



Meeting the Challenge at 50

Report of the Executive Chair 2009/10

2009/10 completed the Council's 50th anniversary year which, with its emphasis on looking forward, challenged the Board to consider how CEC can contribute more effectively to improving the range and quality of education across the Commonwealth.

With 72 million children still not able to attend school and some 750 million adults unable to read, the largest proportion within the Commonwealth, the task is indeed challenging.

My report will highlight some of the new ideas and approaches that are emerging.

The year, since our last AGM, also included the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Trinidad, the Royal Commonwealth Society's thought provoking 'Commonwealth Conversation' and the General Election, all impacting in different ways on CEC and leaving less time to reflect. Board members are again to be congratulated for responding positively to special circumstances whilst at the same time maintaining CEC's valuable programme of lectures, research and submissions to Government Ministers.

A full account of the Council's activities is provided by Kees Maxey, the Hon. Secretary, in his annual report and an outline of future plans is set out, after consultation, by John Oxenham, the Deputy Executive Chairperson, in the Three Year Plan 2010-13. We are extremely grateful to Kees and John for these lucid reports but more especially for their tireless commitment to CEC's work throughout the year.

New approaches

Voices : Commonwealth Women and Education

The idea of celebrating 50 years of CEC through the voices of women was transformed by Rosemary Preston and Mo Sibbons from the proposed book into a new website. The stories, found at

www.commonwealthwomensvoices.wordpress.com, are inspirational and a testimony to the power of education and international cooperation throughout the Commonwealth. This is now an ongoing project, which actively encourages further contributions. It is also a tribute to Rosemary and Mo's initiative and their determination to see it implemented..

WAMM and CYMM

Two more Commonwealth acronyms to learn! The Women's Affairs Ministers' Meetings and the Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meetings appear in our three year plan in anticipation of CEC's participation in the civil society section of these conferences. This is an ambitious aspiration and, as well as funding, will need collaborative working with other groups to be successful. Casmir Chanda, who coordinates our student members, is an excellent link with the Commonwealth Countries League Education Fund and we have a good working relationship with the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council. This broader base for promoting education within the Commonwealth is potentially very worthwhile, and also costly in time and resources.

CEC Chapters

As CEC members move within the Commonwealth, returning home mostly after working in the UK, the question is raised with increasing seriousness as to whether a CEC branch or chapter could be started. Conversations continue, particularly in Canada and Zambia, made easier by the internet. The restoration of a group in Scotland and starting one in Wales has also been mentioned. All are exciting possibilities with as yet no firm developments. They could enable CEC to keep in closer touch with emerging issues, provide us all with greater insights and generate stronger advocacy from a wider membership.

Regular seminar/lecture series

Neil Kemp and Balasubramanyam Chandramohan proposed offering members a more regular series of lectures/seminars covering different aspects of education in the Commonwealth and held in association with a university department. The Board was cautious, concerned about the cost and our capacity to deliver. Undaunted Chandra himself, in association with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, organised a monthly seminar series and symposium this summer entitled 'Language Policies/Practice in the Commonwealth'. Well done Chandra, CEC will

seek to learn from this experience. What do CEC members want and how can we best involve more university students and lecturers? Two of the questions we must ask.

Catalyst for Giving

Although Knowledge Aid in Sierra Leone comes under CEC's remit, and we thank Geoffrey Hulme for regularly updating us about the project, CEC does not fund raise for this or any other education group. This year though we have made a direct donation of £500, marking our 50th anniversary, to the Endowment Fund for the the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, which was launched last year at the 17 Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers. It aims to increase the range of Commonwealth countries able to host scholars and senior researchers. A further £845 has since been contributed by CEC members and strengthened our advocacy/defence of Commonwealth scholarships.

How far the Council can develop any of these new approaches will be decided by Board members, having balanced them alongside the main programme of activities and made a realistic assessment of all the necessary resources. It is encouraging to see more members wanting to serve on the Board, their contributions will be most welcome.

Appreciation

The vision, expertise and sheer dedication of individual CEC members is inspirational and as we look ahead, accepting the enormity of the challenge, the possibilities are exciting. No one however should underestimate the time and effort involved, not only for the major conferences, - the booking of rooms and writing of committee minutes are also important tasks! We are grateful to Thelma Henderson, Mo Sibbons , Alba de Souza and Rosemary Preston for efficiently servicing our committees with such good humour, and especially to Mo this year for extra 'minutes'.

Funding is also essential to CEC's development. As a Council without paid staff or an office, resources go directly to the costs of our activities. We are always looking for new fund raising ideas. The Council's finances are carefully administered by Richard Mawditt, the Hon Treasurer, to whom we owe a special vote of thanks. His meticulous accounts, his

encouragement to committees to monitor costs and his sound advice are all valued contributions.

Another important role in CEC is that of the Parliamentary Liaison Officer and Martin Kenyon, who is leaving the Board after nine full years of service, has been a brilliant link for us at Westminster. Martin has an encyclopaedic memory for names and faces, knows his way round the parliamentary system and is persuasive, all great assets as he has shown. His much longer service to CEC cannot be fitted in here, but our thanks to him for his dedication and we trust he will be at CEC events for many years to come.

At Westminster a warm word of appreciation to our patrons in the House of Lords, Lord Judd and Lord McNally on whose support we have come to rely. We were pleased to welcome to join them last year Lady Trish Morris who, with experience of youth groups and as a Trustee of UNICEF, will bring new insights to CEC. Our Parliamentary Chairpersons in the Commons the MPs Tim Boswell, Simon Hughes and Sally Keeble have again done us proud, willingly raising questions in the House, joining delegations and chairing CEC meetings. We extend a special thank you to them all, trusting that Simon after his re-election will continue to work with us, offering Tim our congratulations on his elevation to the House of Lords and Sally condolences on losing her seat, but looking forward to maintaining a link with both.

The support we receive from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Royal Commonwealth Society and the British Council is gratefully acknowledged. We greatly appreciate the encouragement, collaboration and financial help given in different ways during the year.

Finally 50 is a good age, with some experience and maturity to draw on but not fixed in one's ways, to meet a new challenge. CEC at 50 has a wealth of experience amongst its members and they are clearly willing to develop new initiatives. Please encourage a friend or colleague to join, so that CEC can maintain this momentum and continue to make its contribution towards improving the range and quality of education across the Commonwealth.