COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

Learning for Development

BOARD OF GOVERNORS
President's Quarterly Progress Report:
January – March 2011

1.   Board Matters

On the recommendation of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Professor Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, FRS, Coordinator General of the OIC Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH) and Professor, International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences, University of Karachi, was appointed as the Regional Representative for Asia on COL's Board of Governors. He is a citizen of Pakistan and former Chair of the Pakistan Higher Education Commission and former Minister of Science and Technology. We thank the Honourable Ms. Zahiya Zareer (Maldives) for her contributions to the Board as the previous representative for Asia.

The Audit Committee met via teleconference on March 17 to review second quarter financial statements, risk management and self-assessment. At their request, an orientation for new Audit Committee members is being arranged to coincide with the next meeting of the Board in June.

Preparations are underway for the upcoming meetings of the Board of Governors which will be held in Vancouver from June 6-8 – these are the Performance Sub-Committee and an Orientation for new Members on June 6, the Audit Committee and a Planning 'Retreat' on June 7, followed by the Board Meeting on June 8.

2.   General

2.1   President's Commentary

This has been another productive quarter. As I note later in introducing our programme activities, I am increasingly struck by the need to take the long view in trying to effect development. I observe that other agencies often give up on their initiatives too soon, or sunset them just as they are about to bear fruit. Perseverance and consistency are particularly important for COL, since we are not a donor agency but try to make existing systems work better by relying on our expertise and the use of various models for the use of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) that we have developed over the years. A good example of this is our Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programme. The key here is to generate local resources for improving farming through community banking. This took nearly a decade to embed in India but is now very successful. Partners in Kenya and Uganda are now introducing the model and finding that there too it takes time.

In order to be effective externally, COL has to be well organised internally and maintain a complement of competent and committed staff. In this context, an important activity in this quarter has been to re-do the job evaluations of all staff posts, as agreed when the Board approved the Human Resources Framework and Compensation Plan in 2005. In order to ensure consistency, the three most senior staff: President, Vice-President and Director of Finance, Administration and Human Resources, did all the work of job analysis with the help of the Manager of Human Resources and Contracts. The results will be presented to the Board in June.

Board members will be aware that the Commonwealth has set up an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to recommend how the Commonwealth might become more effective. The Canadian member of the EPG, Senator Hugh Segal, visited Vancouver in February to hold a public consultation. During the course of his remarks he noted that wherever the EPG travelled it heard nothing but praise for COL's work (www.thecommonweatlh.org/EPG).

2.2   President's Activities

Despite our small size, COL is now seen as the premier intergovernmental organisation specialising in the use of technology in learning. As a result my colleagues – particularly the Vice-President and I – receive far more speaking invitations than we can accept. We try to be intelligently selective and are making increasing use of Skype and video recordings to participate in meetings at a distance. In this way, for instance, I was able to make introductory remarks to an important meeting in New Zealand on the idea of an *Open Educational Resource University* hosted by the Open Education Resource (OER) Foundation and chaired by former COL colleague, Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, Director of the International Centre for Open Education at Otago University. (See "Open but Tough" http://vimeo.com/19268389).

Sometimes we agree to contribute to important events in non-Commonwealth countries provided the hosts defray our expenses. As examples, in January I gave the introductory address at a meeting on eLearning convened at the Senate in France by former Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, and in March I gave the Ernest L. Boyer lecture at the 40th anniversary of the State University of New York's Empire State College. The latter event had special meaning for me since I worked with Ernie Boyer as a trustee of the Carnegie Foundation for most of the 1990s when he was its president.

Earlier in March, I visited India to give the keynote address (on teacher education) at the conference of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network and gave another keynote a few days later at the 4th Australian Higher Education Conference, where my remarks encouraging Australia to renew its funding to COL made the front page of *The Australian.* On the way home, I stopped in Lesotho where COL was holding a three-week course-development workshop for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). My visit coincided with Lesotho's national day and I was honoured to be seated with the King and the Prime Minister at the lunch following the event. Lesotho was a wonderful host to

VUSSC and this workshop was the most ambitious that we had yet attempted in terms of the amount of learning material generated.

Finally, at the end of a quarter it was a pleasure for the Vice-President, Education Specialists Madhulika Kaushik and Trudi van Wyk and me to take part in the Caribbean Focal Points meeting in Trinidad. Our Caribbean Board member, Professor Clement Sankat, Pro-Vice Chancellor and Principal of The University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad & Tobago, invited me to give a guest lecture at the UWI campus on that occasion. The text and slides (and links to videos, if available) for this and all my speeches, and those of other colleagues, including our Chair, can be found at www.col.org/speeches. The Vice President and I called on the Honourable Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, Minister of Education and the Honourable Fazal Karim, Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education to brief them about COL and to ask them about their priorities.

3. Programme

This has been a productive period during which the importance of two principles that guide COL's work has become even clearer. First, the best results occur when our education specialists identify a niche area in which to focus their work over a period of time. Second, as noted above, we should persevere even if results do not come immediately. Following these principles has enabled COL to punch well above its weight and to gain a reputation as an organisation that delivers on its commitments.

3.1 Education Sector

In this quarter, this sector has focussed on content development and revision: for open schools, teacher education, VUSSC and the Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA Programme. Most of the new content being developed is in the form of Open Educational Resources (OER), a development to which COL is committed.

3.1.1 Open Schooling

Fifty faculty members of the Open School at Bangladesh Open University attended a learner support workshop. The Learner Support Guide was translated into Bengali.

A second Open Educational Resources for Open Schools (OER4OS) workshop was held in Zambia. Course material in 15 subjects is in various stages of completion: four subjects have been uploaded to the open source Learning Management System, MOODLE. Course development usually takes a long time, but the process is even more drawn out when the course writers are spread over six different countries and have full-time jobs as school teachers.

3.1.2   Teacher Education

The UNICEF-COL Child Friendly Schools (CFS) project continued its capacity-building training. Regional training-of-teachers (TOT) workshops for 150 teacher educators and 60 master trainers were held in ten training centres in Botswana; and 180 teacher educators were trained in a similar workshop in Lesotho. A writers' training workshop was held in South Africa for the Advanced Certificate in Education: Life Orientation (ACELO) self-learning modules; 80% of the modules have been developed. The remaining 20% will be completed by the end of April.

An instructional design workshop for 30 academic staff of the University of Gambia was organised to help staff build the skills necessary to develop materials for a new ODL B.Ed. course.

The draft CARICOM standards for teacher education, developed in December 2010, were reviewed in a consultative meeting held in Antigua & Barbuda in February, followed by a workshop in March to critique the second draft.

3.1.3   Higher Education

The COL Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM) for institutional quality assurance in higher education continues to garner interest. The Commonwealth Secretariat committed up to £26,000 to support COL RIM implementation at the National Institute of Health and Social Studies (NIHSS) in Seychelles and the University of Guyana. With respect to institutions currently engaged in the review, verification reports for the COL RIM audit undertaken at The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) were received, and a verification visit of the University of Calabar, Nigeria was undertaken. To date, a total of seven internal verifiers and three trainee verifiers have been trained to undertake the COL RIM exercise.

The Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) Programme is under revision. Twelve CEMBA/CEMPA courses have been revised and are being edited.

COL organised a one-day workshop on Quality Assurance in Dual-Mode Universities in advance of the annual conference of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) that was hosted by India's National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). Since I was attending the APQN conference to give a keynote address on teacher education, I facilitated this workshop with Honorary COL Fellow, Professor Ram Takwale. Thirty people took part, including a number of vice-chancellors.

3.1.4   Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

Six VUSSC Team Leaders met in early February in Singapore to develop a curriculum and action plan for the ninth three-week long VUSSC content development workshop. In March, 21 participants from 16 Commonwealth countries gathered in

Lesotho to develop a Bachelor's Degree level course titled: *Business and Entrepreneurship*. The objectives of these workshops are to i) develop content collaboratively; ii) build the capacity of participants in online course development; and iii) facilitate networks for further cooperation across the Commonwealth.

3.2   Livelihoods & Health Sector

The focus in this sector has been primarily on capacity-building using a range of technologies including community radio, mobile telephones and web-based platforms. The purpose is to identify appropriate technologies suitable for different contexts.

3.2.1 Skills Development

Thirty institutional managers and policy makers made up the second cohort for an online course on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training). Consultancy visits to build capacity to manage ICT infrastructure in eleven institutions in six African countries were completed.

The Flexible Skills Development Community Learning Network was established over the past three months. Its 120 members continue to engage in a wide range of discussions related to technology-mediated TVET.

3.2.2 Learning for Farmers

Community banking is gaining strength at the grassroots level in the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programme in Kenya. Mobile-based learning using Wireless Application Protocol (WAP)-enabled phones has started. The WAP protocol allows users to access internet content such as videos on their mobile, dispensing with the need for computers. Makerere University launched a web-based Short Message Service (SMS) Platform for sending text messages to farmers in Uganda.

As a follow-up to the signing of a Memorandum by 25,000 villagers in November 2010, the National Bank of Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD) in India has asked COL partners to develop a proposal for district-level L3F.

A course on mushroom cultivation in Sinhala, modified for mobile-phone based learning, was completed in Sri Lanka. A new cohort of 200 bank staff joined The Open University of Sri Lanka's course on Microfinance and poverty eradication.

The Centre for Environment Education in India developed a course on the Crop-Season Calendar in Gujarati. Village participants of L3F were trained in participatory video production. The L3F farmers association in Tamil Nadu launched a website in Tamil with multimedia learning materials.

3.2.3   *Healthy Communities*

COL continues its work with community and other local organisations to increase their capacity to create and use health-related ODL materials. The Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication staff trained 13 media producers, health workers and community representatives from Belize in content creation and programme development. Similar training was received by 25 media, education, health and development workers from South Africa. Thirteen community representatives from Tonga engaged in community media awareness and content creation skills training, while Kenya Community Media Network staff trained eight community health workers and media producers from Kenya with support from COL. During this quarter, three new and 12 existing partner organisations and government departments engaged in ODL training across the Commonwealth.

Two new community learning programmes were established in Worcester and Atlantis, South Africa, and advocacy materials on community radio and development education were published.

3.2.4   *Integrating eLearning*

A three-hour introductory Module on Instructional Design and an Instructional Design Tool are now completed.

Nine Caribbean countries agreed to participate in an ICT in Education Audit for the Caribbean. The Bahamas developed an additional module called *ICT: Potential and Possibilities* for the Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration.

At a training workshop on developing eGovernment and eBusiness Strategies for the Caribbean, organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec) in Antigua, the session on eEducation to introduce the use of ICT for teaching, learning, management and administration was facilitated by COL.

This month, Microsoft Trinidad & Tobago Ltd., ComSec and COL signed an addendum to their existing Letter of Understanding to extend the Partners in Learning Initiative until June 28, 2013. This enables schools in the Caribbean Region to licence Microsoft software at minimal costs.

3.2.5   *eLearning in International Organisations*

Three eLearning cohorts were completed this quarter. eLIO is currently experiencing a delay in new cohorts and a decrease in learner numbers; five of the nine organisations with whom eLIO is working have delayed the start of new cohorts. One reason could be cuts in the training budgets.

3.3   CEMCA (Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia)

CEMCA continues to act as a lead agency in Community Radio in India and is working with various partners to harness the potential of technology to bring education and training to the Commonwealth member states in Asia.

CEMCA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Uttarakhand Open University to develop an eContent course. An MOU was also signed with Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) to develop a course for public transport workers using radio-enabled learning.

An eGovernance system for Community Radio was developed for the Government of India and is currently being piloted (www.cronlineindia.net). CEMCA supported a session on Internet Radio at the Radio Asia 2011 conference in Delhi at which it showcased its successes in India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka.

The Science for Women's Health & Nutrition programme was initiated in another community radio station in Pant Nagar, Uttarakhand, India.

CEMCA hosted a multi-partner workshop to launch a community learning programme on occupational health issues with the Self Employed Women's Association in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India.

CEMCA developed a multimedia resource kit, in English and Hindi, for parents and caregivers of children with impaired vision or hearing or with multiple disabilities.

A video series of 11 interviews on ODL, recorded at PCF6 in Kochi, has now been edited and production finalised.

In February, CEMCA organised an OER workshop at the University of Mumbai at which 24 staff members were trained in developing online content. CEMCA will continue to work with the University in this area.

3.4   Vice-President's Activities

COL Vice President, Professor Asha Kanwar, delivered the valedictory address on *Crisis in ODL: what is the response?* at the Symbiosis International Conference on Open and Distance Learning in Pune, India, in February. She also delivered a lecture on *Three Generations of Open Education: Future Implications* at the University of Mumbai, which was prepared jointly with Dr. Venkataraman Balaji, COL's Director, Technology & Knowledge Management.

In March, Professor Kanwar was the Guest Speaker at the 6th Lecture in the ODL Occasional Lecture Series organised by the University of South Africa (UNISA). She also conducted a two-day workshop at UNISA on *Developing Research Proposals* (www.col.org/speeches).

4.   Stakeholder Relations

4.1   Member Governments Support

Financial contributions have now been received from 37 countries so far this year (year ending June 30, 2011). In this quarter, we received contributions from Antigua & Barbuda, The Gambia, Jamaica, Namibia, Nauru, Nigeria and Tanzania. Namibia increased its contribution by 50% over the previous year.

4.2   Focal Points Update

The Regional Focal Points Meeting (Caribbean) was held in Port of Spain from March 28-30, co-hosted by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. Thirteen Focal Points or their alternates from all 12 Caribbean Commonwealth countries attended the Meeting. The Honourable Fazal Karim, Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, inaugurated the meeting. A site visit to the Ministry of Education's National Open School of Trinidad and Tobago (NOSTT) for all participants and the COL representatives was arranged on the last day.

The objectives of this year's regional Focal Points meetings are to discuss a mid-term report on what COL has done in each country with its representative and to seek the advice of the group on COL's next three-year plan so as to ensure that it responds to national and regional priorities. We also find that countries greatly appreciate the opportunity for the exchange of national experiences that these meetings provide.

During the quarter, we welcomed the following new Focal Points and thanked the outgoing ones for their excellent contributions:

The Bahamas – Ms. Michelle Sears, Education Officer, Ministry of Education;

India – Shri Amit Khare, Joint Secretary, Bureau of BP & CR Education Policy, UNESCO, INC & ICC, Ministry of Human Resource Development;

Grenada – Mr. Andrew Augustine, Senior Human Resource Development Officer, Ministry of Education & Human Resource Development (Interim Focal Point); and

Malaysia – Professor Dr. Rujhan bin Mustafa, Director-General, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education.

4.3   Honorary COL Advisors

Whilst in Pretoria in March, the Vice President met Professor Veronica McKay, CEO of Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign, who is an Honorary COL Advisor in South Africa (www.col.org/advisors).

4.4   UNESCO COL Chairs

COL and UNESCO, in partnership with other funding contributors including the Government of Alberta, Canada, established our fifth joint Chair in January: Dr. Rory

McGreal, Vice President of Research at Athabasca University, Canada, holds a UNESCO/ COL Chair in Open Educational Resources (www.col.org/chairs).

4.5   Congratulatory Letters

Twenty-two congratulatory letters were sent to newly appointed Heads of Governments, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ministers of Education, High Commissioners and Heads of educational institutions in the Commonwealth. We also sent our condolences to the family of the late former Minister of Human Resource Development, India.

5.   Finances

5.1   Revenue

COL has received a total of $7.8 million from member governments as voluntary contributions towards the budget since the beginning of the financial year on July 1, 2010. This represents 99% of the annual funding forecast from member governments for this fiscal year, so by year end on June 30 we expect to exceed the forecast given that some more countries are still expected to contribute. Contributions have been received so far from 37 countries (our forecast was 34). Some countries have also contributed more than we expected. These factors helped to offset the impact of country contributions that fell short of forecast due to changes in foreign exchange rates from the time the forecasts were made. The Canadian dollar continues to be strong, relative to the US dollar and British Pound in particular.

Contributions in the following sums were received from these member governments in the third quarter:

Antigua & Barbuda – $4,969; The Gambia – $4,950; Jamaica – $44,500; Namibia – $59,400; Nauru – $4,938; Nigeria – $548,731; and Tanzania – $28,594.

In addition to funding from member governments, over $1.5 million has been received from additional contributions in the following categories:

Grants and special projects: Work is ongoing under three major grants: from UNICEF for Mainstreaming Child Friendly School Models; from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for Open Education Resources; and a recent agreement for support for VUSSC. The first two of these grants are expected to be completed by the end of June.

Fee-for-service contracts: Revenue of $600,000 was forecast for the fiscal year from COL eLearning for International Organisations services with just over $475,000 recognised by March 31. Two new agreements with the ILO (International Labour Organization) and the IADB (Inter-American Development Bank) were entered into during the quarter. These were valued at US$78,000 for eLearning course delivery services with a portion of these services to be provided in the first half of the next financial year.

5.2   Cash Flow

COL began the new fiscal year on July 1, 2010 with cash and cash equivalents of $8.8 million. This position has increased at March 31 to an estimated $11.5 million due to the high percentage of funding received during the first three quarters and with receipts exceeding expenditures in these quarters.

In addition, COL continues to holds a cash reserve of $1.7 million to protect against any shortfalls in expected revenues.

5.3   Expenditures

Approximately 70% of the $11.5 million budget approved for 2010-2011 is estimated to have been spent or committed by the end of the third quarter to meet programme and organisational management activities, staff and office costs. The budget for 2010-2011 includes $2 million of expenditures related to additional contributions.

6.   Human Resources

6.1   Staff Matters

6.1.1   Arrivals and Departures

Professor Madhulika Kaushik joined COL as Education Specialist, Higher Education, on February 1.

Also on February 1, Mr. R. Thyagarajan joined CEMCA as Head, Administration & Finance, succeeding Mr. Dalip Tetri who retired from service at the end of January.

6.1.2   Job Evaluation

As noted above, the substantive work of the job evaluation exercise was undertaken in the third quarter with results to be shared with staff and Board in the fourth quarter.

6.1.3   Earthquake Drill

All staff took part in a British Columbia-wide earthquake drill in January.

7.   Information Technology & Knowledge Management

This quarter saw significant IT developments both internally and in relation to COL's work with partners.

Our daily information service, which pulls news on matters relevant to COL's mission from various web-based sources, has been formalised in a novel online presentation as *COL Daily News* (http://dailynews.col.org – also available from

www.col.org/newsfeeds). For this we used the popular WordPress (blogging software application) to create a format that looks similar to the layout of an online newspaper. Response has been very positive. A useful feature in this layout is the ease of access to country-specific news.

There have also been a number of internally focussed developments. Learning Management Systems support, which is now operated entirely on the open source Moodle platform, is carried out with the assistance of a professional service that offers exclusive hosting and maintenance arrangements for COL's various Moodle installations. This has enabled education specialists and COL's eLearning for International Organisations programme to create highly customised systems for course and learner management. We have also upgraded our Moodle applications to the latest, more stable, version and have set up an internal staging server for staff and specialists to check the course content and appearance before publishing it via the new service provider.

The beta version of Moodle 2.0, the document repository software DSpace and the learning-oriented social networking software, Elgg, have all been installed on a trial basis to help staff and specialists to use them as test beds in envisioning new services.

We have set up a task group for consultative development of protocols and standards for digital records management. Similarly, we have created a special committee for formulating and updating business continuity plans for IT as well as non-IT components of the organisation. A comprehensive test for the integrity of COL's offsite IT back up (maintained in Calgary, over 800 km from Vancouver) was carried out and found to work well.

8.   Visitors to COL

Mr. Imbenzi George, Honorary Consul, Consulate of the Republic of Kenya in Vancouver, visited COL in January.

Dr. Norman E. Looney, Past President of the International Society for Horticultural Science and Principal Scientist Emeritus, Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre, Agriculture and Agri-Food, Canada visited COL in March.

9.   Publications/Resources

The following is a list of recent publications and resources:

Connections/EdTech News, February 2011, Vol. 16, No. 1 (www.col.org/connections).

"Delivering on the promise of community radio for development", by Ian Pringle, published in *Signis Media* journal.

A Sustainable Open Schooling System for Ghana, a COL consultancy conducted by Ed Du Vivier.

A Study of the Development of the State Open Schools in India, a COL consultancy conducted by T. Rajagopalan. The consultant produced a similar report for COL in 2007: *A Study of the Development of the State Open Universities in India.*

The three resources listed immediately above are at www.col.org/publications.

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

Sir John Daniel
President & Chief Executive Officer
March 31, 2011