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Council for Education in the Commonwealth 2019 Annual Conference on “Students: Our Common Wealth. A Focus on Student Success.” Grenada, 21 – 23 May 2019



St George's University

CEC

The Council for Education in the Commonwealth (CEC), a parliament based NGO, was founded 60 years ago, at the time of the first Commonwealth Education Ministers' Conference.

Its purpose is to create an informed public opinion on the salient issues concerning education and training in the Commonwealth and to identify appropriate ways in which Britain and the European Union can best contribute to their development.

The aims of CEC are to:

- provide a forum where Members of Parliament and others with an interest in the Commonwealth can exchange information and views
- initiate action to foster educational cooperation and the sharing of experience among countries and governments of the Commonwealth
- offer to informed and experienced persons from the UK and other Commonwealth countries a platform for the discussion of educational issues and developments
- liaise with the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth High Commissions, and cooperate with government departments in the UK and in the European Union, and with NGOs and professional bodies in the field, for the improvement and development of education throughout the Commonwealth

This year's conference took place from 21 - 23 May at St. George's University's (SGU) True Blue Campus in Grenada, and it marked two historic milestones: the modern Commonwealth celebrating its 70th anniversary, while the CEC itself celebrates 60 years since it was founded. It was also the first CEC conference to take place in a Caribbean country.

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, delivered a keynote address at the conference, and was joined by others including Dame Cécile La Grenade, Governor-General of Grenada, Asha Kanwar, President and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL), and Faye Taylor, The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). CHEC's Chair, Mark Robinson also attended the conference.

The theme of the conference was 'Students: Our Common Wealth. A Focus on Student Success' and it showcased presentations and debates on a variety of topics pertaining to student success and achievement. Presentation themes included education challenges across the Caribbean; equity and access; the role of learning technologies to enhance student experience; teacher education; qualitative improvements in education, and importantly, understanding students and their needs, for which a special panel discussion was held to appreciate this perspective.



True Blue Resort (photo Eva Ekehorn)

St George's University (SGU)

Founded as an independent School of Medicine in 1976, St. George's University opened its doors to students beginning in January 1977. It has evolved into a top centre of international education, drawing students and faculty from 140 countries to the Caribbean island of Grenada, in the West Indies. Students attending SGU enjoy the benefits of a thriving multicultural environment on the [True Blue campus](#), offering all the amenities and technologically advanced facilities of a world-class institution.

The University's more than 20,000 graduates include physicians, veterinarians, scientists, and public health and business professionals across the world. The University offers medical and veterinary medical degrees in the [Schools of Medicine](#) and [Veterinary Medicine](#), and independent and dual graduate degrees in the sciences, public health, and business. Undergraduate degree programs are also available through its [School of Arts and Sciences](#), and students may build on their education by pursuing a degree in the School of Graduate Studies. The University programmes are accredited and approved by many governing authorities, and SGU is affiliated with educational institutions worldwide, including in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Ireland.

Report from the Conference

The theme this year was “**Students: Our Common Wealth. A Focus on Student Success**”. With this theme the aim was to explore a range of questions:

- *Students in the 21st Century face many daunting challenges but what are governments, education institutions and teachers doing to better meet their life and employment needs?*
- *What is ‘success’ in the education context, and from whose perspective?*
- *What are the main challenges facing education provision for the 21st Century, in the Caribbean and beyond?*
- *What are the needs of students, and how might these differ according to level, location and finance?*
- *What more should we all be doing to enhance learning experiences, wherever the student might be studying?*

The event brought together leading educationalists, scholars, researchers, teachers, policy makers, business leaders and students from secondary and higher education to share best practice to address the above and explore how we all might better work together.

The Caribbean location for the event facilitated the bringing together of people from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences: large and small island states, rich and poor, public and private providers, Commonwealth countries and others.

The conference feature distinguished plenary speakers, concurrent presentations, workshops, poster presentations, and opportunities for future collaborations. Social activities took place to allow attendees the opportunity to explore and enjoy the many natural treasures on the beautiful island of Grenada.

The keynote speakers highlighted important issues for education; be it in higher education or for vocational work. Here are just some key phrases used by speakers:

Students need preparation for a changing world. The world needs innovation (Sonny Leong).

Education for climate change is important and education is the most powerful means we have to change the world. Learning has to be life-long! It is for employment, for entrepreneurship, engagement. Every person has a talent. Everyone should be able to develop that talent. (Sec Gen. Patricia Scotland).

Learning is the key for sustainable development (Asha Kanwar).

There were some statistics on student participation around the Commonwealth. The University of West Indies have 4 campuses, 50,000 students, 14 with no campus, working online. The possibilities to study online have increased. The problem with distances between places of studies can be eased through online work. To do such courses you have to have several skills: a team for the basic web design; a team for the input; and a team for responding to students’ questions. The relationship is very important between universities and their students. Craig Mahoney, Vice

Chancellor of the University of West of Scotland, highlighted the many ways the relationship between teachers and students could be approved.

There were some 30 paper presentations. There were also lively workshops and poster presentations, now not on whiteboard or flipcharts but on computer screens.

Among the speakers, Eva Ekehorn, Trustee & Hon Secretary of CHEC, made a presentation on 'Human Ecology – growing a backbone in students' education'. She made suggestions to use human ecology as a structure behind the teaching about the environment for all and for children. Human ecological understanding can help to form a backbone for children and that can be of great support for teachers aiming at more sustainable teaching. An education about the environment has to go into the heart of a child and help it to feel part of something bigger rather than studying a language or physics in a pure form. The connection to the environment is not just to understand – it is to feel, get attached and be inspired. 'Therefore, in conclusion, I want human ecology to be at the core of education'.



So what is human ecology? It may need an explanation. Eva presented a Human Ecology cake to highlight the complexity of including the whole of our planet in studies or research. This cake is now accessible via CHEC's webpage: <https://www.checinternational.org/the-human-ecology-cake/>

Dr Glen Jacobs and Sonny Leong gave the closing remarks, and a handover was made to Dorothy Kamwilu, Education Attaché, Kenya High Commission in London, as the next CEC conference will be held in Kenya in two years' time.

The conference ended with a Sunset Social with music and a very convivial atmosphere. Other networking opportunities were arranged throughout the conference.

**CHEC is grateful for the warm support
by organisers of this conference and especially by the
President of SGU, Dr Richard Olds and Provost of SGU,
Dr Glen Jacobs**

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