

# Connections



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## Education ministers' agenda features COL

COL is high on the agenda at the 13th triennial Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers to be held at the end of July in Gaborone, Botswana. As requested by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their last meeting, the future of COL's funding base will be discussed at ministerial and senior officials meetings.

COL's Board of Governors will present a formal report along with a three-year plan covering the years 1997-2000. Heads of Government have requested Education ministers to treat this as a pledging meeting for this three-year period, and toward this end, the Board has proposed a three-tiered funding structure, seeking commitments from all 53 member Governments.

The formula would provide a Cdn. \$6.0 million annual core operating budget, which would be augmented by additional project funding and consulting fees.

The three-year plan is embedded in a firm belief that the nations of the Commonwealth expect to continue to receive tangible benefits from COL, with its constant emphasis on improving access to education and training for all peoples, throughout the Commonwealth.

## Canada to adjust foreign-aid priorities

In an interview with Canada's *Globe and Mail* newspaper and published on January 15, 1997, Canada's foreign minister, the Honourable Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, announced that the country's foreign-aid focus would be shifting from large technical projects to what he calls "human-security concerns." As examples, he predicted that new priorities could include training Third World journalists, promoting distance education, beaming development-related radio and television programmes into the world's poorest countries and linking rural organisations and human-rights groups through the Internet.

In response to requests from developing countries, he said, "we're shifting ... from large-scale projects into ones that are more



supportive of environmental issues, children's issues, governance issues—ones that have a direct impact on individuals." "It means projects are much smaller scale and tend to be very much in the realm of soft power projects. They don't have the big ribbon-cutting attachments to them."

The minister also pledged that Canada's foreign-aid budget would not be cut beyond the current plans, which are to be completed by the 1998/99 fiscal year.

All of this is good news for The Commonwealth of Learning. As Canada's new focus fits squarely within the mandate and work of COL, and funding through The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has been maintained despite budget cuts, support from the Canadian Government appears to be on solid ground. This support has been vital to the viability of COL since its inception.

Mr. Axworthy made the comments in New Delhi while on a trade mission to India.

He retained this cabinet portfolio after Canada's June 2 general election.

## Funding update

During the 1996/97 year, ending on June 30, 19 member governments and one provincial government contributed a total of almost Cdn. \$4.0 million to COL's core budget, although this total may not reflect contributions that are intended for this year but received after June 30. From COL's inception in 1989, over 32 countries (of 53 that are members of the Commonwealth) have contributed at least once. A complete schedule of funding received from governments and other agencies is available upon request.

Since the last issue of *Connections*, new or additional contributions have been received from Australia, Canada, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, Malta and the host Province of British Columbia.

## Canadian ministers visit COL

*Canada is pleased to be the host and a significant contributor to The Commonwealth of Learning. This unique institution is at the cutting edge in terms of its capability to help developing countries improve access to quality education through the use of distance education. It is an important example of the ways in which knowledge can be harnessed for development.*

This encouraging statement was issued by the Canadian Minister for International Cooperation following a meeting with staff at COL's Vancouver headquarters on February 5, 1997. The minister, the Honourable Don Boudria, became House Leader after the general election in June while responsibilities for International Cooperation were taken up the Honourable Diane Marleau. The portfolio includes responsibility for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) as well as Canada's participation in la Francophonie.

A similarly encouraging visit took place on March 24, when COL had the honour of hosting a visit by the Honourable Dr. Hedy Fry, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women and Member of Parliament for Vancouver Centre, Canada.

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# COL in Action

## Laboratory technician training

Recognising the importance of well-run and maintained school laboratories in the provision of quality science education, Commonwealth Education Ministers have acknowledged the necessity of well-trained laboratory technicians and asked the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec) to assist member states in this area. After a review, ComSec, in consultation with The Commonwealth of Learning, concluded that the most efficient method of providing quality laboratory technician training to a large number of learners would be through distance education.

Toward this goal, COL and ComSec jointly sponsored, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA), a November 1996 workshop for participants from polytechnics and universities in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The purposes of the workshop were to introduce the participants to, and give them an opportunity to review, existing distance education materials developed to train laboratory technicians for which COL has acquired the licensing rights; to train the participants in issues relating to distance education; and to develop draft syllabuses outlining the required curriculum content for a training programme of this nature. Dr. S. Kannan, from India's Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), attended the workshop and provided expertise and advice relating to the delivery of science courses by distance.

As a follow up, a second workshop, again supported by ComSec and COL, and in collaboration with CAPA, was convened in order to finalise the syllabuses. During this workshop, participants were given hands-on training in adapting and modifying the learning materials for use in Africa and at writing and developing new modules, which were identified in the finalised syllabuses. The training of key personnel is an essential part of capacity-building in participating institutions toward delivering sustainable programmes through the distance mode.

This second workshop was held in Kenya in April 1997, and staff from polytechnics and universities in the four African countries initially involved in the project attended. As in the earlier workshop, a staff member from IGNOU, Professor B. S. Saraswat, attended as a resource person, providing advice and guidance, as well as assistance in the training of the participants in various aspects and issues relating to distance education.

CAPA has accepted a COL/ComSec contract to prepare the new training modules, which should be ready for field testing by early next year.



COL, ComSec, CAPA workshop on laboratory technician training. Kenya; April 1997

## Support for WETV

As one of the founding partners in WETV in its development over the past three years, COL continues to support the growing initiative. WETV and its affiliate broadcasters offer television viewers public affairs, non-formal education and entertainment programming which chronicles world development and celebrates cultural diversity. The network launched programming in October 1996 in English and Spanish. Its programmes are now seen on 32 networks with a combined potential reach of 145 million viewers.

WETV has a unique organisational structure combining not-for-profit and for-profit elements. WETV Development Corporation operates the network and associated multimedia ventures, while the Canadian-registered WETV Foundation receives funds from national governments, international organisations and charitable trusts and oversees editorial policy and content. Earlier this year, at the Foundation's founding meeting, COL President, Dato' Dr. Gajaraj Dhanarajan, was elected to the Board of Directors.

## CEMCA workshops

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) is continuing to provide a series of participant-paid training workshops for associated institutions in India and South Asia. Recent workshops included *Script-writing for Educational Television*, for staff of the National Open School, and *Educational Applications of Multimedia*, offered in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Mass Communication. The latter was attended by 26 participants, the highest number in a CEMCA workshop so far, from various open and agricultural universities, distance learning institutes, Doordarshan (the Government of India's television broadcasting authority) and NGOs. A wide range of experts provided presentations and workshop leadership.

In both cases, participants left the five-day sessions reporting that it had been a valuable training experience and one that should be repeated and expanded upon.

## COL in Southern Africa

Resulting in part from a visit by COL's President to Southern and Eastern Africa earlier this year, *National Forums on Distance Education* will be held in Tanzania (July 22-24) and Malawi (August 18-20). The forums will be attended by providers of distance education as well as stakeholders, including education ministries. The meetings, sponsored and facilitated by COL, will review the development of distance education and draw up plans of activities toward the establishment of national policies on distance education. Professor Peter Kinyanjui and COL's Regional Adviser to the President, Professor Geoffrey Mmari, will participate as resource persons at both meetings.

The Zimbabwe National Association for Distance Education was launched earlier this month in Harare. Professor Mmari represented COL at the launching conference and delivered a message on behalf of the President of COL. The association came about as a result of COL's encouragement and support.

Six Southern African Ministers of Education have now welcomed and endorsed a COL proposal that addresses the in-service training of teachers, aiming to make them effective in science, mathematics and technology at the upper primary and lower secondary levels. Under the proposal, training materials will be developed which will draw on both local and international sources. The process will result in a package of modular materials that will be made available for use and adaptation in other countries. While consortium, multilateral and bilateral funding is being aggressively pursued, COL has allocated a Cdn. \$150,000 contribution towards first-year implementation as a part of its 1997/98 budget proposals. The project was also recently endorsed at *Global Knowledge '97*, through the World Bank's Colloquium on Distance Education for Teacher Development.

## People

Professor Ram G. Takwale, Vice-Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (India) has accepted the role of Regional Adviser to the President to help represent COL throughout South Asia. In partnership with key institutions in Commonwealth regions, distinguished staff members or associates have been designated to take on additional responsibilities on COL's behalf.

Trinidad & Tobago has appointed a Minister of State, Dr. Rupert Griffith, with special responsibility for distance education.

On June 30, COL said a sad farewell to three senior staff members who have been associated with the agency for several years. Mr. Peter McMechan, Dr. Ian Mugridge, and Mr. John Steward have all had a major impact on the development of COL, consistently providing valuable professional and personal contributions. On the same date, Ms. Mavis Bird, took a one-year leave-of-absence, although it is expected that she will be able to provide some consultative services over the year, representing COL in her area of specific expertise, technical/vocational education and training.

Dr. Rovin Deodat, Technical Adviser on Communications, Office of the President of Guyana, has been asked to act as technical adviser to the Ministry of Education in order to expand and improve the use of distance education in Guyana. Dr. Deodat did his Ph.D. at Simon Fraser University and much of his dissertation dealt with the genesis of COL starting with the Nassau declaration in 1985 and tracing its growth, development and operations to 1994.

Dr. Krishna Alluri joined COL in January 1997 on an attachment as a Visiting Fellow. First working in India, he has been involved in agricultural research, training and development for almost 30 years. He has been associated with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Environment Programme. He was an employee of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Philippines and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, two of the 16 international agricultural research centres supported by the CGIAR. Before joining COL, he was the IRRI Liaison Scientist for Africa and Co-ordinator of the International Network for Genetic Evaluation of Rice in Africa. Through his simultaneous association with COL and the Centre for Distance Education of the Simon Fraser University, his aim is to contribute towards poverty alleviation by empowering the rural poor through the extension of improved agricultural technologies. He is working with COL and the CGIAR centres in developing projects to train research and extension workers in Asia and Africa.

Patrick Guiton, Director of Academic Services at Murdoch University (Western Australia), will be at COL from July to September this year as part of an outside

studies programme through his university. From 1991 to 1994, Mr. Guiton worked at COL as Senior Programme Officer responsible for the establishment of programmes in continuing professional education. During this current stay he will take a fresh look at several COL projects, at the invitation of the President, as well as undertake personal research on the changing nature of distance higher education.

The cause of world development through mass education has lost one of its foremost leaders. Professor Don Swift died suddenly in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 20 January 1997. A former Pro-Vice Chancellor of the UK Open University, founding Principal of the Open College of the University of East Asia (now the University of Macao) and founding Director of the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong (now the Open University of Hong Kong), he had been working with the South African Institute for Distance Education assisting in the transformation of the national education system to meet the needs of the new South Africa. His teaching, research and writings had an impact on many government policy initiatives on educational access. Professor Swift was remembered by Dato' Dr. Gajaraj Dhanarajan in the Volume 1, 1997 edition of ICDE's *Open Praxis*: "Had it not been for Don and his persistence, Hong Kong may not have seen open and distance education come into being at all ... Don Swift's sudden death has deprived many of us an inspiring leader, a wonderful mentor, a great friend and, most of all, a decent human being. He will be missed."

## Correction

In some editions of the April 1997 *Connections*, former Zambian Minister of Science, Technology and Vocational Training, Dr. Kabunda Koyongo, was incorrectly identified as the Kenyan Minister. COL apologises for this error and any inconvenience that it may have caused.

## Events

### Caribbean education ministers adopt regional plan

COL Regional Adviser, Dr. Dennis Irvine, represented the agency at a special meeting of the Standing Committee of Ministers Responsible for Education in the Caribbean, held in Barbados in May 1997. The meeting was convened for the special purpose of examining the human resource development imperatives of the English-speaking Caribbean. Participants adopted, and agreed to recommend to Heads of Government for approval and immediate implementation, a regional action plan entitled, *Creative and Productive Citizens for the Twenty-First Century*. Distance education, open schooling and COL all feature prominently in the action plan.

The ministers also noted that some member states had not yet pledged their contributions to COL's 1997-2000 operating budget and agreed that ministers should renew their commitments in this regard at the upcoming Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers.

## Caribbean CEOs

Also in Barbados in May, COL convened a three-day meeting of Chief Education Officers from the English-speaking Caribbean region. The purposes of the meeting were:

- to provide an overview of distance education activities and initiatives currently being carried out in the region,
  - to discuss and review a number of proposals for the use of distance education in the region in order to acquire the CEOs' feedback and endorsement,
  - to discuss the establishment of a distance education professional association for the Caribbean, and
  - to receive advice and guidance from the CEOs as to areas in which they would like to see initiatives and projects launched through COL.
- Participants identified several projects and initiatives for follow-up action by COL.

## Canadian "stakeholders"

The Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), in collaboration with The Commonwealth of Learning, hosted a meeting for Canadian "stakeholders in communication technologies and distance education" (Ottawa; June 9, 1997). The primary purpose of the meeting was to provide information about COL and its activities in the field, in order that the participants could acquire a clear idea of areas in which collaboration with COL may be possible. Thirty-five senior level representatives from various organisations, companies and agencies attended the meeting and contributed to useful discussions regarding areas of mutual interest and professional involvement. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Piers Stainforth of DFAIT and Dr. Abdul Khan of COL. Dr. Khan and Ms. Susan Phillips made presentations on COL's work.

## Global Knowledge '97

Over 2000 delegates attended *Global Knowledge '97*, held last month in Toronto, Canada—almost twice the number that organisers had originally expected. And several others participated without travelling, through computer- and video-conferencing sessions.

*GK '97* and the activities that preceded and follow it launch a global learning process about the state of knowledge and its use for development in the information age. It also signals a new partnership and spirit of co-operation between public and private sectors and among a diverse and large number of development agencies, non-governmental organisations, and government departments.

COL was one of more than forty public and private sponsors that joined the World Bank and the Government of Canada in hosting the conference and was instrumental in guiding and presenting one of the conference themes: *Life-long learning and distance education*.

*Global Knowledge '97* will continue through computer-conferencing for at least a year. Further information and participation is available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.globalknowledge.org>

## Reddy Memorial Lecture

The 2nd Professor G. Ram Reddy Memorial Lecture was held on July 2, 1997, televised in India, and made available to television and educational broadcasters throughout the world via satellite. Dr. Wichit Srisa-an, Rector, Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand spoke under the title, "Making Distance Education Borderless." An opportunity for live interaction with the speaker was also available through telephone or fax.

The event is jointly sponsored by the Indira Gandhi National Open University and COL in memory of the late Professor Ram Reddy, who was the first Vice-Chancellor of IGNOU and first Vice-President of COL.

## Canada and the Pacific World

*Canada and the Pacific World: Imperatives for International Education*, the Canadian Bureau for International Education's (CBIE) 1997 Annual Conference, will be held this year in co-operation with The Commonwealth of Learning and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (Ottawa; November 6-8). The conference will focus on co-operation among Asia Pacific countries in education, culture, youth exchanges and business partnerships—and has been designated by the Government of Canada as an event of Canada's Year of Asia Pacific. Canada is serving as chair of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) forum this year.

Workshops and plenary sessions will cover the following broad themes:

- education as an instrument in forging business and political relations between nations,
- the influence of culture in international relationships and business, and
- communications technology in the advancement of learning

COL President, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, will be one of several keynote speakers, a roster that includes officials, educators and youth from Canada and APEC countries.

Canadians from colleges, universities, schools and governments, with an interest in international education, will join visitors from Asia Pacific countries to participate in the two-day conference, plus pre-conference workshops, rounded off with social events and networking opportunities.

Contact: CBIE, 220 Laurier Ave W., Suite 1100, Ottawa, ON K1P 5Z9, Canada; Tel: 613.237.4820; Fax: 613.237.1073; E-mail: [mkane@cbie.ca](mailto:mkane@cbie.ca); WWW: <http://www.cbie.ca>

## AAOU 1997

The Asian Association of Open Universities will hold its 11th Annual Conference and Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur from November 10 - 13, 1997. The theme for this year's conference is *Quality Assurance in Distance and Open Learning*. COL's newly published volume of case studies on quality assurance in higher education will be featured at a COL pre-conference workshop. COL's President, Dato' Dr. Gajaraj Dhanarajan, will

also be delivering one of the two keynote presentations at the conference. Contact: 11th AAOU Conference Secretariat, c/o Mara Institute of Technology, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. Fax: 60.3.550.0226; E-mail: [norimah@psmb.itm.edu.my](mailto:norimah@psmb.itm.edu.my)

## Now available

*Library Services to Distance Learners in the Commonwealth*. Edited by Elizabeth Watson and Neela Jagannathan, 1997. While distance education is an effective and versatile means of addressing the problems of human resource development in the Commonwealth, an important concern is adequate and appropriate services to support distance students.

There is a growing recognition that the provision of good library services is a crucial factor in determining the quality of distance education. The purpose of this collection of 22 articles is to acquaint readers with distance librarianship as it is practised throughout the Commonwealth. Case studies cover institutions in both developed and developing countries located in Africa, Australia, Britain, Canada, the Caribbean, India and New Zealand. All of the contributors are distance education/librarianship practitioners. The book will be of value to distance librarians, educators, administrators and planners as well as to library school students. (247 pages)

*Perspectives on Distance Education: Quality assurance in higher education—selected case studies*. Edited by Alan Tait, 1997. This publication marks the first collection to emerge from the work of the COL/ICDE quality assurance research group, chaired jointly by Jocelyn Calvert (Deakin University) and Alan Tait (UK Open University). It consists of a set of case studies of quality assurance practices in distance teaching universities, along with an introductory chapter by the editor. These case studies represent a significant addition to existing work in the field, particularly at a time when universities in many parts of the world and distance teaching universities, both new and established, are placing great emphasis on reviewing and, where necessary, revising what they do in accordance with established practices and principles of quality assurance. (88 pages)

Requests for COL publications may be sent directly to: COL Customer Service, c/o the Open Learning Agency of BC, 4355 Mathissi Place, Burnaby BC V5G 4S8 Canada; tel: 604.431.3210; fax: 604.431.3381; e-mail: [catalogue@ola.bc.ca](mailto:catalogue@ola.bc.ca). Nominal charges apply to orders from *developed, newly developed and non-Commonwealth countries*—usually Cdn.\$12.00 plus shipping. Orders must be accompanied by an institutional purchase order, be pre-paid in either Canadian or US funds, or charged to VISA or MasterCard accounts.

Limited copies of the following publications are available *free-of-charge*, although shipping and handling charges will only be waived for requests from institutions in developing Commonwealth countries:

*Economics of Distance Education: Recent Experiences*. Edited by G. Dhanarajan, P.K. Ip, K.S. Yuen and C. Swales, 1994 (Open Learning Institute Press, Hong Kong). This book comprises a selection of papers originally presented at the Seventh Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities. The papers cover a wide range of geographical locations, institutions and operational models. Comparisons between traditional and distance education delivery methods are included along with discussions covering the costs and benefits of different course production methods, media presentations and services to students. Provided through the courtesy of the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong and the Asian Development Bank. (Hard cover, 280 pages)

*Learning from Each Other: Commonwealth Studies for the 21st Century—Report of the Commission on Commonwealth Studies*. Chairman: Professor Thomas H.B. Symons (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1996). This report was highlighted in a previous issue of *Connections* ("Commonwealth studies need support," September 1996) The potential role of both distance education and The Commonwealth of Learning were viewed positively by the Commission. Provided through the courtesy of the Commonwealth Secretariat. (59 pages)

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Chairman:  
Dr. H. Ian Macdonald  
York University, Canada

President & CEO:  
Dr. Gajaraj Dhanarajan

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The Commonwealth of Learning  
1285 West Broadway, Suite 600  
Vancouver, BC V6H 3X8  
Canada

Tel: 604.775.8200  
Fax: 604.775.8210  
Telex: 04507508 COMLEARN  
E-mail: [info@col.org](mailto:info@col.org)  
World Wide Web: <http://www.col.org>

*Connections* is edited by  
Mr. Dave Wilson.