

Several significant developments have marked the past three years in the life of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) even though it is a relatively young organisation. They include the appointment of a new President, the introduction of a new structure for its Board of Governors and organisation and the move to less costly and smaller premises. They reflect signs of its growing maturity and its ability to maintain the momentum of its activities in the face of the financial uncertainty that continues to cloud its life.

Since its last report (Islamabad 1994), COL has continued to advance steadily and within the resources at its disposal towards its goals of widening access to education and enhancing its quality through open and distance learning and the effective use of new communications technologies. New, renewed and increased financial contributions to the organisation have been encouraging although they fall short of COL's needs. The decision of Heads of Government at Auckland (1995) to urge countries to make three-year pledges commencing with the Botswana Conference of Education Ministers should, if implemented, bring COL greater financial stability and strengthen its planning and operational capabilities.

COL's programme accomplishments for the reporting period as outlined in this report will indicate that it was a busy one despite many changes and uncertain funding. COL has provided invaluable support to Commonwealth countries and institutions in the adoption of distance education and open learning and is continuing to expand its influence. Through COL's expertise and world-wide network of practitioners, assistance is available in the application of innovative technologies, model learning materials, open and distance learning systems development and training of distance educators.

Examples of a few key COL project achievements over the reporting period include:

- the organisation of an international workshop on the **potential of open schooling for increasing access to basic education for women and girls** in collaboration with Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan and UNICEF, South Asia;
- the development of a **technical-vocational teacher training core curriculum** that is now being pilot tested in the Caribbean and its feasibility for transfer to the Pacific region explored;
- the Asian Development Bank's selection of COL to undertake a regional technical assistance project on **capacity building for primary teacher education by distance** in the five high-population countries in the Asia region;
- the completion of first-year course work by 60 students across the Commonwealth in the two-year **Masters of Distance Education** programme offered by Indira Gandhi National Open University in India under the auspices of the Rajiv Gandhi Fellowships Scheme;
- the organisation of two **international conferences on education and technology**: one in Singapore in August 1996 and the second in Ghana in April 1997;
- the development of an extensive training package and first year pilot-testing in 14 countries of a COL/Commonwealth Secretariat **Legislative Drafting programme**; and
- the development of a major proposal for **training of lower/junior secondary science and mathematics teachers** in Africa by distance for submission to potential donor agencies.

Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, COL's new President who succeeded Professor James A. Maraj, assumed his responsibilities in September 1995. The Board also completed a restructuring of the Board of Governors and of staff that will result in a leaner organisation and lower operating costs. Three senior posts that became vacant on July 1, 1997 will not be considered for filling until financial stability is assured.

In order to meet the directives of Commonwealth governments to plan wisely for the future and to maintain the momentum of its programmes, the Board of Governors is proposing a *Three-year Plan, 1997–2000*, based on a core budget from governments of approximately Cdn. \$5 million annually. COL will continue to seek funds for project purposes from other sources and is encouraged by the progress made in this respect. It will also undertake contracts for its services to augment its income. As it has done in formulating this *Plan*, COL will regularly consult with and provide updates to Commonwealth Ministries of Education, as well as other concerned government departments, regarding the operationalisation of the project and programme plans, and progress made.

“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.”

The Honourable Don Boudria
Minister for International Co-operation, Canada (1997)

The Board proposes, for consideration by Ministers, a three-tiered contribution arrangement to broaden its funding from Commonwealth governments on an equitable basis and to ensure financial stability until Ministers next meet in three years, as outlined below:

Tier 1 countries would contribute, as a group, a total of Cdn. \$4 million annually in each of the next three years.

Tier 1 countries are Australia, Britain, Canada (Province of British Columbia), Canada (Federal Government), India and New Zealand.

Tier 2 countries would contribute, as a group, a total of Cdn. \$1 million annually in each of the next three years.

Tier 2 countries are Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Nigeria (Commonwealth membership currently suspended), Singapore, and South Africa.

Tier 3 countries would contribute, as a group, a total of Cdn. \$1 million annually in each of the next three years.

Tier 3 countries are Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Cameroon, Cyprus, Dominica, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malawi, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, Vanuatu, Western Samoa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

By this report, the Board of Governors requests Commonwealth Ministers of Education to:

- *note* COL's work and accomplishments of the past three years;
- *endorse* the Three-year Plan, 1997-2000;
- *approve* the three-tiered funding proposal; and
- *take the necessary action to implement their commitment* to COL's core budget for the next three year period to enable it to fulfil its mandate.

From Islamabad to Gaborone

- 1 This third report by the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to Commonwealth Ministers of Education is submitted in accordance with the requirements of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing COL (1988; amended 1995).
- 2 When Commonwealth Heads of Government founded COL in 1987 in Vancouver, Canada, they pioneered a new kind of international instrument. COL is a bold initiative designed to mobilise the use of open and distance learning and new communications technologies to widen access to learning and to enhance its quality.
- 3 At their Twelfth Conference in Islamabad in November 1994 (12CCEM), Ministers of Education reaffirmed their commitment to COL as an instrument of Commonwealth co-operation in education. They received the Board's report on results of the reviews of COL's progress, organisation/management and governance, as well as actions taken, and expressed satisfaction with this report. They pledged to strengthen COL's financial base and to help establish a stable core budget to ensure COL's viability and facilitate the Board of Governors' efforts to broaden its income sources.
- 4 Despite government expressions of support for COL at 12CCEM, one year later at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland, the Board of Governors reported that government pledges and income were falling well short of a level of funding sufficient to allow programme operations to continue with effectiveness beyond the 1995/96 financial year.
- 5 Heads of Government welcomed the proposal that **countries be invited to make regular three-year pledges to COL** at subsequent conferences of Education Ministers, beginning with 13CCEM, to ensure stability and a longer-term planning cycle for the organisation. In the meantime, to protect the organisation's viability through to 13CCEM, CHOGM urged new and renewed pledges to cover COL's short-term budgetary shortfalls.

- 6 During and since November 1995, many contributions have been received. Kenya, Malaysia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines are new contributors. New Zealand increased its funding by more than 150% and Tonga nearly doubled its annual contribution. Dominica has recently resumed contributing with a significant increase. Britain pledged £1 million over three years (1994/95-1996/97), and a further £0.6 million over the two years 1997/98 and 1998/99. India has committed to continuing financial support to COL and during 1997/98 has made provisions for COL at a higher level than in 1996/97. The maintenance of support from other major donors notably Australia, the Province of British Columbia, and Canada, as well as the renewal of contributions from smaller donors, have enabled COL to weather its funding crises.
- 7 COL's income from governments will this year again fall short of the minimum of Cdn. \$5 million, identified by the Progress Review Committee¹, and affirmed by Heads of Government in 1995, as the core budget

“The Commonwealth of Learning has forged an important and unique role in the international education sector and has established itself as a cost-effective implementation agency.”

The Honourable Alexander Downer
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Australia (1996)

¹ Governments commissioned a review of COL in 1993 designed to assess the performance and achievements of its first five years of operation and to report to governments with recommendations for COL's further development and funding. The Progress Review Committee consulted over 250 individuals and conducted a survey of more than 200 education ministries, institutions and organisations associated with COL across the Commonwealth, and reported high levels of satisfaction with COL's programmes and activities.

required by COL to function effectively. At the time of writing, actual income from member Governments in 1996/97 is projected to be Cdn. \$4.1 million, and income beyond 1996/97 will be unclear until the conclusion of 13CCEM. Thus, continuing concern for COL's uncertain financial situation was reiterated at the Senior Officials meeting (London, October 1996) and at the meeting of Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (November 1996).

Governance and Management

- 8 Since Ministers of Education last met, COL has undergone many changes in governance and management. At 12CCEM, Ministers endorsed the recommendations of a review proposing a smaller governing body for COL. To implement these changes, amendments to the MOU were proposed by the Board and ratified at the 1995 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The new Board of Governors was constituted from January 1996, reduced in size from 18 to 14 members, and reflecting in its membership regional representation and a move toward achieving greater gender balance.² Dr. H. Ian Macdonald completed his first term of Chairman of the Board and was unanimously re-appointed by the Board for a second three-year term beginning January 1997.

"Ghana attaches great importance to the work entrusted to The Commonwealth of Learning and the dedication and professionalism with which the mandate is being pursued."

His Excellency Annan A. Cato
High Commissioner for Ghana in Canada (1996)

² A list of Board Members is available on page 9. Among the Governors appointed from January 1996, five of fourteen (35.7%) are women. Among the current Executive Committee of the Board, three of seven members (42.8%) are women. The representation of women on the Executive Committee, as well as on the Board as a whole, is significantly greater than in the past (representation of women did not exceed 20% prior to 1996), and COL acknowledges the co-operation of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Commonwealth member Governments, and other appointing authorities in this achievement. The Board will continue to urge appointing authorities to give attention to achieving an even greater representation by women in future.

- 9 The Board wishes to record its appreciation to the individuals who retired from it as a result of the restructuring and who had helped to lead the organisation and the Commonwealth education community through many challenges.
- 10 COL's second President, Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, was appointed in September 1995 succeeding Professor James A. Maraj. Professor Dhanarajan took up his post in a period of severe financial constraints, and has endeavoured to steer COL toward focusing its activities to achieve greater cost-efficiency in its delivery of programmes, while ensuring that its contributions to education in the Commonwealth are made even more effective. Under Professor Dhanarajan's leadership, achievements have been made in developing project partnerships and relationships to market COL's expertise to international agencies to diversify its sources of revenue.

Programme Achievements 1994–1997

- 11 Despite uncertainty about funding, the Board and staff have made every effort to avoid any loss of momentum in COL's programme delivery and service to Commonwealth member countries. Strategic plans have focused on four central objectives that were identified as priority areas both by the Progress Review of COL and through consultations with Commonwealth colleagues, as follows:
- facilitating access to affordable, high quality **learning materials and resources** in support of formal and non-formal education;
 - promoting the utilisation of **communications and information technologies** for the purpose of open and distance learning;
 - providing access to **training** in the adoption and use of distance learning techniques and technologies; and
 - supplying **information and advice** on distance learning systems, programmes and technologies, both to practitioners and developers alike.

In this report, COL's work is summarised in terms of the impacts it has made in these four areas in the Commonwealth community during the last three years.

- 12 Through teaching networks and other initiatives, work towards achieving the four central objectives has focused on five sectoral areas:
- open schooling;
 - technical vocational education and training;
 - non-formal education and training;
 - continuing and professional education; and
 - teacher education.
- 13 COL has continued its efforts to **remove barriers to women's access to education** through delivery of gender-balanced programmes and projects, as well as through initiatives that are specifically targeted to benefit women and girls, such as those in open schooling described in paragraph 24. COL is also committed to participating actively, within the framework of its mandate, in implementing the *1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development*. In addition to the initiatives mentioned in the following paragraphs, COL has published an educational resource survey on women and sustainable development, as well as research on women and distance education.

"I appreciate receiving (a copy of Producing Gender Sensitive Learning Materials: A Handbook for Educators), which sets out clearly and concisely the principles and issues surrounding the needs of women learners... Thank you for sending the publication and for your excellent work in mobilising concerned groups and individuals around these important issues."

The Honourable Dr. Hedy Fry
 Secretary of State (Status of Women), Canada, March 1996

Learning Materials and Resources

- 14 In the period 1994–1997, COL's has supported activities to provide information about, and facilitate access to, affordable, high quality open and distance learning materials and resources through assistance in acquiring, transferring, adapting, developing and delivering such materials. In early 1997, an international meeting on facilitating the transfer of materials was convened by COL, and COL is examining the proposals for action arising from this expert group. Some of the specific initiatives completed by COL during the reporting period include:
- acquiring the rights to reproduce and distribute on a pan-Commonwealth scale, learning materials in subjects such as distance education practise, computer software, study skills, laboratory techniques and teaching of science.
 - publishing in collaboration with partners in the North and the South, a core learning module that focuses on the theoretical justification for examining the specific roles and contributions of women to development initiatives.
 - producing a handbook for educators on producing gender sensitive learning materials.
 - assisting the Commonwealth Pharmaceutical Association with design and co-ordination of a teaching package on the management of drug supplies.
 - developing a technical-vocational teacher training core curriculum that is currently being pilot tested in the Caribbean and its feasibility for transfer to countries in the Pacific region explored.
 - convening an international workshop, with funding provided by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, on the development of a Commonwealth master's programme in business and public administration. The workshop resulted in CFTC's agreement to fund the hiring of a programme development expert to develop a proposal for further discussion.

15 Academic credit is a key issue surrounding learning materials initiatives. COL has developed, with funding from the UK Department for International Development, a proposal for a Commonwealth credit bank, and this proposal was considered at a meeting of institutional and agency representatives at the International Council for Distance Education World Conference in June 1997. The proposal is one of three related COL initiatives. The first, on establishing guidelines for remote delivery of courses, has recently been disseminated through distance education journals, regional associations and institutions. The second relates to the establishment of workable quality assurance policies and practices in distance teaching universities. The third, the proposal for a credit bank, is based on the assumption that students in a growing number of countries will have access to courses from several institutions and will request that such courses be brought together in a single credential. An arrangement that can establish credit equivalencies across countries and institutions and can accredit courses to provide, where possible, a credential to students with courses from several institutions, will become increasingly a necessity for students in the Commonwealth.

*“We have found *The Learning Game* to be an excellent resource for teachers in our full-time and part-time programmes. We have decided to reproduce again for use with 150 more teachers and 100 primary school principals who will be studying by distance through the college during the 1996/97 school year.”*

Ms. Cynthia Thompson
Principal, Belize Teachers' College (May 1996)

Communications and information technologies

16 A significant achievement in the communications and information technologies sphere, has been the Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) established by COL in July 1994 at Indira Gandhi National Open University in India. When Ministers last met, this Centre was just getting off the ground. Four staff members have been appointed to CEMCA, including its Director, Mr. Gopal Saksena, and a signing ceremony

with the Government of India to mark the establishment of CEMCA's legal status in that country will take place during 13CCEM. Over 9,000 educational radio and television programmes from 150 organisations in 65 subject areas are now included in the CEMCA database, and the Centre's newsletter, EDUCOM-ASIA, is regularly published. The Centre has had a significant impact in media training in the region: from 1995 to 1997 more than 80 individuals have participated in CEMCA workshops. Steps toward establishing a similar centre for Southern Africa have been initiated. Other examples of COL's impact on increasing the diffusion and the use of appropriate media and technology in Commonwealth member countries include:

- organising two pivotal international conferences: *Educational Technology 2000: A Global Vision for Education* in Singapore in August 1996; and *Opening New Frontiers for Learning: An International Conference on Technology and Distance Learning* in Ghana in April 1997. Both conferences have opened up opportunities for dialogue between the distance education community and the communications and information technologies industries.
- being the lead agency for a life-long learning series on agriculture, health, life skills for youth and small business management for WETV (the global access television service that was launched during the Fourth World Conference on Women), of which COL is a founding partner.
- completing media projects in Ghana (field-based audio programme production), Jamaica (low-powered radio system), and the Maldives (a digital video production system).
- assisting with the application of audio-conferencing in medical education in Malaysia and providing technical assistance to the Educational Technology Centre at the University of Brunei Darussalam.
- undertaking a multi-phase research project on diffusion of appropriate technology in developing countries, with funding

provided by the UK Department for International Development.

- 17 An innovative COL project in Zambia has assisted women and men to achieve skills to use new information technologies. COL helped to establish a computer awareness programme at the National Correspondence College in Luanshya. It was developed with assistance from the Open University in Sri Lanka and uses distance education methods to teach computer skills that enable students to gain employable skills to enter the local mining-related industries workforce. Seven of the ten graduates in the first class were women.

Training

- 18 In 1994, the Board reported to Ministers that 100 Rajiv Gandhi Fellowships had been awarded to enable graduate students from nineteen Commonwealth developing countries to follow a Masters of Distance Education programme offered by IGNOU. Of the original 100 enrolments, over sixty students have completed the first-year course work and the programme has entered its second-year phase.
- 19 A study, commissioned by COL in 1995, showed a critical need and strong demand for training in instructional design and media applications. Consequently, COL conducted more than 20 training workshops covering these skills in all regions of the Commonwealth. Canadian distance educators, under the auspices of the COL/BC Fellowship Programme, carried out eight of these workshops. COL has also co-operated with the Commonwealth Youth Programme in developing their diploma in youth work to be delivered by distance education, with the pilot phase of the diploma programme targeted for July 1998.

Other examples of COL's impact on training personnel in distance education are:

- co-ordinating the production of trainer tool-kits in six topic areas.
- developing a train-the-trainer manual.
- updating and disseminating a directory of courses and materials for training in distance education.

- 20 A major achievement in the training field was the Asian Development Bank's selection of COL to undertake a Cdn. \$500,000 regional technical assistance project on capacity building for primary teacher education by distance in the five high-population countries in the Asia region. The fulfilment of this contract is ongoing, and it is planned that COL will in due course adapt the training materials developed for use across the Commonwealth.

Information and advice

- 21 COL's aim is to provide information concerning open and distance education through appropriate collections, Internet applications and by the distribution of publications. COL's World Wide Web (WWW) site (<http://www.col.org>) created in 1993 has now expanded to include over 100 documents and links to related organisations. A daily dial-up service to COL's Internet facilities in Vancouver connects the Eastern Caribbean with the world – and provides inter-island messaging and file transfer services. COL's Information Resource Centre continues to respond to increasing number of requests for information and documents and *Connections*, COL's quarterly newsletter, is distributed to over 5000 government officials and education leaders.

"We value greatly the work being performed by The Commonwealth of Learning which has already made a significant impact on the educational needs of small developing countries like Jamaica."

The Honourable P.J. Patterson
Prime Minister of Jamaica (1995)

- 22 The undertaking of research and the dissemination of findings is a further mode through which COL provides information. In addition to the research projects reported previously, under the auspices of the COL/ICDE

research agreement, two working groups on funding and costing of distance education and on quality assurance were formed. The former has developed a set of research proposals for which funding is being sought. The latter commissioned a series of case studies of quality assurance practices in Commonwealth distance teaching universities, which has been published (June 1997) and disseminated.

Teaching Networks

- 23 COL's efforts in the areas of learning materials, technology, training and information are brought together in regional teaching networks. The Rajiv Gandhi Fellowships scheme and the technical-vocational teacher training core curriculum project referred to above are two examples. In addition, 14 countries are taking part in the pilot year of a COL/Commonwealth Secretariat Legislative Drafting programme. The Royal Institute of Public Administration (International) in London is administering the pilot under contract. The extensive training package has been developed with experience drawn from existing Commonwealth legislative drafting training programmes based in Canada, the UK and Barbados, and the costs have been jointly shared by COL and the Commonwealth Secretariat. COL has also continued its financial and technical support for the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Distance Education pilot project in which skills-development courses adapted in the sub-region are being delivered by distance to students in six OECS countries.

Sectoral Areas

- 24 The Board has accorded high priority to strengthening systems to support basic education in member countries of the Commonwealth through appropriate distance education and, in particular, for marginalised groups. Programmes designed to improve conditions for women and children have had special priority. Efforts in this area have focussed on open schooling, non-formal education and teacher education. For instance, in 1994, COL published a series of case studies on international experiences with open schooling. COL also convened an international workshop on the potential of open schooling for increasing

access to basic education for women and girls in collaboration with Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan and UNICEF, South Asia. In 1996, COL and the International Extension College (UK) jointly published *The Use of Distance Learning in Non-formal Education*. COL then convened an interagency meeting in Washington, DC to consider this report. The participants agreed on the significant potential of non-formal education in reaching the large number of adults left out of the educational systems in developing countries – and emphasised the need for development agencies to share their experiences to formulate effective strategies. As a result, COL is now leading a consortium of development agencies to promote open and distance learning approaches in non-formal education. Teacher training is an integral component of this focus on basic education, and a major proposal for training of lower/junior secondary science and mathematics teachers in Africa by distance has been submitted for funding to potential donor agencies.

Re-organising COL's Operations

- 25 This high level of activities and impacts has been made possible through the organisation's staff and network of experts across the Commonwealth. An extensive staff and management reorganisation was approved by COL's Board and became effective on July 1, 1996. In response to wide consultations, the new structure is designed to provide a more responsive and flexible approach to programme delivery. It typifies both a lean and flat organisation, and has three groups. The first, headed by the President, is responsible for governance, the executive office and all aspects of administration and finance, including the development of business opportunities and network of consultants. The second, headed by a Director, is responsible for Programmes. COL Programmes provide professional expertise to the national, regional and pan-Commonwealth activities of the organisation. The third, also headed by a Director, is responsible for ensuring that programmes, projects and information are delivered effectively in the various regions of the Commonwealth. Instead of the broad division into four macro-regions that obtained in the past, nine regions were identified — each

defined in a manner consistent with the current state of distance, open and flexible learning in the particular region. Eight specialists, each of whom concentrates on their specific areas of expertise, support the Directors. Appointments to the Directorships were made for one-year terms with effect from July 1, 1996 and the present financial situation has necessitated the decision to neither renew nor appoint persons to fill these two posts from July 1, 1997. In the interim, the President is undertaking responsibility for all Programme and Regional matters. The post of the senior Administrator will also not be renewed or filled from July 1, 1997. Consultants and visiting fellows who are attached to COL on term assignments, and 12 administrative support staff, round out the staff complement of COL's central office in Vancouver.

- 26 Gender balance in staffing has been a priority. The Board of Governors adopted a *Policy on Equal Opportunities* in September 1995, which includes "the principle of gender equity in recruitment and staffing, consistent with the overall goal of equal opportunity for all persons." Four of the eleven core professional staff of COL are women.
- 27 In examining COL's regional structures, the Board determined that some form of regional presence is an imperative. A centralised organisation, though economical, may run the risk of not being sensitive to the needs of its constituents despite modern communication technologies. However, the present size of COL and its budget do not allow for either growth in the size of the central organisation or expansion of its regional presence. To complement the staff reorganisation, nine Regional Advisors to the President have been selected to represent the organisation throughout the Commonwealth. In partnership with key institutions in the regions, distinguished staff members or associates have been designated to take on additional responsibilities on COL's behalf. Liaison officers have also been designated within COL's professional staff.
- 28 In addition to internal and regional structure changes, COL has changed to its location. In 1994, the Board reported to Ministers that it had approved a reduction in overall office space

and a renegotiated lease at COL's Dunsmuir Street site in Vancouver, to reduce rental costs by about 40% in 1995/96. The Board continued to look for further savings and in 1996/97, an opportunity became available for COL to move to even smaller premises to reduce monthly rental costs by a further 35%. While the cost per square foot remains about the same, the economies are due to a significant reduction in the available floor space. COL's relocation to the new premises was completed in April 1997.

- 29 COL has been leveraging its resources through increased collaboration and joint project initiatives with other agencies. Development of additional, non-governmental sources of project funding has been a priority. As reported earlier in this document, in May 1996, COL was selected by the Asian Development Bank to undertake a Cdn. \$500,000 regional technical assistance project on its behalf. Preparation of bids for project funding, as well as execution of projects awarded, has had a significant impact on the nature of work undertaken by COL staff and the organisation has had to be responsive to this demand, while ensuring that its core activities are still implemented effectively and

"Your co-operation and sheer willingness at assisting is a demonstration of the inculcating standards and values you set. You are indeed instrumental in helping us to realise our commitment to excellence, to not only our nation's children and all other recipients of educational programmes but to our educators as well."

Mr. Kenrick Seepersad
Ministry of Education, Trinidad & Tobago

efficiently.

- 30 Although the number of professional staff employed by COL in a full-time capacity will continue to be kept to a minimum, the organisation has an established network of

professional associates throughout the Commonwealth, and is able to assemble expert teams on an international basis. One of the main objectives of the COL International Consultancy Network (COL-ICN) is to provide a framework through which Commonwealth institutions with considerable expertise in distance education can play a significant role in the international development of distance education. COL has a unique role in such co-operative endeavours, as the only international organisation solely concerned with distance education and open learning. In addition, COL is committed to Commonwealth co-operation, especially where this increases the use of the considerable expertise that exists in the developing countries.

COL's Three-year Plan, 1997–2000

- 31 The purpose of this report is not only to review the accomplishments of the past three years, but also to set out a proposal for Ministers for COL's future directions and to obtain Ministers endorsement and their governments commitment to this plan of action.
- 32 When COL was founded in the late 1980s, educating people at a distance was neither widely understood nor its potential fully appreciated. The situation has changed in the last decade. In reports published recently by UNESCO, the World Bank and the OECD, distance education is predicted as perhaps the most important mode of educational delivery for learning throughout life and for life in the coming decade. Across the Commonwealth, institutions of learning are embarking on open learning/distance education ventures.
- 33 COL's *Three-year Plan, 1997-2000*, which sets out the way forward for COL in this new distance education environment in the next millennium, has been provided to Ministers and therefore a detailed review of its contents will not be undertaken in this report.
- 34 The *Three-year Plan* proposes a path for COL and estimates the resources required to accomplish the objectives of the *Plan*. In order to fulfil its intentions, COL requires a commitment of resources to implement the *Plan*. Core funding from Commonwealth member

governments, at a level of approximately Cdn. \$5 million annually is forecast in the *Plan* to remain almost constant over the three years of the planning period (with a 2% annual inflationary increase), while project funding will increase from Cdn. \$3 to 5 million. Consultancy and project funding will be primarily sought from international agencies and major donors. Targeted projects are either related to specific distance education objectives or to educational developments that contain distance education elements in the overall design.

- 35 In order to achieve the level of core funding from Commonwealth member countries, as urged by Heads of Government, and to stabilise this level of funding over the three years until Ministers of Education meet again, the Board of Governors proposes a three-tiered funding structure for consideration by Education Ministers, as outlined below:

Tier 1 countries would contribute, as a group, a total of Cdn. \$4 million annually in each of the next three years.

Tier 1 countries are Australia, Britain, Canada (Province of British Columbia), Canada (Federal Government), India and New Zealand.

Tier 2 countries would contribute, as a group, a total of Cdn. \$1 million annually in each of the next three years.

Tier 2 countries are Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Nigeria (Commonwealth membership currently suspended), Singapore, and South Africa.

Tier 3 countries would contribute, as a group, a total of Cdn. \$1 million annually in each of the next three years.

Tier 3 countries are Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Cameroon, Cyprus, Dominica, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malawi, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, Vanuatu, Western Samoa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Towards the New Millennium

36 As Commonwealth countries advance towards a new millennium, they face daunting challenges. Burgeoning populations, growing expectations from their peoples and menacing unemployment will require an educated citizenry that possesses the skills to cope with rapidly changing economies and social conditions in a competitive environment. An increasingly mobile workforce will need a central and easily accessed system of credit that recognises not only formal qualifications but also work experience and other life skills.

37 Conventional education and credit arrangements are inadequate to meet this situation. Conventional education does not possess the capability to educate vast numbers of people and to develop the skills to prepare them for the range of tasks they will face. Open and distance learning and new communications technologies, however, can equip populations for this situation in ways that traditional education is unable to do. COL's experience and expertise can be of strategic value in assisting Commonwealth governments to reform and to refashion their educational systems to meet this challenge. In today's world an uneducated and unskilled citizenry is potentially an explosive source of social unrest and political instability and governments cannot ignore its needs.

38 COL's relevance can best be measured in terms of its usefulness to Commonwealth governments to bring about changes to their education systems and to improve the lives of their citizens in tangible ways. Its record to date demonstrates what it can achieve, even with meagre and unstable funding. If Commonwealth governments regard their contribution to COL as an investment in their own future and as a means to transform their societies to meet the challenges and opportunities of a new millennium COL will be a dynamic instrument of Commonwealth co-operation. COL hopes that in the challenges that lie ahead it will also find a response by the governments that brought it into existence.

- *note* COL's work and accomplishments of the past three years;
- *endorse* the Three-year Plan, 1997-2000;
- *approve* the three-tiered funding proposal; and
- *take the necessary action to implement their commitment* to COL's core budget for the next three year period to enable it to fulfil its mandate.

Recommendations

39 Ministers are requested to:

The Commonwealth of Learning Board of Governors (from January 1, 1996)

Chairman

Dr. H. Ian Macdonald, President Emeritus, York University (Canada).

Members

Commonwealth Secretary General:
His Excellency Chief Emeka Anyaoku.

Appointments by Donor Organisations

Government of Australia: Professor C.D. Blake, Vice Chancellor, Charles Sturt University.

Government of British Columbia: Mr. Shell Harvey, Assistant Deputy Minister, Post-Secondary Education Division, Ministry of Education, Skills and Training.

Government of Brunei Darussalam:
Dato Paduka Haji Ali Hashim bin Haji Daud,
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education.

Government of Canada: The Honourable Iona Campagnolo, Chancellor, University of Northern British Columbia.

Government of India: Mr. P.R. Dasgupta, Education Secretary, Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Government of United Kingdom: Ms. Myra Harrison, Chief Education Adviser, Department for International Development.

Regional Appointments on the Advice of Commonwealth Ministers of Education

Africa: Mr. John Samuel, Program Director, African Programs, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, USA.

Asia: Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Pakistan.

Caribbean: Dr. Marlene Hamilton, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Undergraduate Studies), University of the West Indies, Jamaica.

Pacific: The Honourable Dr. S. Langi Kavaliku, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Works and Civil Aviation, Tonga.

Appointment by the Commonwealth Secretary General

Mrs. Esi Sutherland-Addy, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana.

President (Ex-Officio)

Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, President, The Commonwealth of Learning.

Advisers

Ms. Fay Chung, Chief, Education Cluster, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Datuk Dr. Johari Bin Mat, Secretary General, Ministry of Education, Government of Malaysia.