

Opening Remarks - Pacific Focal Points Meeting

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Pacific Focal Points Meeting Samoa

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**Presented by
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President & CEO
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Honourable Minister, Vice Chancellor & President, USP; Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, NUS and Member, COL Board of Governors, Distinguished Focal Points and Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to be here in Apia for the Focal Points meeting. We are very grateful to The Honourable Magele Mauiliu Magele and his colleagues at the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture and the Vice Chancellor, NUS and his team, for their generosity in co-hosting this regional event. Thanks to each and every one of you for coming to this meeting. I am pleased to note that we have 8 FPs or their representatives from the 10 Member States.

Samoa is a very important member of the Commonwealth and hosted the Commonwealth Secretary General and his delegation at the recent SIDS conference. Samoa has also been very consistent in its financial and intellectual contributions to the Commonwealth of Learning and we are very grateful for this support.

As you know, we hold regional meetings of Focal Points at the mid-point of our Strategic Plans. The first meeting in this series was held in Trinidad & Tobago in March followed by one for Africa and the Mediterranean in Mauritius in May. We are just coming from the Asian Focal Points meeting held in Penang last week. All have been co-hosted by the ministries of education in the respective countries and we thank the Hon Ministers for their valuable support.

These Focal Points meetings are very important events in the life of COL, which is why you see four of us here. This is usually not possible as we have only a small group of professional specialists. We have taken this opportunity to organize other meetings as well. One of these is the launch of our Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD), which will happen later this evening and we are very grateful to Prof Rajesh Chandra for being with us today and for being the gracious host of this Centre which will be located at the USP

campus in Suva. PACFOLD is being established as a regional hub of expertise in flexible and open approaches to learning and will strengthen existing institutions through capacity development designed to meet their specific needs.

COL has been working in Samoa with our local and regional partners. The National University of Samoa is an important partner for COL. In 2013, the university hosted a regional workshop on Teacher Education in the Pacific to discuss challenges, plans, and priorities as well as establish major areas of focus for COL's involvement. As a result of this workshop, COL identified a plan of action with the Solomon Islands National University to develop distance learning materials in Teacher Education.

NUS is an active member of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) and played a key role in the developing the VUSSC Postgraduate Diploma in Education by hosting a course writing workshop. One important milestone for the VUSSC and the National University of Samoa partnership was the graduation of the first group of students who earned their Diplomas in Sustainable Agriculture. In partnership with the Multimedia Team at the National University of Samoa, COL has supported the creation of audio materials in vocational literacy and numeracy for the Basic Trades Training Programme, for use across the Pacific region.

In addition, COL supports the Matuaileoo Environment Trust Inc. to strengthen the training of community development workers in Life Skills and Permaculture. COL has also supported a number of conferences and forums, including the Pacific TVET Open, Distance and Flexible Learning Forum in Tonga, a Pacific TVET Workshop in Fiji, and the 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in Nigeria. These events not only provide a forum for sharing effective practices, expertise and research but are also a great opportunity for networking and wider Commonwealth cooperation.

What do we hope to achieve at this meeting? Let me outline four key objectives.

One, as we start our strategic planning process beyond 2015, we need to hear from you what your priorities are and how these will fit in with COL's mission and mandate. We will be listening very carefully as you outline the key areas that COL should integrate into its plan so that we are able to address these systematically as we go forward. At the 18th CCEM, ministers commended COL on its country focus.

Two, this is also an opportunity for us to present a summary of what we have done thus far in each of your countries. You will recall that the current Three Year Plan started on July 1, 2012 and takes us to June 2015—we are now at the mid-point and would like to give you an interim report. The final report will be presented to your ministers in June 2015 when they meet in The Bahamas for the 19th CCEM.

Three, these face-to-face meetings are an excellent forum to remind you of COL's purpose, its organization and its programme. While some of you may be veteran Focal Points, others may be quite new to COL and its work. Since you are our ambassadors in the field, it is important that you know what we do.

Four, as a Commonwealth organization, it is part of our mission to promote Commonwealth-wide cooperation. The Commonwealth is often referred to as a family of nations that works through consensus, respect and understanding. In fact the theme for 2014 is 'Team Commonwealth' which celebrates the spirit of friendship and the unity in our great diversity. These meetings serve to remind us of our shared values and our common identity as citizens of the Commonwealth. They are also an opportunity for us to network, and forge multilateral and bilateral linkages for future collaboration within and beyond the region.

These meetings also allow us to introduce our staff to you. Just as some of you are new, we too have a policy of rotation under which old staff members leave making way for new colleagues from other Commonwealth countries. Let me then introduce you to our Vice President Mr Vis Naidoo from South Africa; and two colleagues who you know well since they have been very active in the region: Dr Alison Mead Richardson, our ES; Skills Development and John Lesperance our Team Leader: Education and ES: VUSSC.

Let me thank you all once again for your presence and for being COL's voice in the field. Let me also thank the Honourable Minister for hosting this meeting and Dr. Ioana Chan Mow for her hard work in helping us to organise this meeting. Let me extend a warm welcome to each one of you.