

COL Mid-Term Evaluation

REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL PANEL

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1. Introduction

1.1 At its 18th meeting, the Board of Governors endorsed the proposal that COL should carry out a mid-term evaluation of the full range of activities in the four fields under which its projects are packaged in the current Three-Year Plan 2000 – 2003:

- resource for training;
- capacity builder;
- information and knowledge provider; and
- catalyst for collaboration.

1.2 A five member External Panel was asked to consider all available information and reports, to solicit additional information from stakeholders and COL staff, to assess the internal Self-Appraisal and to produce an evaluative report. The methodology section that follows contains a full description to the process. This is the final report of the External Panel.

2. Methodology

2.1 The review was undertaken by a five-member panel comprising:

- a team leader and Chair, Mr. Shell Harvey, from Canada;
- Professor Geoff Peters, Pro Vice Chancellor of The Open University, United Kingdom;
- Professor V. S. Prasad, Vice Chancellor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University;
- Ms Jenny Glennie, Director, The South African Institute for Distance Education;
- Dr. Esther Batiri Williams, Director, Planning and Development of the University of the South Pacific.

Brief resumes of the panel members are included at Appendix A to the report.

2.2 Each of the four members focused on one mission objective in addition to acting as a resource person to the whole team in relation to the work undertaken by COL in a particular region of the Commonwealth; Prof. Peters was responsible for COL as Capacity Builder and was also resource person for projects in the Mediterranean/West Africa; Prof. Prasad was responsible for COL as a Catalyst for Collaboration and the South Asia region; Dr. Esther Williams was responsible for COL as an Information and Knowledge Provider and for the South Pacific region; and Ms Jenny Glennie was responsible for COL as a Training Provider and the Southern Africa region. The Chair was asked to take responsibility for the Caribbean region.

2.3 The terms of reference are attached at Appendix B. The panel consulted a number of documents and activities, including information on COL provided on the web-site (www.col.org), the Three-Year Plan 2000 - 2003, the Core Plan of Expenditure for the period July 2002 to June 2003, Project Approval and Report Form, a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis on COL, a list of all approved projects and data and reports on these.

2.4 In addition, COL staff undertook a self-evaluation exercise to assess COL's progress towards the objectives set out in the three-year plan 2000 - 2003. This evaluation considered the following questions:

What activities were planned and budgeted for?

What was the planning process to determine the activities included in the plan?

What activities actually took place?

What were the reasons for the discrepancy between the two?

What were the project objectives?

What methods were employed?

What were the outcomes?

How did these meet the objectives and the needs of the beneficiaries?

How were the outcomes disseminated?

How was the project evaluated?

What criteria for evaluation were used? What was the investment made (time and money)?

What were the lessons learned?

What evidence exists to demonstrate the qualitative and quantitative difference that has been made by the activities undertaken?

Are the projects sustainable?

The purpose of this Self-Appraisal was to reflect on the effectiveness of the activities and interventions undertaken during the period under review in delivering the objectives defined under each role in the three-year plan and to draw out lessons for future engagements in the field.

2.5 A comprehensive validation of the Self-Appraisal through site visits and stakeholder interviews was not possible due to the limited resources available for the review. Instead, Shell Harvey and Esther Williams visited COL's head office in Vancouver for two days in late June 2002 to conduct interviews with staff. All members of the panel held further consultations and structured focus group discussions with a wide cross-section of project participants and beneficiaries during the Second Pan Commonwealth Forum (PCF2) in Durban during July 2002. The panel was also able to conduct face-to-face interviews there with COL's Educational Specialists. These interviews proved to be very useful. They focussed on project design and management, the mode of delivery of projects, decision-making, and the evidence for outcomes and country-level and region-level benefits. All participants were asked about future priorities in their respective responsibilities and how these would impact on the next three-year plan. These discussions were intended to assist in the assessment of the perceived progress of COL's projects to date. Lists of correspondents are included at Appendix C.

2.6 Since one of the objectives of the review was to examine the "extent to which the projects undertaken are aligned with COL's strategic goals or objectives", it was necessary to review the projects in this light. Interviews with the President and Vice-President of COL and more general discussion with Board Members during PCF2 were very helpful in this regard.

- 2.7 During the period of the review, the panel reviewed project documentation and outputs, specific project history, rationale for project design, and the quality and usefulness of outputs. Where necessary, project details were clarified with the Project Specialists and staff at COL.
- 2.8 For additional information on projects and internal assessment conducted by COL, the panel used a listserv that was established by COL for this purpose. This proved to be workable and useful.
- 2.9 The internal project evaluations provided one of the primary sources of information for the review. The panel noted unevenness in the comprehensiveness and quality of the project reports and this limited members' ability to comment on some aspects of the total programme under each role.
- 2.10 The role of the external panel was largely to reflect upon the Self-Appraisal and the other information gathered, and to highlight any areas where they found the Self-Appraisal lacked plausibility or where they wanted to add findings. This model of evaluation is heavily dependent upon a comprehensive Self-Appraisal. COL's Self-Appraisal was a thoughtful and helpful document, and this report should be read in conjunction with it. Nevertheless although COL undertakes a great deal of evaluation at various levels, the evaluations were not systematically brought together in the Self-Appraisal. Furthermore it would have benefited from additional sources of quantitative information such as surveys of staff, stakeholders and funding agencies.
- 2.11 Undertaking a thorough and comprehensive review of an international agency could require resources that are out of keeping with the likely benefits. Conducting such a review using an internationally distributed and busy panel adds to the complexity of the task. The panel met only once as a group and the balance of the work was completed via listserv and e-mail. Members would have preferred to meet together more to reflect upon the findings. Nevertheless, the methodology of reviewing reports, assessments, evaluations and the Self-Appraisal together with interviewing management and educational specialists at COL, as well as regional experts, beneficiaries and stakeholders was found to be effective and sufficiently robust for this mid-term review.

3. Performance Relative to the Three Year Plan 2000-2003

The following section contains an analysis of COL's activities in undertaking its four roles: resource for training, capacity builder, information and knowledge provider and catalyst for collaboration together with the panel's observations and recommendations.

3.1 Resource for Training

3.1.1 Numerous COL documents attest to the centrality of training to COL's mission and purpose, with the Self-Appraisal of April 2002 reporting that it is back at the 'top of COL's agenda'. The three reasons cited in 1993, by a COL strategic plan on training, for regarding training as an essential activity remain valid today:

- the implementation of open learning and distance education is dependent on the appropriate application of sound educational principles and innovative educational techniques and technologies. These techniques are changing and evolving;

- many of the personnel in distance education institutions come from other educational and professional sectors and require training to adapt their skills to the contexts of distance education and open learning; and
- the on-going global process of educational reform is breaking down the artificial and counter-productive distinction between ‘distance education’ and more traditional educational activities. This process will continue and will necessitate a supporting process of skills development in all types of educational institutions.

3.1.2 In COL’s Three-Year Plan, 2000 to 2003, the objective and methods for COL as a Resource for Training are described as follows:

Objective

to develop national and institutional capabilities in distance, open and technology-mediated learning;

Methods

- organise workshops and seminars on various aspects of ODL, including orientation to ODL, its management and policy implications, instructional design and course development, the use of multi-media, student support systems and quality assurance;
- produce print materials like the “tool kits” to support trainers of trainers;
- mount sessional institutes focusing in depth on particular facets of open and distance learning;
- develop a Commonwealth Masters of Distance Education;
- utilise CD-ROMs for those with computer access but with unreliable or costly access to online training;
- develop Internet and Web-based training in different aspects;
- support train-the-trainers initiatives, especially among NGOs, etc.

3.1.3 Activities

Drawing from COL’s 2001 Report of the Board of Governors to CHOGM, as well as the Self -Appraisal documents, COL activities reported under the role of Resource for Training can be categorised as follows:

A. Projects aimed at leadership

Four types of activity have been organised in the period:

- a workshop for 20 African Vice Chancellors and other higher education policy makers at the University of Abertay – this annual workshop focussed on managing change has been held twice and is planned to continue;
- a workshop for 16 directors of teacher training colleges and institutes from 10 Sub-Saharan African countries designed by the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. This was the first of a series of five workshops to be conducted annually;

- a workshop for leaders of TVET institutions in the South Pacific in the management of open and distance learning organised by COL in collaboration with the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand;
- an on-line course organised in the SADC region, with the South African Institute for Distance Education, for policy makers working in open and distance education.

B. Projects aimed at more operational personnel

Interventions here are dominated by the activities of CEMCA where COL supported three initiatives:

- a project at BRAOU in Hyderabad for the collaborative development of a web-enabled simulation package targeting students of life sciences at the tertiary level. Aquaculture was chosen as the subject area. Course writers were trained and then contracted to develop three lessons each. This project has the potential to play a significant role in building capacity in ODL at the institution;
- a project among academics from a number of institutions in South Asia to develop and test a print-based manual on “content development for multimedia”. The testing included a training workshop using the manual as well as the production of prototype lessons to be piloted with learners. A group of academics with divergent computer skills from a wide range of institutions have been involved. Many delays have been reported. While there is evidence of individuals gaining skills, doubts have also been raised as to whether this has translated into institutional benefit;
- a project to train staff in instructional design, content development and software packages at two institutions (OUSL in Sri Lanka and BOU in Bangladesh) in sufficient numbers to develop institutional capacity in ODL. Evaluation of the intervention at OUSL is positive.

Other interventions include a project with the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) to build distance education capacity within CXC and to assist CXC and Community Colleges in the region to acquire the capability to deliver distance education programmes.

C. Internship Project

The general objective of the Project is to support the attachment of distance educators to other institutions for professional development. Only nine people took up the opportunity in 2000 and 2001.

D. Support for Formal Distance Education Programmes

COL is beginning to develop a Commonwealth Masters of Distance Education Programme based on existing courses made available free of charge by the World Alliance in Distance Education (WADE).

E. Production of Materials to Support Trainers

The Toolkits series was produced before the period under review and complementary work is being planned on a series of handbooks for practitioners. Whereas the toolkits were designed for workshop facilitators, the handbooks will be for workshop participants to keep and use as reference materials.

3.1.4 *Observations*

In reviewing the activities against the objectives and proposed methods found in the Three-Year Plan, and drawing on the Self-Appraisal comments, the following observations can be made:

- COL used the key methods identified in the plan. In particular, sessional institutes for various types of leadership were introduced, and efforts were made to make use of the Internet and CD-ROMs in some of the training. However it should be noted that two of the sessional institutes for leadership concentrated on general educational leadership and management, paying little specific attention to distance education. Thus while the institutes were reportedly of high quality, they did not resonate with the method identified of 'focusing in depth on particular facets of open and distance learning'; and work on new print materials to support trainers has not yet begun;
- the internship project is surprisingly not included as one of the 'methods' identified in the Three Year Plan;
- the evaluations and self-evaluations point generally to a high quality of intervention. For example the evaluations of the SADC/SAIDE course (full report by Prof. Magagula) and the TVET in South Pacific/ Open Learning Polytechnic programme (short report by John Bartram) point to highly successful interventions. The feedback reported by Helen Lentell on the CXC Project also speaks of the high quality of the professional development. The Lockwood and Latchem Report of 2000 on training confirmed this high standard;
- caution needs still to be exercised in the use of computer technologies. The evaluation of the otherwise successful project with policy makers in the Southern African Development Community points out that most participants, even at this level, 'were unfamiliar with computers and few had any regular access to the Internet and world-wide web';
- most of the projects involved extensive partnership with a centre of expertise in a region, which augurs well for a longer term training strategy;
- the objective and methods identified in the Three-Year Plan for this role were all encompassing and contained few explicitly stated strategic choices or targets against which to measure progress.

3.1.5 The training activities must also be viewed against the Lockwood and Latchem Report on COL's training. This was published in 2000, after the Three-Year Plan was completed, which explains why its recommendations were not taken into account in the formulation of the training component of the plan. This report highlights extensive evidence of the enormous need for training covering a wide range: from basic orientation to in-depth study, and for all levels of personnel. This places a huge burden on COL to respond to needs not simply in a piecemeal and ad hoc manner but rather in a 'consistent, comprehensive or cohesive manner' (p.iv), leading the researchers to conclude that:

a more systematic and innovative approach is called for, one which accords with COL's revised mission, the extent of the need, the call for follow-up, the great potential for Collaboration, uses of technology and mixed-mode delivery. While it is important for

COL to continue to be responsive to institutional and individual needs, to achieve maximum impact and returns on outlay, it is also important that the training events should match COL's strategic goals. Training events need to target strategically/politically important topics, focus on specific target groups, and be designed with specific outcomes in mind.

3.1.6 The Lockwood and Latchem report makes 20 specific recommendations, which can be summarised as follows: COL should:

- maximise the impact of any training event by careful selection of participants, establishment of mechanisms to ensure that participants' needs are met, follow up after the event, and by using every opportunity to 'train the trainer';
- achieve the necessary scale, by exploring strategic alliances with other partners and by working towards a virtual training institution which would use mixed mode delivery based, inter alia, on the existing and proposed training tool kits;
- explore whether there is still a need for the further development of formal programmes in distance education and take forward articulation and Collaboration among those that exist across the Commonwealth;
- move from targeting primarily those at an operational level to those at a leadership and managerial level, and particularly by initiating a series of regional seminars at which senior persons can 'consider the role, costs and benefits of open and distance learning...';
- organise Commonwealth-wide or regional forums on training needs, strategies and networks;
- ensure that, while remaining responsive to needs, the training must also accord with COL's strategic goals.

3.1.7 No formal response to the Lockwood and Latchem Report was made available to the Panel. However, there is evidence of acceptance, in practice, of at least some of the recommendations. The key recommendation about a more strategic approach to training has not yet been fully responded to, although elements of a strategy are in place. The Self-Appraisal does however promise a 'strategy for training' that will take 'as its starting point the need to support the development of key centres of specialisation within the regions, which in turn could help underpin the development of distance education throughout the region' (p 10). COL would then support their activities.

3.1.8 Recommendations

- The key recommendation of the Panel, in this section, is that COL must develop and formally adopt a more strategic approach to its training function. The approach should take into account the recommendations of the Lockwood and Latchem Report and should include:
 - long term plans to support regional centres of expertise in a variety of ways. The approach could differ from region to region but should contain the development and/or collection of learning resources and their widespread dissemination;
 - plans to link the regional centres to the development of the capacity of particular institutions in the region.
- COL's training section should concentrate on its role as a resource for training rather than as a trainer itself. It should aim in the medium term not to run training programmes for individuals or isolated interventions. Rather it should refer these to the regional centres of expertise. It should only run training programmes itself when these form part of the strategic projects rigorously selected as part of COL's long-term capacity building programmes.
- In planning any training project COL should pay serious attention to identifying the motivation for and purpose of a project and to documenting these carefully.

3.2 Capacity Builder

3.2.1 Activities

COL has set itself the objective of adding value to human capacity building by demonstrating how the application of the methodologies of open, distance and technology-mediated learning can benefit a wide range of socio-economic priorities. Furthermore, the "capacity building" role has been framed with a view to demonstrating how the practical application of ODL could bear upon development priorities. As COL's own self-evaluation makes clear, "the intention [is] to draw a link between COL's central purpose of developing capabilities in ODL and ODL's potential for addressing development goals."

Nevertheless, the scope of capacity building is sufficiently all-embracing that the Self-Appraisal lists more than 30 capacity building projects in the year 2001/2 including the Commonwealth of Learning Media Empowerment (COLME) programme and the establishment of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) as but two.

The priorities emphasised in the 2000 - 2003 plan were:

- human resource development especially related to teacher training and upgrading but also encompassing other areas of HRD that could strengthen the social or economic fabric of Commonwealth societies;
- governance, human rights, health and management;

- improved capabilities in the use of information and communications technologies; and
- environmental and agricultural training.

All of these areas are represented in terms of current projects being undertaken.

Internal self-evaluations were provided for twelve projects including COLME, alongside external evaluations of aspects of three other capacity building projects. These and discussions with COL staff have provided the primary basis for comment, although some discussions have been held with non-COL staff involved too. CEMCA activities have been considered as a part of the training role.

3.2.2 Observations

- COL has (understandably and laudably) been trying both to develop capacity in the application and practice of open and distance learning and to build capacity to deal with development topics such as poverty alleviation, health, teacher education and agriculture through the use of distance education. Both are achievable because ODL is in itself a capacity building ‘technology’. As an agency, COL has clearly tried to steer a path between seeing capacity building in ODL as an end in itself irrespective of the context and addressing an extensive development agenda through capacity building where ODL may at times be peripheral. The 2000 - 2003 plan was more consciously influenced by the international development priorities, and the “capacity building” role was framed with a view to demonstrating how the practical application of ODL could best support development priorities.
- The range of activities undertaken under the heading of capacity building is very varied, and the concept of “capacity building” does not easily lend itself to early evaluation of effectiveness. Nevertheless the sheer scale of the activity in content, approach and location is impressive. The requests for further assistance are of themselves a measure of COL’s success.
- However, on the basis of the evaluations provided there would still seem to be scope for improvement in terms of measuring success and gaps in what is being achieved. The internal evaluators have been open that evaluation has not always been built into the design of projects and in some it has not proved possible to retrospectively measure success.

3.2.3 Recommendations

Despite the excellent progress so far the panel would encourage even more systematic evaluation, not only because it is good practice, but also because ODL and COL have much to contribute to the development agenda. Governments and their institutions will be most convinced by clear evidence of success. COL plans to introduce a Results Based Management approach, which, skilfully handled, could facilitate the approach recommended here.

To facilitate the beginning of the next COL planning cycle and in preparation for the presentation of the three-year plan 2003-2006, the panel wishes to draw attention to several areas where there is a need for clarification or where status is uncertain.

- There is a wide variation in the projects undertaken under the heading of capacity building in terms of their scale and potential impact. This may reflect the extent to which COL does not have complete control over the projects it undertakes in that it feels the need to respond to requests from certain quarters. However, this variation can leave the overall picture looking piecemeal. Furthermore this apparent concentration on projects rather than programmes of activities is particularly anomalous in the area of capacity building, which in part arose as an idea to counter project-specific interventions and where continuity of activity with organisations and countries is implicit. The panel recommend that whilst COL must maintain its pan-Commonwealth remit, the next plan should focus upon groups or programmes of activity and make clear the basis on which projects will be declined as well as accepted.
- Evaluations presented for the review are very project specific and often do not address the achievement of capacity building objectives in either ODL or the wider development agenda, nor do they operate to a timescale that is commensurate with the objectives of capacity building. The panel recommends that COL adopt, adapt or develop a programmatic evaluation instrument that fits the nature and timescale of its capacity building objectives.
- The extent to which COL has the freedom and resourcing structures to move beyond capacity building in ODL as its primary agenda to capacity building for development through ODL is a key strategic decision. The panel recommends that COL adopts a greater recognition that ODL is a means to achieving the international development agenda and seeks agreement by its funding bodies that its remit extends well beyond “education” as narrowly conceived.
- Capacity building requires continuity in terms of relationships as well as activities. Although the turnover of staff at COL does not seem to be problematic, there are potential issues of capacity maintenance if all the specialist staff in COL work to a common date for the end of their contracts. The panel recommends that the COL Board adopt an approach to staffing and contracts that supports continuity as well as diversity and change.

3.3 Information and Knowledge Provider

Despite its limited budget and small size, COL is not only successfully meeting its role as an information and knowledge provider, but is surpassing expectations in meeting its responsibilities and commitment to providing timely information and knowledge to Commonwealth governments, institutions, individuals and COL staff.

In the past decade, COL has earned a reputation of being a leading organisation in knowledge management in open and distance learning and uses and provides cutting edge technologies to enable it to reach many of the people it serves. It is a leader in the collection, management and development of knowledge in the less developed countries of the Commonwealth and has been able to share this information and skill with others to meet the information and knowledge management needs of many developing Commonwealth countries.

3.3.1 Activities

In COL's Three-Year Plan, 2000 to 2003, the objective for COL as an information and knowledge provider is "to harness the information and knowledge available on open and distance learning and make it accessible to stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth". (COL: *Three Year Plan 2000 - 2003*, p. 19)

It aims to achieve this objective by:

- developing and maintaining a number of networking links especially the Commonwealth Open Learning Interactive Network for Knowledge Sharing, COLINKS and the Commonwealth Electronic Network for Schools and Education (CENSE);
- maintaining a highly successful communication service by improving COL's website, provide service electronically on a 24-hour basis, and expanding COL's electronic publishing;
- publishing newsletters, *Connections* and *Edtech News*, produce monographs, guides and research studies, and supporting the *World Review of Distance Education and Open Learning* series;
- maintaining and expanding a compact but effective Information Resource collection;
- organising major Pan-Commonwealth conferences to allow the sharing of knowledge, expertise and new developments;
- creating a fund to purchase copyright and distribution rights to distance education materials in order to facilitate the transfer of materials.

COL's information and knowledge services are seen to be of good quality, accessible and timely. COL's 24-hour communication services through its website continue to provide useful information services to many. COL's newsletters *Connections* and *EdTech News* are well known and popular. Contributions to the publications are provided mainly by the education specialists and COL staff with some contributions coming in from project leaders. Many libraries hold these publications, which can also be accessed online.

The publication, *World Review of Distance Education and Open Learning* volumes 1 and 2 has been highly successful. The case studies are used as selected readings in a number of academic institutions and are available free to Commonwealth countries. However, volume 3 of this series is still facing some difficulties due mainly to the shortage of writers able to make contributions on the topic of policy on open and distance learning. In discussions with the COL staff on this matter, it was clear that the project has been successful but that for the future, it may be best to move away from sets of case studies and concentrate on publishing books with thematic chapters.

COL's networking and communication activities and projects are functioning satisfactorily. These networks have been developed to enable project leaders and participants and countries to access information, publications and results of studies undertaken. The internal assessment of COLINKS, SchoolNet, GDENet indicates that despite some difficulties they are progressing well and provide a useful service to the members.

One of COL's most valuable resources is the Information Resource Centre. While it is small in physical space, its contents and work are something that COL should be proud of. The quality of the collection is good; the service to COL staff and users excellent; the current status of the collection is high and the usage also high. One person manages this collection and the services that are available far exceed expectations.

COL publishes a wide range of materials including courses, special reports, short-term training courses and packages for both training and capacity building. These are made available to students and institutions in Commonwealth countries free of charge.

3.3.2 Observations

- There are many positive and commendable features of COL's role as an information and knowledge provider. COL's work and performance in the last two years under review have been commendable. It has built on work over the past decade, and has been able to respond to the many challenges and changes taking place in the environment. With a small pool of staff, it is a very cost effective information and knowledge management operation that has taken advantage of information and communication technology developments to discharge its responsibilities.
- A recurring theme in discussions with beneficiaries was the wealth of information and news covered on COL's website. Users commented on the attractive design, the ready access to electronic discussion groups, and the availability of useful documents on open and distance learning. As many developing countries have or are getting Internet access, access to such documents has become a reality. Through its web site and GDENet, COL is fast becoming the leading comprehensive source of information on distance, open and flexible learning for many developing countries where high costs and great distances from the publishing source restrict physical access to materials.
- For the future COL will need to decide if it wishes to address a number of issues relating to operational matters, processes of work, publicity, marketing and greater collaboration and co-ordination of activities.

A. Co-ordination through knowledge provision

The panel believes that there may be value in developing the information and knowledge provider role still further. Sharing the lessons learned from the various COL projects would help ensure that its activities are better publicised and should raise COL's profile.

B. Corporate Knowledge

In discussions with a number of COL's Education Specialists, and as evident from the internal assessment and observations, there is a considerable volume of valuable information available in COL related to the planning of past and present activities and projects. However, in some areas of work and project history, there are reportedly gaps in information. The information and knowledge provider staff have examined the possibility of bridging this gap and capturing more knowledge from the project planning and discussion stages. The panel believes that it may be useful to record and preserve information at the early planning stages of projects.

C. Improved Information Services

The organisation, management and sustainability of communications services are costly. The Knowledge Management section of COL depends heavily on the Education Specialists to provide news and stories to add to the website. Since many of the specialists are busy, it is not always easy to get good quality contributions. In addition, the electronic component of the site has grown significantly to serve external and internal users. So far, the section has been able to respond to requests in a timely fashion. Nevertheless, in view of the crucial importance of maintaining the effectiveness of the communication system, the Panel recommends that COL consider providing dedicated staffing to fulfil client expectations of COL in its role as an information and knowledge provider.

However, a more effective evaluation of COL's success as an information and knowledge provider would require reliable measurement of outputs, products, achievements and also gaps in the services provided. The panel would therefore recommend that COL define a number of indicators that will be part of an ongoing evaluation of the system; and that all COL's services, as an information and knowledge provider, be monitored on a continuous basis. The data gathered would provide useful input to research activities relating to the use of ODL methods for development.

D. Marketing and Publicity

COL has produced a number of high quality publications, newsletters, brochures, guides, course books and handouts on the use and practice of ODL. Some of these have been the result of successful projects, products of written course materials and personal experiences of COL staff and members of the Commonwealth. It would be an advantage if this valuable resource were more aggressively marketed, publicised and sold outside the Commonwealth. Perhaps the Editorial Committee could provide advice on these important functions. The current differential pricing policy will continue to protect the interests of developing Commonwealth countries.

3.3.3 Recommendations:

- That COL's projects and activities be better co-ordinated and more widely publicised through the different media in order to raise COL's profile;
- That COL improves its system of capturing and archiving information related to the development and outcomes of projects;
- That the information and knowledge section develop a more effective method of measuring performance and information services on a continuous basis;
- That COL reviews the staff resources necessary to manage the growing work in information and knowledge management;
- That COL reviews the space requirements for the Information Resource Centre in the context of an expanding collection and growing number of users;
- That COL considers undertaking more research into its activities and work, as well as research in ODL methods for use in development projects;

- That COL considers developing a marketing plan/strategy for its publications and services so as to generate additional income.

3.4 Catalyst for Collaboration

In the networking era, international agencies such as COL have an important role to play in the promotion of partnership arrangements. COL's identification of its role as a Catalyst for Collaboration as a key component of the Three Year Plan 2000-2003 demonstrates its understanding of the fundamental importance of this aspect of its work. Its aim has been to 'build synergies among governments, organisations and individuals to leverage both talent and resources'. For this purpose it has identified objectives, key methods and targets, reflecting clarity of vision, mission and methods in this area of activity.

3.4.1 Activities

The Commonwealth of Learning combines the roles of implementing agency, advocate, catalyst and facilitator. In fulfilment of the objectives of the Catalyst for Collaboration programme, COL has initiated activities and brokered partnerships to leverage its capacity to deliver results across the entire Commonwealth.

Programmes such as the Canada Caribbean Distance Education Programme (CCDESP), COL's Youth Internship Programme and the Writing Effectively Course for UNHCR demonstrate COL's capacity to build partnerships with Governments and Aid agencies to strengthen the use of distance education for development purposes. The Federation of Commonwealth Open and Distance Learning Associations (FOCODLA), which supports networking between regional associations of professionals working in open and distance learning, is a good example of the way in which COL can use its status as a respected member of the international ODL community to encourage systematic collaboration among fellow professionals around the Commonwealth. The Pan African Policy Dialogue on ODL and Teacher Training held in Namibia in July 2001 and the Dialogue for the establishment of the Andhra Pradesh Consortium of Distance Education held at Hyderabad, India, are examples of the promotion of collaborative networks at policy level. The Commonwealth EMBA and EMPA programme has facilitated the collaborative development and delivery of a common academic programme by universities in four countries. The activities also included networking the territories in the Caribbean, the Literacy Project and collaborative projects for the promotion of ODL use by NGOs. The value of collaboration is particularly apparent in the Caribbean and the South Pacific and other small states where resources are limited.

3.4.2 Observations

- The four roles in the three year plan, 2000-2003, though inter-related, are each characterised by their own set of objectives. Nevertheless there are many crosscutting issues in the different roles. This is particularly true in the case of COL's role as a Catalyst for Collaboration, as the collaborative approach is frequently adopted as a means to achieve the objectives of the other roles rather than as an end in itself.
- COL has commendably preferred the partnership approach to a paternalist one (Dr. H. Ian Macdonald, Expanding Learning Horizons, Summary Report, 1998-2000). The panel became aware that individuals and institutions partnering with COL might

not have such a clear understanding of the spirit of the partnership approach. One of the Directors of a popular correspondence institute in India observes: “how can we have partnership with such a great international institution like COL? We can only expect some help and advice from them; what is there for us to partner?” Our Indian member considers this attitude – stated or unstated – to be typical of many heads of distance education institutions in India, which may be a reflection of their own lack of confidence. COL may therefore need to do more to inculcate a full understanding of the collaborative approach among its partners.

- COL’s Three Year Plan 2000-2003 defines two objectives of collaboration, but in South Asia COL has also undertaken many collaborative projects that seem to have the aim of 'bridging the digital divide' without this being signalled as an explicit objective.
- COL in its appraisal report rightly emphasises the importance of identifying the right partner or partners to take projects forward as one of the lessons of experience. The commitment of specific individuals can be crucial and yet in some contexts it is known that positions will change frequently. For example in the South-Asian cultural context, the sustainability and survival of a collaborative project may rest on the approach and preferences of the head of an organisation. We would have hoped to find more evidence of protocols for collaborative arrangements that alleviate some of these risks by broadening the collaborative base.
- COL has rightly focussed on the linkages between ODL projects and development. In countries like India and Bangladesh, ‘Self-Help Groups’ - the association of people who are direct beneficiaries of development - are given a prominent role in the development process. The UN Millennium goals also emphasise the role of civil society in development. The panel was surprised to find little explicit reference to self-help groups as a target for collaborative engagement by COL.
- The six evaluation reports of collaborative projects underline the importance of context in the successful completion of projects. Even though it may be difficult to adapt practices that have been used with small numbers in one context to another environment, like South-Asia, where huge populations exist, it would have been helpful if the project evaluation reports had differentiated between the universal and contextual lessons learned and suggested ways in which replicability could be facilitated.
- It is unclear from the evaluations of collaborative projects what role COL assumes in relation to follow-up actions. Once COL has established the links between its partners in a particular project, it is the responsibility of the institutions and agencies in the respective countries to take follow-up actions. Nevertheless the panel believes that COL could usefully evolve some mechanism to keep reminding institutions of the need for follow-up actions and keep track of follow-up steps to ensure their speedy and effective implementation.
- The panel would have expected projects that have collaboration as a specific goal to have evaluation criteria that are linked to broad generic characteristics of successful collaboration.

- Moreover, the panel noted that the six evaluation reports of collaborative projects concentrate on summative evaluation and pay less attention to formative and developmental evaluation. The panel recommends that COL include formative evaluation as part of its battery of evaluative instruments.

3.4.3 *Recommendations*

- Collaboration is a key means through which COL achieves its aims, but there seems to be a need for the wider dissemination of best practice in collaboration. There is also a need to learn from failures through deeper study of the not so successful projects of collaboration. The panel recommends that COL undertake research studies on these aspects and that it give wider publicity to the possibilities for partnership between individuals, institutions and nations with examples of specific areas that demonstrate the spirit of COL's role as a catalyst for collaboration.
- Even though society in general and the educational environment in particular may have become increasingly networked, many ODL institutions have not been able to structure their organisational arrangements to suit the needs of collaborative working. The arrangements for the approval and launch of academic programmes in universities, for example, are mainly based on the principle of the autonomy of the institutions. Institutional autonomy is a desirable academic principle, but these institutions may need training in collaboration and help in overcoming the barriers to successful collaborative action that exist within the organisation or in the broader operating environment. COL may advise on models of quality assurance that satisfy local as well as collaborative criteria. The panel recommends that COL provide guidance on the techniques for effective collaboration as part of its projects in this programme.
- COL has done a commendable job in information dissemination and in sharing/pooling the available wealth of experience, talent and resources, regardless of where they exist, for the benefit of all the countries of the Commonwealth. The panel recommends that COL consider supporting the development of regional data banks with a particular focus on regionally available experiences, talent and resources that can be deployed as part of the collaborative agenda to meet regional/local requirements.

In addition the panel recommends that COL consider:

- prioritising "bridging the digital divide" as an area for collaboration taking into account the different regional contexts in which it works;
- targeting collaborations involving "Self-help Groups" in the next plan period;
- designing evaluation reports that focus on the replicable aspects of collaborative projects;
- devising follow up mechanisms for the collaborative projects;
- taking steps to disseminate "Best Practices of Collaboration" more widely

4. General Observations on Performance

The preceding section addresses performance in each of the four roles. This section of the report will address issues relating to general performance.

- 4.1 Prior to this evaluation each member of the panel was familiar with COL and its work and through the process panel members learned a great deal more about the organisation, its people and its performance. COL is a well-respected organisation within the Commonwealth of Nations and even beyond. In the twelve short years of the organisation's existence COL has touched nearly all of the nations of the Commonwealth and has had a positive impact on the lives of many thousands of people. Both Heads of Governments and Ministers of Education have been increasingly positive about the performance of COL.
- 4.2 COL benefits from strong leadership and its professional staff is passionately committed to the organisation's goals and objectives. The staff believe strongly in the role of open and distance learning (ODL) in international development. The decision to cap staffing costs at 15% of base budget and to flatten the organisational structure has clearly proved successful in terms of the scale, reach and impact of the organisation. In considering the work that has been undertaken in this planning period, the panel has become aware that in addition to ensuring that maximum resources are directed to programme activity, the 15% policy decision has increased the confidence of the primary funding agencies.
- 4.3 The methodology of this evaluation focused on COL activities that have been classified as projects. It is important to note that COL also performs many other valuable functions and services that are not captured by an inventory of projects. Stakeholders have mentioned that many of these functions are extremely valuable.
- 4.4 Stakeholders observed that COL's involvement in an activity adds credibility and legitimacy to the activity. There was also a strong sense that while COL has successfully developed a profile in certain parts of the Commonwealth, the organisation could benefit from continuing to explore means of raising its own profile.
- 4.5 The panel concludes that COL has a strong base upon which to build for the future.

The purpose of this evaluation was to assist COL in being more effective and to provide useful information for the development of the next strategic plan. The panel identified a number of general areas where COL could improve upon past performance:

- The area that holds the most potential is the relationship between planning, decision making (criteria and process) and evaluation. COL is a small organisation that has considerable expertise and access to the Commonwealth's wide-ranging experience of ODL. However to use its resources to maximum effect requires a focus and selectivity in terms of the projects and programmes it undertakes, and regular evaluation of what has been achieved and learned. There are many excellent examples in COL's work of this "reflection-in-action", and it is clear that COL has made great strides in becoming an organisation that learns from its activities.
- The overall aim is to ensure that COL continues to develop as a learning organisation: one that is clear about its aims and has effective mechanisms for judging its progress and adapting its activities and plans accordingly.

- COL is wedded to plans and planning as a part of the organisational learning process. The current plan is clear and illuminating for those outside of COL, and the process of compiling it and winning approval for it is sufficient reason to justify its existence. However the panel believes that there are several ways in which it might be improved in the future:
 - First the timescale. Three years seems a very short time frame for an organisation that is seriously involved in capacity building, especially now that the role of open and distance learning is well established and the organisation has matured. The planning horizon need not be inextricably linked to funding. Funding agencies may only agree to three-year cycles (at best) but COL can, and in the panel's view should, be looking much further ahead.
 - Whatever the longest planning timescale, it would be helpful to all stakeholders including COL staff if there were a more seamless relationship between long term strategy, medium term developments and current and immediate activities. The present plan does not seem to provide sufficient guidance to say "Yes" or just as importantly "No" to proposed activities, and staff report that it is not used for this purpose. In the panel's view COL's performance would be further enhanced if the approval of projects and activities and the setting of any associated evaluation were determined in a clear planning context. Such an approach would also allow successful and unsuccessful activities to inform future plans.
- In an ideal situation one might expect to find a set of projects each contained within programmes of activity where the objectives of a project address both the specifics of the task in hand and the objectives of wider programmes. In this idealised world, sets of objectives based upon the project and the programmes would be set and measured and action taken as a result. Thus, a tightly defined project aimed at enhancing the skills of women agricultural workers in rural communities by developing ODL capacity in that country might have objectives and measurements for those objectives that reflected:
 - the improvement in the relevant skills of those women;
 - the increased competence in ODL of the local partner;
 - the enhancement to the programme of work in that country/region;
 - the gains to the trans-national programme of work on women's education and skills.
- As has been mentioned earlier, the scope of COL work is far-reaching and extensive and belies its size. Nevertheless COL managers have the daunting task of matching the likely available resources, the expectations of the stakeholders and the needs implied by the world development agenda. Ever more focused plans are one way of reducing the inevitable tensions between these conflicting factors.
- Projects are the primary vehicle by which COL seeks to achieve its goals, and it is successful project work that provides COL with its credibility to work in the policy arena too. Project evaluation therefore is a critical process for COL's ongoing success and should produce documentation that guides and informs future projects. The project

evaluation reports produced during the period of this review did not consistently meet the standards necessary to achieve this objective.

- It was noted in the Self-Appraisal that COL is being encouraged to adopt a Results Based Management Approach (RBM) and that COL acknowledges the merits of this approach. An approach such as RBM will support the development of effective project evaluation reports but care must be taken to make the necessary adaptations for applying the methodology to a multilateral organisation.
- COL is a small organisation by most standards and especially so by international standards. As such, it has been successful with a minimum of documented processes, policies and procedures. However if this success is to be sustained there needs to be more systematic documentation. A well-designed system for knowledge management will be crucial. The two dimensions of knowledge management i.e., managing knowledge about COL, its operations, systems and processes and managing knowledge about distance education should be given importance in designing the knowledge management system.
- The current three-year plan lists gender and information and communication technology (ICT) as crosscutting issues that inform all four roles. It is clear from COL's organisational structure how the ICT issue is addressed but there should be greater clarity on how gender issues are addressed.

5. Future Directions

During the period under review, COL has achieved a great deal and has consistently improved upon previous performance. Nevertheless the panel has identified a number of areas that should allow COL to further improve its performance in the next planning cycle.

This final section brings together the panel's recommendations in relation to each of COL's roles as well as a number of general observations and recommendations.

5.1 Resource for Training

The key recommendation of the Panel, in this section, is that COL must develop and formally adopt a more strategic approach to its training function. The approach should take into account the recommendations of the Lockwood and Latchem Report and should include:

- long term plans to support regional centres of expertise in a variety of ways. The approach could differ from region to region but should contain the development and/or collection of learning resources and their widespread dissemination;
- plans to link the regional centres to the development of the capacity of particular institutions in the region.

COL's training section should concentrate on its role as a resource for training rather than as a trainer itself. It should aim in the medium term not to run training programmes for individuals or isolated interventions. Rather it should refer these to the regional centres of expertise. It should only run training programmes itself when these form part of the strategic projects rigorously selected as part of COL's long-term capacity building programmes.

In planning any training project COL should pay serious attention to identifying the motivation for and purpose of a project and to documenting these carefully.

5.2 Capacity Building

COL should undertake even more systematic evaluation, not only because it is good practice, but also because ODL and COL have much to contribute to the development agenda. Governments and their institutions will be most convinced by clear evidence of success. COL plans to introduce a Results Based Management approach, which if skilfully handled, could facilitate the approach recommended here.

To facilitate the beginning of the next COL planning cycle and in preparation for the presentation of the three-year plan 2003-2006, there appear to be several areas where there is a need for clarification or where status is uncertain.

- There is a wide variation in the projects undertaken under the heading of capacity building in terms of their scale and potential impact. This may reflect the extent to which COL does not have complete control over the projects it undertakes in that it feels the need to respond to requests from certain quarters. However, this variation can leave the overall picture looking piecemeal. Furthermore this apparent concentration on projects rather than programmes of activities is particularly anomalous in the area of capacity building, which in part arose as an idea to counter project specific interventions and where continuity of activity with organisations and countries is implicit. The panel recommends that whilst COL must maintain its pan-Commonwealth remit, the next plan should focus upon groups or programmes of activity and make clear the basis on which projects will be declined as well as accepted.
- Evaluations are very project specific and often do not address the achievement of capacity building objectives in either ODL or the wider development agenda, nor do they operate to a timescale that is commensurate with the objectives of capacity building. The panel recommends that COL adopt, adapt or develop a programmatic evaluation instrument that fits the nature and timescale of its capacity building objectives.
- The extent to which COL has the freedom and resourcing structures to move beyond capacity building in ODL as its primary agenda to capacity building for development through ODL is a key strategic decision. The panel recommends that COL adopt a greater recognition that ODL is a means to achieving the international development agenda and seeks agreement by its funding bodies that its remit extends well beyond “education” as narrowly conceived.
- Capacity building requires continuity in terms of relationships as well as activities. Although the turnover of staff at COL does not seem to be problematic, there are potential issues of capacity maintenance if all the specialist staff in COL work to a common date for the end of their contracts. The Panel recommends that the COL Board adopt an approach to staffing and contracts that supports continuity as well as diversity and change.

5.3 Information and Knowledge Provider

- That COL's projects and activities be better co-ordinated and more widely publicised through the different media in order to raise COL's profile;
- That COL improves its system of capturing and archiving information related to the development and outcomes of projects;
- That the information and knowledge section develop a more effective method of measuring performance and information services on a continuous basis;
- That COL reviews the staff resources necessary to manage the growing work in information and knowledge management;
- That COL reviews the space requirements for the Information Resource Centre in the context of an expanding collection and growing number of users;
- That COL considers undertaking more research into its activities and work, as well as research in ODL methods for use in development projects;
- That COL considers developing a marketing plan/strategy for its publications and services so as to generate additional income.

5.4 Catalyst for Collaboration

Best Practices of Collaboration: Collaboration is a key means through which COL achieves its aims, but there seems to be a need for the wider dissemination of best practice. There is also a need to learn from failures through deeper study of the not so successful projects of collaboration. COL may wish to encourage research studies on these aspects.

It may also be useful for COL to publicise more widely the possibilities for partnership between individuals, institutions and nations with examples of specific areas that demonstrate the spirit of COL's role as a catalyst for collaboration.

Flexibility in Institutional Arrangements: Even though society in general and the educational environment in particular have become increasingly networked, many ODL institutions have not been able to structure their organisational arrangements to suit the needs of effective collaborative endeavours. The arrangements for the approval and launch of academic programmes in universities for example are mainly based on the principle of the autonomy of the institutions. Institutional autonomy is a desirable academic principle, but these institutions may need training collaboration and help in overcoming the barriers to successful collaborative action that exist within the organisation or in the broader operating environment. COL may for example advise on models of quality assurance that satisfy local as well as collaborative criteria. The panel recommends that COL's collaborative projects take the need to provide guidance on the techniques for effective collaboration as part of its projects in this programme.

The Sharing of Talent: COL is seen to have done a commendable job in information dissemination and in sharing the available wealth of experience, talent and resources, regardless of where they exist, for the benefit of all the countries of the Commonwealth. COL should now consider supporting the development of regional data banks with a particular focus on regionally available experiences, talent and resources that can be used to meet regional / local requirements.

In addition the panel recommends that COL consider:

- prioritising “bridging the digital divide” as an area for collaboration taking into account the different regional contexts in which it works;
- targeting collaborations involving “Self-help Groups” in the next plan period;
- designing evaluation reports that focus on the replicable aspects of collaborative projects;
- devising follow up mechanisms for the collaborative projects;
- taking steps to disseminate "Best Practices of Collaboration" more widely.

5.5 General Observations

5.5.1 *Improved Planning*

COL has provided much evidence of planning and evaluation of projects being used to good effect, but there may well be room for improvement. COL needs to learn the most from its activities and after reflection to modify its behaviour. In other words it needs to constantly seek to increase its effectiveness by adopting an efficient model of organisational learning. At a simple level it needs to be able to set out a strategy, use that strategy to guide its action, evaluate its performance against that strategy and to modify its plans and activities as a result. All of these things it does, but it is possible to improve them in a number of ways.

5.5.2 *Timescales*

The current three-year plan is an ambitious manifesto that has inspired staff and supporters of COL. However, three years is a very short time for a strategy. It is clear that COL is well established and respected throughout the world and that distance education is increasingly recognised as a major vehicle for development. The panel therefore recommends that COL should formulate a much longer-term strategy. Like most organisations COL cannot be sure of its funding base over in future years, but the strategy should cover a range of future scenarios. Within that context a medium term-plan that clarified both focus and objectives could be the basis of funding negotiations and lead to annual operating plans. None of this is revolutionary and many organisations operate a 10:3:1 planning cycle, and in the panel’s view COL is now mature enough to benefit from such an approach.

5.5.3 *Scope*

As has been commented earlier, COL is a small organisation and yet the development agenda within the Commonwealth is enormous. Education and specifically open and distance learning is a powerful engine for addressing that agenda, however COL can only tackle so much in any period. The panel is very impressed by the success the organisation is having, but there is a danger that by spreading its activities too thinly COL may limit its overall effectiveness. Even greater focus and prioritisation (for example on particular regions or issues such as gender differences or health) would no doubt create tensions, but successful strategies often involve some discomfort.

There must also be a question about whether open and distance learning is now sufficiently well established in some parts of the Commonwealth that COL could either

step back or concentrate on being a catalyst by creating networks and development mechanisms in which it had little long-term involvement.

5.5.4 *Integration of Plans and Action*

The current 3-year plan provides a useful backdrop to specific projects, but evidence was only rarely available of it being used as a guide to actions and decisions. The work of COL's staff and the activities conducted with its support are the means by which it achieves its objectives. Therefore for the plan to be implemented or modified there needs to be a clear articulation between the activities and the plans. There are a number of ways in which this could be achieved, for example through the objectives of individuals, regional or sectoral frameworks, and project criteria as well as the staff forums that already exist.

5.5.5 *Integration of Projects into Programmes*

At present the unit of activity within COL seems to be "the project". Projects may at times be useful vehicles for intervention and for budgeting purposes, but if they are to contribute to capacity building they need some overarching framework to provide continuity. The panel believes that programmes of activities that are linked to higher level plans would be more likely to maximise the overall benefits of COL's activities.

5.5.6 *Establishing Linkages of Roles*

COL's flat organisational structure reflects the functional expertise of the Education specialists. The current three-year plan defines its activities under the four roles and identifies priorities for each of the major Commonwealth regions. All these three categorisations i.e., thematic roles, regional roles and functional specialisation are loosely inter-related. This makes the structural arrangements potentially very complex. In the next planning period there may be merit in considering what organisational arrangements would provide optimal support for the plan and at the same time enable it to achieve its objectives. The accompanying analytical framework for evaluation would also need to take into account the organisational arrangements in place.

5.5.7 *Gender Issues*

The current three-year plan lists gender and information and communication technology (ICT) as crosscutting issues that inform all four roles. It is clear from COL's organisational structure how the ICT issue is addressed but there should be greater clarity on how gender issues are addressed.

5.5.8 *Policy and Procedure*

COL is a small organisation by most standards and especially so by international standards. As such, it has been successful with a minimum of documented processes, policies and procedures. However if this success is to be sustained there needs to be more systematic documentation. A well-designed system for knowledge management will be crucial. The two dimensions of knowledge management i.e., managing knowledge about COL, its operations, systems and processes and managing knowledge about distance education should be given importance in designing the knowledge management system.

5.5.9 Evaluation and Measurement

This review is but one example of the way in which COL conducts evaluations across all levels of its activities and we have seen much evidence that it is keen to reflect and learn. Nevertheless we think there are opportunities to improve this aspect of its activities. Specifically we feel that if COL were to set out programmes of activity it could evaluate those against a set of performance measures and modify its plans as a result. Much of the evaluation we have seen seemed to us to be at a detailed project level and could not inform future organisational action, whereas the very substantive Lockwood Latchem Report had taken a long time to impact on the conduct of training activities at COL.

6. Conclusion

We hope that the recommendations contained in this report will be useful to COL not only by providing an external validation of its self-evaluation at the project level, but more significantly by offering timely advice on the process of planning and evaluation itself which can feed into the internal process of developing the next Three Year Plan.

APPENDIX A: BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF MID-TERM EVALUATION PANEL TEAM

Shell Harvey, Panel Chair

Geographical Area is the Caribbean

Shell Harvey has more than thirty years experience in the field of education. Prior to establishing an educational consulting practice in 2001, Shell was an Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) in the Government of British Columbia for twelve years.

In the capacity of ADM, Shell oversaw the rapid development of B.C.'s post-secondary education system including the establishment of three new universities and five new university-colleges. This position was the senior advisor to the government, the Minister and the Deputy Minister on strategic direction and policy determination for post-secondary education in the Province. Prior to joining the Government of B.C., Shell had a successful career as a college faculty member and administrator.

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Esther Batiri Williams, Panel Member

Responsible for COL as Knowledge Provider

Geographical Area is the South Pacific

Esther Batiri Williams is Director of Planning and Development at the University South Pacific, and holds a PhD in Government from the University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Australia with specialization in information technology, communication studies and good governance. She has been University Librarian at USP for over 20 years. In this capacity she has planned, set up and managed libraries and information networks in the region and lectured in library and information studies. She has undertaken consultancies in marine science, information studies, Information and communication technologies particularly focusing on women, record management, and distance education for the region as well as abroad. She has written widely in these areas. In semester 2, 2000 she taught at the International Women's University, University of Hamburg in the area of information as a social resource focusing on citizenship, Internet for teaching, information and democracy, women's health information service and virtual communities. She headed the team that conducted the Fiji Election Study in 1999 and August 2001. She also conducted the Election Study for Samoa in March 2001. She is on a number of local and international committees including the Media Council of Fiji, International Oceans Institutes Committee, Legal Matters and Copyright for the International Federation of Library Associations, and Fiji Commerce Commission. She was a commissioner in the Fiji Education Commission of 2000. She takes keen interest in sport and has represented Fiji in squash in two South Pacific Games and three South Pacific Cup. She is manager of Fiji squash team to the South Pacific Mini Games in Norfolk Islands in December 2001 and South Pacific Games in Fiji in 2003.

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Geoff Peters, Panel Member

Responsible for COL as Capacity Builder

Geographical Area is the Mediterranean/West Africa

I have worked at the Open University since 1971. I have been Pro Vice Chancellor responsible for Strategy since 1991 and prior to that I was Dean of Technology for six years. Until this year I have not undertaken any formal duties for COL, but in addition to this review I have been involved in a COL project at the University of Delhi. I am also Professor of Systems Strategy and I write and research on failures in large scale systems which means that I go into most things knowing that I will learn something valuable!

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Jenny Glennie, Panel Member

*Responsible for COL as Training Provider
Geographical Area is Southern Africa*

I'm a proud English speaking, born and bred South African. Over the last nine years I have established and run an NGO, SAIDE - The South African Institute for Distance Education which promotes open learning and distance education through contributing to policy processes, assisting in systems initiatives and supporting educational programme development. Access to quality education is our mission.

We conduct research, provide professional development and collect and disseminate information. We have worked mainly in South Africa but are increasingly being asked to provide services in Southern Africa. Aside from a small grant, (8% of income), we generate the rest of our income through projects.

Prior to SAIDE, I worked for many years for a prominent anti apartheid education trust, SACHED. SACHED provided educational opportunities primarily for black adults, and was punished by the apartheid state in a number of ways for this involvement.

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Prof. V.S. Prasad, Panel Member

*Responsible for COL as Catalyst for Collaboration
Geographical Area is South Asia*

Prof. Prasad, born on 6th February 1943 at Mahadevapuram Village of Khammam District of Andhra Pradesh, is currently Vice-Chancellor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU), Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Dr. Prasad obtained his Postgraduate degree (M.A.) and Doctorate degree (PhD) in Public Administration from Osmania University. Starting his academic career as a Lecturer in 1966, he has taught for more than 35 years in various Indian Universities, both in formal and distance education systems and has to his credit more than 40 publications in Public Administration including books and research articles. Dr. Prasad was a recipient of Best Teacher Award (1991) from Government of Andhra Pradesh, India.

Dr. Prasad is closely associated with open and distance education in India since 1982. He actively participated in the development of first Open University in India i.e., Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (formerly known as APOU) and held many important academic and administrative positions in that university, including Professor of Public Administration; Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences; Director, Academic; Director, Staff Development and Rector, a position equivalent to that of Pro-Vice-Chancellor.

Dr. Prasad, as Director, Distance Education Council (DEC) at IGNOU (1995-97) and also as Director, Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) (1996-97) at IGNOU, has initiated and actualised a number of programmes for promotion, co-ordination and quality assurance in distance education in India. The Human Resource Development and Quality Assurance Systems are his credit in distance education, which include research articles, manuals and chapters in books. Dr. Prasad participated as resource person in many international and national Seminars/Workshops. He has traveled widely to several countries including Thailand, UK, Canada, USA, China and Sri Lanka to participate in academic activities relating to Distance Learning.

He has been nominated by the Ministry for Human Resource Development, Government of India as a Member of the Executive Committee of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) for assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions in India.

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APPENDIX B: TERMS OF REFERENCE

COL Mid-term Evaluation

Background

At its 18th meeting, the Board of Governors endorsed the proposal that COL should carry out a mid-term evaluation of the full range of activities in the four fields under which its projects are packaged in the current three-year plan 2000-2003:

- resource for training;
- a capacity builder;
- an information and knowledge provider;
- a catalyst for collaboration.

The evaluation would be conducted in the first half of 2002 and the results would be influential in the formulation of the next three-year plan 2003-2006.

Objectives

The objective of the exercise would be to produce a 5000-word report to the Board of Governors, which would evaluate:

- the usefulness and impact of the totality of projects undertaken under each rubric to the stakeholders involved locally and regionally;
- the contribution of the projects to meeting the broader objectives of the international development agenda;
- the extent to which the projects undertaken are aligned with COL's strategic goals or objectives:
 - to promote the utilisation of communications and information technologies for the purpose of distance learning.
 - to facilitate access to affordable, high quality learning materials and resources in support of formal and informal education.
 - to provide access to training in the adoption and use of distance learning techniques and technologies.
 - to supply information and advice about distance learning systems, programmes and technologies, both to practitioners and developers alike.

Methodology

A five-person team of international experts in distance education from around the Commonwealth will be appointed to conduct the evaluation. Four of the members will each focus on one mission objective and will in addition act as a resource person to the whole team in relation to work undertaken by COL in a particular region of the Commonwealth including, where necessary, undertaking visits or communicating with partners and clients to obtain more detailed feedback. The Chair will be responsible for taking an overview of the impact of activities in one geographic region on behalf of the team and for leading the process of analysis and drafting the Panel's report. The COL Vice President will lead the internal self-evaluation exercise. Liaison between the Panel members and COL will be provided by a professional member of COL staff. Core

information on individual projects and a self-evaluation of COL's progress towards meeting the objectives set in the three year plan 2000-2003 by December 2001 will be provided by COL's specialists and Project managers. Based upon these project evaluations and other relevant information, the senior management team will produce an institutional evaluation linked to the four fields from the three year plan. Evidence will also be sought from project partners and other stakeholders of the depth of change facilitated by COL's engagement with them. Team members may be required to travel to/within the specified region in fulfillment of their duties.

The preliminary findings of the evaluation team will be presented to the Board of Governors at their July 2002 meeting in Durban, S.A. The report will be finalized for presentation to the Board by October 2002.

Timeline

January/February 2002	Appointment of evaluators Development of evaluation protocols
February/April 2002	Completion of self-evaluation by COL staff
April-June 2002	Evaluation activities by Team
July 2002	Presentation of preliminary findings to COL Board
October 2002	Presentation of final report to COL Board

Proposed Team members and responsibilities

Name	COL as	Geographical area
Prof Geoff Peters, UKOU	Capacity Builder	Mediterranean/W. Africa
Prof VS Prasad, BRAOU,	Catalyst for Collaboration	S. Asia
Dr Esther Williams, USP	Knowledge provider	S. Pacific
Ms Jenny Glennie, SAIDE	Training provider	Southern Africa
Chair		
Mr Shell Harvey, BC		Caribbean

APPENDIX C: DISCUSSION LIST

MTE – REGIONAL MEETINGS, FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS SUNDAY, JULY 28, 15h30 – 17h00

MEDITERRANEAN/WEST AFRICA – Prof. Geoff Peters

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PRIVATE MEETINGS

The Mid-Term Evaluation Panel held the following private meetings either prior or during the Pan-Commonwealth Forum in Durban, South Africa:

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Dr. Raj DHANARAJAN	President
Ms. Helena FEHR	Governance & Programme Officer
Mr. Nic GAO	Co-Ordinator, Information Resource Centre
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