and Mathematics Educators (CASTME). Both CASTME and CEC will miss him.

We also wish to record, with grateful thanks, a legacy of £500 by Mrs. Hardie given to the CEC for use by the Knowledge Aid project in Sierra Leone. We would take the opportunity of asking members to think of the work of CEC when making their wills.

Peter Williams has come to the end of three consecutive periods of three years on the Board – and according to the constitution, cannot stand for election this coming year. He has been involved in the work of the Council since the 1960s – and is one of its longest serving members. His knowledge of education in all parts of the Commonwealth is unparalleled both within the Council itself and in the Commonwealth at large and its many institutions. He has had an uncanny ability to identify the important issues in education. His commitment has always been to benefit the education of those children who miss out. It is difficult to imagine the Council's Governing Board without him. However that does not mean he will not be there in the CEC – he will no doubt be nagging us from the wings.

