



**Council for Education**  
**in the**  
**Commonwealth**

**House of Commons – House of Lords**

**Supporting**  
**Commonwealth**  
**Education Effectively**  
**2006-07**

**Valerie Davey**  
**Executive Chairperson**

Commonwealth House • 7 Lion Yard • Tremadoc Road • London SW4 7NQ  
Tel: 01277 212357 • Fax: 020 7720 5403 [www.cecomm.org.uk](http://www.cecomm.org.uk) • E:  
[secretariat@cecomm.org.uk](mailto:secretariat@cecomm.org.uk)

Patrons: Lord Judd of Portsea • Lord Thomson of Monifieth KT PC •  
Baroness Chalker of Wallasey PCJ

Joint Parliamentary Chairpersons: Tim Boswell MP • Simon Hughes MP • Sally Keeble MP  
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# Executive Chairperson's Report 2006/07

It has been another eventful year for the Council. All our activities, particularly those relating to the 16<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) in Cape Town last December, and our CEC Spring Conference in March, are well described by Kees Maxey in the Hon. Secretary's Report. Again thanks to Kees, the information is also increasingly available on our website, [www.cecomm.org.uk](http://www.cecomm.org.uk).

How the Council achieves so much without paid staff or an office, is a constant source of wonder to those with whom we work. At our AGM last year, we again recognized the urgent need to improve the range and quality of Commonwealth education, and agreed that for CEC to contribute effectively, it needed to focus its efforts more sharply. We therefore decided to hold a residential conference, allowing time for members to reflect on how we could achieve most within our capacities. The conference, entitled 'Supporting Commonwealth Education Effectively', proved to be a worthwhile and enjoyable event for the forty people who took part. I want to use my report this year to share some of the outcomes, which will undoubtedly influence our work in coming years.

## **Spring Conference 2007**

The very fact that the conference took place demonstrated again the key strengths of CEC; the commitment and hard work of the Board members, the support of our Patrons and Parliamentary Joint Chairpersons and the generous support of our Commonwealth partners. All the speakers gave their time freely and the Commonwealth Secretariat hosted the first day at Marlborough House and provided refreshments. Our grateful thanks again to everyone involved.

The first immediate outcome was a series of excellent lectures. Most of these have since appeared on our website but if, like me, you prefer a hard copy I have available the inspiring opening remarks by Lord Thomson of Monifieth (George Thomson), a founder member of CEC, and three main speeches.

'Civil Society as Partners in Commonwealth education'

by Mark Collins, Director, Commonwealth Foundation

'Challenges to education in the Commonwealth in the next decade or two'

by Steve Packer, formerly Deputy Director GMR – UNESCO

'The Commonwealth and its Member Governments: Unlocking the Potential'

by Stuart Mole, Director-General, Royal Commonwealth Society

Also available in the pack is a summary of our final plenary session, drawing on group discussions and based on notes kindly taken by Mark Robinson. From the wide ranging and often lively discussions three priorities for CEC's work emerged, together with many other useful ideas.

First, the importance of the contribution CEC makes to CCEM and Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) was widely recognised and sup-

ported. The Women's Affairs Ministers' Meeting (WAMM), it was felt should be included in future. The quality of all we offer at preparatory briefings, the conferences themselves and subsequently, has to be high. 'Too substantive to be ignored', was the phrase used. With CHOGM in Kampala this November, 17CCEM in Malaysia in the first half of 2009 and the Trinidad and Tobago CHOGM later the same year, preparation for these events alone is a challenge. Add to this the fact that 2009 is the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of both CCEM and CEC, and the suggestion that a task group be set up to develop ideas, particularly for these anniversaries, seems imperative.

Second, and reflecting the enormity of the tasks in hand, the Conference emphasised the need for CEC to strengthen its important links with Parliament, Government Depts. (DFID, DfES, FCO), the British Council, the Commonwealth High Commissions and the Commonwealth Secretariat. It was clearly recognised that CEC would continue to work in partnership with many other organisations within the Commonwealth. However Lord Thomson reminded the Conference CEC's origin was the bringing together of educationalists and politicians.

The third strongly stated priority was for a campaign to promote education about the Commonwealth in the UK at every level. Reviving understanding of and enthusiasm for the Commonwealth was again seen as something we should be doing with others, and some excellent ideas were put forward involving the use of the internet.

These three priorities for CEC as it works towards its main objective of supporting Commonwealth education effectively, together with some of the other valuable points raised, are beginning to influence our forward planning. Nothing is in tablets of stone though, ideas will evolve, so please go on adding to the debate.

### **Members' Interests**

We were delighted to have new faces at the Conference, but are always looking for ways to recruit more members and to involve members more directly. One suggestion was to circulate a questionnaire, asking members if there are areas of specific interest, which they would like to pursue. The questionnaire is now ready, on the website and in hard copy. Please take a look, your replies and/or comments will be welcome.

### **Appreciation**

This year's varied and extensive programme has only been made possible through the commitment and hard work of the Board members. I extend a heartfelt word of appreciation to them all, CEC must never take their goodwill for granted. We are very fortunate to have as our Hon. Deputy Chairpersons, Peter Williams and John Oxenham, two exceptionally able and skilled people, whose wide experience of working in different parts of the Commonwealth is invaluable. As well as chairing the two main committees, Peter and John's contributions range widely, from writing /editing reports, contacting speakers and securing resources, to arranging special birthday celebrations!

Two key positions in any organisation are those of secretary and treasurer. CEC owes a debt of gratitude to both Kees Maxey and Richard Mawditt. Kees calmly, efficiently and with innate good humour ensures the smooth running of CEC, and takes pride in maintaining our website. (A deputy secretary is now needed, please have a word with Kees if you are interested.) Our finances are well managed thanks to Richard's diligence and his watchful eye on any plans for expenditure.

We are grateful to Alba de Souza, Thelma Henderson and Trevor Bottomley for faithfully servicing our committees, and to Deryn Holland whose organisational skills underpinned the varied events we held. Our thanks to Rosemary Preston for editing the last Newsletter and, especially, for her vision and sheer hard work in organising the 2007 Summer Conference. We value Geoffrey Hulme's special contribution in maintaining our link with the Knowledge Aid in Sierra Leone Project, and Martin Kenyon's in continuing to foster our Parliamentary contacts. Congratulations to Lalage Bown, for successfully overseeing the Universal Primary Education research project, commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat and with support from the CREATE project at the University of Sussex. It was a joint exercise between five African experts and five CEC members, was well received at the 16CCEM, and is to be published later in the year. The CEC researchers were: Felicity Binns, Balasubramanyam Chandramohan, Alba de Souza, John Oxenham and Peter Williams.

A special word of thanks to two Board members who are standing down. Trevor Bottomley has completed 25 years on the Board and is both a former Executive Chairperson and for many years an extremely effective Hon. Secretary. This is a proud record, and we pay tribute to his professionalism, commitment and friendly manner, which have been significant in shaping the work of CEC. Peter Jeffreys would admit by comparison to being a relative newcomer, but his work as Membership Secretary in sorting out and stabilizing the records, has been crucially important.

Our Parliamentary base is entirely dependent on our Patrons in the Lords and our Parliamentary Chairpersons in the Commons. Without exception Baroness Chalker, Lord Judd, Lord Thomson and the MPs, Tim Boswell, Simon Hughes and Sally Keeble, have responded positively to requests to speak, lead delegations to Ministers or chair CEC sessions. We appreciate their interest, and the time they give us.

Each year we also recognise the support we receive from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Royal Commonwealth Society and the British Council. This year they have been especially helpful, and we are grateful for their generous responses to our requests.

Finally we remember Bill Bonney Rust, a long-term CEC member, and member of the Board, who died sadly last year. His lifelong passion for education, especially further education, his infectious enthusiasm and outgoing nature, earned him the respect and affection of many CEC members. The best tribute we could pay him, would be to maintain his positive approach and willingness to consider new ideas.