

Open Remarks - Asia Focal Points Meeting

Opening Remarks

Asia Focal Points Meeting Malaysia

17 September 2014

**Presented by
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It is a great pleasure to be here once again for the Focal Points meeting. This is the third meeting being held in Malaysia. We are very grateful to Dato' Prof. Dr. Asma Binti Ismail, Director General of Higher Education and her colleagues at the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, for their generosity in co-hosting this meeting, as well as the previous ones in 2008 and 2011. I would also like to thank the Vice Chancellor and his representatives from USM for their generous support. Thanks to each and every one of you for coming to this meeting. I am pleased to note that we have six representatives from the eight Member States.

Malaysia is a very important member of the Commonwealth. We were here in 2009, when the Commonwealth Education Ministers met for the 17th CCEM and both Ministries of Education played a key role in ensuring the resounding success of the event. Malaysia 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 during this triennium was held in Trinidad & Tobago in March followed by one for Africa and the Mediterranean in Mauritius in May. After this meeting, we will be going to the final one for the Pacific which will take place in Samoa next week. All have been co-hosted by the ministries of education and sometimes in collaboration with national universities as in this case. We thank the Hon Ministers for their continued confidence and support.

These Focal Points meetings are very important events in the life of COL, which is why you see four of us here along with our CEMCA colleagues. This is usually not possible as we have only a small group of professional specialists.

COL has been working with different institutions in Malaysia. COL enjoys a close partnership with the Open University Malaysia. OUM won the COL award of Excellence for Institutional Achievement in 2009. Through a tutor and learner support training project, COL has been working with the University to enhance the skills of master tutors, with a goal of training approximately 3,000 tutors over 3 years. In collaboration with COL, OUM is offering a number of joint scholarships for their Masters in Instructional Design and Technology programme to academics from other Commonwealth countries such as Kenya, India, Zambia and South Africa.

COL has supported capacity building at Wawasan Open University through workshops on OER based e-learning, an area in which the University has shown impressive leadership and innovation. Supported by COL, WOU has been actively involved in promoting OER resources and is engaged in research into OER use, search and retrieval. In addition, the University has played an integral role in the growth and refinement of COL's CEMBA/CEMPA programmes, which it has offered since 2006; in 2013 WOU revised 12 of the courses, resulting in an improved curriculum, which is now available to all CEMBA/CEMPA partners across the Commonwealth. COL successfully implemented its COL Review and Improvement Model of Quality Assurance at WOU, which has been a model of good practice in distance education, on account of which the university received **two** Awards of Excellence, **one for** Institutional Achievement and **one for** Distance Education Materials, from COL at the 7th Pan Commonwealth Forum held in Nigeria in 2013.

Academics from WOU and OUM, as well as from other institutions such as University of Malaya, Universiti Utara, Mara University, the Institute for Research and Innovation and Asia e-University have benefitted from COL's support to attend regional events. As a result they have strengthened their capacity while contributing their expertise to the important work being done on topics such as OER, Quality Assurance, e-learning, leadership in higher education, and skills training.

The Universiti Sains Malaysia is about to inaugurate a Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility (CTEF) and COL is one of the network partners, who will work with Malaysian colleagues to build this into a vibrant centre for promoting quality tertiary education in the Commonwealth. As you know, COL organizes triennial conferences that have become well known as the Pan Commonwealth Forums on Open and Distance Learning or the PCF. We organized PCF 7 in Nigeria last December and this attracted over 600 participants from 49 countries. We received 13 bids from different Commonwealth countries to host the next conference in 2016. You will be pleased to note that the bid was won by the Open University of Malaysia, which will be the official host of PCF 8. Our engagement with Malaysia will be further strengthened through this major event.

Coming to this meeting of Focal Points, what do we hope to achieve? 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 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; Ms Frances Ferreira from Namibia; Dr Jessica Aguti from Uganda. We also have with us our CEMCA colleagues: the Director, Dr Sanjaya Mishra and Dr Thyagarajan, Head- Administration and Finance; Dr Anukuran Datta and Dr Manas Panigrahi, Programme Officers, CEMCA.

Let me thank you all once again for your presence and for being COL's voice in the field. Let me also thank Noorazmahani Md. Kasim, Assistant Registrar of the Universiti Sains Malaysia for all her hard work in helping us to organise this meeting.