Senior Officials' Working Group Meeting on the Proposal to Establish a Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility (CTEF)

Proposal for a Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility presented by Sir John Daniel, Commonwealth of Learning (12 October 2007).

1. Introduction

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to take a few minutes to present the proposal that is before you for a Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility. At the request of the Commonwealth Secretariat the background paper was initiated by my colleague Professor Asha Kanwar, now COL's Vice-President and Programme Director, but formerly our Higher Education Specialist. It has been extended and refined by our colleagues at ComSec and the ACU, so this is already a team effort.

You have all read the paper, so I shall simply draw attention to some of the key issues for our discussion by asking and commenting on five questions.

- What is the scope of tertiary education?

- Do Commonwealth countries seek help with developing tertiary education? If so, what kind of help do they need and what is the volume of the demand?

- Which agencies and organisations are already responding to this demand?

- How might the Commonwealth's collective response be made more effective?

- How much money is needed and where will it come from?

Let me take these in order.

2. The Scope of Tertiary Education

What is the scope of tertiary education? It refers all post-secondary education, including but not limited to universities. Universities are clearly a key part of all tertiary systems, but the diverse and growing set of

public and private tertiary institutions in every country - colleges, technical training institutes, community colleges, nursing schools, teacher training institutions, distance learning centres and many more, form a network of institutions that support the production of the higher-order capacity necessary for development.

For many governments the development of the non-university parts of the tertiary sector, especially teacher training establishments and technical/vocational institutes, are at least as important as the growth of their universities. Most Commonwealth countries have very young populations and will face huge challenges in responding to the demand for tertiary education. The statistics are in the paper and I shall not repeat them here.

3. Tertiary Education: Is Help Needed?

The next, and key question, is whether Commonwealth countries seek help with developing tertiary education. What kind of help do they seek and what is the volume of the demand?

Section 3 of the paper lists the areas in which governments are seeking support and technical advice and lists the requests for assistance that have come into the Commonwealth Secretariat in the last twelve months.

I can also give some data from the Commonwealth of Learning (annex). COL has a 3-Year Plan for the period 2006-09. It supports Commonwealth governments through 15 initiatives, six of which relate mostly to tertiary education. They are:

- Higher Education

- Teacher Development

- Quality Assurance

- Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

- Transnational Programmes

- eLearning for Education Sector Development

Several of COL's other initiatives, although they cover education, training and learning more widely, also touch on tertiary education. Since COL has broken down its overall 3-Year Plan into 49 Country Action Plans we know how many countries have asked for COL's help in one or more of the six areas of tertiary education listed above. The answer is 41 out of the 46 developing countries of the Commonwealth.

This figure is, perhaps, slightly inflated by the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, in which 30 of the 32 small states are now involved, but that is an important component of tertiary education development for those countries and we are grateful for the CFTC's support to it.

Through its offices in Vancouver and New Delhi and its Commonwealth-wide network of collaborators, COL is now the most active Commonwealth body supporting Member States in tertiary education. The table shows that COL presently devotes the equivalent of four full-time professionals and two support staff to this work, spending $900,000 of its core funds and taking advantage of just over $1 million contributed by partners. These partners, which are governments, institutions or supporting donors, pay for all or a large part of the services requested. The challenge for all the agencies involved is that most governments do not feel able to pay more than a small proportion of the costs of the assistance with tertiary education that they would like to have.

This is just one indicator of demand. At present governments request help from a variety of bodies and one useful outcome of this Working Group would be to coordinate the effort so that governments could make requests to one address with assurance that they would be dealt with in the most appropriate way.

4. Which Agencies and Organisations?

This brings us to the question of which agencies and organisations are responding to the demand. Section 3 of the paper lists the three main official players. The **Commonwealth Secretariat,** in responding to requests from governments, now focuses on the teacher education element of tertiary education. The **Association of Commonwealth Universities**, as a membership organisation, supports its universities with a range of activities in gender, research management, libraries, human resource management and communications. It also undertakes some commissions for governments, most recently for Australia, Pakistan and the UK.

Heads of Government articulated their expectations of the Commonwealth of Learning in the only reference to tertiary or higher education in the communiqué from the Malta CHOGM which reads:

"In recognition of the challenges facing the higher education sector, Heads of Government requested the COL to assist member countries in further developing expertise in the areas of quality assurance mechanisms for open and distance learning, developing criteria for opening and operating distance learning programmes, accreditation of open and distance learning programmes and undertaking trans-border education...
Heads of Government also expressed satisfaction with the implementation by COL of Commonwealth Education Ministers' call for the establishment of a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth." (para. 94)

COL 's mission focuses on the use of ICTs and open and distance learning. However, since these have become central issues for tertiary systems and institutions in many countries, and since COL has useful expertise in tertiary education generally, its work in this sector has gradually broadened and now covers quality assurance, capacity building, teacher education, materials development, eLearning, institutional audits, qualifications frameworks, copyright, technical/vocational education and leadership training.

5. How Might the Commonwealth's Collective Response be Made More Effective?

We now come to the primary question for this meeting, which is how might the Commonwealth's collective response to member country requests for help with tertiary education be made more effective.

Section 4 of the paper lays out five fundamental principles that should guide decisions on any moves to create a Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility

- First, as my examples show, more resources are needed if the three agencies are to give more assistance than they do currently to governments that are not in a position to pay for it.

- Second, any CTEF should focus on the tertiary education needs of developing countries as articulated by them.

- Third, a CTEF should build on existing activity and expertise in supporting tertiary education in developing countries, notably that of COL and the ACU. It should not be a new entity.

- Fourth, and following the injunction of Ministers at 16CCEM that Commonwealth agencies should work towards a harmonised work plan in education - a process already under way - the CTEF should be part of such a framework.

- Finally, the CTEF should not duplicate the programmes in support of tertiary education offered by regional or multi-lateral organisations outside the Commonwealth. In this respect it is helpful that COL has a work plan agreement for tertiary education with UNESCO, which in turn is working closely with the World Bank, particularly on issues of quality assurance.

6. Mandate, Governance Organisation and Resources

6.1 Mandate

The activity areas of a CTEF that responds to requests from member governments will evolve to reflect those requests. To judge by current demand the following areas will see ongoing activity:

- Policy development for:

    o tertiary education sector reform

    o institutional governance

    o ICTs and distance education

- Capacity building

- Institutional audits

- Curriculum reform, notably to integrate professional/vocational programmes

- Professional and leadership development

- Qualifications frameworks

- Enhancing and expanding ICT capacity to reduce the digital divide.

6.2 Governance

The CTEF should show an example of Commonwealth inter-agency cooperation by having a board representing the Commonwealth Secretariat, COL and the ACU and contributing donor governments. This would review progress annually and make reports to the Boards/Councils of the partner organisations.

6.3 Management

The CTEF could be managed from either COL (Vancouver/New Delhi) or ACU (London), possibly alternating every 3-5 years.

6.4 Funding

The CTEF's main requirement is for funds to support work in the member countries rather than full-time staff. An annual budget of $1 million would enable the Facility to respond to a large proportion of the demands made on it, given that some Member States or institutions would pay all or part of the costs of the assistance they request.

A five-year commitment from the contributing Member States to the CTEF would be needed to ensure sustainability. This would give adequate time to test the model and determine whether it is an effective way of responding to the needs of Member States.

7. Next Steps

Finally, the text suggests that if the meeting recommends going ahead with a Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility a small working group of experts should be convened to consider the technical matters involved in getting it started. Recommendations would then go to 17CCEM in Malaysia in 2009 for the approval of Ministers.

Annex

COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING

Requests for Assistance in Tertiary Education
2006-09

COL 's Three-Year Plan has 15 initiatives. Of these the following six relate directly to tertiary education:

- Higher Education

- Teacher Development

- Quality Assurance

- Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

- Transnational Programmes (degree programmes shared between countries)

- eLearning for Education Sector Development

COL has prepared Country Action Plans for 49 Commonwealth countries. 41 of the 46 developing countries list one or more of these six initiatives in their Country Action Plan.

The table below shows the level of COL's current activity in responding to this demand in 2007-08. After reviewing the Country Action Plans and calculating the cost of responding to all the demands in tertiary education COL's Higher Education specialist, Dr. Clarke-Okah, estimates than an additional $1.5 million would be needed over the period of the Three-Year Plan 2006-09.

Resources committed to working with countries/institutions in tertiary education

2007-08

Human Resources	Name	Funds from COL's Budget	Partner(s) Funds (approx.)	Nature of Work
1 FT	Dr. W. Clarke-Okah	*$350,000*	$100,000 $50,000	COL *Tertiary Ed* UNISA Audit CEMBA/CEMPA
0.2 FT	Prof. A. Kanwar		$150,000	Pakistan VC Training
0.2 FT	Sir John Daniel		$200,000	University of Ghana
0.6FT	Mr. Paul West		$500,000	VUSSC
1FT	Prof Mohan Menon	*$350,000*	$50,000	*COL Teacher traning* TESSA
0.6FT	Dr Wayne Mackintosh	*$100,000*		*COL eLearning*
0.4FT	Mr Joshua Mallet	*$100,000*		*COL TVET in Tertiary*

2FT support			
Totals:			
6FT		**$900,000**	**$1,050,000**