

the committees, and to Geoffrey Hulme for being our link with the Knowledge Aid in Sierra Leone Project.

A word of thanks to Martin Kenyon for his diligence as parliamentary liaison officer and to Balasubramanyam Chandramohan for his commitment as projects secretary, contributions they have made over many years. We have also gained from the experience, ideas and input of new Board members this year, Roselle Antoine, Ann Brumfit, Neil Kemp and Sonny Leong, we trust they will stay and become more involved.

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

Looking Ahead

There are clearly more anniversary events and publications to anticipate and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Trinidad in November for which to prepare, but the ongoing challenge for the Council is to find more effective ways to support Commonwealth education, its range and its quality.

This year we have successfully provided a forum for education professionals and politicians from across the Commonwealth to work together for international education development. In addition as we prioritised more recently, we have made a substantive contribution to 17CCEM and strengthened our links with the British Parliament and other Commonwealth organisations sharing similar educational aims. Our plans to promote education about the Commonwealth and involve young people have not been realised.

CEC has a strong base from which to move forward thanks to the dedication of members over the years. Please introduce CEC to a friend or colleague who might like to join, especially any with a long-term vision for international education!

Looking Ahead at 50

Report of the Executive Chair 2008/09

This last year has been demanding, exciting and essentially forward looking as the Council's Board planned for and launched CEC's 50th anniversary year, in addition to maintaining the regular, valuable schedule of lectures, research and submissions to Government Ministers. Each Board member is to be congratulated.

2009 is not only a special year for CEC, it also marks the 50th anniversary of both the Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers (CCEM) and the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP), while the Commonwealth itself is celebrating 'serving a new generation' at 60. The collaboration and sharing in events to mark these anniversaries has strengthened the ties between these Commonwealth organisations and built new links and individual friendships.

For CEC however one longstanding friend is missing. We were all saddened to learn last October of the death of Lord Thomson of Monifieth who, as a founder member of CEC in 1959, had been keen to help plan for 2009. As a patron George Thomson offered CEC unfailing support and encouragement. He spoke, as many will recall, at the opening of our Spring Conference in 2007 in stirring tones, telling us that CEC was created as a forum through which education professionals and politicians could work together for international education development, an essential partnership that was still of critical importance today. So, by implication, no giving up at 50! We plan, after further discussion with Lady Thomson, to find a tangible way to mark George Thomson's unique contribution to the Council.

A complete account of activities during the year is well recorded by Kees Maxey in his annual report as Hon. Secretary. In addition our website www.cecomm.org.uk goes from strength to strength, now offering video clips of recent distinguished lecturers. For this and all the information he also circulates by e-mail and post, we again owe Kees a huge debt of gratitude. Offers of help to work alongside Kees would be welcome, as our activities increase so does the secretary's work.

Especially significant events

We were honoured to have Kamallesh Sharma, then newly appointed as the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, to open our annual conference in 2008 and delighted to find that the subject, 'A Commonwealth for Young People: What future – What learning?' was a priority for him too. It was a stimulating occasion. Four young people, from different areas of the Commonwealth who formed a panel of speakers, clearly showed the need for the voice of the 60% of the Commonwealth now under 30 years of age, to contribute towards future education planning. A year on and in CEC we have so far made little provision to welcome young people.

Lord Kinnock the Chairman of the British Council, to our great pleasure, gave the Gladwyn Lecture in December. With eloquence and insight he set out 'A Manifesto for New Public Diplomacy', drawing on the 75 years' experience of 'people-to-people diplomacy' used by the British Council and soon found a resonance with his audience. Discussion continued during the reception when Neil Kinnock generously found time to listen, share ideas and laughter with, it seemed, everyone.

Oxford was the setting, as it had been 50 years ago, for the anniversary conference on 31 March/1 April, 'Commonwealth Educational Co-operation: Looking Ahead at 50'. It was a magnificent occasion. The conference co-sponsored by the University of Oxford, the Commonwealth Secretariat and CEC brought together representatives from over half the countries of the Commonwealth, including 12 Commonwealth scholars, and amongst the speakers were the Hon. Nahas Angula, Prime Minister of Namibia and the Hon. Naledi Pandor, then Minister of Education in South Africa. We are most grateful to all the individuals and organisations who supported the event, but without the vision, experience, diplomacy and sheer hard work of two CEC members, Peter Williams and Rosemary Preston, this memorable event would not have taken place. To both of you, a heartfelt 'THANK YOU' from us all! (Again, please go to the website for full details.)

As we met in Oxford the G-20 Heads of Government were meeting in London to consider the gravity of the financial situation worldwide. This context in part influenced the wording of the Aide Memoire, which was agreed and sent from Oxford to the Education Ministers meeting in Kuala Lumpur for the 17CCEM in June. Also in preparation for 17CCEM, CEC sent a submission to HMG and a delegation met with the Rt. Hon David Lammy MP the Minister attending. Our main contribution to 17CCEM will probably have been made however by the 8 CEC members, who in various capacities contributed to the

Stakeholders Forum at Kuala Lumpur, and will soon be sharing their experiences.

Alongside these high profile events advocacy has continued on behalf of the CSFP. We were encouraged that the Government did eventually provide matched funding with British universities of £800,000 over the next three years towards postgraduate scholars from the more developed Commonwealth countries and contributed £500,000 to the new Endowment Fund for scholarships launched in Kuala Lumpur. Early Day Motion 1353 urges continued Government commitment to CSFP, please get your MP to sign.

Appreciation

It is awesome to recognise that so much has again been achieved through the commitment and dedication of individual Board members, without paid staff or an office. They in turn though depend on the interest, support and subscriptions of CEC members. Our grateful thanks to you all!

Remembering that it was a group of MPs who started CEC, a special word of appreciation to the MPs, Tim Boswell, Simon Hughes and Sally Keeble, who serve us so well as Parliamentary Chairpersons today and maintain our strong link at Westminster. Their willingness to raise questions in the House, join delegations and chair CEC meetings is greatly valued. A staunch ally in the House of Lords is Lord Judd, we also value his constant support. A warm welcome is extended to Lord McNally, who has graciously agreed to follow Lord Thomson as a patron. He has strong Commonwealth credentials and we are looking forward to his involvement in CEC.

How fortunate we have been to have Peter Williams and John Oxenham as deputy Executive Chairpersons. Their wide experience of education work in Commonwealth countries, together with their ongoing enthusiasm and remarkable talents, means that they have both made an exceptional contribution to furthering CEC's work. Peter is now leaving the Board after serving a full nine years and, although a few words within this report are inadequate, I do want to record our great appreciation and to let him know that we value his friendship as well as his expertise and will keep in touch. Our best wishes to Peter and Julia for a well earned break!

As Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer, Kees Maxey and Richard Mawditt are key to the smooth running of the organisation and each offers CEC a superb service. Thank you both, and for challenging the rest of us to recognise the importance of good communications and sound finances. We are grateful to Alba de Souza, Thelma Henderson and Mo Sibbons for efficiently servicing