**Opening Address to 7th National Conference**

**For the Children’s University**

**On 4th December 2014**

Welcome to this 7th National Conference. A Conference with many Differences……We have an excellent programme ahead of us.

A Difference this year is that it has been designed by the CU Team with input from some CU managers and by taking note of some recent comments from many of you.

So….It is your programme… so I hope that you feel the benefit…. when you return home tomorrow.

This Conference is different in another way too. It is the first we have had without Ger Graus, who has resigned to pursue his career elsewhere.

I am confident that the Children’s University will continue to prosper because of the strength and commitment of all of you involved. In my experience the energy and enthusiasm of CU managers in the field coupled with the dedication and skills of the CU Team will ensure that we can approach our 10th Anniversary Conference in 2017 with great confidence.

The leadership and support that I receive from the Board of Trustees and the Board of the CU Trading Ltd. provides wise counsel and much stimulation for innovation and development.

**Our Conference Theme this year is “Looking Past Limits”.**

This Theme captures one of the essences of the Children’s University. BECAUSE….In all you do….. you try to help young people find skills, interests and passions that they did not know they might have.

You stretch them,… you open up new horizons, …you foster their development.

Let me give you a few examples of how the CU is looking past limits. There will be many more throughout the next two days. And remember, “Looking Past Limits” for some of you will be as simple as:

How do I get started?;

Where do I look to find a local Chancellor?;

How do I get the funding that I need?

These are very simple and pragmatic questions or challenges.

**For others** the “Looking Past Limits” is about getting a lot more schools and children involved; or working out new partnerships…

All these practical things are answered by talking to colleagues here at the Conference – at any time,

or especially in the “Speed Dating Session” tomorrow,

or by linking in to Debbie Bird, Caroline Gilbert or Lynne Upton – the senior members of the CU team.

**So what examples** do we have of “Looking Past Limits”?

The CU in England has many stories to show that you have not only “Looked Past Limits”, but you have actually travelled past them too….

The CU has been finding London difficult to get going so we are delighted that The Newham Education Business Partnership, whose remit is to forge education-business links, supporting the development of work related learning and enterprise skills in young people will be the lead organisation for the Newham CU. It is working alongside with 15billion, an organisation who have the contract to provide the careers focused Information Advice & Guidance service to young people aged 13-19 in the Borough.

Newham CU already has the support of University College London and is developing further, their existing links with the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

At the other extreme, through the enthusiasm and commitment of Anna Chamberlain, Leader for Inclusion at Selby Primary School, we have a first CU in the North Yorkshire area. A tiny acorn from which we hope a big oak tree will grow.

“Looking Past Limits” requires us to see potential for all Children to participate in the CU movement. So we are proud that Bromley College see the potential of CU to engage its learners through The Bromley Trust Alternative Provision Academy.

**The road to success with CUs is not smooth**. Many hit problems of lack of leadership, or of funding.

A school promotion for Heather Beach, CU Manager for Bristol found her with little or no time to develop further the CU work she had started. With Heather’s help opportunities to develop further the existing relationships with University West England were explored and Di Stone, newly appointed CU Manager, will be building upon Heather’s work and extending the reach of Children’s University across Bristol and South Gloucestershire.

The Shropshire CU floundered last year, but a group of Heads made it clear that they did not want it to fade away, and have got together and have established a new arrangement to take it forward.

In the same vein, the Suffolk CU was abandoned by the County Council, but has been re-generated through the commitment to CU from Stephen Chamberlain, who many of you will have heard speak last year, in his role as Regional Director of Education for Suffolk and North Essex for the Academies Enterprise Trust, Stephen is also a CU Parent. A new CU Manager has been appointed and work is underway for re-development to begin.

**Finally**, “Looking Past Limits” meant that the CU Team together with the CUs in Lancashire/Sefton, Blackpool, Blackburn and Middlesbrough gained substantial funds from the Education Endowment Fund/Cabinet Office to use the CU model as a vehicle to engage young people in social action. This innovative approach has attracted national interest and is being evaluated by Durham University to establish the impact on young people’s attainment and engagement – we are delighted that Dr Nadia Siddiqui is able to join us today.

By working together, the CU Trust and local CUs created a compelling argument for large-scale funding and, as a result, have been able to expand operations and increase the choice and benefit for all children involved; a strategy which we want to apply to other themes, geographies and funding streams. An exciting prospect I think you’ll agree.

**Let’s finish with the recent Press Release** about connecting Coventry with China!!

The Press Release starts out with:

*A primary school in Coventry is amongst the first in the country to develop international learning links with a school with a collaboration of schools in China, enabling year 5 and 6 local schoolchildren to broaden their horizons and learn on a virtual level across the Globe.*

*Through the ‘Children’s University’ (CU) Finham Primary School in Coventry has collaborated with the Confucius Education Group in China to establish a firm basis for future learning for pupils. The scheme was inspired by a partnership approach to learning between the schools and the Children’s University, a charity that enables children to develop learning and improve their skills in a fun and engaging way.*

The first output of this collaboration will be shown tomorrow and the leaders of this initiative, Richard Machin from Coventry, and Mark Upton and Jenny Li from China are all here at the Conference. We are in discussions with Mark Upton to seek ways in which the CU movement can be commenced within the very different society that is the modern day China. (Mark and Jenny would stand up please so you can be recognized.)

In a similar vein, Emile Van Der Zee, championed the development of Lincolnshire CU through the University of Lincoln, the first meetings taking place at the beginning of this year, and he has already established links with China.

A little nearer the UK, than China, I participated in the first Graduation in Malaysia in early November. It was held in Kuala Lumpur and was part of an intensive first pilot year of the CU in Malaysia. Over 200 children, from 9 different schools, received their Awards and it was a joy to behold their delight and pride in having their achievements recognized in this way. Jagindar Singh who led this programme is with us at this Conference and will be sharing his story with you later. (Please stand up)

Slightly further away, but with strong connections to the UK, the CU in South Australia held its second Graduation in late October and Lynne Upton represented us there. In the first year, a small group graduated from a single school, Mark Oliphant College. The second graduation saw over 100 children graduating from 6 schools and, by the New Year, CU Australia will have grown to 21 schools with 1,750 passport holders. I’m pleased to say Gary Martin and Sally Owen from the University of Adelaide are with us so you can talk to them too, directly. I would also like to welcome Melissa Pollard, Senior Policy Advisor from the University of Tasmania, with whom we hope to develop a growing partnership. (Please could Melissa, Gary and Sally stand up)

But let us return to the UK. Well whilst Scotland did not vote for Independence in the Referendum, it is certainly,…. in CU terms, showing how well it can do its **own thing** in the context of their particular society and education set up.

In contrast to England, the education system is still run by the Local Authorities, and – as many of you may know – that brings its own challenges. Decision-making can be slow and money can be difficult to find.

However, in Scotland through the unstinting efforts of Mary Brittain (now Mary de la Pena – congratulations Mary) and the persuasive Board of Trustees led by Jock Brown, we have a thriving CU in Scotland. Their first Graduation was in April this year, they have received significant start up funding from Scottish Power, and most recently the Scottish Government has made a significant grant. The CU in Scotland will fly high.

Ever since Ger Graus went on Special Leave in August I have been providing an Executive role to the CU team, ably supported by Lynne Upton and all the others. Now that Ger has departed, the Board of Trustees has commenced the recruitment of a new CEO. This job is a very special role.

Clearly we wish to make an appointment as soon as we can; however, it is equally important to find someone who shares our values and ambition. We need a new CEO who has the right management style and networking capabilities to take us forward. The CU Board is determined to make the right appointment so we shall take whatever time is necessary.

So, in the meantime, we are pleased that we have established an interim CEO function in the form of a job share with Lynne Upton and Mary de la Pena,… each giving time to lead the CU together. Happily, they have complementary skills and work well together, so out in the field you will probably experience a seamless transition. You are in safe hands.

We shall involve the top team in the selection process so that we shall appoint the candidate who is best placed to take the CU forward through it next phase of development.

So together we remain strong.

Together, ……in partnerships, we can innovate.

Together,…. in mutual support, we can deal with whatever difficulties arise.

Together …..we shall build towards a great 10 year celebration.

And Most importantly,…

…..Together we shall enable 100 of thousands of children, across the globe, to “Look Past the Limits” that their Societies put in their paths,

……and to find their own ways to brighter and better futures.

Enjoy the Conference,….. and I hand over to Lynne to give more insight into how the next 24 hours will unfold………

Dr J Sandy Bradbrook

Chair, Children’s University (CU) Trust

28th November 2014