

Third SCEN China Youth Summit At Gleneagles.

Over 300 delegates came together at Gleneagles on 7 November 2014 for the Third China Youth Summit organised by the Scottish-China Education Network (SCEN).

The theme of this year's event was *China and Scotland at Home*, celebrating the relationship of friendship, collaboration and mutual understanding between Scotland's schools, colleges, universities, professions and businesses. Pupils and teachers from 33 primary and secondary schools attended and the highlight of the day was- as ever- the excellent presentations offered by the pupils about their learning experiences.

As in previous years, the Summit's guests of honour were piped in by Aaron Hossain of Oban High School, and included SCEN President Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, Mr Pan Xinchun, Chinese Consul General in Edinburgh and Michael Russell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. In his inspiring opening address, Mr Russell said, "I believe that young people should have a strong voice in shaping their own education, I know here that the implementation of the SCEN Ambassadors' programme is a key part in helping choose a direction driven by young people themselves."

The day got off to rousing start thanks to The Mandarin Band of Bannerman High School, who sang and played a lively Chinese rock song. Speaking after the event, Craigmount High School language volunteer Jing Li said the performance had been the highlight of the day for her, explaining that she was very impressed with the band's rendition of such a well-known and popular piece of music.

Another of the morning's highlights was a presentation by Fhiona Fisher from the Confucius Institute for Scotland's Schools (CISS), who explained that CISS have just completed a series of animated stories about China for use in primary schools. She was joined on stage by Fergus Cao from Our Lady and St Joseph's Primary School. who plays a Scottish ox in the series, and Chunyi Kang from Mosshead Primary School, who plays a caterpillar. Both Fergus and Chunyi were dressed in costume and introduced themselves very confidently! Pupils at Lasswade High later said that this presentation had been their favourite. Rachel Dobbie, Amber Foster and Catriona Sargent all said that they thought the interactive eBooks were 'really good' and would definitely help younger children learn Mandarin in the future.

The morning's presentations were rounded off by Lasswade High's account of their recent trip to China entitled 'Beyond the Panda', which tied in with the school's recent learning initiative of the same name. Pupils were initially taken to the city of Chengdu, where they experienced their very first authentic Chinese meal, before travelling through the mountains to Szechuan province and visiting a school. The highlight of the pupil's trip was a visit to a panda sanctuary, where they were allowed to feed panda cake and bamboo to the residents! All the pupils involved said it had been a life-changing experience.

After a delicious three-course lunch, Barclays Director of Trade and Working Capital Eric Balish took to the stage to give a fascinating account of the new Scotland-China Business Forum. The forum is currently engaged in bringing representatives from the Scottish government, schools and various professions together to build bridges, join the dots and come up with a cohesive approach to encourage top

students from China to study in Scotland and bring business professionals into Scotland's schools to encourage China connections, things which benefit both countries equally.

Delegates also enjoyed hearing about Leith Academy's and Craigmount High School's trip to China, where they visited the Terracotta Army of Emperor Qin Shi Huang in Xi'an before taking the bullet train to Tianjin to visit their partner school. Pupils explained that they were amazed to find the huge school had over 2000 pupils. SCEN Convener Judith McClure then asked the speakers if they thought the young people at Tianjin No. 3 Middle School had a more serious attitude to schoolwork than pupils in the UK, and was told that they do chat a lot and have fun, but that while they are learning they seem more focused on their work.

Later in the afternoon it was time to welcome several new SCEN Ambassadors. Certificates were awarded to India Murray and Michelle Whitehall of Leith Academy, Shannon Grew and Hannah Scott from Denny High School and Abigail Ironside and Mary-Anne Paterson from Braes High School. Volunteer Coordinator Valerie Macintosh from Edinburgh University Students' Association said she had enjoyed this part of the Summit very much, saying: "it was very inspiring to meet the Ambassadors and hear about the passion these young people have for language learning, as well as the work that they put into their roles," a sentiment with which we can all agree!

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning Michael Russell MSP got in touch after the event to say how much he had enjoyed the summit, explaining:

"I was delighted to be able to attend the Third SCEN Youth Summit at Gleneagles. The event demonstrated the enthusiasm and excitement in Scotland for Chinese learning and to see so many young people as well as representatives from industry and education share their passion for Chinese language and culture was truly heart-warming. I was very pleased to be able to speak to some of the young people at the Summit. Events such as this provide them, and other attendees with an invaluable experience to broaden their learning experience and to meet others who share their interest in China. Many thanks to SCEN for the valuable contribution they are making to language learning in Scotland."

SCEN President Lord Wilson closed the Summit by describing how he feels that "there is a dream to learning Chinese. It is a dream-not a nightmare! - and we've seen that today. The enthusiasm of those taking part is wonderful to see. May you all achieve that dream, and may SCEN help you to do so."

Based on this year's fantastic array of presentations, it certainly seems that many pupils are well on their way to making their Mandarin learning dreams come true.

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