



## **BOARD OF GOVERNORS President's Quarterly Progress Report: October – December 2006**

### **1. General**

This has been a busy and productive quarter marked by two important events in COL's calendar: the Fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF4) held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, from 31 October to 3 November and the 16<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (14CCEM) that convened in Cape Town, South Africa, from December 11-14. COL can be well satisfied with the outcomes of both events, on which I comment more fully below. In this report, I shall integrate my usual update on our programme into these accounts and include a separate section on the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth.

### **2. Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning**

#### **2.1 PCF4**

COL has organised previous Pan-Commonwealth Forums on Open Learning in Brunei (1999), Durban (2002) and Dunedin (2004). PCF4, held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, attracted 523 delegates from 64 countries and several international organisations.

Thanks to sponsorship money from a variety of sources, the developing Commonwealth was extremely well represented, with 109 delegates from Africa alone. The most significant sponsor was the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (US\$180,000); the Government of Barbados and the Caribbean Development Bank helped to ensure good representation from the Caribbean; and some 20 other organisations also contributed (<http://pcf4.dec.uwi.edu/sponsors.php>). The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation made possible a planning meeting for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth that was held immediately after PCF4 (see section 5.1 below).

The formal evaluation questionnaire for PCF4, completed by over 100 delegates, confirmed the sense we had during the event that this was an exceptionally successful conference – as the five Board members who were there can testify. Replies to most questions were clustered at the extreme positive end of the scale, ranking almost all aspects of the conference as 'excellent' and most of its objectives as 'fully achieved'. The conference organisers also have a thick file of enthusiastic letters and e-mails that came in after the conference, many of them saying that PCF4 was the best conference the writer had ever attended.

Why was the conference so successful? First, there was outstanding teamwork amongst the consortium of Caribbean partners, led by Professor Stewart Marshall of the University of the West Indies, and excellent collaboration between them and the team at COL. Second, we achieved a good balance between sessions based on papers submitted in response to a Call for Papers and 'orchestrated' sessions that brought groups of COL's partners together to focus on our work. Third, we had outstanding keynote speakers (available online at [www.col.org/speeches](http://www.col.org/speeches)), that included Board Member Penina Mlana and Winston Cox, formerly the Secretary-General's representative on the Board. Fourth, the Sunset Grande Resort Hotel proved to be an ideal venue, with pleasant surroundings that encouraged informal contacts and an all-inclusive regime for accommodation, meals and drinks that worked very well. Finally, the Caribbean and COL staff that supported the event were extraordinarily welcoming, helpful and efficient, attracting many accolades from tired delegates arriving from all over the world – often without their luggage!

The conference will also leave a significant intellectual legacy in the form of the 236 papers on the website (<http://pcf4.dec.uwi.edu/papers.php>) and a book bringing together the 'best of PCF4', that will be published in 2007.

## 2.2 EDEA Awards

PCF4 also saw the conferring of COL's biennial Excellence in Distance Education Awards as follows:

**Honorary Fellows of COL:** Dr. Felicity Binns; Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan; The Honourable Zobaida Jalal; Father T.V. Kunnunkal; The Honourable Fiamé Naomi Mata'afa; Ambassador Michael Omolewa; and The Honourable Burchell Whiteman.

**Institutional Achievement:** Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning; Netaji Subhas Open University, West Bengal, India; and the University of the South Pacific.

**Materials (print/lower-end media):** School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa (Advanced Certificate in Education in the Field of Learners with Special Educational Needs); Open University Malaysia, Malaysia (Learning Skills for Open and Distance Learners); and Women in Fishing Industry Project (WIFIP), Education and Development Trust, Kenya (A Facilitation Handbook for Women's Learning Group Facilitators).

**Materials (interactive/higher-end media):** Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Alberta, Canada (PharmaLearn – Anticoagulation); Namibian College of Open Learning, Namibia (NAMCOL Online – Welcome to the World of Physical Science Grade 12); and the School of Social Work, University of Victoria, Canada (Indigenous Approaches to Healing and Helping).

**Student Distance Learning Experience:** Ms. Neelam Narayan, Suva, Fiji (degree granting programme) and Ms. Najwa Qaisy, Baghdad, Iraq (eLearning in difficult circumstances).

For more details on the awards and the winners, see: [www.col.org/edea](http://www.col.org/edea). The press coverage that these awards generated in the winners' countries indicates that they are greatly valued.

### **2.3 PCF5**

We were honoured that Sir Graeme Davies, Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, came to Ocho Rios himself to host a reception to launch preparations for PCF5, which will be held in London from 13-17 July 2008 as part of the celebrations to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the University of London External System, a seminal event in the development of distance learning and cross-border education.

## **3. 16<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers**

At their triennial conferences Commonwealth Education Ministers are asked to endorse a three-year Plan for COL and pledge funding for it. The 16<sup>th</sup> conference in the series (16CCEM) took place in Cape Town, South Africa, from December 11-14. COL's Board was represented by our Chairman, Lewis Perinbam; our South African member, Ms. Jenny Glennie; our United Kingdom member, Dr. David Levesque; and our Nigerian member, Ambassador Michael Omolewa, who represented his country at the Senior Officials Meeting on December 11. I headed a staff delegation that included Vice-President Asha Kanwar, Programme Director Rod Tyrer, Director of Knowledge Management and IT Paul West, Education Specialists Willie Clarke-Okah and Joshua Mallet, as well as Board Secretary Helena Fehr and Communications Manager Dave Wilson. Some of us played an active role in the Stakeholder and Youth Forums that were held in parallel to the meetings of Ministers.

Thanks to excellent collaboration from Ann Keeling of the Commonwealth Secretariat, who was Conference Secretary for 16CCEM, the conference schedule provided COL with good opportunities to present its past work and future plans. As well as a presentation to Senior Officials and two presentations to Ministers in the formal sessions, COL hosted a lunch to update delegations on the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth and a breakfast devoted to a general discussion of COL. Nearly all the 29 Ministers attending 16CCEM came to the breakfast along with members of other delegations.

Eleven of the 12 Ministers who intervened at the formal presentation of the work and plans of the Commonwealth Secretariat and COL made comments about COL, all favourable. The highly consultative nature of our planning process, the care we have taken to define outcomes and performance indicators, and the progress achieved in implementing the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth were commended. The 16CCEM Communiqué included the following paragraphs:

*14. Ministers complimented the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) on its work and achievements over the past three years, 2003-06. They endorsed the Plan, 'Learning for Development, 2006-09', and recognised the need to mobilise the proposed level of*

*funding of C\$12 million for the Plan period. Ministers noted with appreciation the United Kingdom's offer to contribute 30% to the total funds provided by other Commonwealth countries for COL in the Plan period as an incentive for increased funding. They also noted the commitment of the Governments of Cyprus, India and New Zealand to increase funding to COL.*

*15. Ministers acknowledged that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has improved access, and enhanced quality of education and training in many parts of the developing Commonwealth. The implementation of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is a step in the right direction as it seeks to bridge the digital divide and encourage collaboration.*

The commitments to increased funding from Cyprus and New Zealand had been communicated to us earlier in the year. India announced at the Conference that it would raise its contribution to COL from Rs 24 million to Rs 40 million, a 66% increase. This was wonderful news.

At the reception he hosted during the conference, the Secretary-General formally launched the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, which I acknowledged on COL's behalf with some brief remarks.

## **4. Stakeholder Relations**

Following her appointment as Vice-President, I asked Professor Asha Kanwar to review and strengthen our processes for keeping in touch with governments and other key stakeholders. The result of this work is a multi-faceted approach to enhancing stakeholder relations.

### **4.1 Focal Points**

We have requested Ministers of Education to nominate a Focal Point for their countries for the next three years to coincide with the life of the current Three-Year Plan. The Focal Points are expected continuously to interact with COL and provide feedback on our initiatives to help us align our activities with national priorities. They are also expected to coordinate the information flow across ministries of health, agriculture and foreign affairs in their respective countries so that information on COL activities can be effectively disseminated to various stakeholders within the countries. COL will ensure that there is a regular flow of information on programmes, activities and other important and relevant matters like job openings, etc. So far, 44 Focal Points from 41 countries have been appointed. The names are listed on the COL website at [www.col.org/focalpoints](http://www.col.org/focalpoints).

### **4.2 Country Reports**

In order to capture the salient features of the work done in each of the 49 countries where COL is active, we have prepared a compendium entitled *COL in the Commonwealth*:

*Country Reports 2003-06* and made it available to all countries. In addition, copies have been sent to Commonwealth High Commissioners in London and Ottawa and to our Focal Points. It was also presented, along with COL's Three-Year Plan, *Learning for Development*, at the 16CCEM. This compendium ensures that all our stakeholders in different countries are fully aware of what we have done and can judge to what extent it has contributed to their national development goals. Feedback from countries helps us to reassess our own strategies and approaches and to adjust the focus of our initiatives so that they make a meaningful contribution to the overall development efforts in each country ([www.col.org/reporting](http://www.col.org/reporting)).

#### **4.3 Country Action Proposals/Plans**

Using the programme matrix based on the three sectors, Education, Learning for Livelihoods and Human Environment, and our 15 programme initiatives, we have developed Country Action Proposals for each of the 49 countries. These proposals have emerged after extensive consultations in each region and discussions with Ministers, Focal Points, officials and colleagues from partner institutions. These drafts were discussed and refined during the 16CCEM. Following further in-house refinement, we shall publish these as a set of Country Action Plans. This will serve as a dynamic document to guide our operational planning and work scheduling in 2007-2009. Governments have welcomed this process.

#### **4.4 Invoicing for Financial Contributions**

In August, COL invited all member states to send in their contributions for the fiscal year 2006-2007 according to the existing three-tier funding formula. Follow-up letters and support from Focal Points have enabled us to mobilise just under \$6 million (Canadian) to date and estimates indicate that we should receive further voluntary contributions of up to \$2 million, with several returning donors and one new donor. Returning donors are Belize, Maldives, Mozambique and Sri Lanka, with Fiji making its first contribution to COL this quarter. The invitation made in August has been followed by monthly reviews of responses so that further follow-up can be initiated. This proactive approach to securing contributions has paid dividends as we have been able to mobilise more than 65% of the contributions for the current fiscal year within the first six months. We will continue this effort and hope to end the year with most member states contributing their share in full measure.

#### **4.5 Country Visits**

Country visits by COL staff are another important way of nurturing COL's relationships with stakeholders. Given the demands of PCF4 and 16CCEM, I have made fewer country visits than usual this quarter. However, I did respond to an invitation from New Zealand to advise its Tertiary Education Commission on the organisation of open and distance learning in the polytechnic sector. I also gave opening keynote speeches at the annual conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities in Kunming, China and the British Council's *Going Global 2* conference on international education in Edinburgh, UK. PCF4 in Jamaica gave me an opportunity to visit Belize to finalise its Country Action Plan

and I also visited Ghana with a similar purpose. The 12 formal speeches and presentations that I have given this quarter can be found on the COL website at [www.col.org/speeches](http://www.col.org/speeches).

#### **4.6 Visits to COL**

Finally, as well as making visits, we are always pleased to receive visitors to COL's offices in Vancouver and New Delhi. In this quarter, for example, I note the following visitors in particular:

- A visit by two senior officials from the World Bank to inform themselves more fully about COL's work. I shall pay a return visit to the Bank in Washington DC in late January. Our World Bank colleagues were surprised by the extent and impact of COL's work in development and particularly the growing significance of open schooling.
- A visit by the Minister of Education of Sri Lanka (The Honourable A.D. Susil Premajayantha)
- A farewell visit by Mr. Robert Benoit, CIDA's Advisor to the Canadian Governor for the past two years. We expressed our gratitude for his counsel and extended our best wishes to him when he retires next month.

#### **4.7 Summary**

In summary, we have made good progress in institutionalising COL's stakeholder relationships through effective but inexpensive processes in order to foster meaningful partnerships between COL and the Member States. This account has focused on Member States but we also pay systematic attention to sustaining strong relationships with partner institutions (e.g. our current dialogue with the new Vice-Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, Professor Pillai). We believe that we are laying the basis for enduring and productive relationships between COL, our member states and our partner institutions.

### **5. Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth**

#### **5.1 Planning Meeting in Jamaica**

In my previous report I described the course development Boot Camp, held in Mauritius in August, which gave considerably greater momentum to the VUSSC initiative. The key event in this quarter was a planning meeting held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, immediately after PCF4. As well as reinforcing the collective commitment to the VUSSC and extending the skills of country interlocutors and implementers, this meeting planned out a series of future events, including Boot Camps to initiate course development in new areas (made possible by CFTC support) as follows:

### **2006-2007**

- VUSSC Planning Meeting #3 (completed in Jamaica).
- Boot Camp #2 (Professional Development Skills, co-sponsored and hosted by Singapore).
- Boot Camp #3 (Life Skills, hosted by Trinidad & Tobago).

### **2007-2008**

- Boot Camp #4 (Disaster Management, hosted by Samoa).
- Boot Camp #5 (International Development Management, hosted by Botswana).
- Quality Assurance activities (Regional Workshops).

### **2008-2009**

- VUSSC Planning Meeting #4 (United Kingdom in association with PCF5).
- Boot Camp #6 (Technical Vocational materials; host to be identified).
- Quality Assurance activities (Regional Workshops).
- Boot Camp #7 (Technical Vocational materials: host to be identified).

### **2009-2010**

- Quality Assurance activities (Regional Workshops)
- Technical support activities (Remaining hardware, software and bandwidth issues)
- Quality Assurance activities (Regional Workshops)

## **5.2 Discussions at 16CCEM**

The recent 16CCEM was a valuable opportunity to update Ministers and senior officials on the development of the VUSSC in both formal and informal settings. It was also the occasion for the Secretary-General formally to launch this initiative. There is increasing understanding that the value of the VUSSC to a country will depend entirely on the vigour with which Education Ministries and tertiary institutions engage with it. A growing number of Ministers are taking a close interest in this initiative and supporting the continuing involvement of their staff. Identifying individual countries is somewhat invidious but the interest of Ministers from Barbados, Botswana, Mauritius, Samoa, Seychelles and Trinidad & Tobago is particularly exemplary.

Furthermore, some of the smaller larger states showed interest in benefiting from the VUSSC. As a result, we have now included Sierra Leone (population ~ 6 million) as a participating state.

## **6. Finances**

### **6.1 Audit Committee**

COL's Audit Committee met in November to review and approve the consolidated audited financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2006. Members also approved



a framework to be used by COL to evaluate its internal control practices. This evaluation is planned for the 2008-2009 financial year.

## **6.2 Revenues**

Contributions of \$4,380,854 received from member governments in the quarter were as follows: Belize - \$30,000; Cameroon - \$23,835; Canada - \$2,600,000; Fiji - \$70,800; India - \$620,522; Jamaica - \$31,500; Maldives - \$10,000; Mozambique - \$53,408; Namibia - \$28,405; New Zealand - \$529,166; St. Kitts and Nevis - \$31,500; South Africa - \$250,000; Sri Lanka - \$30,000; Tanzania - \$30,900; Tonga - \$35,180; and, Uganda - \$5,638. This brings year-to-date contributions to a level of \$5.83 million.

Following India's announcement at 16CCEM to increase funding by 66%, COL can expect an additional 16 million Indian rupees (about \$380,000) during the year in fulfilment of India's increased contribution level. The second half of the UK's contribution in the amount of £500,000 is due next quarter, and up to \$250,000 from other governments can be reasonably expected based on past years receipts. Nigeria's payment from 2005-2006 of \$500,000 is still promised and its payment for 2006-2007 remains outstanding. The increased level mentioned previously in Section 3 for New Zealand for 2006-2007 has been received while a further increase has been promised for 2007-2008 from NZ\$670,000 (\$529,166) above to NZ\$800,000.

Close to \$900,000 in extra-budgetary revenues has been recognised at November 30, 2006 with December figures yet to be finalised. Sources include the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, international organisations and *infoDev*. One new agreement was signed in the quarter with an international organisation for the continuation of another cohort in eLearning for the Writing Effectively series.

## **6.3 Cash Flow**

At December 31, 2006, an estimated \$6.6 million in cash is on hand in the form of cash and cash equivalents. This does not include the \$1.5 million restricted under the cash reserve policy and the \$250,000 held as collateral by a bank. Cash has increased from the end of the previous quarter due to the higher level of contributions received.

## **6.4 Expenditures**

Using October and November figures (December in progress), it is estimated that \$4.7 million was utilised or committed in the first and second quarter to meet programme costs, salaries and site and office costs. This represents 54% of the approved budget of \$8.7 million for 2006-2007.



## **7. Human Resource Matters**

### **7.1 Staff Changes**

#### *7.1.1 Departures*

Dr. Usha Reddi, Ms. Susan Phillips and Ms Helen Lentell left COL on December 31; the last named to take up a new appointment as Director of The Centre for Educational Development and Technology at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. COL is indebted to these three colleagues for their important contributions and for the legacies of work that they leave behind.

Dr. Usha Reddi has been Director of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia since 1998, and recently organised the successful move of CEMCA to its new premises in the Safdarjung Development Area of New Delhi.

Ms. Susan Phillips has been with COL since the early days. As a result of her effective and diligent work, COL's expertise on Open Schooling is now much in demand and there is significant south-south collaboration in developing alternative schooling.

Ms. Helen Lentell has made a strong contribution to capacity building in ODL systems around the Commonwealth and led the creation of the Instructional Design Template that is now the basis for COL's work in this area.

#### *7.1.2 Upcoming Arrivals*

Dr. Ramamurthy Sreedher will join COL on February 1, 2007 as Director of CEMCA. Prior to joining he was most recently the Project Director at the Local Voices Project of Internews in Chennai, India. Ms. Frances Ferreira, formerly Director of the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) will join COL on January 22 to continue our work on Basic Education and on Open Schooling in particular.

These appointments followed Commonwealth-wide search processes that attracted 32 and 53 applications respectively.

#### *7.1.3 Recruitment*

Two international posts are currently under recruitment: Education Specialist, Governance and Education Specialist, Media. Deadlines for applications were/are December 21, 2006 and January 15, 2007 respectively.

#### *7.1.4 Locally hired staff*

Three staff members on maternity leave for the past year will be returning to work in January 2007. As a result some temporary appointments came to an end or are being extended to accommodate a job-share arrangement agreed to for two of the returning staff.

Such arrangements are provided for under COL's flexible work policy but this is the first request from staff for a job share.

## 8. Publications

Publications released this quarter include:

- *Connections/Ed Tech News*, October 2006: [www.col.org/connections](http://www.col.org/connections).
- COL in the Commonwealth 2003-2006: Country Reports: [www.col.org/reporting](http://www.col.org/reporting).
- Creating Learning Materials for Open and Distance Learning: Document Template (Instructional Design Template): [www.col.org/trainingresources](http://www.col.org/trainingresources).
- Resources CD-ROM, updated November 2006: [www.col.org/cdrom](http://www.col.org/cdrom).
- *Boys' Underachievement in Education: An Exploration in Selected Commonwealth Countries* (by Jyotsna Jha and Fatimah Kelleher), a COL/Commonwealth Secretariat joint study and publication on boys' underachievement. Dr. Tony Sewell, a notable researcher in the field, conducted the study in selected Commonwealth countries: Jamaica, Lesotho, Malaysia, Samoa and Australia. This research is a part of the 15CCEM agenda and reports to 16CCEM on how open and distance learning methodologies can alleviate the problem of boys' education in circumstances where under-achievement is evident (available online soon).
- A new Quality Assurance Micro-site on COL's web site: [www.col.org/quality](http://www.col.org/quality).
- *A Bibliography of ICT Education Applications in Africa*, is now available on COL's web site, as a first step in an Information for Development Program (*infoDev*) initiative that has partnered with COL to assess the state of ICT applications in education by undertaking a survey that will address several questions. The *Bibliography* is extensive, but now is posted to invite further additions and edits through WikiEducator: [www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/4062](http://www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/4062).

*All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.*

*Sir John Daniel  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
December 31, 2006*