



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

President's Quarterly Progress Report: July – September 2006

1. General

1.1 Meeting of the Executive Committee: September 11

The Executive Committee of the Board met by teleconference on September 11 and approved a final version of the 2006-2009 Three-Year Plan. This went to press on September 15. Board members will receive copies as soon as they arrive from the printer.

The Committee also received a summary report on the operation of COL's performance management system in 2005-06 and the performance-related increments made to staff as a result.

1.2 Planning and Preparations for 16CCEM

We have had constructive discussions with ComSec about the scheduling of COL's presentations to Ministers and Senior Officials at the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (16CCEM) that will be held in Cape Town from December 11–13. COL will host a breakfast meeting for Ministers in addition to the events in the official timetable. This will provide an opportunity to update them on the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth in particular.

The centrepiece of COL's presentation to Ministers will be the Three-Year Plan, *Learning for Development*. Each country will receive two other documents, a Country Review 2003-2006 summarising COL's work in that Member State in the last triennium, and a Country Action Proposal for 2006-2009 outlining plans for COL's activity there in future. The Country Reviews will be brought together as a document entitled *COL in the Commonwealth*. Board members will receive copies in October.

Country Action Proposals (CAPs), directly keyed to the 15 initiatives in the Three-Year Plan, have been drawn up for each Member State and our aim is to convert these into agreed Country Action Plans through dialogue with each government before 16CCEM. For example, I discussed their CAPs with the Ministers of Education in South Africa, Seychelles and Mauritius in August; Professor Kanwar had similar meetings with Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bangladesh in September before we both met in India for discussions there with the Minister of Human Resource Development, Honourable Arjun Singh; the Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Honourable Prithiyraj Chavan; and the Chairperson of the University Grants Commission, Professor Sukhadeo Thorat. Rod Tyrer met Ministers from the Pacific states for the same purpose at a Pacific

Island Forum meeting in Fiji, and other colleagues are holding similar dialogues as they travel. PCF4 will also be an opportunity for finalising these Plans with some governments. We shall work by correspondence with the Ministers whom we are not able to meet directly before 16CCEM.

This approach has been extremely well received by Ministers, who appreciate the opportunity to align COL's work in their countries with their own priorities. In order to facilitate a coordinated approach to COL within governments we have asked all Member States to name focal points for COL and 30 have now done so. This will help to ensure, in particular, that relevant COL business is brought to the attention of ministries other than Education.

1.3 Country Visits

This quarter, I have travelled to the UK, South Africa, Seychelles, Mauritius, Canada and India. Apart from some eight keynote addresses (see Website) at various events, the main purpose of these visits, as noted above, was to interact with governments and institutions about COL's work in their countries in 2006-2009.

Country visits by COL staff are a key feature of our work. COL is an intergovernmental organisation and sustaining regular communication with governments is vital. Whilst the various regional and pan-Commonwealth meetings of ministers and officials are helpful, visiting countries is still the most effective way of ensuring the relevance of COL's programme to them. Between them COL staff visited 31 Commonwealth countries in 2003-2004; 37 in 2004-2005; and 38 in 2005-2006. Many countries were, of course, visited more than once – some 596 country visits were made in all. Only eight Commonwealth countries did not receive a COL visit over the 2003-2006 triennium and we shall make these a priority in the next two years.

Unfortunately international air travel is becoming simultaneously more expensive, because of oil prices, and more unpleasant because of obtrusive security measures. I pay a warm tribute to my colleagues for the absences from home and the inconveniences that they put up with in order to maintain COL's tradition of staying close to Ministers and country realities. Travel costs averaged 15% of COL's core budget over the 2003-2006 triennium and we are putting measures in place not to exceed that proportion in 2006-2009 despite rising costs.

1.4 Extrabudgetary Funds

1.4.1 The Information for Development Program (*infoDev*) of the World Bank is collaborating with COL to assess the state of ICT applications in education in Africa. This study, for which *infoDev* is providing US\$130,000, focuses on how ICTs are presently being used in the education sector in Africa and the strategies and policies related to their use. After considering the common challenges and constraints faced by African countries, the study will outline what is happening on the ground and how donors can be practically involved. This study ties in closely

with COL's work with *InfoDev* on the monitoring and evaluation of the NEPAD eSchools Demonstrator Project.

1.4.2 The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CfTC) has agreed to cooperate with COL in strengthening the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). To this end, CfTC has allocated GB£1 million to COL for VUSSC-related activities: 2006-2007: GB£200,000; 2007-2008: GB£250,000; 2008-2009: GB£250,000; and 2009-2010: GB£300,000.

During this time, VUSSC's work will focus on the empowerment of professionals and institutions to be able to create, customise and deploy open education resources (OERs) for skills training in their countries. This will be achieved by a series of activities that focus on:

1. Capacity building in Commonwealth Public Sector Institutions.
2. Strengthening Health Systems in Commonwealth Small States by focussing on Life Skills.
3. Enhancing the Ability of Commonwealth Small States to Attract Investment through Capacity Building of Management and Business.
4. Enhancing the Capacity of Commonwealth Small States through the Networking of Core Competencies and Skills.
5. Capacity for Quality Assurance and Accreditation.
6. Enhancing the Ability of Commonwealth Small States to Attract Investment through the Capacity Building of Technical and Vocational Education.

2. Programme Matters

2.1 Monitoring and Evaluation of the 2006-2009 Plan

The majority of COL staff attended a three-and-a-half day monitoring and evaluation workshop held in Vancouver in July. The event was organised and run by Dr. Patrick Spaven, the Evaluator of the 2003-2009 plan (see www.col.org for the report) and Dr. Glen Farrell, a senior COL consultant. The workshop examined all aspects of the M&E process and developed outputs, outcomes and performance indicators for the three sectors of the new plan: Education; Literacy & Livelihoods; and Human Environment – as well as Knowledge Management and Gender. The means by which data could be collected, the type of data, and how it could be stored and retrieved were also determined. The Board was consulted beforehand on those aspects of performance they wanted to see reviewed and those requests were fed into the workshop. The next steps, which are already underway, are to develop an M&E strategy for the sectors and an easily accessible reporting mechanism on how the plan is achieving its goals.

2.2 Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

The VUSSC agreements signed by the small states in 2005 were followed by an initial plan of action agreed by Interlocutors (representatives of governments) and Implementers (people working in course development/delivery) from the 25 participating countries in April 2006. This set the scene for the hosting of the first professional and course development workshop, affectionately titled a “Boot Camp”. The Boot Camp was held in Mauritius for three weeks in August 2006 with the 13 countries which need courses in the areas of Tourism and Small Business Management taking part. During the workshop, 30 hours of learning material was developed on each of these two topics. This is the first multinational, online community of course material developers to be established in this way, so it is a world première. Members of the group are now continuing to create course content collaboratively from their countries using COL’s online facilities and a WikiEducator space to which all can contribute.

Participants of the Boot Camp were issued with “Virtual PCs” which are USB memory sticks that carry operating programmes such as a browser and office suite, and user files. The memory sticks serve as an alternative to carrying PCs and help especially in the case of people who use multiple computers.

The upcoming meeting of Interlocutors after PCF4 will focus on developing a business plan for using the CfTC grant (mentioned in 1.4.2 above) on the basis of the grant proposal and previous VUSSC agreements. Member countries will be asked to commit human, infrastructural and financial resources to further strengthen VUSSC. During the meeting, participants will have further opportunities to improve their own skills in using the Internet and online tools.

2.3 Team Leaders

A new feature in COL’s organisation in 2006-2007 is the appointment from July 1, 2006 of team leaders for the three programme sectors. The team leaders are meeting every 5-6 weeks and have a standing agenda which considers Programme matters, budgets, travel, issues within the teams and monitoring and evaluation.

There have been two meetings held so far. Minutes are transmitted to the Senior Management Meeting for information and approval of any recommendations.

3. Finances

3.1 Revenues

Forecasted revenues for 2006-2007 from member governments’ contributions are expected to be at a level similar to 2005-2006 of \$6.6 million plus the increases already confirmed from New Zealand, India and Cyprus of about another \$0.4 million.

I have received further assurances from Nigeria that its outstanding contribution for 2005-2006 will be paid shortly and a request has been sent for its 2006-2007 contribution. All other member governments were also invoiced for their contributions for this year and those payments received to date are listed below.

These are: Bahamas - \$28,288 (the first of two instalments); Barbados - US\$25,500; Botswana - \$70,000 (arrears for 2005-2006 and current for 2006-2007); Lesotho – US\$53,070; Mauritius - \$50,000; Samoa - US\$50,000; Swaziland - \$31,500; Trinidad and Tobago – US\$63,650; and United Kingdom - GB£500,000 (the first of two instalments) for a total of \$1.5 million.

An additional \$1.3 million in revenues for programmes was also forecasted for 2006-2007 from extra-budgetary funding sources. At June 30, 2006, \$890,000 of monies already received was recorded as deferred revenue to be recognised in the current year. Close to half relates to funds from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation with scheduled activities, including PCF4 well underway. Two new agreements (See Extra-budgetary Section 1.4) include the *infoDev* grant for US\$130,000 and the CfTC grant portion for this year of GB£200,000 for VUSSC. A contract was also recently signed with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for US\$35,000 to undertake training for up to 70 learners.

3.2 Cash Flow

At June 30, 2006, \$5.3 million in cash before current liabilities of \$2.0 million was on hand in the form of cash and cash equivalents. An additional \$1.5 million is on hand but restricted under the cash reserve policy and a further \$250,000 is held as collateral by the bank for corporate credit cards. The unrestricted cash available at June of \$5.3 million has been partially used during the quarter to meet liabilities from 2005-2006 as well as current expenditures for the quarter. Cash of \$1.5 million in the form of member governments' contributions (see 3.1 above) was also received.

3.3 Expenditures

Using July and August 2006 figures (September data not finalised) it is estimated that approximately \$2.3 million was utilised or committed in the first quarter to meet programme costs, salaries and site and office expenditures. This represents 26% of the approved budget of \$8.7 million for 2006-2007.

4. Human Resource Matters

4.1 Staff Changes

New Appointment: Dr Willie Clarke-Okah joined COL on September 1 as Education Specialist: Higher Education & Policy Development.

Posts under Recruitment: Two posts for internationally recruited staff will become vacant on January 1, 2007. These are: Director of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), (New Delhi); and Education Specialist: Basic Education and Open Schooling (Vancouver)

There was strong interest from potential candidates in both positions. The selection process for Director of CEMCA was completed with interviews in New Delhi on September 25, an offer has been made, and I expect to announce an appointment shortly. Interviews for the Education Specialist post are scheduled for October.

5. Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning

More than 400 people from almost 60 countries and several international organisations will be attending COL's Fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, taking place in Ocho Rios, Jamaica from 30 October to 3 November 2006. COL is also hosting four e-mail-based virtual conferences, held in July, August, September and October 2006, as a lead-up to PCF4. The discussions have been lively and informative with participants contributing a wide variety of experience and opinions.

In addition to myself, there are three other keynotes at the Forum: Mr. Winston Cox, member of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) Board of Executive Directors and former Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General (Asa Briggs Lecture); Dr. Sugata Mitra, Senior Vice President for Research and Development at NIIT Limited, India (famous for "hole-in-the-wall" computing for disadvantaged children); and Professor Penina Mlama, Executive Director of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and COL Board member.

COL's Excellence in Distance Education Awards (EDEA) will be presented at PCF4. Seven new Fellows of the Commonwealth of Learning will be named as a part of the ceremony.

The Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Right Honourable Portia Simpson Miller, will officially open the Forum on Tuesday morning, October 31.

www.col.org/pcf4
www.col.org/virtualconferences

6. Publications and Website

Recent publications by COL include:

- *Higher Education Crossing Borders - A Guide to the Implications of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for Cross-border Education.*

A Report Prepared for the Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO by Dr. Jane Knight (www.col.org/consultancies).

- COL's Three-year Plan, 2006-2009: *Learning for Development* (www.col.org/3yp0609).

Following the launch of COL's 'new-look' website on June 30, we have received many favourable comments and notes of appreciation: www.col.org.

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

*Sir John Daniel
President & Chief Executive Officer
September 30, 2006*