



BOARD OF GOVERNORS
President's Quarterly Progress Report:
January – March 2009

1. Board Matters

1.1 New Board Member

We welcome Professor Clement Sankat who has been appointed as Regional Representative for the Caribbean. He is currently Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI). A registered Mechanical/Agricultural Engineer, he obtained his Bachelors and Masters degrees from UWI and his doctorate from the University of Guelph (Canada). In 2001, he received the UWI Vice-Chancellor's Award of Excellence for his contribution to public service, university service and research.

With Professor Sankat's appointment all Board vacancies, apart from the Secretary-General's appointee, have now been filled.

1.2 Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met in Marlborough House in the Commonwealth Secretariat in London on February 23-24. The most significant agenda item was the review and approval of COL's draft Three-Year Plan (TYP) for 2009-2012 on which I comment further below. The Secretary-General attended the meeting for this part of the Committee's business.

The Committee received an updated policy on additional contributions that will come back to the Board at its next meeting. It also received an update on the progress of the review of the Human Resource Framework and Compensation Plan and recommended that COL continue to operate with an annual performance management process. In 2008, the Board had requested a proposal for moving to a three-year budget cycle but after discussing the proposal, the Committee recommended retaining an annual budget approval process.

The minutes of the meeting will give a complete account of these discussions.

1.3 Audit Committee

The Audit Committee met in London on February 24 after the Executive Committee Meeting. It reviewed the interim financial statements for the period July 1 to December 31 2008, a report on COL's cash and cash investments, and an update of the regular report on critical success factors and risk management. The Committee then discussed its own performance with the help of a self-evaluation questionnaire provided by COL's auditors Deloitte & Touche.

The minutes of the meeting will give a complete account of these discussions.

2. President's Commentary and Activities

In this quarter, the global economic recession has been on everyone's mind. While this may yet affect COL and its work in various ways, there have been no negative impacts so far. By March 31, 2009 the total of voluntary contributions received so far in FY2008-2009 exceeded the amount received by March 31, 2008 in FY 2007-2008. As I report later in the section on Finance, we have received satisfactory assurances about the safety of our cash and cash investments although, of course, COL's interest income has dropped sharply along with the bank rates. On the foreign exchange side, the strength of the US dollar against the Canadian dollar has had a positive effect whereas the reverse is true of the weakness of the British pound.

Although programme implementation has continued actively throughout this quarter, I have focused my later Programme report on the development of the Three-Year Plan for 2009-2012 and COL's response to the evaluations carried out in 2006 and 2009. In order to devote the required time to the planning process for 2009-2012, I travelled less in this quarter.

In January I addressed the Commonwealth High Commissioners in Ottawa at their monthly luncheon. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the kind hospitality of the High Commissioner for Nigeria, His Excellency Professor Iyorwuese Hagher, on this occasion. His staff battled one of Ottawa's major winter snowstorms to get me to the airport so that I could fulfil an engagement the following day in Washington, DC, to give an address on 'Combating Degree Mills' at the international seminar of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

From Washington I went to the Caribbean to assess and promote COL's work in three countries. In Antigua & Barbuda, I met the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education and had a most useful discussion at the Antigua State College with those colleagues who had taken part in various events organised by the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). It is gratifying to see the impact of the VUSSC and to realise how much the participants value the new skills they have acquired.

In Dominica, I met the Minister of Education and had fruitful meetings with the President of the Dominica State College (DSC), Hubert Charles, a former UNESCO colleague. The DSC has missed opportunities to take part in the VUSSC because of poor communication from the Ministry of Education. This problem has been corrected. I was pleased to find that the media units that COL helped to set up in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture continue to produce material that has national impact.

In St. Kitts & Nevis, I met the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education and raised the issue of degree mills. St. Kitts has an unusual number of offshore medical schools and because of the activities of some spurious providers – now closed – it acquired an unfortunate reputation in other jurisdictions as a haven for degree mills. The Prime Minister assured me that they are aware of the danger and are strengthening their accreditation process. I also had an informative meeting at the Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College with faculty who had been involved in VUSSC activities as well as some who had taken the UTech (Jamaica) TVET Teaching Diploma that was developed with COL's assistance.

While circumstances are somewhat different in each of these three countries, they are all engaged in making their tertiary colleges into statutory bodies, instead of units of the Ministry of Education, and increasing their university-level offerings. Participation in the VUSSC is proving very helpful in this context, as is the training that COL has provided in eLearning.

In March, I spoke in New York City at *Global Education 20/20*, a one-day invitational conference organised by *The Economist*. The title was a misnomer since, aside from contributions from colleagues from UNESCO, the World Bank and the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences, the focus was resolutely on the problems of US education. However, since President Obama gave his first major speech on education on the same day, the debates were topical. The following day, I addressed the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Public Affairs in Halifax, NS, on *Success and Failure in the Global Campaign for Education for All: What Next?* This was an opportunity to profile COL's work in Open Schooling and Teacher Education.

Later in the month, I took part in a meeting of the steering committee of the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity, attended a ministerial meeting at ComSec to prepare the agenda for 17CCEM and spoke at an invitational conference at Oxford University to celebrate the 50th anniversary of 1CCEM.

It is a pleasure to report that because the current Commonwealth Secretary-General takes a close interest in COL we are invited to participate more fully in Commonwealth events than heretofore. As a result Paul West, Director of Information Technology and Knowledge Management, had the privilege of carrying the Commonwealth mace to lead the Queen's procession into Westminster Abbey for the Commonwealth Day service.

Finally, one of the recommendations stemming from the formal evaluation of COL is that we do not do enough to share experiences and perspectives between staff members.

In order to facilitate such exchange we have held a number of internal seminars. After seminars on Course Production, Country Twinning and Partnerships, and Policy Development, the most recent topic was Workshops. My last Quarterly Report noted that COL is intensively involved in organising training and capacity-building events. This seminar was a very fruitful sharing of views on the theory and practice of workshops. We also had staff events in March recognising Commonwealth Day (an international pot-luck lunch) and International Women's Day (the viewing of an award-winning documentary on the women of India and then discussion on the challenges in influencing the changing roles of women in relation to COL's work).

3. Programme

During this quarter, there were two significant programme planning-related developments. First, a penultimate draft of our next Three-Year Plan (2009-2012) was presented to COL's Board of Governors and discussed by its Executive Committee at a meeting in London. Second, the external evaluation report of the current Three-Year Plan (2006-2009) was completed.

Thanks to the dedicated engagement of members of the Board of Governors, in-country Focal Points and key stakeholders, we received valuable input and feedback on TYP drafts. In London, in February, the Executive Committee helped with further revisions to ensure clarity and approved the TYP on behalf of the Board. Now that the rotation policy has created regular turnover among our international Education Specialists, it is vital to spell out exactly what COL does and what it plans to do under each initiative. The TYP is now in final preparation for distribution in advance of 17CCEM, where Ministers will be invited to endorse it.

We devoted special effort to finalising a Logic Model in which we present a graphic overview of what COL will do (initiatives and crosscutting themes); how COL will do it (strategies); what COL hopes to achieve (outcomes); and specific targets for the next three years (performance indicators). The Logic Model presents the big picture for three years and specifies corporate-level outcomes. Using this as a basis, Education Specialists will elaborate "Log Frames" with outputs and outcomes for their respective activities and show how these are linked to the corporate outcomes.

Many agencies do not make a distinction between a Logic Model and a Log Frame and often use the two interchangeably but, following UNICEF's practice, we have made this distinction: For COL the Logic Model provides the bigger picture of our work at the organisational level. The Log Frames are organised as a matrix at the activity level within each initiative and are more specific and analytical. We believe that this strategy speaks directly to one of the recommendations of the 2006-2009 Evaluation report which states that:

"COL needs to introduce log frames at the Initiative level and possibly below, with well-designed monitoring aligned with the corporate indicators"

The Evaluation report also states that:

“There have been distinct improvements since 2003 and more since 2006. COL's TYP process is highly participative.”

I am particularly pleased that members of COL's Board engaged so readily with the process of developing the TYP for 2009-2012. Special thanks go to our Canadian Board member, Ms. Denise Chong, who arranged for some very useful interaction between my colleagues and experts on Results-Based Management at the Canadian International Development Agency.

Before I comment generally on the recommendations of the 2009 Evaluation report, I should dwell briefly on the 52 recommendations made in the 2006 Evaluation report. An internal assessment exercise revealed that of these recommendations, 28 had been implemented; 18 were in process of being implemented; four had been noted and two were no longer relevant. The recommendations were treated seriously and a systematic effort continues to address the challenges that still remain.

One important recommendation was the need for COL to be more focused in its work. In this spirit, the 2009-2012 TYP has only two programme sectors, *Education* and *Livelihoods & Health* instead of the three sectors through which COL operates in the current plan period. Moreover there will be only eight initiatives in 2009-2012 instead of the current 15, and three cross-cutting themes: quality; gender equality and the use of appropriate technologies. The Education sector will deal primarily but not exclusively with formal education institutions. The Livelihoods & Health sector will work to promote non-formal education and training but this does not preclude the possibility of linkages with formal institutions, where appropriate.

The 2009 Evaluation has measured COL's achievements against the 15 corporate performance targets set in the 2006-2009 TYP. Eight of these targets have been exceeded; one has been met and six have been partially met. The evaluator points out that this is *“not necessarily a good guide to its overall performance. In several cases the targets were either unrealistically ambitious or insufficiently challenging”*. Board members agreed that such quantitative assessments do not adequately capture either the complexity of COL's work or the extent of its achievements.

The targets related both to outputs (what COL does) and to outcomes (what others will do as a result of COL's interventions). The outcomes have a longer gestation period and often overlap from one TYP to the next. In the 2009-2012 Logic Model, we have identified only outcome-level targets – the outputs will be elaborated in the Log Frames at the initiative/activity level.

The 2009 Evaluation report lists 12 recommendations. These will serve as an important checklist for implementing the new plan over the next three years. Some of the areas that we will prioritise are:

- Ensuring the scalability and sustainability of our interventions by developing replicable models;

- Investing in innovations using technology to reach the unreached with quality programmes; and
- Rigorous needs-analysis and data capture for effective monitoring and evaluation.

4. Stakeholder Relations

4.1 Member Governments' Support

This quarter, we received contributions from Canada, Kenya, Nauru, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tuvalu and the United Kingdom. Nauru contributed for the first time making this the first occasion when both the largest (India) and the smallest (Nauru) Commonwealth countries have given financial support of COL! Thirty countries have contributed to-date during this fiscal year (ending 30 June). At this time last year we had received contributions from 33 countries. Reminders were sent out in the first week of February and there will be further follow-up.

I am pleased to say that Antigua & Barbuda and Lesotho have already forwarded their contributions for 2009-2010 which is a nice start towards funding for next year.

4.2 Focal Points Update

In this quarter, the following new Focal Points were nominated:

- Belize – Mr. Christopher Aird, Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education.
- Namibia – Ms. Eva-Liisa Kafidi, Executive Secretary, Namibian Open Learning Network Trust.
- Tonga – Mrs. Siatukimoana Vaea, Principal, Tonga Institute of Higher Education.
- Malta – Ms. Mary Rose DeBono, Service Manager – Projects & Initiatives, Directorate for Educational Services (interim).

4.3 Congratulatory Letters

Congratulatory letters were sent to 13 newly appointed Heads of States, Ministers, High Commissioners and CEOs of partner organisations.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenues

COL has received a total of \$8.8 million in voluntary member government funding since the beginning of the financial year (July 1, 2008). This exceeds the forecast amount

by \$0.4 million, in part due to an arrears payment of \$885,398 from Nigeria that was not included in the forecast. An amount of \$280,000 included in the forecast, representing expected contributions from 11 governments, has not yet been received. COL is hopeful that a good portion of this amount will be received before June 30 and is redoubling its efforts to secure contributions from these governments.

In this quarter, contributions of \$5.4 million were received from the following governments: Canada - \$2.6 million; Kenya - \$52,787; Nauru - \$6,225; Nigeria - \$750,000; Sierra Leone - \$11,480; Sri Lanka - \$37,035; Tuvalu - \$8,905; and the UK - \$1.96 million. All contributions from major donors have now been received for 2008-2009 but due to the depreciation of the British pound against the Canadian dollar less revenue was recognised than forecast from the United Kingdom. This reduction has been partially offset against revenues received in US dollars where the appreciation of the US dollar against the Canadian has translated into higher amounts than anticipated.

COL has deferred revenues received from Antigua & Barbuda and Lesotho totalling \$80,000 intended for 2009-2010.

On additional contributions, COL entered into five new agreements this quarter with international development agencies to provide eLearning services, with the World Bank committing to a three-year contract. Based on estimated figures to March 31, 2009, grants of \$900,000 for programme activities and \$600,000 for eLearning services will be recognised for the nine-month period towards the target of \$3 million set with additional amounts to be recognised in the final quarter based on actual work completed. Activities have been completed against the grant due from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) for VUSSC for this year and activities are ongoing with the grants under contract from UNICEF for Mainstreaming Child Friendly School Models and from the Hewlett Foundation for open education resources and Learning4Content.

Interest income of about \$85,000 was earned in the nine-month period ending March 31 as compared to \$306,010 in the previous year, mainly because of lower interest rates on cash reserves.

5.2 Cash Flow

COL's cash position remains strong despite global economic pressures and fluctuating currencies. COL began the new fiscal year on July 1, 2008 with cash of \$8.8 million, where a portion of this amount was restricted in accordance with the cash reserve policy to protect against any shortfalls in expected revenues (\$1.6 million) and another portion was on hand to meet approximately four months of activity until revenues materialise (\$3 million).

It is estimated that a similar if not higher level of cash will be on hand at year end due to higher revenues than forecast achieved this year. This will help to strengthen COL's position to deal with any downward turns in funding should they occur while ensuring activity levels are maintained. That being said, support from governments has remained

consistent this year and we remain hopeful for the coming year. COL will continue to monitor the health of the banks/financial institutions it uses and limit its exposure to foreign currencies while making prudent financial decisions in the utilisation of its resources.

5.3 Expenditures

At March 31, approximately \$7.7 million is estimated to have been spent or committed of the \$11.9 million budget (March figures in progress). The budget includes \$2.9 million of expenditures related to additional contributions, where a portion of this will not be spent due to lower than targeted levels of revenues received from additional contribution sources. Progress reports on the programme indicate most initiatives are proceeding to schedule and where there have been delays, progress is being chased. Human resource and site and office costs are in accordance with budgeted amounts.

6. Human Resources

6.1 Staff Changes

6.1.1 Arrivals

Dr. K. Balasubramanian joined COL on January 2, 2009 as Education Specialist – Food Security and Environment.

Mr. John Lesperance joined COL on January 2, 2009 as Education Specialist – VUSSC.

Ms. Kari Karlsbjerg joined COL on January 5, 2009 as Programme Assistant.

Ms. Rebecca Kinakin joined COL on January 19, 2009 as Project Manager – Child Friendly Schools.

Ms. Sharmila Gracieuse joined COL on March 2, 2009 on a temporary appointment as Programme Assistant.

6.1.2 Recruitment

Recruitments have begun for the following positions which will become vacant at the end of April and June 2009, respectively:

- Education Specialist – eLearning.
- Education Specialist – Skills Development.

7 Information Technology & Knowledge Management

In this quarter, COL launched its new website based on an industry standard platform called SharePoint from Microsoft. The first phase of this activity gave COL a better platform for its website, but future implementation phases will incorporate further website enhancements and interactivity, an updated COL Intranet and improved means of collaboration with consultants and partners. A separate website has been developed for the VUSSC, using a free software solution: Joomla. This website will be managed by COL until the VUSSC Management Committee feels ready to take it over.

After testing the process of virtualising computer servers at COL last year, the first virtual servers have now been fully deployed. Both the new COL website and the library catalogue system now run on virtualised servers. More will follow during this year. Rather than dedicate particular machines as servers to run specific systems, a virtual server environment links several machines with virtual server assignments. This technique provides much more flexibility and reliability. For example, if one machine goes down, others cover for it.

With free and low-cost systems becoming more available, COL's Boardroom and some workstations have been equipped to handle Skype audio and video calls. COL also subscribes to a web conferencing service called "GoToMeeting" that enables staff to launch some presentations from their offices in Vancouver.

The online backup and recovery system that I referred to last year has been tested. We believe we are now adequately prepared for most events that could disrupt IT services.

The knowledge management system that has served us well for capturing reports of events involving COL staff is now being renewed. We are developing a system that will capture information from the three-year plan, planning Log Frames and all reports, including consultancy reports and those related to travel and meetings. It will allow us to provide customised reports on the available corporate intelligence within COL. The Commonwealth Foundation has expressed interest in reusing the programme code associated with this system for the management of its own knowledge base.

COL's book on copyright for educators and administrators has been completed and is available on our website. It significantly enhances the available knowledge on copyright in open and distance learning.

8. Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF6)

An agreement has been signed with our major partner for PCF6, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The Forum is planned for November 2010 in Kochi (Cochin, Kerala), India.

9. Visitors to COL

Mr. Martin Bean, General Manager, Marketing & Business Development, Education Products Group, Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA – and Vice Chancellor-designate, UK Open University – visited COL on February 13, 2009. I have been invited to lead a COL delegation to Microsoft in April.

10. Publications/Resources

Connections/EdTech News, February 2009, Vol. 14, No. 1 (www.col.org/connections).

The Open Schools Handbook: A resource guide for managers, by Ed Du Vivier, published by COL (www.col.org/OpenSchoolsHandbook).

Introducing Copyright: A plain language guide to copyright in the 21st century, by Julien Hofman, published by COL (www.col.org/IntroducingCopyright).

Open and Distance Learning in a Changing World: Selected speeches of Sir John Daniel and colleagues, 2007-2008 (www.col.org/speeches).

Draft Three-Year Plan, 2009-2012 (www.col.org/typ).

External Evaluation, 2006-2009, by Patrick Spaven (www.col.org/typ).

Video recordings on Respect and Understanding:

1. Five interviews with Professor Amartya Sen.
2. One interview with His Excellency Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary General. Available at (www.cemca.org/civilpaths).

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

*Sir John Daniel
President & Chief Executive Officer
March 31, 2009*