



Council for Education in the Commonwealth
House of Commons – House of Lords

Commonwealth Education News

April 2009

In memoriam and in gratitude...

CEC has sadly had to start its 50th anniversary year with the loss of one of its founding members and staunchest supporters, Lord Thomson of Monifieth. George Thomson was one of the MPs who took part in the first conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in 1959. As one of the several good outcomes of its proceedings, he and a number of colleagues from the three main political parties decided to found CEC to be sure that education in the Commonwealth would always have the ear of Parliament.

The Council will always be grateful to Lord Thomson for the interest he unfailingly took in its work, the support he steadily gave it and for the good counsel he offered in March, 2007, when, although already in weakened health, he came to the Spring Conference on the directions that the Council should be taking in the 21st century.

CEC was well represented at Lord Thomson's funeral and was able to offer our deepest condolences to Lady Thomson.

... and welcome

In the shadow of the news above, CEC nevertheless has the privilege of being able to announce that Lord McNally of Blackpool, House of Lords Leader of the Liberal Democrats since 2004 and a former Parliamentary Chair, has kindly agreed to take Lord Thomson's place as Patron of the Council. We welcome him warmly and look to receiving from him the kind of wise guidance we received from George.

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CELEBRATING COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION – LOOKING AHEAD AT 50, March 31st – April 1st 2009

Celebrating CEC's 50th anniversary started with a scintillating conference at the University of Oxford, the birth-place of Commonwealth cooperation in education. In 1959, the University hosted the first conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers that launched the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan and led, as noted above, to the founding of CEC.

Who convened the conference?

CEC partnered the University and the Commonwealth Secretariat in convening the conference. The University and Secretariat were generous with financial, logistical and networking support, while CEC saw to most of the designing and delivery, mainly through the energetic and apparently indefatigable Rosemary Preston and Peter Williams, with other members of the Governing Board in close, physical support. St. Catherine's College provided a comfortable venue for the sessions, meals and relaxation.

In addition to the conference, the University of Oxford organized a panel discussion in the Sheldonian Theatre. The theme, 'The Future of Higher Education in the Commonwealth', and the questions that the Chancellor of the University, Lord Patten, posed, stimulated eloquent responses from the distinguished panel of four: Mrs. Naledi Pandor, Minister of Education of South Africa and current Chair of the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, Dr. Nicola Brewer, UK High Commissioner Designate to South Africa, Mr. Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary General, and Sir David King, formerly Chief Scientific Adviser to the UK government and now Director of the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment.

Who took part?

The 136 participants included the Prime Minister of Namibia, the Ministers of Education of Barbados and South Africa, the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth, the High Commissions of Cyprus, Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, Namibia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, and Zambia, politicians, educators, scholars [among them 15 Commonwealth Scholars], and advocates from civil society -including CEC members- from a total of 27 of the 53 Commonwealth countries.

To those numbers should be added the UK Minister of State for Higher Education, Mr. David Lammy: at a dinner hosted by Lord Patten, Chancellor of the University of Oxford, he stressed the tremendous impact of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, which in 50 years has enabled more than 26,000 young men and women to study and research across the Commonwealth.

A particularly special participant was Lalage Bown, long time member of CEC, who celebrated her 82nd birthday to the applause, singing and cheers of the assembly.

What was discussed?

The conference aimed to focus on the challenges of the future, while bearing in mind the lessons from past achievements and mistakes. Ian Goldin, director of Oxford's James Martin 21st Century School and Ransford Smith, Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth, did lay out what they saw as looming new challenges that could well exacerbate those with which the Commonwealth is grappling now.

However, the current global economic crisis and its threats to continued educational progress tended to dominate discussion. There was strong consensus that education of all kinds had to be protected and Prof. Frances Stewart, who chaired the conference, underlined the ascertained fact that countries that had invested strongly in education had recovered most rapidly from past recessions. Sustaining such investments across the Commonwealth, as Prime Minister Nahas Angula of Namibia observed, will require the richer members to support those harder hit by the downturn.

The four plenary sessions and ten group discussions covered more ground than can be summarized here. However, CEC members can look forward to a fuller report, when the proceedings of the conference are published later this year.

What message was sent to the CCEM?

One aim of the conference was to send a message to the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, who will be meeting in Kuala Lumpur in June. The three convenors are preparing an aide memoire, which will be submitted to ministers early in May. The note will probably stress the vital necessity of protecting education from cuts during the current crisis, express strong support for expanding the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan and underpinning it with a substantial endowment fund, urge elaboration of the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol to limit the poaching of teachers and press for a rapid development of a Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility.

17th Conference of Commonwealth Ministers of Education

Fifty years since their first conference in Oxford, Commonwealth Ministers of Education will be meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from June 16th through 18th. The theme is 'Commonwealth Education: Beyond Global Goals and Targets', which recognises that most member countries have achieved Universal Primary Education and gender parity at the primary level and that it is time to resume thinking about education as a holistic system, in which the working of each component depends critically on the working of the other components.

CEC will of course be sending a small delegation to put the Council's point of view to the Ministers.

Stakeholders' Forum

Alongside the main conference, civil society, with the help of the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Foundation organise a number of forums for special interests like teachers, vice chancellors and youth. CEC will be taking part in the 'Stakeholders' Forum' for organisations in civil society. CEC has agreed to organise a workshop on public and private partnerships in higher education.

Commonwealth Consortium for Education

Just before the main CCEM, the Commonwealth Consortium for Education, of which the Council is an energetic member, will be convening a 2-day conference of its own on 'Learning to Live Together: education for social cohesion', which will build on the themes of respect and understanding that the Sen report, 'Civil Paths to Peace', highlighted at the CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) at Kampala in 2007.

Report Back – Friday, 3rd July, 2009

As in the past, CEC has secured the agreement of the UK Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills that the Minister representing the UK, David Lammy, will offer a report back to CEC members. CEC hopes to arrange for the report back to coincide with the AGM on Friday, 3rd July. More detailed information will follow as soon as it is available.

UKFIET Conference, Oxford, 15-17 September, 2009

The theme of the biennial conference organised by the UK Forum for International Education and Training (UKFIET) in Oxford is 'Policies, Politics, Progress' this year: CEC will be contributing in terms of how civil society bodies like itself help influence policies and progress through their individual brand of politicking. Its 50-year history should provide fertile material for discussion.

60 Years of Educational Progress in Sri Lanka

In 2007, CEC was able to celebrate educational progress in Ghana -50 years- and India -60 years- in the presence of the High Commissioners of the two countries. In November, 2008, the Council was fortunate to have H.E. Mr. Justice Nihal Jayasinghe, High Commissioner for Sri Lanka, grace its celebration of 60 years of educational progress in his country.

In a crowded room in the parliamentary premises of 1 Parliament Street –arranged by Tim Boswell, one of our Parliamentary Chairs- Dr. Harsha Aturupane of the World Bank gave a well evidenced history of remarkable achievements at all levels of education. In her following commentary, Prof. Angela Little of the London Institute of Education, who had facilitated Dr. Aturupane's visit, recalled that Sri Lanka's respect and appetite for education long preceded the successive conquests by Europeans. A particularly impressive aspect was that despite the long running troubles in Sri Lanka, all parties there agreed that education is vital. Indeed, at exam times, examinees were guaranteed safe passage by both the military and the Tamil Tigers!

The Gladwyn Lecture 2008

In early December, Lord Kinnock delivered the 2008 Gladwyn Lecture, a very interesting and entertaining disquisition on the nature of the 'soft power' of cultural and educational relations and how the British Council, of which he is Chair, built, nurtured and exercised it around the world. Thanks to Lord Judd, one of our Patrons in the House of Lords, an audience of over 70 people enjoyed a bright and comfortable venue on one of the upper floors of Parliament and a lively reception in the premises of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Westminster Hall.

The Gladwyn Lecture 2009 – Tuesday, December 8th, 2009

CEC is delighted to be able to announce that Commonwealth Deputy Secretary General, Ms. Mmasekgoa Masire Mwamba, has graciously accepted its invitation to give the 2009 Gladwyn Lecture. Thanks to the good offices of Lord Judd, the venue will be in the Robing Room of the House of Lords. More details will be published in due course.

Beyond London –CEC in Manchester with the British Council

CEC's effort to reach parts of Britain well beyond the sprawling limits of London proved mistimed: it happened in the middle of one of the largest snowfalls of this millennium! CEC member Paul Barry, with the willing and generous support of his Director, Willy McCourt, of the Institute for Development Policy and Management at the University of Manchester, organised a meeting for the afternoon of February 5th and mobilised a goodly score of students, including Commonwealth Scholars and a Commonwealth Fellow. From the CEC side, however, only six members –apart from Paul- made it through the snow, including the ever gallant Lalage Bown from Shrewsbury, our Executive Chair,

Valerie Davey, from Bristol and John Anderson from over the Pennines. And it was good to welcome one other local member, John Turner.

Like Lord Kinnock, the speakers were from the British Council: John Payne, Director of Business Management, who had managed to get in from the Peak District, and John Law of the Higher Education Division. They took as their theme 'The British Council and Education in the Commonwealth' and astonished the audience with the number and range of programmes in education that the Council was managing through its offices in 23 Commonwealth countries on behalf of a range of partners –the UK government, the European Union, the World Bank and private corporations. Soft power, indeed! And clearly helping to keep the Commonwealth glued as a community.

Snowy Manchester to Sunny Seychelles

Quick thinking by Peter Williams and deft organisation by Roselle Antoine delivered at the Commonwealth Secretariat on March 12th an interesting session on "*Barriers to girls education in Africa: FAWE's successful intervention*" by Hon. Mrs. Simone de Comarmond, the new Chair of the Commonwealth Foundation, Chair of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and former holder of several ministerial posts in the Government of the Seychelles.

Mrs. De Comarmond pointed out that in Sub-Saharan Africa, despite impressive progress, the gender gap handicapping girls persists in terms of access, retention and achievement at all levels of education. Gender bias in pedagogy, learning materials and management compound the problem. FAWE works to eliminate it through comprehensive and holistic measures in all 36 countries where it has chapters. Although it partners with ministries of education to get policies changed, it accepts that it needs also to work at school and community level, as strong cultural biases against the education and advancement of girls and women remain strong in most countries.

FAWE has a strong Commonwealth link through its operations in Commonwealth African countries and having its administrative centre (FAWE House) in Nairobi, Kenya. This operational reach allows the organisation to benefit from its experience of good practice within and beyond Commonwealth African countries and, crucially, in its ability to raise significant funds from a variety of sources.

At CEC's invitation, speakers from the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Countries' League Education Fund complemented the narrative by outlining the support they provide for enhancing educational opportunities for girls and also, in specific cases, for boys. Valerie Davey valuably contextualized and linked the presentations, while Lalage Bown brought the session to a rousing end with a strong call for the appointment of a woman as the next Secretary General of the Commonwealth!

Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships

Members will recall the campaign that CEC spearheaded last year to keep the eight higher income countries of the Commonwealth within the British programme for Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows: they had been excluded by the decision of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to cease its annual contribution of £2.5 million. Partial success was achieved through the decision of John Denham, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, to offset the loss with a grant of £400,000 for scholarships at the doctoral level.

A new development is the launch of an endowment fund to enable more of the less wealthy Commonwealth countries to take part in the programme and to exchange scholars and fellows between themselves. Malaysia was the first to support the fund with a pledge of \$500,000 and the good news is that, on March 31st, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office contributed a further

£500,000 out of unexpended funds. More countries are expected to announce their pledges at the CCEM in June.

While warmly welcoming this, CEC and its allies are now pressing the British government to increase the contribution sufficiently substantially to move other high income governments to be generous and to enable the endowment to support a large number of scholarly exchanges.

DFID White Paper

“Eliminating World Poverty: Assuring our Common Future” is the title of a consultation document that DFID has issued for public discussion until Wednesday, 27th May, 2009. CEC is of course preparing a submission on how DFID should support the education sector and promote policies and practices that deal with education systems in a holistic way.

CEC Publications

“Islam and the Education of Women and Girls in the Commonwealth – Proceedings of the CEC Annual Conference 26 June 2007” is available in printed version from the Hon. Secretary. Please email him on the email address below. There is no charge – but remember to give your address.

Publication by CEC members:

Chandramohan, Balasubramanyam and Fallows, Steve, (eds.)
Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Theory and Practice
(New York: Routledge, 2009)

CEC Website

The website can be accessed from the following address:

www.cecomm.org.uk

It is kept up to date – and has most of the lectures and presentations given in meeting of the Council over the past four years. The presentations from the Oxford Conference are being put onto the website – and it should have short videoed interviews and statements by the three Commonwealth Ministers who attended the conference. Go and have a look! Tell your friends and colleagues about it.

Dates for your diary

AGM and [possible] Report Back from the 17th CCEM – Friday, July 3rd, 2009, British Council, Spring Gardens, London

Gladwyn Lecture 2009 – Tuesday, December 8th, Robing Room, House of Lords

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