

A personal view by Professor Jeff Thompson

Looking back - and going forward!

No doubt there are many people – including not a few readers of this newsletter – for whom one or more key experiences in their lives have, on reflection, set them on a road to a chain of events which turned out to be of central importance in a way that could never have been anticipated at the time. In reflecting now, on my formal retirement from the University of Bath and my role with the IBO (though I will still be around! – see below), there are a number of such key professional moments without which my career would certainly have taken a quite different path.

Aside from the decisions to become a school-teacher and then a teacher-trainer – both important against the opportunity to continue in Cambridge with scientific research – the first such key moment perhaps, given the direction in which my career path subsequently led, was when, while at University College London in 1968, Alec Peterson – then Director of the Department of Educational Studies at Oxford University – asked me to ‘knock together a few Chemistry questions’ for a new



Jeff Thompson retired from his post at the University of Bath at the end of September 2005. He has been elected as an Emeritus Professor of the University and will continue teaching, writing and researching with CEIC

countries? As an IB examiner, Chief Examiner, Chair of the Examining Board and – more recently – Academic Director and Head of the IB Research Unit, I have experienced at first hand many developments, many challenges and many ‘full and frank’ discussions with colleagues, as well as having my interest in the field of international schools and international education well and truly ignited.

Difficult as it is to narrow down the choice of significant professional moments in a long and action-packed career, the next point I would identify as having been crucial to me professionally was my move

to Bath in 1979. As the new young professor I joined one other professor (Ken Austwick) and a team of colleagues in a university little more than ten years old. Becoming Head of Department soon after, for the first in what was eventually to be three stints of three years each in that role, as well as Arts Area Chair and Pro Vice Chancellor, was challenging and stimulating. Having spent the period 1979–2005 as professor in the same university may seem to suggest potential for stagnation and tedium, but in reality nothing could be further from the truth. New developments within both the department and the growing university more broadly, together with the IBO involvement that ran throughout this period and the major national initiatives to which I was fortunate enough to contribute, meant that there were not too many dull or repetitive moments – if any at all!

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programme being developed called the International Baccalaureate. Who would have thought then that, some 37 years on, the IBO would have grown to the point where it offers three programmes covering the entire school age range in over 1600 schools and more than 100

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The third significant moment I would identify is the establishment at Bath of CEIC. Growing out of an idea that had been bubbling under for some time, and linked closely to the international school and IBO involvement noted above, CEIC's establishment in 1992 brought together Jim Harvey and myself, with Mary Hayden, David Black and Sue Oakley, in the first stages of developing the teaching of the modular Masters programme into a more flexible and accessible model for those based internationally. Jim's first foray to teach a group of teachers in Dar es Salaam, and our first teaching of MA modules on campus in July, were the prototypes for the Study Centre and Summer School programmes that have become a central part of the Advanced Courses programme since that time. And how interesting and exciting those developments have been, in terms of the numbers of teachers and other education professionals who have studied with Bath through one or more of these routes, in addition to the full-time and part-time Masters and Doctoral programmes already pursued by those based more locally. More recent developments have included the generation and implementation of an international education unit for the new EdD programme, and a range of publications relating to international education which have appeared in the form of books and journal articles. And that's not to mention the 2002 launch of the *Journal of Research in International Education*, which I continue to edit and which has attracted some excellent pieces of writing to date (though more are always welcome – readers please note!).

Which brings me to my final point (and in doing so I am conscious of the many other points I could have chosen to mention) which is the establishment of the IB Research Unit at Bath in 2000. As the IBO has grown, so has the need for evidence to inform decisions made with respect to the three programmes – and indeed to support the claims that are made for those programmes. The closeness of those working in the IBRU with colleagues in CEIC has given me particular satisfaction and has, I believe, enhanced the quality of work associated with each of them, and I owe a massive debt of gratitude particularly to Mary Hayden who has been – and continues to be – a crucial part of that development.

In reflecting on these four key points in a long and rewarding career, I am conscious of what has *not*

been mentioned. In choosing to focus for the purposes of this article on international education-related issues, I have not mentioned the involvement I had over many years in science education nationally – including the Association for Science Education, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and chairing the first (science) national curriculum working group – with the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting, and with a number of aspects of the national curriculum and examination system.

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So what comes next? The Welsh Baccalaureate pilot internal evaluation project in which I am involved will run until 2007, and I will continue as Chair of the national Examinations Appeals Board until 2008. The University of Bath has conferred upon me the title of Emeritus Professor, which means that I will continue to be involved in teaching and supervising Masters and Doctoral students, as well as other academic activities. I also plan to keep researching and writing, and to continue to play an active role in CEIC activities in particular, as well as supporting the ongoing work of the IBO – cheering from the sidelines, at least! I look forward to continuing to interact with the many teachers and administrators I have been privileged to meet and fortunate enough to work with to date, and to meeting many more colleagues who are involved with the crucially important task of promoting international education worldwide. Serious gardening and golf will have to wait for a while yet!

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