

Welcome to PCF5 at the People's University



*Introductory Remarks to the Opening Ceremony of the
Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5)
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*Sir John Daniel
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Vice-Chancellor, Prime Minister of Uganda, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Assistant Director-General for Education of UNESCO, Acting Chair of the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth of Learning, Your Excellencies the High Commissioners, distinguished delegates to the Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a personal pleasure to add my welcome Sir Graeme's. He and I have had remarkably similar and intersecting careers. We both began our academic lives in engineering and metallurgy. We each moved from Commonwealth countries to posts in UK universities; he from New Zealand, I from Canada. We have between us some 35 years of experience as vice-chancellors of five universities, and we have each worked for governmental or intergovernmental educational agencies.

I greatly admired Sir Graeme's wisdom and skill when he was Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England and helped us steer the Open University through the UK's higher education reforms of the early 1990s. Later, when he became Chairman of the Universities Superannuation Scheme, I knew that my pension was in safe hands.

I pay tribute to Sir Graeme's great personal interest in the planning of this PCF5. COL's partnership with the University of London has been quite extraordinarily harmonious and productive. There will be other occasions to thank the University of London team for their tremendous dedication and thoughtfulness, but let me say here that I could not have imagined a more effective working relationship.

Sir Graeme wrote to me two years ago to ask if the University of London could co-organise the Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning as part of the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of its External Studies programme. I leapt at the opportunity. The four other regions of the Commonwealth had already hosted similar events: Asia - Brunei in 1999; Africa - Durban in 2002; the Pacific - Dunedin in 2004 and the Caribbean - Ocho Rios in 2006.

The prospect of associating this Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum with the sesquicentennial of the University of London's External Studies system was tremendously exciting. Distance learning and cross-border education attract so much attention today that we sometimes think of them as new phenomena. As we meet to exchange achievements, experiences and ideas on the theme *Access to Learning for Development*, let us remember that one hundred and fifty years ago this University took a bold step and imaginative step to create access to learning for development across the British Empire. It was nicknamed the People's University.

Since then the University of London has played a central role in the development of higher education in the Commonwealth. I think of the University of Ghana, the University of Ibadan, the University of the West Indies, Makerere University, and others that began life as colleges of the University of London. Yesterday I was privileged to take part in a meeting organised by the University of London and UNESCO that brought together these and other institutions to look into the future.

I thank Sir Graeme and the University of London for organising this forum with the Commonwealth of Learning. In welcoming you, I hope that as you discuss access to learning for development in the days ahead you will be fully conscious of the long tradition of idealism and innovation in which your work is embedded.