

COMLEARN

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Quality through distance



trained teachers, more adequate supplies of teaching and learning resources, improved infrastructure and related factors have all been identified as necessary in the search for qualitative improvements in education. Each of these has further financial implications for countries in which education already takes a significant part of the national resources. Efforts must continue in each dimension but realism suggests that progress will be slow unless truly imaginative and creative ways can be found to address the already well documented problems.

Against this background distance education and the approaches and techniques with which it is associated merit close consideration. It is not a panacea. It is not even an alternative but wisely used, and integrated into overall systems, it can contribute significantly to better training for large numbers of teachers and to making available teaching and learning resources - better tools with which to tackle the formidable challenges. Its potential in increasing access has already been acknowledged. Now we need to explore its potential in the search for quality and more importantly to ensure that that potential is realised.

Can distance education contribute to the general improvement of education?

The Commonwealth of Learning believes that this is one of the main functions of distance education, a function which deserves greater recognition.

Many countries turn to distance education because they want to increase access to education. They want more education for less cost. They may not realise that they are also getting good education. Indeed, many people still believe that distance education is second best. It is time to erase the stigma of inferiority and acknowledge the quality of distance education.

It would be foolish to claim that all distance education is of superior quality. But let us recognise the potential. The curriculum and the course materials can be developed by the best teachers. The materials, especially the broadcasts, are publicly visible, in a way that

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In search of quality

This edition of COMLEARN coincides with the Eleventh triennial Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers. On this occasion the principal theme concerns Quality in Education.

Great gains have clearly been made in increasing access to schooling almost everywhere although some of these gains have been subsequently eroded by population growth. Increased access to some levels of education have also created greater pressure for places at higher levels and much attention has been given to expanding such opportunities. In the process high quality has not always been maintained. Smaller classes, better

no class teacher is, and must be of a quality that stands up to scrutiny. In addition, every learner gets the same package of materials - print, audio and video - and therefore gets teaching of the same standard, while students in school or university depend on the quality of their own teachers.

The question of what constitutes quality in education is a complex one. In distance education, as in conventional education, performance indicators such as examination passes and completion rates are often used as measures. While distance students often achieve high marks compared with their peers in formal education,

Good distance courses attract students, poor ones lose them - the survival of the fittest.

completion rates may be disappointing as the predominantly part-time students of distance education have different study needs and patterns from full-timers.

In distance education, it is also possible to examine the teaching in a way that is unusual in conventional education. Class teachers are seldom subjected to the kind of public appraisal that course materials receive. Distance learners are often asked to evaluate the materials they learn from. Less formally, market forces tell a lot. Good distance courses attract students, poor ones lose them - the survival of the fittest.

It is sometimes asserted that distance education is second rate, that it addresses questions of quantity at the expense of quality. In some cases, sadly, this assertion is true; poor quality, under-resourced distance education is supported by governments to stave off complaints about inadequacies of national education. In an increasing number of countries, however, distance education is making an important contribution to national education systems, and is proving itself of no less quality than conventional offerings.

In primary education, the most important contribution of distance education lies in training teachers, whether unqualified or underqualified. In Tanzania, for example, where almost 38,000 teachers completed distance-based training between 1976 and 1984, studies have indicated that the distance trained teachers are as good as and sometimes better than their conventionally trained peers.

At secondary level, children are mature enough to learn using distance methods. In Zimbabwe, where primary completion has outpaced secondary expansion, thousands of children complete their secondary education in study groups using correspondence materials, and pass the same examinations as their peers in formal schools.

At the tertiary level, the main potential of distance education is the democratisation of higher education through open learning. In Commonwealth countries, it takes place both in autonomous institutions - known as Open Universities - and in dual mode institutions that run distance programmes parallel with conventionally taught ones.

In countries where distance education is well established, degrees gained through distance study are given equal recognition to those gained conventionally. But it is not just distance students who benefit from distance education, it is a tribute to its quality that conventional students, and their teachers, seek out and use the teaching materials. Good distance education has an immediate ripple effect. Within a few months of the Indira Gandhi National Open University launching its courses

in management, the video programmes were selling like hot cakes to various colleges in India. In Britain, ordinary bookshops stock Open University course units alongside popular paperbacks. In Kenya, university lecturers and students try to obtain from the Faculty of External Studies copies of B Ed correspondence texts. It is remarkable how quickly good news about materials spreads, and an incontrovertible indicator of quality.

Once again, it is the quality of materials that counts. Distance education can only be of high quality if the materials are good (though we acknowledge that the quality of materials is necessary but not sufficient to ensure quality of education). And good quality materials can have an impact that reaches far beyond the confines of a distance education programme.

That is why The Commonwealth of Learning places such importance on materials. We know that many good materials exist, and we believe that if these materials can be made more widely available, the effects will be dramatic. A central platform of our programme is the development of a database of courses, so that any bona fide institution can get information on what is available in a particular subject. COL is also ready to help institutions to obtain, adapt and use the materials they select. As the use of good materials spreads, we can expect the impact of distance education to become more visible.

"We are going to see to it that from the point of view of quality, this education is as good as we can make it . . . We will expect this system to survive on the basis of its credibility and its ability to establish quality." These words were spoken in August 1985 by the then Indian Minister of Education, Mr. K.C. Pant, in the closing moments of the debate in Parliament which led to the establishment of the Indira Gandhi National Open University. These words will also find an echo in COL, and through us, should resonate throughout the Commonwealth.

Improving quality in the management of education

Consultations undertaken by The Commonwealth of Learning have repeatedly indicated the need for distance education programmes to cater for the continuing professional education of several groups, including lawyers, health service workers, surveyors, and managers, among many others. A recent meeting in Vancouver, involving senior representatives of over twenty distance teaching institutions in the Commonwealth, noted, however, the importance of continuing professional education for those involved in education itself. The group emphasised the critical importance of continuing professional education for teachers, meriting special attention in any country. The group also noted that for many countries this will be a first priority.

But while the professional development of teachers often concentrates on training or retraining people to be effective in the classroom, another dimension of professional development is essential to any plans for improving the quality of the educational service. School and post-school institutions use significant amounts of the national budget, but the front-line managers of these resources are usually not trained in management skills.

Over the last two decades there has been a staggering growth in the number of management programmes offered for business and industry; the MBA has become a recognised management tool. Increasingly, too, institutions have begun to offer certificate, diploma, or MBA programmes through distance education. For most

Good distance education has a ripple effect



people assuming a managerial role, or preparing for one, it makes good sense to be able to acquire new skills without taking time out to attend a series of in-service courses, let alone college. Moreover, distance education courses allow an integration between work and study.

Recent developments in many countries have recognised the need for a similar training pattern which reflects specific work environments, including management for those managing and administering educational establishments. A well-known commercial institution markets a course which addresses this need directly, and does so utilising distance education techniques.

Most Commonwealth countries have yet to implement the managerial training patterns implied by such initiatives, although several countries recognise that there are benefits to be gained from training school principals, and there are several examples of either in-service training, or university post-graduate education oriented towards these ends.

Quality in education depends upon the efficient delivery of the product. The process depends, ultimately, on the quality of the service offered by the local school or institution. Collectively, these institutions, ranging from the small rural school to the metropolitan university, consume vast quantities of resources.

It is difficult to imagine how high quality can be achieved in national education systems without a concerted effort being made to strengthen the management capability of such systems. In this regard, distance education has a distinctive role.



Improving Quality through Materials

Whatever else distance education has done it has undoubtedly highlighted the critical importance of good teaching-learning materials to the quality of education. The constraints imposed by distance and by studying in isolation have resulted in the development of courses whose content, structure and presentation have been designed to guide, encourage and motivate individual study. Adopting the view that the effectiveness of instruction is likely to be influenced more by the quality of the instructional message than by the particular characteristics of the instructional medium, not excluding the human medium at that, an important principle followed by distance educators in the area of

course design has been the focus on clarity of thought and language. In distance education a basic philosophy of course design is that students must know precisely what they are expected to achieve, how they can attain these objectives, and exactly when this will be required of them. Above all, there is a clear realisation that the subject content has to be presented lucidly, and in a way that makes it easy for people to assimilate.

The success which distance education materials has had in raising quality of individual study has not gone unnoticed by teachers and students alike engaged in conventional face-to-face education, and an observ-

...use of distance teaching materials...can have the effect of narrowing the gap between the haves and have-nots.

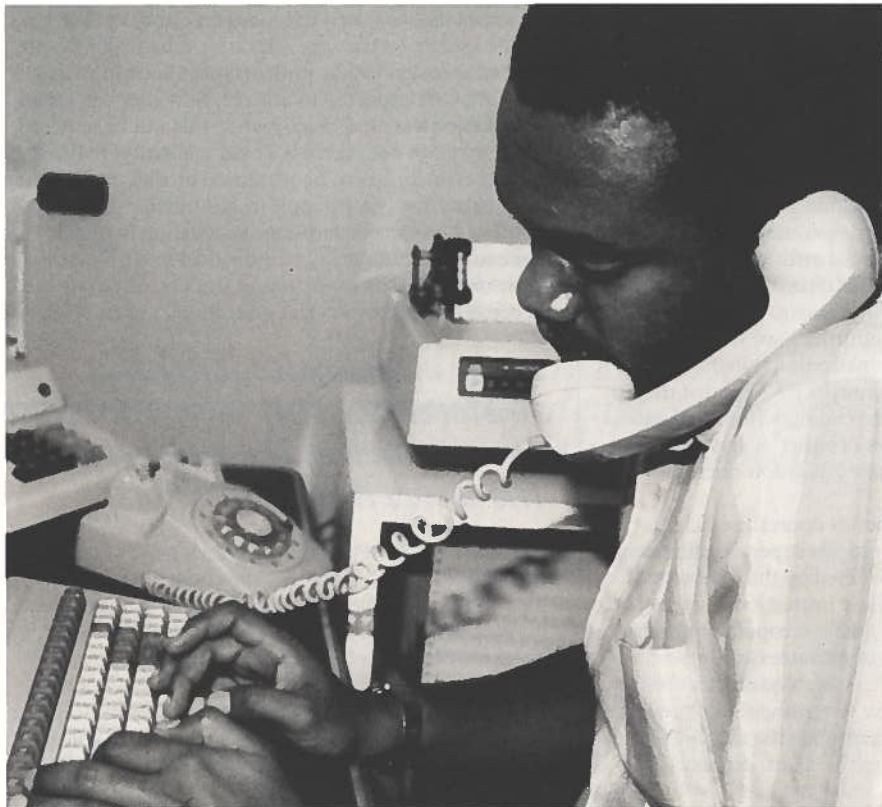
able trend in recent times is the growing use of distance teaching materials within the conventional system. Further, distance teaching materials, in so far as they are in a position to "offer the services" of a specialised teacher, are being increasingly seen as a means of redressing inequity and of equalising educational opportunity. For example, in many instances it is just not materially possible to implement the same programmes in a rural school or college as in their urban equivalents, and use of distance teaching materials in such situations can have the desired effect of narrowing the gap between haves and have-nots.

Provided the student population to be served has reached a sufficient level of maturity and literacy, carefully designed print materials, which can create the necessary learning experiences in an appropriate and orderly sequence, offer a widely applicable teaching-learning resource that can be accessed at a pace suitable to each individual student. The significance of this to the formal system, where the problem of different learning abilities in a single classroom remains a serious issue, should not be overlooked. At the same time, and this is also a conclusion emerging out of the experiences of distance education, audiovisual media can play a significant role in enhancing learning in subject areas. The view that from a student perspective there is some virtue in using a variety of instructional media has in its turn led to the production of a range of audiovisual materials that are applicable to different audiences in different geographical and cultural contexts.

One of the great strengths of distance education in general and of print-based materials in particular, is the fact of being able to call upon the services of experts wherever they can be located. This means that once a course is developed it is more than likely to have encapsulated the latest developments in the field, as interpreted and articulated by the experts themselves. The materials thus offer, albeit indirectly, some of the best attributes of team teaching.

The need for appropriate materials of quality to serve the needs of both pupil and teacher at all levels is a reality that is recognised in many countries, and access to good, relevant teaching-learning materials has become one of the recurrent items on the educational agenda of many countries. In proposing the establishment of The Commonwealth of Learning, the Expert Group on Commonwealth Co-operation in Distance Education attached the greatest importance to cooperation in the production and sharing of essential educational materials. They saw both the exchange of existing materials, and the cooperative development of new materials, as necessary to realise significant economies of scale and to yield particular benefits for new institutions and small states.

Quality in education depends upon the efficient delivery of the product



Among the many functions and objectives designated for it in the Memorandum of Understanding governing its establishment, The Commonwealth of Learning has singled out for special attention that of "assisting the acquisition and delivery of teaching materials and more generally facilitating access to them". It has done so in the firm belief that of the many factors which contribute to the improvement of the quality of education, good teaching materials offer one of the quickest and most cost-effective. In order to discharge this function, The Commonwealth of Learning has been busily engaged since its inception in seeking out information and, where appropriate, samples of courses and programme materials available at educational and other institutions in Commonwealth countries. COL has also collaborated with a number of institutions to ensure that course materials are obtained at an affordable price and distributed in response to requests to educational institutions within the Commonwealth.

In seeking to access educational materials, particularly for distance education, countries have three options. They can develop their own; they can take existing materials developed elsewhere which closely approximate their needs and adapt them to their own particular requirements; or they can simply acquire and use materials developed elsewhere without modification, where considerations of cultural appropriateness do not apply. This last is true of some subject areas of universal significance, notably the sciences, technology and to some extent English, the very subjects constituting the essential foundation of good basic education.

To assist countries in developing their own materials, or to adapt available materials to their own needs and specification, The Commonwealth of Learning has embarked on a series of programmes in different regions of the Commonwealth to train course writers and editors. Institutions are also being provided with the appropriate equipment and trained in the necessary techniques of desktop publishing so as to facilitate the inexpensive production of instructional materials.

Although, in keeping with its mandate, the main thrust of COL's activities is in distance education, the organisation is fully aware of the fact that distance education has much to offer to formal education, both in rendering back-up service in particular areas and also in providing the benefit of techniques developed with specific regard to the individual learner. Materials produced for distance education can add greatly to the teaching-learning process in the formal system, something that countries could well exploit much more to their advantage. Self-study modules are the bread and butter of distance education programmes, but they can also be used to replace or complement conventional face-to-face courses. Certain parts of the curriculum lend themselves to translation into distance learning format, and it may often be possible to adapt existing published materials for this purpose.

It has been suggested that with the growth of experience among lecturers/teachers in the writing of distance teaching materials, there is an increasing case for producers to facilitate the distribution of these materials. The argument put forward is that if there were a wider choice of materials available in the same skill or subject area it could only redound to the benefit of the end users. A valuable service to education would be rendered, so the argument continues, by seeking out these materials, selecting the most useful among them, and finding ways of making them available to users to complement, perhaps their own specially commissioned materials. There is clearly a case for closer examination of some of the more innovative approaches to the sharing of materials.

There is little doubt that materials produced for a distance learning context have the capacity to contribute significantly to improving the teaching/learning process on a much wider scale in the education system generally. Accordingly far more attention needs to be paid to this aspect of the matter in the general debate about mechanisms and strategies to improve educational quality.

Calendar

Preparations are fully underway for the following meetings in which COL is involved:

Meeting of Ministers concerned with Women's Affairs
Ottawa, October 8 - 12

Meeting of Board of Governors
Barbados, October 24 - 26

Commonwealth Broadcasting Association General Conference
Cyprus, October 28 - November 3

Meeting of Education Ministers
Barbados, October 29 - November 3

Meeting of Ministers of Science & Technology
Malta, November 15 - 19

Technical and Vocational Conference/Mart
Hong Kong, November 19 - 24

Telecommunications and technology strategy for The Commonwealth of Learning

The Memorandum of Understanding establishing The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) emphasises the importance of telecommunications and technology in expanding and improving the quality of Commonwealth human resource development. Distance educators are dependent upon effective means of communications not only for teaching and supporting students remotely, but also for the effective administration of their geographically-dispersed institutions.

The ingenuity and resourcefulness of educators is such that at least several examples of almost every type of information technology can be found in various locations throughout the Commonwealth. The Universities of the South Pacific and of the West Indies employ satellite-derived telecommunications systems as a fundamental part of their programmes across hundreds of miles of oceans. Educational broadcasting is commonly used for teaching purposes in countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom. Video and audio tapes are integral components of distance education course materials in India and many other of the Commonwealth nations. Word processing and desktop publishing are directly integrated with printing presses in Nigeria to produce large quantities of teaching materials.

Despite these many achievements, the vast majority of Commonwealth educators are not enjoying the gains in productivity and effectiveness made possible by the rapid technological advances that have characterised the last half of the twentieth century. They are particularly not realising improvements in the quality of education that can be had for example, through supporting and tutoring students through teleconferencing, or by having immediate access to the largest publications by means of computer database systems. Scarce resources and limited domestic infrastructure often make it difficult for many Commonwealth countries to take advantage of modern technology, even though it offers a vital way of achieving their essential educational goals and priorities.

For these reasons, COL has developed as a priority a programme for assisting member nations in helping their educational institutions benefit from information technology. In the area of educational telecommunications, COL will endeavour to assist with extending the reach and capabilities of existing networks, while also supporting projects which will not only be of immediate educational benefit, but will also make progress towards establishing the types of communications facilities that educators require over the longer term. With regard to educational broadcasting, COL will assist educators in accessing existing public broadcasting facilities, and in obtaining access to educational broadcast programming. In the case of other technologies, such as computers and audio-visual systems, COL will seek to improve the awareness of Commonwealth educators about the developing applications of informatics so that they will be better positioned to decide for themselves how they might best use the resources they have available to meet the educational imperatives of greater access and higher quality.

Despite its significant potential as a tool for improving the quality and reach of education, technology should not be considered as a "cure all". It would equally be a mistake to become preoccupied with "high tech" or with implementing technology as an end in itself. The aim of COL and all Commonwealth educators, should be the appropriate use of informatics, assessing technological investments in terms of other educational priorities and the potential for success. Any other approach would result in the presence of educational technology being as much a problem as its absence.

A degree of technological awareness and sophistication is a crucial element in making appropriate informatics decisions. Therefore, starting with this issue of COMLEARN under the heading of "EDTECH REPORT", COL will offer as a regular feature a forum for Commonwealth educators to tell each other about their telecommunications and technology activities. Hopefully, this regular feature will contribute towards Commonwealth educators and students everywhere enjoying the benefits of technological evolution.

Technology in Distance Education

The most rapidly developing aspect of distance education is probably the application of technology to both teaching and administration. The range of technologies available for use in education continues to expand, and most institutions that use distance education need help to understand whether a particular technology may be useful to them, and how it may be used. Could there, for example, be a role for computer-assisted learning or audio-conferencing in a new distance learning programme? At the same time the more traditional technologies such as broadcasting are often not fully exploited in distance education. Greater awareness of how the technologies may be used well could assist planners and managers.

COL, in collaboration with the Open Learning Agency of British Columbia, is preparing a multi-media training package on the use of technology in distance education. It will help planners and managers to make an appropriate choice of technology for new distance education programmes, and use the technologies selected effectively. The package will consist of a thirty-minute video and an accompanying booklet. The video will demonstrate how technologies can be used, drawing on examples from several Commonwealth countries. The booklet will offer further explanation of the themes introduced in the video. The package can be used on its own, or in the context of a workshop. It will be ready before the end of 1990.

Modern technology offers a vital way of achieving essential education goals and priorities

Edtech Report

Adelaide College compressed video teleconferencing trial moves to regular study option - from February 1990, the Adelaide College of Technical and Higher Education has linked its Barossa Valley Campus to its main Campus in Adelaide with compressed digital television, and has since delivered approximately twenty hours of instruction per week through the system. The courses conducted include Rural Property Planning, Computer Applications, Building Practices, Economics, Office Practices and Business Law. Although the transmission facility is a two megabyte landline circuit provided by Australian Telecom, the system uses only 382 kilobytes and provides excellent video picture quality. In July 1990, the Administrative Centre of the Light College at Gawler, was added to the system, and future extensions are envisaged over the next year.

Indira Gandhi National Open University implements a facsimile network - IGNOU, with the assistance of COL, has installed a network of fax machines to facilitate communications and exchanges with associated distance teaching centres throughout India.

COL fields an educational technology demonstration in Barbados - the use of technology in distance education is the theme of a technology exhibition being planned for BARBADOS at the end of October 1990, coincident with both the Meeting of Commonwealth Education Ministers and COL's Board of Governors. Included in the demonstration will be technologies ranging from desktop publishing for the production of print materials to applications of computer assisted learning.

Guyana posed to implement desktop publishing to speed course materials production - the University of Guyana, with the assistance of COL, will soon take delivery of three IBM compatible microcomputers, complete with laser jet printers, to be used in the production of course materials. The course materials are required for the implementation of a pre-university entrance course and teacher training, representing Guyana's first distance education program.

VITA'S PACSAT communications experiment (PCE) offers potential to demonstrate ways of improving educational communications in developing countries - The Volunteers In Technical Cooperation (VITA) of Arlington, Virginia, working with the University of Surrey, have developed a polar-orbiting satellite packet radio system capable of providing low volume data communications between groundstations costing an estimated \$3,000 to \$5,000 US. COL is exploring with VITA the possibility of using PCE to facilitate exchanges between Nigeria, The Gambia and Sierra Leone on teacher training.

NOTE: Educational technology items for ED-TECH REPORT would be welcomed from Commonwealth educators everywhere. Please forward suggested items to Mr. John Quigley, at COL's Vancouver Headquarters.

COL in action

The Fellowships Programme

The 1990 COL Study Fellowships Programme has just been completed. Ten visiting Fellows from Bangladesh, Barbados, Botswana, India, Nigeria, Malawi, Pakistan, The Gambia, Uganda and Zambia came to British Columbia from September 9 to 29. During this time they visited educational institutions around the Province. Although special emphasis will be placed upon distance education, it is expected that due to the Fellows' wide range of interests, many other aspects of education will also be covered. While the Fellows are in British Columbia, they will be presenting papers on the educational situations in their own countries.

A new element being introduced into the programme concerns the movement of British Columbia's personnel to Commonwealth countries to assist in strengthening distance education programmes. The B.C. Government has doubled its grant to facilitate this component of the Fellowships Programme.

The reactions of some of last year's Fellows indicate how such an experience has been of value. Mr. A. Mkhwanazi, Director of the Division of Extramural Studies at the University of Swaziland, feels that the Fellowship not only exposed him to the "rich Canadian distance education tradition" which "contributed immensely" to his professional growth, but also provided a unique opportunity for an exchange of experiences and ideas with other Fellows.

Ms. S. Kulatunga, of the Educational Technology Centre at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), believes participating in this Programme has directly deepened her faith in distance education and that, since returning, she has been very aware of the important role of counselling. She gained a particularly positive impression of the expertise of Instructional Designer, Kate Seaborne of the University of Victoria, describing the session with her as one which gave her an appreciation of the capabilities of sophisticated new technologies and one that "has contributed positively to improve my capacity to contribute more productively to our programmes at OUSL".

Likewise, Dr. O. Khalid, Assistant Director of the Ministry of Education in Brunei Darussalam, sees the experience of the Fellowship as being extremely worthwhile. He maintains that coming from such a small country, "one can only imagine and translate distance education in the context of (that) environment" and that participating in the Programme widened "the horizon of my understanding of distance learning".

By having this type of exposure, he is now aware of the use of technology in enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning and how through this method, "opportunities" can be provided "to a much broader band of learners, irrespective of age". He also feels that being able to share experiences and the interaction of ideas with the other COL Fellows during the Programme provided a grasp of the complexities of distance education.



These sentiments were also echoed by Ms. C. Marrett from the University of the West Indies Distance Teaching Experiment (UWIDITE) who feels that her time spent on the Programme also enabled her to learn about The Commonwealth of Learning and how it related to her own institution. One of the greatest benefits, she feels, deriving from this experience was the idea to hold a distance education conference in the Caribbean, which was co-hosted by COL and UWIDITE in July this year. The opportunity to attend the COL Fellowship Programme created a situation whereby she could learn about the various projects COL was involved in and "explore, question and interact in a way" that would not have been possible otherwise.

Dr. M.J. Matshazi, Chairman of the Department of Adult Education at the University of Zimbabwe, regards the opportunity to participate in the Fellows Scheme as a great privilege. As a result of this experience he believes that he "learnt a lot about The Commonwealth of Learning and Distance Education provisions at all levels in Canada in general, and British Columbia in particular". A very positive outcome of Dr. Matshazi's involvement in the Scheme are the efforts being undertaken currently to establish a linkage between his own institution and North Western Community College.

Fellows coming from countries with little experience of distance education, are particularly provided with a unique opportunity. Such was the response of Mr. O. Khalid, who not only met "many people in the field of education and technology", but, as a direct result of participating in the programme, also realises that "distance learning can provide opportunities to a much broader band of learners, irrespective of age and with greater time flexibility".

These views, expressed by a number of last years' Fellows, attest to the fact that the Programme is regarded as a positive step in increasing awareness of the educational difficulties facing many of the less-developed countries today. It is also seen as a means of initiating collaborative projects between institutions in British Columbia and those countries.

Such a Programme is jointly sponsored by COL and the Province of British Columbia. This year it has been expanded to include sending personnel from British Columbia to institutions in developing countries, enabling them to discover first-hand the challenge facing educators in these regions.

Consultancy Reports

Ten Consultancy reports have been produced as a result of expert services provided by COL. Seven of these have focused on Africa. Each report emphasised that distance education is a cost-effective way of delivering education to developing, isolated regions. In a country such as Uganda, an urgent need was recognised for the introduction of post-secondary education programmes. Following the consultancy, it was suggested that COL work with Makerere University in developing its distance education programme, by assisting with materials acquisition, and staff training.

Given the University of Mauritius' intention to expand significantly, a consortia of institutions for distance education projects and extensive use of courses already available from other countries, were strongly recommended. In a newly independent country such as Namibia, that has undergone much internal dislocation, distance education was seen as playing a distinctive role. To facilitate this, a recently completed Report recommended the cre-

ation of a single multi-purpose national institute responsible for the development, administration and teaching of all public distance education programmes at pre-university level.

Consultancy services were also provided to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Swaziland on the development of a strategic plan for a distance education programme. A Report on the role of media technology within the proposed Open University of Tanzania, advocated the use of a wide range of media and the development of modern technologies in the preparation and delivery of distance education materials. In Malawi, by using predominantly print-based materials, video and audio tape cassettes, and a network of regional centres, distance learning was seen as a means of expanding some of the University of Malawi's offerings.

Training

A Round Table on Training took place in Vancouver from 2 - 6 April and was attended by twelve training experts and senior staff from every region of the Commonwealth to discuss training needs, priorities and strategies. The workshop report, which includes suggested syllabuses for training in key areas of distance education, is now being published. An action plan has been prepared and is under discussion.

A series of regional training workshops has also been organised. A workshop in course development for Southern Africa took place in Swaziland in July; workshops in course development are also arranged for the Pacific region in September, in Vanuatu, and for South Asia in November, in India; for the Caribbean, a workshop on course adaptation will take place in Barbados in October. Participants at all these workshops will be key resource people who may themselves go on to train others.

COL has begun to collect samples of materials and plans a survey of training resources which will among other things identify further materials. A video showing how distance education can be used for national development through a case study of India is also being planned.

Legal and law-related education and training and Public Administration

COL was represented at a workshop convened by the Commonwealth Legal Education Association in conjunction with the Ninth Commonwealth Law Conference. Agreement has been reached to produce a directory of law and law-related education in the Commonwealth, and work is under way to plan and commission this development. Professor Jack Goldring (Dean of Law, Wollongong University, Australia) is surveying Commonwealth legal jurisdictions concerning attitudes to, and needs for, distance education in law. A pilot project in regional continuing legal education is planned for the Caribbean; and COL has expressed interest in assisting Sierra Leone to develop its new law school.

...The Fellowship Programme exposed the "rich Canadian distance education tradition"

Conferences, meetings, symposia

Health Sciences

Discussions were held with a variety of groups from the fields of medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and medical technology. A pilot project has been identified to enable continuing education packages in Pharmacy, developed in Australia, to be made available in the Eastern Caribbean. Discussions have been held with appropriate Indian institutions to further the work of the Commonwealth Association for Mental Handicap and Developmental Disabilities. A workshop is planned for November, to refine these initial contacts, and identify additional project work.

Resource Management

A staff member from the College of Estate Management, Reading, England, spent some time in Vancouver assisting staff in identifying appropriate areas for Commonwealth activity in the wider aspects of environmental management including surveying, planning, and related fields. Discussions have been held with representatives of the Commonwealth Association for Surveying and Land Economy, and with the Commonwealth Association of Planners.

Support Services: Discussions have been undertaken with the Commonwealth Library Association, the Commonwealth Museums Association, and the Commonwealth Association for Archives and Records, all three of which have an interest in, and some experience of, distance education.



Consultative Group

Consultative Group meeting

COL has been invited to make a submission to the High Level Appraisal Group of Commonwealth leaders considering the Commonwealth in the future. In order to facilitate this exercise, COL was greatly assisted by an expert consultative group drawn from across the Commonwealth. The participants came from the academic, political and technical assistance spheres and served in their personal capacities. The group met at COL Headquarters, Vancouver, from July 2-4 1990.

Executive Heads Meeting

COL brought together in Vancouver from June 11-13 1990, twenty-two of the Executive Heads of the major Commonwealth distance education universities and colleges, to participate in a meeting designed to enhance understanding and cooperation. The meeting focused on workshops on various aspects of distance learning and very interesting discussion papers were produced by each group.

Technical and Vocational Conference/Mart

This will take place in Hong Kong from November 19-24 1990 and will examine the use of distance education techniques in technical and vocational education and training. It is anticipated that arrangements will be put in place for the exchange of materials among the participants.

Environment

Marine Resource Management Training - COL and the International Council of Ocean Development (ICOD) sponsored jointly a meeting held in Vancouver in September 1990. It was intended to build on the initiative of the Malta Symposium on marine resource management.

Sustainable Development - COL has completed the co-production with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) of a video on the environment, titled "Sustainable Development". It highlights how individuals and nations can assist in the process of environmental protection without sacrificing the development option, and draws on examples of innovative practices found in the Commonwealth.

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COMLEARN



Working in the Regions

AFRICA

MALAWI - Consultancy Report on "Distance Education at the University of Malawi" by Dr. Tom Prebble was completed and submitted to COL. It will be discussed by all parties concerned, and the Ministry will advise COL about any further assistance required in implementing any of the recommendations accepted by the University and the Government.

NAMIBIA - Meetings took place between Professor Kinyanjui from COL and the Namibian Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, the Hon. Nahas Angula, on the 6 and 9 July.

The Minister pointed out a number of urgent issues in education and training requiring immediate attention. These include teacher education and training; teaching of English; adult and continuing education; vocational and technical training and professional education and training.

COL has agreed to a formal request by the Ministry for assistance in the establishment of Educational Broadcasting Programmes and in the integration of the Namibia Extension Unit into the National Adult and Non-Formal Education Framework.

SOUTHERN AFRICA - From May 2-3 there was an inaugural Meeting of COL/AIDAB Project Advisory Committee for Southern Africa.

SWAZILAND - A DLA training workshop, held at Emlatini Distance Learning Centre from 25 June to 6 July 1990, was the first major activity under the COL/AIDAB Programme for Southern African Countries.

WEST AFRICA - A Consultative meeting between the West African Commonwealth countries took place in The Gambia between July 24-28, 1990. Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the host country, The Gambia, were represented at the meeting in Banjul. After the meeting in The Gambia, the COL team, led by the President, proceeded to Nigeria for a more in depth consultation with the Federal Ministry of Education and the institutions and universities that offer distance education programmes in that country. The basic outcome of these sub-regional meetings is the reinforcement of cooperative activity between the various West African Commonwealth countries specifically the three nations that attended the consultation meeting.

With respect to activities for individual countries, COL has agreed to assist The Gambia in its plans to upgrade The Gambian College. It was agreed that The Gambian College would use distance education methods to provide some of these courses at the post secondary level.

In Nigeria, COL has agreed to commission two studies: the first deals with the state of distance education; the second concerns the methods which National Teachers' Institute had adopted in delivering its distance learning programmes.

ASIA

BANGLADESH - The Government, with financial assistance from Asian Development Bank (ADB), plans to set up an Open University. Meanwhile, COL has been approached by Educational Consultants in India Limited who have won the ADB contract to prepare

the Bangladesh Open University project report. COL has agreed to assist them in the preparation of the project report and to release Vice President, Professor G. Ram Reddy as Team Leader.

INDIA - As a result of the consultations held by the President and the Vice President in May in India, the following areas have been identified for COL's collaboration with Indian institutions:

- COL will assist the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in setting up a training institution for distance education teachers in India.

- Initial training programmes will be organised with the help of a mobile team of three or four staff members drawn from Open Universities in India and COL will help by providing a consultant.

- It has been agreed by IGNOU and other distance education centres to develop jointly core curriculum and the material to be used by the Open Universities to improve the quality of B Ed programmes. COL will help the Open Universities in designing the curriculum and making the existing course material available for their use.

- COL has agreed to provide consultant(s) for a workshop which will be organised under the auspices of the Department of Personnel to identify the priorities in training and to develop the strategy for the use of distance education technologies to meet the training needs.

- In collaboration with the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), COL will bring out a special edition of distance education in South Asia to coincide with the Meeting of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) Executive Heads in 1991. AIU and COL will also publish a Handbook on Women Studies Programmes in Indian universities.

- A regional workshop on course development will be organised in November 1990 in India by COL in collaboration with IGNOU. The workshop will have participants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives.

PAKISTAN - Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), the oldest open university in Asia, would like COL's assistance in producing new programmes and training staff. Their particular emphasis is on environmental education, population, drugs, women's education, technical and vocational education. As soon as a Vice Chancellor assumes office, the initial proposals will be prioritised and implemented.

In collaboration with AIOU, COL is planning a round table on student support services in Pakistan to be held in early 1991.

CARIBBEAN

EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES - A project on Tech/Voc Education and Training which is at the conceptualisation stage at present, aims to link together the seven technical colleges of the Eastern Caribbean with a view to enable them to pool their resources and operate the "centre of excellence" approach to providing higher technician training in the sub-region.

REGIONAL - A conference on distance education was held in July at UWI, Mona Campus under the joint sponsorship of COL and UWIDITE. Experiences of various institutions in distance teaching were shared with UWI and mechanisms likely to enhance the quality of distance education were explored. It also served to familiarise a cross-section of the Caribbean community with different aspects of distance teaching.



GUYANA - Agreement has been reached with University officials on the Guyana Distance Education Communications Network (GDECN) project. The project which is to be implemented as a series of sub-projects over a one to one-half year period commencing November 1990. It will provide the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) at University of Guyana with the necessary communications infrastructure to develop and deliver by distance a pre-university entrance course in Science, Maths and English, as well as a programme to upgrade teachers in schools.

SAINT LUCIA - COL, in cooperation with North Island College (NIC), and with assistance from CFTC, has arranged for the secondment for one academic year of a lecturer from NIC to Sir Arthur Lewis Community College in Saint Lucia. The COL fellow will assist the College in establishing a distance teaching infrastructure and delivery system, and have at least one outreach centre operational before the end of his assignment.

SOUTH PACIFIC

The Team undertaking a Review of USP Extension Services has completed the drafting of five chapters, comprising the bulk of the work. At the end of August revisions to the chapters took place as a result of comments made by other review members. The first version of the final draft is expected to be completed shortly, and the Review Team will meet in Trinidad immediately prior to the Board meeting to finalise this version for transmission to USP. The model developed for the review process appears to be working well, and discussions have taken place with a view towards applying it to the University of the West Indies as a second major research and evaluation project.

SOLOMON ISLANDS: Provincial Teaching Network

(a) Continuing Education for Teachers

The first phase of this project has been completed. ACPAC identified staff from the Charles Sturt University who visited Honiara. Several problems were encountered in the project, although a useful body of material has been accumulated on which to base a second phase, the funds for which have been carried forward. This project is funded under the COL/AIDAB agreement.

(b) Commonwealth of Learning Regional Teleconference Network

Planning for the design of the network has been undertaken in Vancouver (and equipment identified). Further action awaits the receipt of a formal note from the Solomon Islands Government, following which an engineer will visit Solomon Islands to prepare the on-site details for the establishment of a seven-centre teaching network linking provincial teaching centres with the College of Higher Education, the University Centre, and with selected overseas access points.

(c) Development of Technical and Vocational Teaching Materials

The British Columbia Provincial Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology has approved funding for a BC College to work with the Solomon Islands College for Higher Education in the initial stages of developing suitable tech/voc courses for the new teaching network. The first activity will be a visit to Honiara by a senior consultant, and this will link in with the planned conference on tech/voc activity in Hong Kong in November.

The COL/AIDAB project which provided an initial training workshop in the adaptation of teaching materials for the Centre has been completed. The project was undertaken under the management of the Adelaide College of TAFE. A full report has been completed, and a small fund has been set aside to provide the Tonga Centre with course materials identified from suitable Australian sources.

Visits, Consultations

- visits to COL (and attendant consultations) were undertaken by the Principal, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, representatives of Monash University (Australia) and staff of USP's Extension Services Course Development Unit;

- representatives of Otago University and USP attended a workshop in Jamaica concerned with developments in teleconference teaching;

- discussions were held with representatives of the law faculties of Monash University, and the University of British Columbia concerning the development of distance education programmes in legal studies in the Pacific region.

- discussions have been undertaken with USP and with Simon Fraser University, BC, concerning the implementation of a joint programme in nutrition education developed by the two universities for the South Pacific region;

COL attendance at:

- Commonwealth Law Association (Workshop on continuing education for Commonwealth Bar Associations). The Director concerned attended, together with the Director, BC Legal Education Association. The latter also visited sister institutions in Melbourne and Sydney to discuss COL planning, and he and the Director had similar discussions with the NZ Law Association continuing education unit.

- The Commonwealth Professional Associations. The President, and the Directors for Continuing Professional Education and for Communications and Technology addressed a meeting of the CPA in London, and follow-up discussions were held.

- The Commonwealth Foundation Conference, Sydney, Australia.

COL/AIDAB Project Activity in 1990-91

A meeting was held in Sydney, between COL and ACPAC (the AIDAB agency managing COL/Australian projects), in July. The two 1989-90 projects (noted above) were reviewed, and agreement has been reached about the orientation of the fiscal 1990-91 funding year. Subject to discussion with the regional advisory committee, projects will be initiated in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea.



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