



BOARD OF GOVERNORS President's Quarterly Progress Report: October – December 2008

1. Board Matters

A meeting of the Audit Committee was held by teleconference on November 20. It approved the annual accounts for 2007-2008. The Committee also received a first report on the review of the evaluation of our internal control for reliable financial reporting.

2. President's Commentary

This has been a busy and productive quarter for everyone at COL. My later report on the programme shows that our work has created extensive outputs that are leading to useful outcomes for our Member States. Our relentless focus on Results Based Management has yielded greater clarity about outputs and outcomes and helped colleagues become more impact oriented.

Much of the activity has involved capacity building, which is a central thread of COL's mission. Development agencies are sometimes criticised for running workshops that do not give the participants skills that they use when they get home. COL avoids this problem in a number of ways. First, our workshops are in many cases simply milestones in a long-term relationship between COL and the organisation in question. They are just one way through which we accompany them on their journey. Second, our familiarity with partners allows careful choice of participants to ensure that the training is not only directly related to their work, but also that they incorporate work on tasks related to their jobs into the workshop. Third, we also ensure that the workshops are long enough and intensive enough to impart and embed the new skills. Fourth and finally, my colleagues and the consultants that we use are well versed in effective workshop techniques that get participants thoroughly engaged so that they take ownership of their training and extend it on their own initiative. There is evidence that many participants are applying their new skills immediately and effectively, not least in building the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

Alongside the implementation of the programme, my colleagues and I have developed a draft proposal for the Three-Year Plan for 2009-2012 which was forwarded to Board members and posted on our website at the end of November with an invitation for comments by January 15. This work benefited greatly from the discussions at the Board Planning Retreat in June.

We have used regional meetings of our Focal Points from Member States to obtain input on national, regional and Pan-Commonwealth priorities. The last of these meetings, grouping together the Asia and the Pacific regions, was held in Kuala Lumpur in October. I comment later on the outcomes of these very useful meetings, simply noting here that our Focal Points also found them helpful, as evidenced by their enthusiastic participation. With the exception of two African colleagues who could not get visas in time, and the Fijians who were not invited because Fiji is currently suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth, each meeting attracted a representative from every developing Member State in each of the four regions.

Within COL and CEMCA, we have been consulting all staff as part of the review of the Human Resources Framework and Compensation Plan (HRFCP) that will conclude early in 2009. COL's HRFCP was modelled in part on the policies of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Secretary-General has kindly promised the full cooperation of ComSec in updating us on developments in their HR practices. I met ComSec's Director of Human Resources, Ms. Monica Oyas, in London in December to begin this dialogue.

During my own travels in these three months, I have had the opportunity to see our programme initiatives in the field (Lifelong Learning for Farmers in Sri Lanka; VUSSC in The Bahamas; CEMCA in New Delhi; and Open Schooling in Haryana, India) and to take part in conferences of the Asian Association of Open Universities and the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). I participated in three special task groups created by UNESCO and its partners on Degree Mills, Private Higher Education and Capacity Building for Quality Assurance respectively. These events and visits have also given me the pleasure of meeting some of our Board members (Shri R.P. Agrawal, Professor Omolewa, and Dr. Linda Sissons) and an opportunity to update the Secretary-General on our plans to contribute to the Commonwealth's work on Respect and Understanding.

At the ACU conference I was greatly touched to be awarded the Symons Medal for service to Commonwealth universities. This was particularly meaningful since I have admired and worked with Professor Tom Symons, a great figure in Canadian and Commonwealth higher education, for many years. In November, I received the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, from University Canada West, which is Canada's first for-profit university.

3. Programme

This quarter has been very productive. The emphases, and thus my main focus for the report for this quarter, have been on capacity-building through training, the development of resources, and research. Our objective is to create a substantial cadre of experts and expertise in ODL and technology-mediated learning to respond to the education and training needs of Member States. For just eight Education Specialists, a small group of support staff and a small office in New Delhi, successfully to organise so many events and activities across the Commonwealth is a remarkable accomplishment by any standards. It

is made possible by the cooperation of our partners in the field. Many hundreds of persons were trained in all four regions of the Commonwealth. Some of the activities completed during this period were:

3.1 Education Sector

3.1.1 Quality Assurance

A draft *Framework for Quality Assurance for Multimedia Learning Materials Version 1* was released in November. This was a joint initiative of CEMCA and the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia. The framework will now be widely circulated, feedback reviewed and a more formal version readied for release in June 2009.

The first component of a *Higher Education Quality Assurance Toolkit* resource and training package has been prepared covering the topic: Standards and performance indicators for quality assurance of distance higher education institutions and programmes.

3.1.2 Open Schooling

Twenty-three people involved in open schooling across the Commonwealth were trained in how to offer effective learner support to students at a workshop held in Johannesburg. Learner support is usually seen as the Achilles heel of distance education.

Eleven women leaders from open schools around the Commonwealth received training on ICTs and leadership skills in Vancouver in November, an initiative meant to help eliminate the gender dimension of the digital divide.

COL supported the advancement of a strategy for developing multi-media resources for the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). Also during this period, six countries participated in the Steering Committee meeting of the Hewlett Foundation/COL Open Educational Resources (OER) project to finalize the strategy for the next two years.

3.1.3 Higher Education

Twenty-five staff members of Maseno University, Kenya, underwent a three-week training programme in Instructional Design as part of a broader capacity-building initiative for this dual-mode institution.

Under the aegis of the Regional Training Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL), the Regional Centre that we support in West Africa, COL organised an eLearning training workshop for 30 staff members of the Open University of Tanzania, facilitating south-south collaboration and the strengthening of local capacities.

A training workshop for 28 members of senior management from East African universities and institutions on *Current Trends in University Management Practices* was

co-hosted with the Tanzania Commission for Universities, from November 30 to December 3, 2008.

3.1.4 Teacher Education

COL aims not only to increase the number of trained teachers but to also improve the quality of their classroom teaching. In collaboration with the Regional Institute of Education, Mysore, India, COL organised an international seminar on constructivist pedagogy in teacher education at which six experts from four countries participated.

Two workshops to train teacher educators in instructional design were held in The Gambia and in Sierra Leone in December at which a total of 50 persons were trained. In collaboration with the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Abuja, 30 teachers received training in the use of the Quality Assurance Toolkit for Teacher Education.

COL is a long-standing partner in the TESSA (Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa) consortium. TESSA reached 500,000 African teachers this year with its teacher training materials that are in the form of Open Educational Resources.

COL and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), India, jointly held a tutor training programme in which 40 persons participated.

3.1.5 eLearning

Under the Learning for Content (L4C), 1,645 people across the Commonwealth have been trained to develop online content collaboratively since January this year. The training is conducted both online and in face-to-face mode and provides a model for scaling up training at minimal cost. A recently concluded online workshop attracted 92 participants. Two workshops, one for the Caribbean region and one specifically for Barbados, were held in Bridgetown in November at which 37 persons received training and were designated 'wiki apprentices'. Another face-to-face workshop conducted in Tuvalu trained 34 participants.

Fifteen ODL practitioners of the B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, were trained in Easy Now, one of CEMCA's popular eContent development platforms. This seventh training programme brings the total number of ODL professionals trained in the region to over 100. A similar workshop was held for 20 Haryana Open School teachers, who received their first level of training in course development last year.

3.2 Learning for Livelihoods

3.2.1 Livelihoods

Twenty-one participants from ten Caribbean countries participated in a consultative forum in Barbados to identify priorities and strategies for Technical and Vocational

Education and Training (TVET) in the region. This will help COL to develop a plan of action for this important topic for the next triennium.

A regional workshop for livelihoods initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa was held in Accra in November at which 25 participants from six countries reviewed the ODL courses in Community Health Nursing that are now available for use in Commonwealth jurisdictions to improve the health of communities.

3.2.2 Rural and Peri-Urban Community Development

The Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programme was launched at a second Sri Lankan site (Batticaloa) in October. L3F has been a very successful model in India and has been adapted to suit the needs of participating farming communities in Sri Lanka. The next phase will be to scale it up and to start similar initiatives in Africa. A planning meeting for this purpose brought together partners from Asia and Africa and developed the concept of Knowledge Info-mediaries. This concept will help COL to create an intermediate level of expertise and competence to work at the grassroots level in scaling up Lifelong Learning for Farmers. L3F is also expanding into the Pacific region.

3.2.3 National and International Community Development

COL organised several capacity building workshops on Web 2.0 tools for developing OERs for agriculture in Kenya and in Uganda. We partnered with the *Strengthening of University Capacity for Promoting, facilitating and teaching Rural Innovation processes (SUCAPRI)* project, managed by Makerere University in Uganda, in association with four universities in Kenya (Nairobi, Egerton, Kenyatta and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology) and the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), a consortium of 22 universities in East, Central and Southern Africa. The partners have developed exemplary OERs for agriculture and agreed to develop content for a course on climate change.

3.2.4 VUSSC

The Sixth International Training and Materials Development Workshop of VUSSC was a striking success with 23 participants from 19 countries meeting in George Town, Exuma, The Bahamas, for nearly three weeks. Three hundred pages of learning materials were developed on Building Safety, which are now being refined in collaboration with the participants.

The first online course to be offered in cooperation with VUSSC, which was developed at the University of the West Indies, has been run with 23 participants from 13 countries. The topic is *Managing and Facilitating Online Instruction*. This course represents the start of the transition from face-to-face workshops to online training, which is possible now that small states have a larger cadre of ICT-skilled professional educators.

Institutions in the 30 VUSSC participating countries are expected to start offering online courses to the international market in 2009. A new VUSSC-Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) website to support the listing of both non-formal and formal qualifications offered by VUSSC institutions is being developed.

3.2.5 Transnational Programmes

During this quarter, some 400 learners have enrolled in the various eLearning programmes that COL offers under a fee-for-service arrangement to the staff of eight international organisations, including the World Bank and other UN organisations.

Two new contracts for online course development were signed with the Special Advisory Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Inter-American Development Bank. COL gains increasing visibility through this work, which gives us the opportunity to showcase best practice in ODL.

3.3 Human Environment

3.3.1 Gender and Development

In order to encourage women's empowerment at the local level, a training workshop for 15 women from South Asian countries was held in Delhi in October.

Nineteen teacher educators from South Asia met in Bangalore in November to finalise the draft of the *Gender Friendly School Indicators* which will be made available to partners across the Commonwealth in the New Year.

3.3.2 Health and Community Development

Sixteen media workers from seven Caribbean countries came together in St. Vincent & the Grenadines to design programme frameworks for addressing community priorities including youth violence, effective parenting, farming livelihoods and HIV/AIDS. Four trainer-facilitators were also trained in participatory facilitation techniques. The workshop is part of COL's *Media for Learning* programme and contributes towards the long-term goal of greater access to effective learning opportunities through media.

Thirty-three women's groups form the grassroots base of Radio Mang'elele, Kenya. Two women from each group participated in an organisational development process to ensure that women are actively represented in all aspects of the radio station, from policy-making to on-air programming. Outputs include a simple strategic plan for the station, which COL will continue to work with over the next triennium.

3.3.3 Good Governance

In this quarter, 15 Master Trainers from a local NGO in Bangladesh learned about ODL with a focus on instructional design and learner support. They will train their colleagues – 300 women and men – in the New Year.

Two modules for strengthening local-level government were developed by the University of Papua New Guinea with inputs from all levels of government. They will be piloted in January 2009.

3.3.4 Educational Use of Media and ICT

CEMCA was appointed the nodal agency for the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, India, and conducted the fourth regional consultation for Community Radio awareness in Gujarat, attended by 100 participants from educational institutions and civil society organisations. CEMCA also helps participants submit applications for community radio licenses.

CEMCA successfully completed the Community Radio Project, *Science for Women* by monitoring, evaluating and submitting the final report on the project that was initiated at 11 community radio stations.

4. Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5)

Last quarter, I gave a full report on PCF5, quoted some third-party observations, indicated the tenor of the participant survey results and provided a link to the detailed participant evaluation returns (<http://tinyurl.com/3tqman>). Our University of London partners have now completed an analysis of the survey results. Over 200 people responded, rating various aspects of the Forum and making comments.

Overall, delegates' comments were very positive about the organisation, the programme and the topics and themes that were covered. PCF5 was described as “a world class event that will not be easily re-constructed” and “a state of the art academic conference”.

The aspect of the conference mentioned most-frequently as the “most valuable” was the excellent possibilities for networking. Other valuable aspects included:

- sharing knowledge/experience/ideas;
- learning about what others are doing in ODL;
- the keynote addresses;
- exposure to new technologies (WikiEducator) / latest developments/new initiatives in ODL; and
- presentation of their own work to others and the feedback they received.

The second most-frequently mentioned feature was shortage of time. Mostly this was because there were so many parallel sessions delegates wanted to attend that they had to make difficult choices.

The most important ideas that the delegates seem to have come across during the Forum related to improving learner support and bridging the distance between educational institutions and distance learners.

Additionally, delegates mentioned their plans to implement ODL technologies, models, activities and approaches, and their willingness to encourage their colleagues to do so as well.

The University of London's analysis documents are available upon request.

4. Stakeholders Relations

4.1 Member Governments' Support

This quarter we received contributions from: Bangladesh, Barbados, Botswana, Lesotho, Malta, Mozambique, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria (for 2007-2008), Pakistan, St. Kitts & Nevis and St. Vincent & the Grenadines, bringing the total so far for the fiscal year to 23 countries. We have received \$3,393,216 which accounts for 38% of the core budget for this year.

4.2 Focal Points Update

4.2.1 Asia-Pacific Meeting

A regional meeting of the Focal Points from the Asia and Pacific regions was held in Kuala Lumpur, October 29-31, followed by visits to the Open University of Malaysia (OUM) and University Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR). This three-day event was organised jointly with the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, which hosted the meeting most graciously. The Minister of Higher Education, Honourable Dato' Seri Mohammed Khaled bin Nordin, inaugurated the meeting and the Director General, Dato' Professor Dr. Radin Umar bin Radin Sohadi, who is also the COL Focal Point, was present throughout.

The feedback received showed that the needs of the two regions are different: the Pacific laid more emphasis on TVET while Asia was more concerned with enhancing access to higher education. The Pacific was looking at community media as a viable option while Asia looked more to Web 2.0 options. However, in both cases there was a shared need for teacher education and for closing the digital divide. COL was asked to invest in innovations based on low-cost technology options over the next TYP. Quality Assurance was another key area of common concern and Focal Points suggested that we foreground this in our Three-Year Plan for 2009-2012.

Meetings of African and Caribbean Focal Points were held earlier this year and were summarised in previous quarterly reports.

4.3 Congratulatory Letters

Congratulatory letters were sent to 19 newly appointed Heads of State, Ministers, High Commissioners and Consuls General.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenues

COL forecasted that member governments' voluntary funding levels will be at a similar level in 2008-2009 as in 2007-2008 – around \$7.9 million before taking account of Nigeria's arrears from previous years and a contribution amount for 2008-2009. COL remains reasonably assured that the contributing countries will continue to provide funding at similar levels and acknowledged Nigeria's payment of its pledge for 2007-2008 which was received this quarter.

Member governments' contributions of \$1,838,326 received in the second quarter are as follows: Bangladesh - \$31,740, Barbados - \$53,316, Botswana - \$53,316, Lesotho - \$71,088; Malta - \$17,772, Mozambique - \$55,234, Namibia - \$47,392, New Zealand - \$545,600, Nigeria - \$885,398 for FY2007-2008, Pakistan - \$35,000, St. Kitts & Nevis - \$36,546, St. Vincent & the Grenadines - \$5,924.

COL set a target of \$3 million in additional contributions for 2008-2009 from grants and special projects and from fee-based contract services. Deferred revenues at June 30, 2008 of \$270,000 from grants and special projects and \$170,000 from contract services for eLearning has been partially recognised in the year. Agreements are in place with: Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation for two more years of a four-year grant for VUSSC – £550,000 remaining; The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation – US\$750,000 over two years to expand open educational resources and teacher development; UNICEF – US\$1.8 million over two years to advance work on child friendly schools; UNESCO – US\$60,000 for community media; and seven new service contracts totalling US\$340,000 for COL's eLearning programme.

5.2 Cash Flow

COL began the new fiscal year on July 1, 2008 with cash of \$8.8 million (inclusive of cash held in foreign currencies). Of this sum, \$1.2 million is committed for current liabilities and \$1.6 million is restricted in accordance with the cash reserve policy. The balance of \$6 million will maintain a positive cash flow while current year funding is being received, fund a portion of the approved budget for 2008-2009 and cover any shortfalls in member government contributions that might occur against forecasted levels.

COL records revenue, incurs expenditures and holds financial instruments denominated in various currencies including UK Pound Sterling, US Dollars and Indian Rupees. We are, therefore, exposed to the risk of loss depending on the relative movement of these currencies against the Canadian dollar.

5.3 Expenditures

The annual budget for 2008-2009 was approved at a level of \$11.9 million. At December 31, approximately \$5 million is estimated to have been spent (December figures in progress) as follows: \$3.1 million for the programme and additional contributions; \$1.4 million for human resources; \$500,000 for governance, management and site and office costs. Commitments in the magnitude of \$500,000 stemming from contracts for programme services entered into during the first and second quarter (and carried over from the previous financial year) have not been expensed as the work has not yet been completed.

6. Human Resources

6.1 Staff Changes

6.1.1 Arrivals and Movements

Ms. Christie Tetreault joined COL in October as Course Coordinator for the eLearning programme with International Organisations.

Ms. Michele Gocolay joined COL in November as Knowledge Management Assistant during Ms. Tatiana Anestik's maternity leave.

Ms. Kalyna Zazelenchuk joined COL in December as part-time Database Coordinator.

6.1.2 Recruitment

Mr. John Lesperance, currently Director of Further Education with the Ministry of Education, Seychelles, will join COL on January 2, 2009 as Education Specialist – VUSSC.

Dr. K. Balasubramanian, currently an independent consultant to international agencies based in India, will also join COL on January 2, 2009 as Education Specialist – Food Security and Environment.

Recruitments are underway for a Learner Support Assistant and a Programme Assistant.

6.1.3 Departures

Dr. Krishna Alluri retired from COL on December 31, 2008. He leaves a remarkable legacy. He led the development of the successful Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative and has established COL's reputation within the international agricultural development community as an effective and innovative agency.

7. Publications/Resources

- *Connections/EdTech News*, October 2008, Vol. 13, No. 3 – www.col.org/connections.
- *Using Mobile Technology for Learner Support in Open Schooling*, a consultancy report prepared by Dr. Alice Barlow-Zambodla and Ms. Fatima Adams – www.col.org/consultancies.
- *Women's Empowerment at the Local Level: A study undertaken in the state of Uttarakhand*, a COL-commissioned study prepared by Dr. Anita Dighe – www.col.org/consultancies.
- *Technology-Medicated Open and Distance Education for Agricultural Education and Improved Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa: Country case studies*. Commissioned by COL and edited by Krishna Alluri and Rainer Zachmann.
- Speeches, presentations and articles by my colleagues and me are available online. Also now available on COL's website are several videos from PCF5, both keynote presentations and studio interviews with high-profile people, including some of our Excellence in Distance Education Award winners and Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma – www.col.org/speeches; www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/5359; www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/5336; www.col.org/edea/2008.
- Professor Asha Kanwar was interviewed about COL and world-wide trends in open and distance learning in a video production by India's Indira Gandhi National Open University. The production was coordinated by CEMCA and hosted by Professor Santosh K. Panda, Director of IGNOU's Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE). It is available on YouTube at: <http://in.youtube.com/watch?v=D3p7oRb12Uk&feature=Playlist&p=0CF2353221ED0C98&index=0&playnext=1>.

8. Information Technology & Knowledge Management

COL has embarked on the upgrade of its online corporate collaboration tools by adopting the Microsoft SharePoint suite of software. This is arguably the gold standard for

organisations operating globally and provides COL with a system that will encompass a range of online services, including a new internal knowledge management system (which the Commonwealth Foundation is planning to emulate), replacement of the older LAN folders technology and a new, more stable and higher functionality platform for our intranet and website. Website migration is nearly complete and a new look will be launched in early January.

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

*Sir John Daniel
President & Chief Executive Officer
December 31, 2008*