OUR VISION
Access to education – Access to a better future

OUR MISSION STATEMENT
Recognising knowledge as key to cultural, social and economic development, the Commonwealth of Learning is committed to assisting Commonwealth member governments to take full advantage of open, distance and technology-mediated learning strategies to provide increased and equitable access to education and training for all their citizens.

OUR ROLE
Building capacity in open and distance learning

OUR “CLIENTS”
Fifty-four member Governments of the Commonwealth, their educational institutions and human resource development agencies

OUR PROGRAMMES
ODL Policy – with the objective of fostering the adoption and implementation of open and distance learning policies within the broader educational and human resource development strategies and policies of member nations.

ODL Systems Development – with the objective of assisting in the development of open and distance learning systems that build on existing capacity or assist in creating new capacity appropriate for the contexts of member states.

ODL Applications – with the objective of demonstrating how open and distance learning applications can benefit individual learners, institutions and member states by accelerating human resource development.

OUR AREAS OF OPERATION
Advisory, Advocacy, Capacity-building, Fostering networks and partnerships, Knowledge management and Research

OUR PARTNERS
Partnerships with local governments and institutions, and with international development agencies and regional agencies

THREE-YEAR PLAN 2003–2006
Building Capacity in Open and Distance Learning
MESSAGE from the CHAIRMAN

This Three-Year Plan manifests both the accomplishments of COL in its short life and its promise in meeting future challenges. The plan represents a cooperative endeavour in which many in the Commonwealth have participated, shaping it by their thinking and vision.

More importantly, the plan reflects a fresh approach that moves COL from a project-based frame of reference to one that is programme-based. Through it, COL seeks to:

- Fashion open and distance learning (ODL) policies in the context of educational, as well as human resource development, strategies;
- Develop ODL systems that enhance existing capacity or create the capacity to meet new challenges; and
- Identify ODL applications that accelerate human resource development in Commonwealth countries.

Together these programmes will enable Commonwealth governments to bring education within the reach of all their citizens, to strengthen their institutional and human capacity to respond to changing circumstances and to pursue imaginative approaches to human resource development. The Three-Year Plan also identifies ways to assess the results of COL’s initiatives.

On the basis of the careful planning that it represents, the extensive consultations that have preceded its preparation – including a special Board of Governors’ Retreat to deal exclusively with it – and its realistic objectives, I am confident that the plan is attainable and merits support.

Lewis Perinbam
Chairman, Board of Governors
Commonwealth of Learning
“Distance education and open learning as delivery mechanisms of education, are relatively new. But already, the range of experience is enormous; the pace of growth phenomenal. In no other grouping of nations is the growth as remarkable as it is in the Commonwealth; but then in no other group of nations do we see such a high proportion of people denied access to all levels of learning.”

Gajaraj Dhanarajan, Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, Durban, South Africa, July 2002
Planning a response to the expressed needs of 54 Commonwealth governments for assistance in open and distance learning is a daunting task. We recognise our responsibilities and the magnitude of the task, and have accordingly developed strategies that allow us to leverage our strengths with those of the Commonwealth to deliver the services expected of us.

We are pleased to submit for your consideration and endorsement our plan of work for the next three years. In this plan, Honourable Education Ministers will note that the agency is taking a new approach to its planning and implementation of activities. This is a response, on the one hand, to many of our stakeholders who have been urging us to be more focussed in our work and, on the other hand, to our need to manage our modest resources more efficiently with clearly defined and measurable outcomes.

During the last triennium, we based our plan on a framework that reflected the four roles we have played since our establishment in promoting open and distance learning. While this has “served the needs of the Commonwealth well,” as noted by an independent evaluation panel, the new plan is driven by three programmes, each with its own strategic objective. These will not diminish our response rate to member governments, but will help us to build capacity in open and distance learning by focussing attention on matters of policy and advocacy, enhancing the efficiencies and effectiveness of existing open and distance learning systems, and exploring the application of open and distance learning in internationally agreed-upon priority sectors of development.

My colleagues and I have consulted extensively around the Commonwealth in designing this plan. We spoke and shared draft ideas with Ministers of Education, funding agencies, Commonwealth professional associations, senior government officials, academic scholars and managers and our international partners. Through the web, we invited comments and input from all who are regularly in touch or partner with us in our work. Last but not least, our Board of Governors, representing all regions of the Commonwealth and several stakeholder interests, took an active part at all stages of the planning. These consultations took place over a period of eighteen months.

As you explore the issues of access, inclusion and achievement, the theme of the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM), I am confident that open and distance learning will be seen as key to any effective strategy to meet those challenges. As such, I trust that the Commonwealth of Learning will continue to be of interest to Commonwealth governments, adding value to the work of ministries and their institutions in the delivery of education and training.

In presenting this document for consideration and endorsement, we are asking Commonwealth member governments, as well as the major development agencies, to make available the necessary financial resources for the execution of the plan. The plan is based on a funding target of CDN$33 million over three years, with at least CDN$27 million of that being provided as core funding by member states, as recommended by the Commonwealth Heads of Governments in 1995 in Auckland, 1997 in Edinburgh and 1999 in Durban.

The assumptions upon which the Three-Year Plan is based are:

- Endorsement of the plan by Commonwealth governments;
- Continued deployment of open and distance learning methods by partner governments and agencies to achieve their education, health and governance plans;
- Continued and increasing funding from partner governments;
- Confidence in COL’s emerging programme-based operation and the relevance of the three strategic objectives;
- A smooth and timely transition in the presidency of the agency as I demit office at the end of May 2004; and
- COL’s skill base matching the aspirations of the plan.

This plan will see the start of our 15th year of service to the Commonwealth. Along the way we have worked with every major Commonwealth initiative in open and distance learning. We have also seen member states moving from scepticism and uncertainty about the use of open and distance learning to embracing it with enthusiasm and commitment. Some three million Commonwealth citizens are engaged in some form of self-learning today. By the end of 2006, we hope to see this number make another giant leap. Open and distance learning is a necessary tool to achieve our world’s development goals.

Gajaraj Dhanarajan
President and Chief Executive Officer
Commonwealth of Learning
The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was created in 1988 by Commonwealth Heads of Government. Since 1997, with the concurrence of Ministers of Education, the organisation has adopted a three-year planning cycle to guide its services to the Commonwealth.

Leaders took the decision to create a new organisation believing that a precondition to development, whether human, social or economic, is an education and training system accessible to all. Providing such access through conventional face-to-face education was obviously failing. Moreover, already tight financial resources could not be expected to increase commensurate with population growth. Awareness that human capital was overtaking other economic inputs in importance added urgency to the challenge.

Open and distance learning (ODL) enhanced through newer technological developments was seen as an opportunity to meet this challenge. COL was established to help member states exploit its potential to extend access to education to the remotest regions and to meet the requirements of those without the option of face-to-face learning. ODL was seen as one means to meet the increasing demand for learning and training without requiring classrooms and lecture halls to be built and equipped.

COL provides examples of excellent ODL practice that demonstrate how ODL can help to rapidly expand education opportunities. Specifically, COL works to help countries develop policies and systems that institutions need to extend the benefits of education to more of their citizens. The accompanying report, entitled *A World of Knowledge: Commonwealth of Learning Summary Report 2000–2003*, outlines the organisation’s work in this respect. COL’s website, www.col.org, also provides information on the organisation’s activities and offers knowledge resources that governments, institutions and practitioners can use.

In the area of knowledge provision, COL strives to “level the playing field” by developing and running systems that enable policy-makers, educators and learners in the world’s poorest countries to access information and knowledge on par with that available to people in the wealthy G8 countries.

ODL has grown significantly in the Commonwealth during the last decade. Today, there is at least one distance education operation in each of the 49 middle- or low-income countries of the Commonwealth. Many resulted from the direct involvement of COL; others have expanded their operations with COL adding value to their work; and many more have incorporated innovations based on COL’s advice, assistance, encouragement and support. As well, COL’s influence has gone beyond the Ministries of Education to whom it has a primary obligation. Other ministries – including those of Youth, Justice, Health, Rural Development and Agriculture – have requested and received support from COL in their human resource development. COL has had success in many sectors, including:

- Tertiary education
- Teacher training
- Open schooling
- Technical and vocational education
- Health education
- Rural development
- Agriculture

Despite its modest resources, COL has achieved significant results. In large measure, this is due to the organisation’s ability and willingness to form partnerships. These involve others from a global network of like-minded organisations and individuals willing to undertake projects that could not, or would not, have been done without COL’s participation. Its partners have included:

- Education ministries and their officials;
- Other ministries engaged in human resource development;
- Institutions of learning;
- Professional associations of scholars and practitioners;
- Commonwealth organisations and institutions, notably the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec), the Commonwealth Foundation and the Association of Commonwealth Universities;
- International agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) and the institutions of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR);
- International financial institutions such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and African Development Bank;
- Government ministries and agencies such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK (FCO), Department for International Development, UK (DFID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA),...
The Commonwealth is very different. We are not a huge bureaucracy. The Commonwealth network comes alive in the efforts of thousands of individuals in some 70 organisations who, through their knowledge and expertise, strengthen cooperation among the people of the Commonwealth.

From a speech given by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt. Hon. Don McKinnon, at the Royal Commonwealth Society, July 18, 2003

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada (DFAIT), New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), IMFUNDO (part of DFID) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA);

- Non-governmental and community-based organisations; and
- Private firms, including consulting agencies.

COL, based in Vancouver, Canada, operates with 34 staff, one-third of whom are education specialists. It is also equipped with technology that enables it to connect effectively and efficiently with the rest of the Commonwealth despite its location in western Canada.

Open and distance learning has served the nations of the Commonwealth well. Currently, about three million learners are engaged in open and distance learning at different levels of education throughout the developing Commonwealth. The Commonwealth of Learning takes pride in its work in sensitising the Commonwealth to the role that open and distance learning can play in the delivery of education and training by member states.
Commonwealth Heads of Government established COL to advocate and promote the use of open and distance learning in the Commonwealth to enhance access to education and training among member states. Since then, both the definition and application of ODL have been evolving in parallel with the arrival of newer and more intelligent technologies. Today and in the foreseeable future, open and distance learning embraces any or all of the following:

- **Open learning** – policies and practices that permit entry to learning with no or minimum barriers with respect to age, gender or time constraints and with recognition of prior learning. These policies need not be part of a distance education system, but are complementary to it.

- **Distance education** – the delivery of learning or training to learners who are separated mostly by time and space from those who are teaching or training. The teaching is done with a variety of “mediating processes” used to transmit content, provide tuition and conduct assessment or measure outcomes.

- **Flexible learning** – the provision of learning opportunities that can be accessed at any place and time. Flexible learning relates more to the scheduling of activities than to any particular delivery mode.

- **Online learning and e-learning** – terms that have emerged to describe the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance distance education, implement open learning policies, make learning activities more flexible and enable those learning activities to be distributed among many learning venues.

- **Virtual education** – includes aspects of both online and e-learning but goes somewhat further. While it is largely web-centric, it does not necessarily limit itself to learners outside a conventional classroom. It uses multimedia and, besides delivering content, also enables a high level of interaction among learners, content, teachers, peers and administration both synchronously and asynchronously.

COL is mindful of these evolving variations as it designs its response to Commonwealth needs and demands. Over the last 14 years of service to member states of the Commonwealth, the organisation has developed unique knowledge, characteristics and ethics that have enabled it to add value to Commonwealth efforts to increase access to learning in a practical way that is appropriate for the particular context.

---


---

**COL’s Mission Statement:**

Recognising knowledge as key to cultural, social and economic development, the Commonwealth of Learning is committed to assisting Commonwealth member governments to take full advantage of open, distance and technology-mediated learning strategies to provide increased and equitable access to education and training for all their citizens.
COL’s Distinctive Characteristics

COL is unique and distinguished by several key characteristics. It is:

- Commonwealth-centred, ensuring that Commonwealth member states are the ultimate beneficiaries of its work;

- Owned by the 54 Commonwealth states (represented by members who sit on its Board and guide its activities), and the only international organisation with a mandate exclusively to help states extend access to education through the ODL mode;

- Specialised in ODL, with 14 years of ground-breaking work in the field;

- Innovative, exploring the new opportunities for capacity-building offered by technological change and research on learning while remaining sensitive to developing economies’ environments;

- Responsive to priorities and needs as defined by its client states, offering solutions appropriate to prevailing conditions;

- Well connected, recognising that its strength resides in its ability to engage the talents and knowledge of the Commonwealth and beyond for the benefit of its member countries;

- Committed to a work ethic and modus operandi that are based on engaging as many of the stakeholders as possible in defining, designing and implementing its activities; and

- Sensitive to gender issues in all of its programme activities.

COL’s knowledge of the Commonwealth, combined with its experience in working with member states, has enabled it to respond quickly and favourably to the call of member states or their institutions for assistance. To shape its response in the next three years, COL will take into account both the rapid and momentous changes taking place in the global environment and those occurring within the organisation. These changes are described in the following sections.

**Political/Social Issues**

The challenge posed by over 113 million children without access to schooling is aggravated by those emerging from conflict situations or left orphaned by HIV/AIDS and other diseases. HIV/AIDS has also taken its toll on the education sector itself, sometimes decimating the ranks of qualified teaching staff at all levels. This deprivation comes on top of the already limited access of many individuals to in-service teacher training, non-formal education and post-secondary and post-experience education. This Three-Year Plan seeks to position countries to use ODL as a key strategy to address these challenges.

**Economic Issues**

The treatment of knowledge as a commodity, the desire to include education and training within the ambit of the World Trade Organisation, and international agreements on intellectual property rights all have an impact on the education and training sectors. As well, globalisation, increased competition and rapid change are placing unprecedented demands for retraining and “upskilling” on the workforce. These challenges can often best be met by short and “just-in-time” training programmes that cause the least interruption to the normal functioning of the workplace. This plan seeks to show how ODL can strengthen the system of continuing education and professional development, as well as entrepreneurship.

**Gender and Youth Issues**

The need to address the issues of access to even basic education for women and girls remains a crucial cross-cutting issue for most Commonwealth countries. The matter is particularly critical given the role women play in raising families – a role that makes them a more potent conduit than men for sharing learning. That being said, an emerging trend in many countries is a distinctive problem facing young men whose traditional roles and work are changing and sometimes even disappearing, leaving them without a sense of confidence in obtaining education relevant to their aptitudes. The plan seeks to address specific gender and youth issues through ODL options.

---

THE CHANGING TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

Advancements in technologies affecting telecommunications and computing (e.g., miniaturisation, wireless, alternative energy sources) continue apace, affording developing countries new opportunities and creating demands for new skill sets. This plan calls for COL to continue to model ways to incorporate changing technologies into the delivery of education and training while also helping to develop necessary skill sets. By doing this, COL will contribute to reducing the digital divide, in this way positioning countries to increase their competitiveness in the technological environment and to make informed choices on the use of technologies for education.

THE CHANGING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The rapidity of change, especially technological, combined with the speed new knowledge is developing, is dramatically altering the learning environment. Focus is less on the transfer of actual knowledge and more on the development of skills to help learners acquire new knowledge. New venues for learning are also increasing (such as the workplace, community centres and telecentres), all of which improve access. The relevance of the learning experience and its fit with the local context are becoming more critical. Flexibility of response is key and this plan is designed to equip countries to provide such flexible response.
OTHER INTERNATIONAL PROVIDERS OF ODL EXPERTISE

COL has to compete for both the limited resources available for development assistance from donor agencies and the limited resources available in the education budgets of client states. Others who work to attract such resources include:

- International financial institutions, some of whom (e.g., the World Bank) have developed their own systems or forms of distance education, such as the Global Distance Learning Network (GDLNet). The principal objective of these institutions, however, is to assist with the national development of countries through the provision of funding to meet strategic priorities. As such, international financial institutions usually complement the work of COL and have been partners on a number of occasions (e.g., Global Distance Education Network [GDENet], the Development Gateway, teacher training at a distance in Lesotho, development of the National Institute for Distance Education in Mozambique, modernisation of distance education in Sri Lanka and improvement to the quality of teacher education in Bangladesh). Their work is usually specific to each country and they therefore attribute less importance than COL to the transferability of lessons learned. In some instances, those helped have subsequently called on COL to deal with needs not fully addressed by the bilateral project.

- Intergovernmental organisations such as UNESCO, UNAIDS, UNHCR and WHO, while drawing on official development assistance funding, have become partners rather than competitors. UNESCO and COL have worked together on numerous challenges, recently having jointly funded a position in Africa to work on COL/UNESCO initiatives to support ODL within Africa. Similarly, COL has helped UNAIDS, UNHCR and WHO adapt ODL to their own training needs. It has also been collaborating with WHO on specific health-related topics in both Africa and the Pacific where ODL applications can be helpful.

- Non-governmental and community-based organisations relying on official development assistance have built strong relationships with those engaged in education and training and regularly partners with them, especially in areas related to vulnerable peoples or rural development (e.g., International Extension College, South African Institute for Distance Education).

- Universities and colleges

Although these are sometimes competitors with COL for funding from international financial institutions for specific education-related projects, they are just as often partners with COL in seeking such support. A major distinction is that COL has as its objective the provision of capacity-building expertise to client countries, whereas universities and colleges look to such projects principally as sources of revenue and a means of increasing their knowledge and appreciation of the international environment (e.g., The Open University, UK, Indira Gandhi National Open University, India).

- Commercial entrepreneurs and consulting firms

These also compete for development assistance funding, yet occasionally also partner with COL. Unlike COL, they have no particular or ongoing mandate within the Commonwealth as such, nor for strengthening education and training systems within the Commonwealth. Their interests are largely commercial, with profit rather than the public good being their principal motive.

- The African Virtual University, which is supported by CDN$12–14 million through donor agencies and draws on significant in-kind resources made available by local governments/institutions

The character of the university as a direct deliverer of education sets it apart from COL, as does its propensity to be a channel to African learners for courses/programmes developed elsewhere. COL is more inclined to foster indigenous development of courses and programmes or to make available those from elsewhere with a view to their adaptation to the local situation.

A key feature distinguishing COL from all other “competitors” is that it is the Commonwealth’s own agent: member governments define its area of action and hold it accountable to them for its performance.
**INTERNAL CHANGES and CHALLENGES**

**GOVERNANCE ISSUES**
The Board appreciates the difficulty to achieve best practice in critical governance roles when it is not financially viable to hold frequent meetings. A review is now being undertaken to determine how more accountability can be delegated appropriately to the Executive Committee. The Board also appreciates the requirement for clearer policy at the governance level to meet future needs.

**LEADERSHIP CHANGES**
A recent change in the Chair, changes on the Board and an impending change of President create a context where there is significant reliance on existing staff to maintain momentum through the next triennium.

**STAFF CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY**
Changing requirements demand new or additional competencies from staff. The small size of the organisation requires staff to have multiple skills – skills that must often be developed in-house. These issues will be addressed through a Human Resource Plan.

**COMMUNICATION WITH GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES**
Governments have chosen to provide their financial support to COL from two different sources: developed member states, through their international development agencies (DFID, CIDA, AusAID, NZAID); and other member states, through their education ministries. COL reports to the Commonwealth through the Ministers of Education, although in the case of the developed countries, these ministers are not COL’s key interlocutors. In addition, Ministries of Foreign Affairs play key roles, in part because they largely have responsibility for the governing body of the Commonwealth, to which COL also provides a report. It is essential that all pertinent ministries be kept informed of COL’s work and achievements. To address this issue, appropriate approaches will be taken to meet the needs of different stakeholders.

**TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM**
COL is a networked organisation required to provide electronic access to knowledge resources around the world and, for its travelling staff, access to their files and work at headquarters. Maintaining this network requires COL to have a robust technology platform, “future-proofed” to the extent feasible. Within this plan, a review of COL’s technology platform, an assessment of future requirements and a business plan will be developed.

**PLANNING CAPABILITY**
The demand by stakeholders for greater transparency and focus in plans required COL to internally develop new skills in strategic planning, including the introduction of Results Based Management (RBM). The challenge is to do this without losing the benefits of the project management skills that have stood the organisation in good stead to date. The plan is therefore developed within an RBM framework.
COL understands the need to respond to a rapidly changing education and training environment that is characterised by increased challenges and expectations at all levels. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) include a number of education challenges, principal amongst which is the call for universal primary education by 2015. This echoes a similar call under “Education for All,” which calls for all citizens to have access to basic education. In addition, the MDGs specifically identify the need to make progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005.

While ODL may be limited in its capacity to provide education to primary-age learners, it can nevertheless be extremely helpful in meeting that objective in other ways, such as by training primary school teachers, teacher aides and community workers. Of the 59 million primary and secondary school teachers in the world, over a third are within Commonwealth countries. Of those, many are untrained or under-trained and insufficiently supported. The urgency to train new teachers, as well as to extend the reach of qualified teachers, is heightened when one realises that HIV/AIDS is sometimes killing more teachers in a country than the country is able to train in a year. Apart from providing teacher training and skills upgrading, COL can be helpful in supporting the development of digital networks connecting communities of teachers, teacher trainers and others managing and supporting educational delivery.

Many Commonwealth countries are beginning to succeed in providing increased opportunities for primary education. However, this success will add to pressures farther up the education ladder. It is expected that, by the end of this decade, large numbers of learners will find their access to secondary education denied unless member governments begin to put in place infrastructure to accommodate the new demand. Demand will be enormous both for more trained teachers and for alternative approaches to delivering secondary education. In both instances, distance education can help.

For any poverty reduction scheme to have effect, the skill sets necessary to underpin more dynamic economies must be created. This requires, at a minimum, the development of
necessary life skills. For this, ODL can be helpful. Similarly, continuing education and skills upgrading will be essential and distance learning practices can provide the flexibility necessary to reach those already employed and requiring training while still in the workplace.

For many countries, the degree of access to tertiary education is the more critical education challenge confronting them. The World Bank and others are beginning to recognise that, in focusing mostly on primary education, too little attention has been paid to the needs of this sector. It is an area in which distance education has proved its value. COL can be useful in helping countries extend access by facilitating improvements to the open university system and by assisting the transition from single mode, face-to-face universities to institutions combining face-to-face with distance learning, incorporating more flexible delivery systems.

**REGIONAL CONTEXT**

COL accepts the need to accord priority to activities that benefit the wider Commonwealth, such as offering access to its knowledge and communication resources and modelling new approaches to education and training that could be transposed widely around the Commonwealth. That being said, COL is also mindful that on a regional basis the challenges confronting the education and training sectors vary in magnitude and focus. Even within regions, such variations can be found between the countries of the region and, in the case of the larger countries, between different states or provinces.

It is clear that sub-Saharan Africa faces many of the daunting challenges that ODL can serve, yet it has the greatest deficit with respect to the systems and people in place necessary to realise its benefits. Education deprivation relative to total population is higher in this region than elsewhere in the Commonwealth. Consequently, COL’s services are in high demand, but fewer local resources are available to partner with COL in the achievement of desired objectives. Given this need, combined with the priority attached to the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), COL expects to intensify its work in Africa.
South Asia also faces daunting challenges that the Millennium Development Goals attempt to address. In some instances – notably India, but true also of other countries of the region – there is some measure of local capacity in systems and know-how to meet a number of these needs. In fact, the talent base in South Asia is proving useful outside the region and COL regularly draws upon it. It will continue to do so while also helping to expand and enrich these capacities by strengthening existing competencies and introducing ODL practices to other relevant areas. In absolute numbers, the size of education deprivation in South Asia exceeds that in Africa. All South Asia countries have serious and legitimate calls on COL’s resources. Maldives has distinctive challenges, more in keeping with other smaller island nations than with its more heavily populated and much larger neighbours in the region.

The countries of South East Asia have little need for COL’s services, but they are a wellspring of expertise and experience that COL can draw on to enrich the competencies of other areas. COL has been pleased to work with Brunei to develop a concept paper for a SchoolNet there, and has been delighted with the collaboration and support of Singapore for a management institute for heads of teacher training colleges in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, COL has been grateful for the collaboration of the Government of Malaysia in the organisation of a meeting of Pacific Islands Ministers of Education and, more recently, for its offer to host a conference on gender and technology, the results of which will be presented to the World Summit on the Information Society.

There are some 30 or so small states in the Commonwealth, many of them island states with their own set of circumstances that differ considerably from the larger and more populous states of the Commonwealth. The Pacific and the Caribbean countries have separately struck regional partnerships for the achievement of their education goals. COL will help strengthen regional institutions and also foster regional networks supportive of ODL’s use for education and training. Depending on the Ministers’ response to the concept of a virtual university to serve the interests of small states, COL may have additional responsibilities accorded it. The
experiences of Malta and Cyprus might be helpful in this context, while COL might also be helpful to them as they develop their own use of ODL further.

Despite its location in western Canada, COL has worked to ensure that it remains sensitive to the environment confronting governments and their institutions in the various regions of the Commonwealth. The ability to bridge distances through electronic communications is one means utilised, as is the frequent travel of its expert staff to all regions of the Commonwealth. The structure of COL’s Board adds a particular value, as the four governors appointed as representatives of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific bring deep personal and professional knowledge of their region to the Board’s deliberations. In addition, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, located in Delhi, provides COL with an operational base that represents COL’s interests and apprises COL of opportunities where it can be helpful.

In the Pacific region, an effective arrangement with The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand has allowed COL to use a member of the Polytechnic’s staff as a regional representative where travel costs and time considerations would have marshalled against COL sending a staff member from Vancouver. The Caribbean does not present quite the same challenge given its relatively close location to Canada.

In the case of Africa, COL is a member of the Executive Committee of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) Working Group on ODL. COL provides considerable assistance to this group, which also helps it maintain an appreciation of developments and needs related to distance education throughout Africa. In addition, COL has been a regular participant on the Technical Committee of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) related to distance education. Also on the horizon are clear opportunities for COL to help develop regional centres of expertise that could provide it with greater regional visibility and presence. One such opportunity exists with Nigeria, which is interested in constituting a centre of expertise on ODL that can serve both national and regional interests. COL is keen to partner with Nigeria on that development. Similarly, there appears to be an opportunity to develop a regional centre for southern Africa, in partnership with SADC, perhaps located in Botswana, home to the SADC secretariat.

COL will seek to extend its network to, and learn lessons from, those beyond the Commonwealth, particularly in the francophone world, and bring this knowledge to bear on its work.
PROGRAMMES

The four roles identified for COL over the past years (catalyst for collaboration, resource for training, capacity builder and knowledge provider) are now focussed on three programmes:

- **Open and distance learning policy**
  Continuous advocacy and promotion of ODL as a major strategy to ensure access, inclusion and achievement require clearly enunciated policies at the national and institutional levels. This programme expects to support member states in this aspect.

- **Open and distance learning systems development**
  A requirement in many jurisdictions is to ensure that ODL systems are built and supported by adequate infrastructure and skilled workers. This programme expects to assist member states in building effective and efficient systems for sustainability and good practice.

- **Open and distance learning applications**
  In this programme, COL hopes to work with institutions in developing models of delivering learning and training using ODL methods, as well as to demonstrate, where appropriate, the application of learning technologies to achieve national and/or institutional objectives.

The connection between the strategic direction set by this plan and COL’s programme activities over the next three years and beyond are crucial to COL realising its mission and aims, thereby fulfilling its mandate. This requires articulating the impact of the plan at the **corporate level**, enunciating the outputs and outcomes of the plan’s purpose at the **programme level** and describing the specific work to be carried out at the **sub-programme level**.

The three levels of operation outlined above are encompassed by a Results Based Management (RBM) framework that will be implemented along with the plan. This management framework will be guided by the strategic analysis described in this document. A summary of the RBM framework is presented on pages 18 and 19.

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

COL is devising a monitoring and evaluation framework for the RBM programme mode. It is holding consultations with other international development agencies to ascertain the most appropriate model for its particular requirements.

**ACHIEVING THE PLAN**

At the operational level COL is devising plans that will use more in-country expertise than before. Individual initiatives may be larger, either in scope or in resource deployment, in order to maximise the leveraging of COL’s resources.
CRITERIA FOR
Selection of
Specific Initiatives

Specific programme initiatives will be selected against the following criteria:

- The initiatives fall within the ambit of COL’s mandate.
- There is evidence of commitment and ownership by local authorities—such evidence often being the resources, whether financial or in-kind, that they are prepared to invest.
- There is potential for working in partnership, in the first instance with local authorities, governments or institutions who will benefit from the activity, and in the second instance with other potential partners such as development agencies, NGOs, intergovernmental agencies or others.
- There is evidence of transferability of lessons learned and of the models developed both within and beyond regions.
- The initiatives do not “reinvent the wheel,” but rather draw from existing knowledge or expertise and use them innovatively.
- There is an identifiable need, and the clients (whether governments or institutions) have already been engaged in articulating that need. In short, the initiatives are demand driven rather than supply driven.
- The related infrastructure and necessary training will be in place to ensure sustainability.
- The initiatives develop local capacities, with a view to ensuring that skills and knowledge acquired will prove useful beyond the narrow confines of the particular activity being undertaken.
- The initiatives exhibit gender sensitivity by being designed to encourage participation of women or to address specific gender issues.
- There is evidence of the potential to magnify the results by training trainers, or by putting in place sustainable systems and infrastructures that can be used beyond the life of the particular initiative.
- It is likely that the initiatives will have an impact on decision-makers at the institutional or governmental level.
- The initiatives are realistically feasible to implement and are likely to achieve results within acceptable time frames.

While the above criteria will be considered in every case, there will be different expectations according to different circumstances prevailing in the country or institution seeking COL’s engagement. In order for COL to consider a request positively, that request must meet the first criterion of falling within its mandate and the last criterion of being realistically feasible. It is equally clear that not all the above considerations need be present to warrant COL’s engagement in an activity, although the more that are, the stronger the case for COL’s involvement.

COL would shy away from initiatives where there is no real added value in the way of new knowledge or additional capacity, but simply the replication of an experience already widely documented. In addition, COL was able to bring new and feasible approaches to the table, it would include items such as credit recognition or credit transfers – issues for which all attempts to address have been thwarted to date.
**SUMMARY OF THE RBM FRAMEWORK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>IMPACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CORPORATE</td>
<td>Citizens within the developing nations of the Commonwealth have greater access to education and thereby the means of securing decent livelihoods, notably increased social and economic development as targeted by the Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAMME</th>
<th>OUTPUTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ODL</td>
<td>Well-designed training materials in key areas of ODL tested and ready for distribution and use Personnel skilled and able to train others in core skills in ODL development and delivery, namely:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICY</td>
<td>• instructional design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORT</td>
<td>• learner support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• technological applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• management of ODL, including costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• materials development and production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYSTEMS</td>
<td>Networks, partnerships and professional associations created and supported with assistance from COL and key contacts in participating institutions, ministries and non-governmental organisations are making use of their expanding base of ODL contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPLICATIONS</td>
<td>Policy makers and practitioners use knowledge for specific ODL applications related to basic education, gender equity, good governance, poverty alleviation and health ODL is identified by a wider number of Officials in selected government agencies, governmental and non-governmental organisations Professionals in education recognise more fully that ODL can provides a useful facility to address training and retraining needs in key sectors of their programming areas – notably: employment, basic education, good governance, poverty alleviation and health Recipients of advice/training utilise knowledge and information in the design of policy, regulatory and budgetary frameworks Key individuals inside relevant institutions and organisations possess the required technical knowledge and tools to (re)design and deliver training using ODL approaches and methods Key contacts across participating government agencies establish new cooperative working relationships in support of ODL design and delivery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUB-PROGRAMME</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ODL POLICY SUPPORT</td>
<td>Policy development for basic and secondary education Policy development for post-secondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODL SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>Developing, strengthening and fostering regional centres of expertise Developing, strengthening and improving ODL capabilities at regional, national and institutional levels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Outcomes

Decision-makers within Ministries of Education and institutions/organisations recognise ODL as a valid alternative system of delivery and incorporate ODL into their plans and budgets.

Leaders within institutions, organisations and professional associations/accrediting bodies recognise the need to establish parity between conventional and ODL qualifications.

Decision-makers are able to make more informed decisions on the use of ODL within their own policy and programme settings.

Educators, trainers, technical and support staff are trained to make more informed decisions on the use of integrated ODL knowledge and skills and deliver a variety of ODL programmes in meeting the achievement of the MDGs.

Institutions and organisations collaborate to achieve stronger programmes, exchange ideas and experience, pool resources and collaborate on initiatives to introduce or enhance the use of ODL professional development in ODL.

Officials in selected ministries, educational institutions and other organisations commit resources to plans and programmes in a gender and culture sensitive way within the fields of:

- **Basic education**
  - teacher training
  - alternate schooling

- **Poverty reduction**
  - communities at risk
  - rural development and environmental sustainability
  - food security

- **Health**
  - HIV/AIDS and communicable diseases
  - nutrition, public health and hygiene

- **Good governance**
  - public administration
  - macro and micro level management

This is accomplished by extending access to education to marginalised and vulnerable groups.

### Sub-Programme

**ODL Applications**

- ODL for teacher education
- ODL applications for poverty reduction
- Other Commonwealth priorities and the Millennium Development Goals, notably health and good governance

---

Introducing a results-based approach aims to improve management effectiveness and accountability by “defining realistic expected results, monitoring progress toward the achievement of expected results, integrating lessons learned into management decisions and reporting on performance.”

Over the life of this plan, ODL applications are expected to be around 40% of the total commitment of COL’s time and resources; work in ODL systems will be around 35% and in ODL policy in the region of 25%. This concentration, however, will change with the shifting needs of the developing world, with a focus on those activities most likely to produce effective ODL systems.

COL will retain under each programme a capacity to respond to requests that member countries make to address their particular priorities where such requests fit the spirit of this plan’s intent.

Existing projects will be assessed in light of their relevance to the new programme activities and will either:

- Be brought to a reasonable stage of completion/exit as rapidly as possible;

or

- Be incorporated into the new framework where they form part of the programmes.

While COL’s planning cycle operates on a three-year basis in line with the schedule of meetings of Ministers of Education, the initiatives it undertakes frequently extend beyond that period. In many instances, delays result from COL’s inability to control the speed of implementation since, in partnership arrangements, partners cannot always move at the same speed. In other instances, the projects themselves simply require longer time spans to be properly implemented. Moreover, projects begun in the last year of the plan will normally extend beyond the life of the Three-Year Plan itself. Nonetheless, it is estimated that fewer than 40% of current projects would still be active beyond the second year of this plan.
Based on recent studies by COL, as well as the findings of an independently conducted mid-term evaluation and an environmental scan, the following success factors have been identified as critical to achieving the plan. Specific activities have been built into the plan to ensure that these success factors can be achieved:

- Securing support of Commonwealth governments – particularly Education and Development Ministers and officials – for the purpose and strategic direction set by the COL Board and the realisation of pledged funding;
- Assuming that a committed COL Board will devote the time necessary to fulfil its governance responsibilities with clear roles and accountability in governance structures and processes;
- Assuming that partner governments and institutions will commit to fulfilling their roles within established timelines for agreed programmes;
- Achieving greater strategic focus, systematic planning and monitoring, adopting a programme-based approach and being clear about what COL will and will not do and why;
- Hiring an exceptional leader for the role of President;
- Matching staff skills, competencies and capacities to meet changing future requirements and sensitivities to different national contexts, while maintaining a balance between continuity and turnover;
- Approaching stakeholder engagements in a more strategic and focussed way;
- Developing the capacity to leverage funding and resources and to capitalise on opportunities to marshal funds from elsewhere; and
- Ensuring that physical infrastructure meets future requirements.
To support the programmes, COL will ensure that the following key areas will be underpinned by specific plans that recognise their relationship to the achievement of the organisation’s core objectives:

- Human Resources,
- Finances and Assets,
- Stakeholder Engagement, and
- Knowledge Management and Communications.

**HUMAN RESOURCES**

COL is committed to developing and implementing human resource strategies that will ensure its workforce is ready and able to respond creatively and effectively to the changes shaping the international stage on which the organisation works. These strategies will be aligned with COL’s mission, values and strategies. To this end, the Human Resource Plan is being reviewed for consideration by the Board of Governors later this year.

As COL’s focus shifts to that outlined in the Three-Year Plan (i.e., a more select and focussed number of programmes), COL predicts its current size, scope and nature will remain fairly stable. COL will remain a 30-something person organisation, operating within a lean and flat organisational structure. Any addition of jobs will stem from needs arising within intensified priorities subject to the availability of the necessary resources.

COL’s original design was meant to be larger – 50+ staff operating under a pyramid style of management. This structure was found to be unsustainable and, in 1996, COL adopted a flat organisational structure driven by function and reflective of its size and budget.

To keep the organisation lean and flat, COL will operate with four main levels of staffing: 1) President and Vice President, 2) Managers, 3) Education Specialists and 4) administrative and programme staff. Those in the first three categories will continue to be hired on a contractual basis, usually three years in the first instance, giving COL the flexibility to adapt its human resources to the needs of any plan. Occupants of the remaining positions are considered permanent staff.

Some of the human resource implications being addressed in the Three-Year Plan include:

- Development of a competency model, including provision of opportunities to enhance knowledge of required competencies;
- Development of competitive compensation, benefits and allowance programmes – a review is now underway;
- Revision of the existing performance management system;
- Linking the training and development needs to the performance management system and to the needs of the organisation;

COL’s organisational structure
• Development of an approach for leadership succession – a change of President will occur during the plan period and the search process has started with provisions for the associated costs made; and
• Development of governance guidelines for Board and management.

A pay reserve of 13.5% of the total human resources provision has been included to accommodate any additional posts that may be required, as well as to offset any impact on pay costs arising from the current review.

**FINANCES AND ASSETS**

The financial plan is drawn up within the Results Based Management (RBM) framework. It is informed by the Three-Year Plan’s thrust to position member states to address their social, economic and human development requirements by using ODL to provide equitable access to education and training for all their citizens.

To ensure the appropriate management of COL’s resources, the financial plan will focus on fiscal responsibility, accountability and viability. By measuring and reporting on its performance and by tracking and reflecting costs accurately, COL will ensure its accountability. To achieve this objective, it will:

• Implement results-based reporting for key activities and improve tracking mechanisms and reporting systems;
• Identify and use key performance indicators to measure performance; and
• Maintain systems and controls for accountability, including appropriate delegation and periodic reviews.

COL will manage the necessary resources – financial, human and technological – to implement its strategic plan and programmes and ensure its continued viability by:

• Developing and implementing resource allocation decision processes based on priorities and core competencies,
• Establishing systematic use of selection criteria and apply appropriate monitoring and assessment techniques,
• Identifying and consolidating non-core activities, “sunsetting” and outsourcing where appropriate, and
• Safeguarding its assets.

To sustain ongoing financial viability, COL will:

• Develop and implement business strategies to expand its fee-for-service activities and decrease reliance on current core funding sources, and
• Maintain and build a contingency fund at an appropriate level.

With the implementation of the above strategies, COL aims to be fiscally responsible, focussing its resources on core competencies while accounting for its performance and results.

The table below displays the summary plan of expenditure for the period of the Three-Year Plan, with resources attributed to the three programme areas and to the governance and management functions of COL. Resources are tracked under five main headings; activity-specific costs; knowledge management and communications services; grants, special activities and contract services; human resources; and infrastructure, site and office costs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SUMMARY PLAN OF EXPENDITURE</strong></th>
<th><strong>2003–2006</strong></th>
<th><strong>CDN$ - MILLION</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programmes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODL Policy</td>
<td>$ 2.2</td>
<td>$ 0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODL Systems Development</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODL Applications</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Programmes</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Governance and Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Audit</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Offices</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Administration</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Acquisitions</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Governance and Management</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Expenditures</td>
<td>$13.4</td>
<td>$ 3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A large portion of COL’s work will be directed to Pan-Commonwealth activities for the benefit of most, if not all regions, with the balance to be region specific or cross-regional. Amongst the regions, COL weights its expenditures according to the needs identified as Commonwealth priorities, while taking into account the geographic origin of its funding. On this basis, COL expects that marginally more resources will be devoted to Africa than to Asia, and Asia in turn will receive marginally more than the small and island states of the Caribbean and Pacific. All of the activities will require dedicated resources to achieve the objectives to which they relate within the three identified programmes.

The total cost of the overall Three-Year Plan for 2003–2006 has been estimated at a level of CDN$33 million. In preparing the plan, a number of assumptions have been made with regard to the availability of financial resources.

**Pledge income** – It is assumed that the pledge income from member governments will be fairly constant over the next three years to average CDN$9 million per year – the figure agreed to by Ministers of Education in Islamabad in 1994 and endorsed by Heads of Government in Durban in 1999 as the minimum needed for COL. The three-tier framework for countries, endorsed by Ministers of Education in Botswana in 1997, provides the basis for the amounts needed from each tier. The Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers remains the platform for governments to signal their financial contributions to COL. An indicative listing of minimum funding levels from each tier is presented below.

It is expected that member governments will meet the targets that their leaders have endorsed – that is, CDN$27 million, over the life of the plan.

**Other sources of income** – It is assumed that income from direct partner contributions, fee-for-service activities, special projects, investment income and other sources will be in the order of CDN$6 million, a level similar to that in 2000–2003.

**Cash reserves** – Uncommitted funds of approximately CDN$4 million are estimated to be available at 1 July 2003 to assist in maintaining the organisation until funding from member governments for 2003–2006 is received. COL will endeavour to retain a cash reserve at a level of no less than CDN$2–3 million at all times and at no more than one year’s operating budget. As well, COL will ensure adequate provision is made in the current year to meet its outstanding commitments for completion of activities already initiated but not yet finished (CDN$1.5 million estimated).

### THREE-TIER FUNDING TARGETS FOR 2003–2006

#### TIER 1

Countries would contribute, as a group, a minimum total of CDN$27 million (CDN$7 million annually) for the next three years.

Included are: Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, Nigeria and the United Kingdom.

#### TIER 2

Countries would contribute, as a group, a total of CDN$4.5 million (CDN$1.5 million annually) for the next three years.

Included are: Bahamas, Bangladesh, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cyprus, Fiji, Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago and Uganda.

#### TIER 3

Countries would contribute, as a group, a total of CDN$1.5 million (CDN$0.5 million annually) for the next three years.

Included are: Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Cameroon, Dominica, Gambia, Grenada, Guyana, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malawi, Maldives, Malta, Mozambique, Nauru, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, Swaziland, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Zambia.
**Stakeholder Engagement**

There is widespread interest in the work of COL as member states cope with the increasing demand for education and training at various levels. Over its 14 years of work for the Commonwealth, COL has benefited from the support of, and at the same time reached out to, many institutions and individuals interested in human development. These range, on the one hand, from Ministers and officials of ministries responsible for human resource development in member states and, on the other hand, to members of the international development community who generously support national efforts. Additional to these two major sets of stakeholders are many others, such as professional associations and their members, the education and distance education communities, intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental organisations associated with education or training, full-time staff and consultants working for COL, as well as COL’s Commonwealth-wide networks, its Board of Governors, and fraternal agencies of the Commonwealth.

The Three-Year Plan is one vehicle to engage and inform these stakeholders about the strategies, directions, priorities and work of COL. In addition, throughout the life of the plan, COL will be seeking advice and assistance from the community at large to enrich its services. Engaging with such a diverse group of stakeholders will require the use of all COL’s communication tools, including publications, web pages, newsletters, seminars, forums, conferences and periodic one-on-one communication. COL seeks to strike a balance in supporting competing needs with its modest resources. It is expected that COL’s Board of Governors will play an important advocacy role with stakeholders.

---

**Summary Table of Resources, 2003–2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000–2003 Actual (CDN$)</th>
<th>2003–2006 Target (CDN$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member governments</td>
<td>$20 million</td>
<td>$27 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sources</td>
<td>$6 million</td>
<td>$6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$26 million before reserves</td>
<td>$33 million before reserves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Underpinning, and in support of, all programmes and the achievement of COL’s strategic objectives are effective knowledge management and communications, along with the informatics capacity to support them. COL continues to expand its knowledge base and information provision and exchange service for member states, not only by investing in newer technologies and software, but also by increasing information-sharing between stakeholders. Key elements of the knowledge management and communications plan include:

- The Information Resource Centre, an internal clearinghouse and ODL information provider for COL staff and across the Commonwealth;
- Knowledge management databases, including COL’s Knowledge Finder, a global index of documents designed to enable users anywhere to find ODL documents with speed and ease;
- Knowledge resources, publications and online communications that are continuing to expand in scope, volume and function (such as the possibility of launching a wide-appeal magazine on ODL); and
- The Global Distance Education Network and the Development Gateway, international partnerships where COL is playing a major role.

COL has always recognised that, as a servant of the Commonwealth, it has a duty to reach all areas of the Commonwealth effectively, speedily and economically. In doing so, it has to be governed not only by the technological capabilities of the developed world, but by the capacities of the users. That has implied a mix of print and electronic communications and, with respect to electronic communications, recognition that bandwidth is limited for most users.

Given the speed of growth in information related to ODL and its use, COL requires a facility that can capture, store, segregate and disseminate information within acceptable timeframes and through a variety of means. This requires a sophisticated technology platform that is also capable of supporting COL’s itinerant workforce so that they have access to their files at headquarters and to the constituencies they serve around the Commonwealth regardless of their location at any given time. Within the life of this Three-Year Plan, an assessment will be made of current and future requirements for COL’s technology platform.
Risks and Risk Management

COL is by nature a risk-taking organisation. It explores new uses for older and new technologies, models new approaches to different education and training challenges, and helps to reform education delivery systems that have been accustomed only to conventional delivery and are devoid of experience and expertise in new approaches, as well as limited in their financial capabilities to develop new capacity. COL must manage all of these risk sensitively. This Three-Year Plan, setting out the organisation’s direction and priorities, is an element of COL’s risk management strategy. In addition, as COL contemplates new initiatives, it attempts to identify risks and assess their consequences, including the organisation’s tolerance to those consequences.

In this respect, and since its inception, COL has been expected to work where the challenges are greatest—that is, where there is the greater education deprivation or where there are special needs that have proved impossible to address adequately through the normally available education channels. As such, COL operates in comparatively high-risk environments. If there were little tolerance for the consequences of risk-taking, COL would need to restrict itself to low-risk areas that characteristically have more wherewithal to meet the educational challenges confronting them. One way the organisation attempts to reduce risks is by implementing a monitoring and assessment system to measure progress with different initiatives and to make necessary adjustments.

In addition to monitoring and assessing progress, COL applies specific accountabilities along with clear delegations of authority to help avoid both overlaps in control and resulting ambiguities that can heighten the risk factors. To reinforce these accountabilities, COL identifies and applies appropriate management practices and internal controls, and tests and monitors those controls.

In applying this approach, COL monitors the following:

**Strategic**
- Finance
- Services offered
- Infrastructure (people, processes and assets)
- Legal/regulatory
- Political
- Economic
- Stakeholder expectations
- Natural disasters

**Operational**
- Asset protection
- Process effectiveness and efficiency
- Compliance with set standards and procedures
- Integrity of information/reporting
RECOMMENDATIONS
to the
15th CCEM

The Board of Governors of COL recommends that:

• Ministers of Education endorse the Three-Year Plan; and

• Ministers agree to support the plan with the financing required.
# Core Funding from Member Governments

**For the Years Ended 30 June 2003, 2002 and 2001 (CDN$)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country / Organization</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antigua &amp; Barbuda</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>360,376</td>
<td>348,841</td>
<td>383,193</td>
<td>1,092,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bahamas</td>
<td>76,570</td>
<td>78,190</td>
<td>37,803</td>
<td>192,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>43,364</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43,823</td>
<td>87,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>17,819</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9,845</td>
<td>27,664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>12,106</td>
<td>36,870</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>48,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2,225,000</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
<td>4,425,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province of British Columbia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>5,536</td>
<td>3,925</td>
<td>3,591</td>
<td>13,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23,646</td>
<td>23,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,615</td>
<td>5,642</td>
<td>16,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyana</td>
<td>14,426</td>
<td>14,490</td>
<td>14,596</td>
<td>43,512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>645,554</td>
<td>652,302</td>
<td>388,965</td>
<td>1,686,821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>12,013</td>
<td>24,230</td>
<td>12,013</td>
<td>48,256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38,225</td>
<td>74,887</td>
<td>113,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>63,171</td>
<td>61,249</td>
<td>58,621</td>
<td>183,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18,858</td>
<td>18,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>7,854</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>36,448</td>
<td>39,794</td>
<td>38,045</td>
<td>114,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>279,720</td>
<td>250,332</td>
<td>230,621</td>
<td>760,673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>570,735</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>570,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45,096</td>
<td>45,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Kitts &amp; Nevis</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25,604</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25,604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Vincent &amp; The Grenadines</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>69,225</td>
<td>79,620</td>
<td>76,120</td>
<td>224,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>89,000</td>
<td>69,450</td>
<td>67,725</td>
<td>226,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaziland</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>56,090</td>
<td>56,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>17,620</td>
<td>17,640</td>
<td>17,640</td>
<td>52,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>54,769</td>
<td>54,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>14,994</td>
<td>5,787</td>
<td>13,489</td>
<td>34,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2,335,800</td>
<td>2,258,400</td>
<td>2,249,400</td>
<td>6,843,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28,735</td>
<td>103,775</td>
<td>132,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$6,326,596</td>
<td>$6,765,033</td>
<td>$6,178,253</td>
<td>$19,269,882</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BOARD of GOVERNORS
Commonwealth of Learning (30 June 2003)

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Lewis Perinbam, O.C.*

MEMBERS
Commonwealth Secretary-General: His Excellency, the Rt. Hon. Donald C. McKinnon*

APPOINTMENTS BY MAJOR DONORS:
Governments of Australia and New Zealand: Vacant
Government of Canada: Ms. Denise Chong,* Writer and author
Governments of India: Mr. S.K. Tripathi,* Secretary, Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development
Governments of Nigeria: His Excellency Professor Michael Omolewa, Ambassador/Permanent Delegate, The Permanent Delegation of Nigeria to UNESCO (Paris)
Governments of United Kingdom: Dr. Marshall Elliott,* Deputy Director, Policy Division, and Chief Education Adviser, Department For International Development

REGIONAL APPOINTMENTS ON THE ADVICE OF COMMONWEALTH MINISTERS OF EDUCATION:
Africa: Professor Penina Mlama, Executive Director, Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)
Asia: Dr. Tara de Mel, Adviser to Her Excellency the President of Sri Lanka (former Secretary, Ministry of Education and Higher Education and former Vice Chairperson, Policy, National Education Commission)
Caribbean: Senator, The Honourable Burchell Whiteman, Minister of Information, Jamaica (former Minister of Education)
Pacific: The Honourable Fiamé Naomi Mata’afa,* Minister of Education, Samoa

APPOINTMENT BY THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL:
Ms. Shona Butterfield, Commissioner, Tertiary Education Commission, New Zealand (formerly Chief Executive, The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand)

President (Ex-Officio): Dato’ Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan,* President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning

ADVISER:
Professor Michael Gibbons, Secretary General, Association of Commonwealth Universities

*denotes member of Executive Committee

SENIOR STAFF
(30 June 2003)

Dato’ Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, President and CEO
Mr. Brian Long, Vice President
Mr. Rod Tyrer, Special Advisor, Strategy, Evaluation and Monitoring (on secondment from the Department for International Development, UK)
Ms. Doris McEachern, Manager, Finance and Administration
# ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADEA</td>
<td>Association for the Development of Education in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AusAID</td>
<td>Australian Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCEM</td>
<td>Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDN$</td>
<td>Canadian dollar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGIAR</td>
<td>Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COL</td>
<td>Commonwealth of Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ComSec</td>
<td>Commonwealth Secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFAIT</td>
<td>Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department For International Development, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDENet</td>
<td>Global Distance Education Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDLN</td>
<td>Global Distance Learning Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and communication technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMFUNDO</td>
<td>Partnership for IT in Education (Prime Minister’s initiative – DFID)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEPAD</td>
<td>New Economic Partnership for African Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZAID</td>
<td>New Zealand Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODL</td>
<td>Open and distance learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBM</td>
<td>Results Based Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAIDS</td>
<td>Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

OUR VISION
Access to education – Access to a better future

OUR MISSION STATEMENT
Recognising knowledge as key to cultural, social and economic development, the Commonwealth of Learning is committed to assisting Commonwealth member governments to take full advantage of open, distance and technology-mediated learning strategies to provide increased and equitable access to education and training for all their citizens.

OUR ROLE
Building capacity in open and distance learning

OUR “CLIENTS”
Fifty-four member Governments of the Commonwealth, their educational institutions and human resource development agencies

OUR PROGRAMMES
ODL Policy – with the objective of fostering the adoption and implementation of open and distance learning policies within the broader educational and human resource development strategies and policies of member nations.

ODL Systems Development – with the objective of assisting in the development of open and distance learning systems that build on existing capacity or assist in creating new capacity appropriate for the contexts of member states.

ODL Applications – with the objective of demonstrating how open and distance learning applications can benefit individual learners, institutions and member states by accelerating human resource development.

OUR AREAS OF OPERATION
Advisory, Advocacy, Capacity-building, Fostering networks and partnerships, Knowledge management and Research

OUR PARTNERS
Partnerships with local governments and institutions, and with international development agencies and regional agencies

THREE-YEAR PLAN 2003–2006
Building Capacity in Open and Distance Learning

Commonwealth of Learning  1285 West Broadway, Suite 600, Vancouver, BC  V6H 3X8 Canada
Telephone: +1 604-775-8200  Fax: +1 604-775-8210  E-mail: info@col.org  World Wide Web: www.col.org