

UK ASSOCIATION FOR THE MILTON MARGAI SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND IN SIERRA LEONE

Summary Record of the Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 29 April 2010 at the Methodist Central Hall Westminster

1. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the 6th AGM since the UKA's inception. Apologies for absence were noted from Liz Fennell, Bernie and Jane Latham, Jack Latham, Joanna Richards, Mary Phillips, John Myers, Kevin Jones and Toyota Gibraltar, Ian Bolton and Freedom Road, Charlie Puddicombe and Mike Vincent.

Chairman's Report

2. In presenting his report for the past year, the Chairman noted that despite some improvement by the government in the payment of the grant, the problems to which he referred in last year's report still persisted. The report instigated by the President and carried out by the Minister of Education into allegations of corruption and mismanagement into the running of the school is still languishing in the Minister's office. The Chairman again brought this to the attention of President Koroma who was concerned and promised action but none has been forthcoming. This has seriously affected the UKA's ability to transfer funding towards the running of the school in the past year. The school has continued to function spasmodically but morale is low. There are presently 35 primary, 29 secondary, 5 tertiary and 8 teachers at the school – a total of 77 living on campus. In keeping with most schools in Sierra Leone, the standard of education appears to be dropping with a few notable exceptions. The choir is not functioning. The Vocational Skills unit has not got underway and therefore the "See Here" kiosk built with UKA funds is not being used by the Blind School although it is being put to good use by the neighbouring School for the Deaf where it is sited. The School's Committee of Management has still failed to recruit a matron to replace "Auntie Rose" who passed away 16 months ago. The programme with the Commonwealth Countries League Education Fund ran into further problems when another 2 girls dropped out leaving just one of the six girls being sponsored. On a more positive note the CCLEF has agreed to sponsor two of the girls at the Bo Blind School, Christiana Kanu and Mariama Sumaila. The visit in October by a group from the Wells Cathedral School, led by Roland Ladley, for which the UKA was the major funder, was unable to do anything at the school because it remained closed at the time.

3. The Chairman reported on his visit to Sierra Leone with fellow committee member, Ibrahim Suma, in February/March when they had discussed all the ongoing problems with a range of people including the acting headmaster, the President, the chairman of the Committee of Management and the UKA's Liaison Committee. He praised the work of Barbara Davidson, whom the UKA continues to support. He also thanked the members of the UKA Liaison Committee under its chairman, Alhaji Jawad, who continue to monitor and

advise on developments. During their trip the Chairman and Ibrahim Suma had visited the blind schools in Bo and Makeni and held useful meetings with Dr Abs Dumbuya of the Dorothy Springer Trust, Thomas Allieu at the Vocational Skills Training Centre and John Koroma at his recording studio. All of these organisations which are providing training and opportunities for the blind could benefit significantly from assistance from the UKA hence the proposal to be considered later on the agenda to amend the UKA's constitution. He noted the efforts underway by a group headed by Joanna Richards to undertake a building project at the Bo Blind School.

4. The Chairman noted that there had been some progress with the proposed disability legislation. The government has now taken it over from the private member's bill proposed by the Hon Julius Cuffie. A draft bill has now gone through cabinet and is sitting in the Attorney-General's Office in preparation for submitting to Parliament.

5. He thanked all the benefactors and supporters of the UKA, mentioning in particular Toyota Gibraltar, Vision Charity, the George Cook Foundation and the churches Trinity Sutton, St Martin's in the Fields and St Helen's Abingdon. In concluding his report, copies of which were circulated, Peter Penfold announced that he would be standing down as Chairman after serving for 7 years. He thanked all the committee members for their efforts and support in the past year and wished the new committee well.

6. In comments from the floor, general disappointment was expressed with the continuing problems which were seriously affecting the UKA's ability to help the school. However, it was emphasised that it was not for the UKA to become directly involved in running the school – this was clearly the responsibility of the headmaster, the Committee of Management and the relevant ministries.

Treasurer's Report

7. The Treasurer, Richard Stowell, circulated copies of the Statement of Financial Activities for the ending 31 December 2009. Income for the year amounted to £22,752 which included a significant proportion of regular planned giving as well as the sizeable amounts from Trusts such as Toyota Gibraltar, whose funding is dedicated to supporting Barbara Davidson. There was a noticeable drop in bank interest from previous years. Expenditure for the year amounted to £23,100 which mainly covered the support for Barbara and the completion of building projects started in the previous year, plus support for the Wells Cathedral School visit. The Treasurer reported a healthy end of year balance of funds in the UKA account of £55,147. Charlie Puddicombe ACMA had submitted an Independent Examiner's report certifying the accounts to be correct. This will be sent to the Charities Commission together with the Accounts and Annual Report as required under UK law.

8. Given the very low bank interest rate, there was some discussion from the floor on alternative ways to invest some of the funds. The incoming committee will consider this.

Resolution amending the Constitution

9. Following upon the discussion from the previous AGM, a resolution, proposed by Peter Penfold and seconded by Richard Stowell, had been tabled the requisite 21 days before the AGM and circulated. The Chairman had also informed the Charities Commission for England and Wales as required under the constitution. The resolution recommended that the “objects” of the UKA should be expanded to cover assistance to “pupils at schools and training establishments for the blind in Sierra Leone”. In tandem with this proposal it was recommended that the name of the charity should be changed to “The UK Association for Schools for the Blind in Sierra Leone”. Several members present spoke in favour of the resolution including Bernard Ginns and Ron Fennell. Jude Thompson, speaking in favour, suggested that a process for bidding for UKA funds should be instituted once the changes were adopted. The resolution was then put before the meeting and it was adopted unanimously.

Election of Executive Committee

10. Under the terms of the Constitution the Executive Committee shall comprise of seven to nine members plus up to three co-opted members. All members shall retire at the end of each AGM but may be re-elected. The Chairman confirmed his intention to stand down as announced in his annual report. He also noted that he had received written notification that Bernard Latham wished to stand down. Nominations had been received for eight members and three co-opted members. Ron Fennell recommended that all the nominations be accepted. Joyce Oshu-Williams seconded the recommendation which was accepted unanimously by those present.

11. The new Executive Committee therefore comprises:

Richard Stowell – Chairman

Jude Thompson – Vice Chairman

Ron Fennell

Ibrahim Suma

Bernard Ginns

Joanna Richards

Elana Cheah

Jack Latham

Liz Fennell – co-opted member

Mary Phillips – co-opted member

Joyce Oshu-Williams – co-opted member.

12. It was noted that no one had been nominated as treasurer. This will become a matter for the incoming committee although Bernard Ginns indicated that he might be prepared to take on this role.

13. Thanks were expressed to the outgoing members, viz Peter Penfold, Bernard and Jane Latham. The incoming Chairman, Richard Stowell, recommended that Peter Penfold be invited to become the “Patron” of the UKA. The latter accepted the honour.

Any Other Business

14. The outgoing Chairman informed those present that he had met with Ian Bolton of Freedom Road, the group based in Hull who had supported the Milton Margai choir during their tour in 2007. They were planning to visit Sierra Leone early next year. Peter had welcomed the proposal and offered assistance.

15. Thanks were expressed to Ron Fennell for arranging the venue and best wishes were sent to Liz Fennell who is recuperating. The meeting concluded at 7.45pm.

In Attendance

Peter Penfold, Richard Stowell, Jude Thompson, George Cook, Christine Purdy, Ibrahim Suma, Joyce Oshu-Williams, Ron Fennell, Bernard Ginns, Momodou Sillah.

29 April 2010