



ZamScotEd | SCIO | SC038694

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Chair's Report, AGM 18.11.2025 by ZOOM

An Overview

Welcome to our 2025 AGM. Throughout the world, nations have experienced challenges. Scotland and Zambia have seen rising prices, climate difficulties, even violence. Zambia has ambitions to become the region's breadbasket, but as we have seen at the COP30 climate conference in Brazil, nowhere on the planet is safe from environmental disasters. Our role as an organisation is a very small piece of the very big and complex jigsaw puzzle that is life as we approach the second quarter of the 21st century.

The progress of St Columba's Community Secondary School

Once again, I visited St Columba's in June, when the Feast of St Columba is celebrated. I was warmly welcomed by Sr Veronica Nyoni, the school's head teacher and so much more.

As always, we had paid school fees, uniforms, reams of paper and school shoes for the children cared for by the Mthunzi Children's Centre in January, which is the start of the Zambian academic year. This enabled 43 children to receive secondary education and amounted to £11,500. They were either resident at the Mthunzi Children's Programme, members of Mthunzi's home-based care programme, or from the Lonjedzani programme for girls in the community. The sum included five children identified by Sr Veronica as vulnerable; and we also paid for five girls supported by Mthunzi to stay in the girls' hostel at St Columba's. This latter addition not only enables girls (who are at exam level) to share in school life more fully, in the school's homework schemes, but also protects them from long walks to and from school which are potentially dangerous.

As you know, the amount we pay fluctuates according to the exchange rate. In January 2025 the rate favoured us. I note as we approach January 2026 that it is not quite so generous – a good sign that Zambia's economic situation has improved; not so good for us!

We continue to support a student who did well at St Columba's and is now studying at the University of Zambia. We feel that this is an encouragement to other pupils at the school, and especially to those who come from challenged families. We continue to have sponsors for other graduates of the school. As I noted last year, this always depends on our own financial situation in the UK – we know that however generous our donors are, we all face challenges. Your generosity is staggering. We thank each one of you.

I must reiterate that ZamScotEd aims to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2, 4 and 5, which are to end poverty (we believe that an educated child is a child who can lift her/himself out of poverty); quality education (St Columba's is now an exam centre for the national Grade 9 and Grade 12 exams and St Columba's pupils achieved the highest merits in Zambian schools); and gender equality. There continues to be a good gender balance but as always, period poverty challenges girls, who may miss lessons. We were able to make provision for period poverty again this year and will campaign for funds again in December. What better Christmas gift could we give a Zambian girl?

We spent £4000 on science equipment when I was at the school in June – more thanks due to generous donors. I joined Sr Veronica and two of the teachers from the science department for a major shopping expedition which wasn't quite as simple as last year's shop for the home economics department, but we have made a difference. Studying science subjects without the equipment just doesn't work. We need more, as the two teachers emphasised, but it was a very satisfying start.

Ongoing responsibilities

No different from previous years - we are committed to paying the school fees, as well as uniforms, paper, textbooks, exam and graduation fees of the most vulnerable in the area, and we will continue supporting girls who need to stay in the hostel. Period poverty is of course on-going; textbooks are expensive and essential; sports equipment is always necessary; equipment and books for the library are always on our wish list; provision of clean water and toilets are a human right.

Our on-going finances

Our treasurer Denise MacLean will give a proper breakdown, but monthly donations continue despite the Chancellor's continuing strains on our individual budgets. Again – I must thank our community here in Argyll and elsewhere. Selfishly, I'm hoping the exchange rate favours us, despite what it means for Zambia..

Major funders are ever more discriminatory in their donations, so we must be frugal. I am sure our partners, the Teresian Sisters, understand that.

A worry

I must report on a development in the area where St Columba's and the Mthunzi project are situated. The Chinese are the neo-colonialists of the 21st century and many Chinese businesses have sprung up in recent years. In 2025, a company opened just half a mile from the school to recycle plastic. When I was there in June, there had been very recent emissions of thick black choking smoke. Complaints were made, and we were invited to inspect the premises. We were told that the processing of the plastic (waste from factories and from the streets to be turned into plastic sacks) was being cleaned up, but there have continued to be poisonous emissions, damaging to health of all in the area, which has previously been agricultural and residential. A further concern that we noted during our visit was that the employees sorting the filthy plastic for processing wore no protective clothing including boots, gloves, masks and goggles. We feel it is our duty to the pupils of St Columba's and the residents at the Mthunzi project to continue to monitor this situation for their health and welfare.

The future

This is all part of our commitment to supporting the most vulnerable children in the neighbourhood of St Columba's, the community secondary school we initiated. Unbelievably, 2026 is our tenth anniversary and from June this year, the pupils at St Columba's are saying a special prayer for that anniversary. The progress – thanks to the admirable efforts of Sr Veronica and her wonderful staff – has been amazing. I will be there in June to celebrate our anniversary, and I'm sure you're welcome to join us. But for the bread-and-butter work of ZamScotEd, without the help of our generous donors, we could do nothing. I can only offer a very simple and heartfelt thank you.

Marian Pallister 18.11.2025