



TWENTY-FIFTH MEETING OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING
BOARD OF GOVERNORS
JUNE 17 & 18, 2008 (VANCOUVER, CANADA)

Summary of the Minutes

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PRESENT

Members:

Mr. Ransford Smith (*in the Chair on June 17th*); H.E. Professor Michael Omolewa (*in the Chair on June 18th*); Shri R.P. Agrawal; Ms. Denise Chong; Ms. Jennifer Glennie; The Honourable Dr. Dame Carol Kidu; Dr. David Levesque; Dr. Linda Sissons; Sir John Daniel (*President*)

Advisor:

Professor John Tarrant

In attendance:

Ms. Laura Griggs, Canadian International Development Agency, Advisor to the Canadian Member

COL Staff:

Professor Asha Kanwar, Vice President & Programme Director; Ms. Doris McEachern, Director – Finance, Administration & Human Resources; Mr. Paul West, Director – Knowledge Management & Information Technology; Ms. Helena Fehr, Board Secretary & Gender Officer (*Meeting Recorder*)

APOLOGIES

H.E. The Honourable Burchell Whiteman; Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General; Dr. (Ms.) Tara de Mel;

The meeting began at 14hrs00 Pacific Daylight Time.

In the absence of the Acting Chair, H.E. Burchell Whiteman, the Deputy Secretary-General accepted the role of Acting Chair for the meeting.

I. OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR

The Acting Chair (Chair) conveyed the apologies of the Acting Chair, H.E. The Honourable Burchell Whiteman, who was unable to chair the meeting due to a commitment as Jamaican High Commissioner to the UK, and welcomed the new Members and COL staff present.

II. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

COL/BD/25/1

THE AGENDA WAS APPROVED AS CIRCULATED.

III. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS – JUNE 19 & 20, 2007 (VANCOUVER)

COL/BD/24/MIN/1

A. Approval of the Minutes

The minutes, which had been circulated to the Board Members for approval, were adopted.

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B. Matters Arising from the Minutes

1. Review of Action Items from the COL/BD/25/2
24th Board of Governors' Meeting

THE STATUS OF THE ACTION ITEMS WAS NOTED.

IV. MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS – COL/EX/28/MIN &
OCTOBER 3, 2007; FEBRUARY 21, 2008 & COL/EX/29/MIN
ORAL REPORT FROM THE MEETING ON JUNE 16, 2008

The Executive Committee had discussed the implementation of the rotation policy, which currently restricts international staff to a maximum service of two terms of three years instead of the three terms of three years as is the practice of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Committee considered a proposal to align COL's practice with that of the Secretariat. Following discussion, a resolution was prepared for the Board's consideration.

1. Review of Action Items from the COL/BD/25/3
29th Meeting of the Executive Committee (February 2008)

The President briefly reviewed select action items. He expressed his satisfaction with the planning retreat that took place prior to the Board meeting.

V. PRESIDENT'S REPORT

A. Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF5), London COL/BD/25/4

The Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF5), organised in partnership with the University of London, looks set to be a financial and intellectual success. PCF5 will be part of the University's celebration of the 150th anniversary of its External Studies Programme. To date, 650 participants have registered of which 250 have been fully sponsored or had support for their registration. Financial contributions have been received from the University of London, the Open University UK, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU); Athabasca University; DFID-UK and most recently AusAid (to fund Pacific delegates); in-kind contributions have also been received. Several virtual conferences are taking place prior to the Conference. These discussions are supported by the submission of 350 papers.

The overall costs for PCF5 were discussed. COL's total contribution for direct costs is budgeted at \$250,000 with some of these costs being paid in FY2007-2008 and some in FY2008-2009. (All figures are in Canadian dollars.)

The next Forum will be hosted by India's Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in 2010, at a location to be determined.

THE BOARD TO RECEIVE A DETAILED BREAKDOWN OF PCF5 COSTS IN 2008-2009.

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VI. FINANCIAL MATTERS – 2007-2008

- A. Minutes of the Audit Committee Meetings – COL/AU/09/MIN &
November 8, 2007; February 14, 2008 & COL/AU/10/MIN
Oral Report from the Meeting on June 16, 2008

The Audit Committee Chair informed Members of the Committee's recent meetings. She summarised the functions of the Committee, stressing that one of its key roles is to review the financial statements on a quarterly basis and indicated that the Committee is receiving financial statements that are progressively more informative. The Committee's key activities in the last year included: approving the consolidated audited financial statements from June 2007; appointing a new audit firm, Deloitte & Touche; approving the draft Audit Plan for 2007-2008; reviewing COL's Investment Policy and the risk management paper (an updated version of this paper forms part of the papers for this meeting); ensuring the Agency's internal financial controls are appropriate – these controls will be evaluated by COL management in the next financial year and a report will be presented to the Board. Members also agreed to strengthen the Audit Committee by co-opting a Vancouver-based professional to provide advice, preferably on a pro bono basis.

The Committee considered a proposal from COL management to wrap up COL International. Members agreed in principle to close the entity; however, they had some concerns around the forgiveness of debt if core funds were utilised and requested a revised draft resolution be subsequently prepared for consideration by the Board.

- B. Ratification of the audited Consolidated Financial Statements, COL/BD/25/5
June 30, 2007

MEMBERS RATIFIED THE AUDITED CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR JUNE 30, 2007.

- C. Interim Consolidated Financial Statements for the period ended COL/BD/25/6
March 31, 2008

THE BOARD NOTED THE PRELIMINARY INTERIM CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED MARCH 31, 2008 WHICH WERE ALSO CIRCULATED TO THE AUDIT COMMITTEE. THE AUDITED CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2008, ONCE PREPARED, WILL BE APPROVED BY THE AUDIT COMMITTEE AND CIRCULATED TO THE BOARD TO BE RATIFIED AT THEIR NEXT MEETING, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE GOVERNANCE MANUAL.

- D. Funding strategy beyond 2009 COL/BD/25/7

A paper on funding strategy had been prepared at the request of the Executive Committee. It highlighted the disadvantages of relying solely on voluntary contributions from Governments, noting the example of Australia's decision to cease funding COL. The paper clarified the difference between grants – which COL seeks for initiatives within the approved programme of activity such as the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) – and contracts, the aim of which is to recover all costs related to the development and provision of a service, e.g. the eLearning for International Organisations activity. The President noted that current funding projections – based on Member Government contributions to date – indicate the possibility of reaching an annual

budget of \$9.0 million, a target originally set at the 1994 Ministers of Education Meeting in Islamabad.

Members agreed to change the current terminology of “extrabudgetary funding”, which creates confusion. After considering several alternatives the term “additional contributions” was adopted.

COL was encouraged to identify the hidden and opportunity costs of seeking additional funding – i.e., overheads, impacts on staff, etc.

The principles governing additional contributions will be included in the next three-year plan. Incorporating the principles governing additional funding into the three-year plan will ensure that the issue is discussed by the Executive and the Board on a regular basis.

MEMBERS NOTED THE PROPOSED FUNDING STRATEGY BEYOND 2009, WHICH INCLUDES VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MEMBER GOVERNMENTS, ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND REVENUES RECEIVED FROM COMMONWEALTH BODIES AND OTHER SOURCES. THE PRINCIPLES, AND PARAMETERS, FOR SEEKING ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE NEXT THREE-YEAR PLAN, 2009-2012.

HENCEFORWARD THE TERM “ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS” WILL REPLACE “EXTRABUDGETARY FUNDING”

At the conclusion of the first day of the meeting, the Deputy Secretary-General had to excuse himself from the meeting due to commitments in London. Members elected that the longest-serving Member, HE Professor Michael Omolewa, as Acting Chair for the second day of the meeting.

VII. HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. Human Resource Matters

COL/BD/25/8
(COL/EX/30/3)

THE BOARD NOTED THE ONGOING WORK CENTRED ON THE HUMAN RESOURCE FRAMEWORK AND COMPENSATION PLAN (HRF&CP) AND RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

- 1. THAT PERFORMANCE PAY BE PAID TO ELIGIBLE STAFF EFFECTIVE FROM JULY 1, 2008. A PROVISION HAS BEEN PROVIDED IN THE BUDGET FOR 2008-2009.**
- 2. THAT A COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT FOR ELIGIBLE CEMCA STAFF BE PROVIDED, SUBJECT TO COL CONFIRMING THE RATES EFFECTIVE FROM JULY 1, 2008.**
- 3. THE BOARD REAFFIRMED THE VALUE OF THE ROTATION POLICY FOR INTERNATIONALLY RECRUITED PROFESSIONAL STAFF, WHICH ENABLES COL TO RESPOND TO EVOLVING PROGRAMME REQUIREMENTS WITH AN APPROPRIATE BALANCE OF SKILLS AND BACKGROUNDS AND PROVIDES IT WITH A REGULAR FLOW OF NEW IDEAS. SUCH STAFF WILL NORMALLY SERVE AT COL FOR NOT MORE THAN THREE TERMS OF THREE YEARS FOLLOWING PRACTICE AT THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT ON WHICH COL’S POLICY IS MODELLED.**

MEMBERS PROPOSED THE ADOPTION OF A THREE-YEAR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK. COL MANAGEMENT WAS ASKED TO CANVASS THE EXPERIENCE OF THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT AND SELECT MEMBER

GOVERNMENTS AND TO PRESENT A PROPOSAL TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR CONSIDERATION.

MEMBERS AGREED TO MOVE THE MEASUREMENT PERIOD FOR THE REVIEW OF THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX TO A MARCH-TO-MARCH CYCLE, STARTING WITH THE 2007-2009 FIGURES.

B. Staff List

COL/BD/25/9

THE BOARD NOTED THE REPORT ON STAFFING.

VIII. PROGRAMME REPORT AND APPROVAL OF BUDGET FOR 2008-2009

A. Three-Year Plan, 2006-2009 – progress report

COL/BD/25/10

The monitoring and evaluation strategy described at last year's Board meeting had been adopted, with a view to increasing staff competence in this area. All of the initiatives were filtered through a "6R" lens: relevance, results, reach, regions, resources, and relationships; a seventh "R" suggested at the previous Board meeting – readiness – had not been adopted; nor are the filters weighted equally. CEMCA's programme of work has been presented separately to highlight its progress in the current financial year. External reviews of fifteen initiatives will be completed by August 31; validation and synthesis of the reviews will be undertaken by an external evaluator.

It was suggested that quarterly reports be replaced with semi-annual reports against the three-year plan that includes a narrative on what has been achieved against key indicators, unexpected outcomes and lessons learned. The rationale for virement and increases in funding, for example, the Open Schools initiative, could also be included. In addition, best practices in areas such as eLearning could be shared. Members expressed a desire for the final progress report for this three-year period to include the suggestions discussed. The information provided will be useful for making decisions on the subsequent three-year period. There was a short discussion on the timing of approval for the next three-year plan, given the timing of the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) in June 2009 and the importance of providing sufficient time for the new plan to be reviewed and endorsed by the Board. The President recommended that the draft plan be circulated electronically to ensure full input from Board Members by year end, with the Executive Committee granted the authority to authorise approving the penultimate draft.

MEMBERS COMMENDED COL ON THE PRESENTATION OF THE THREE-YEAR PLAN PROGRESS REPORT AND NOTED THE PROGRESS MADE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME.

THE DRAFT OF THE NEW THREE-YEAR PLAN, 2009-2012 WILL BE CIRCULATED ELECTRONICALLY TO ENSURE FULL INPUT FROM BOARD MEMBERS BY DECEMBER 2008. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WAS GRANTED THE AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE PENULTIMATE DRAFT.

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- B. Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) – COL/BD/25/11
Update

The President recalled the importance of this initiative for COL. Its implementation is also a considerable learning experience both for COL and the participants.

Approximately 100 educators have been trained in these face-to-face workshops to date. In turn, in-country training offered by returning workshop participants has increased the number of direct or indirect beneficiaries to approximately 500 people. Finished materials – initially developed at the face to face workshops and refined through ongoing online collaboration – are published on COL's website.

An ongoing research component has provided continuous feedback, which in turn has allowed COL to refine and modify its implementation strategy. It is anticipated that one of the small states will offer an eLearning course for VUSSC member countries in the latter half of 2008. The focus of training will eventually migrate away from a reliance on face-to-face workshops and towards the use of more e-learning materials and online training.

The Transnational Qualification Framework (TQF) concept document and framework were refined and approved at a meeting of senior officials from 25 countries. The aim of the TQF is to ensure that programmes being offered by the small states will be recognised in other countries, initially with the VUSSC member countries. Courses meeting the TQF stamp of approval will be posted on a dedicated VUSSC/TQF website.

A brief discussion on e-learning followed. Several Members stressed the importance of COL's role in sharing experiences and best practices among all Commonwealth states, large and small.

MEMBERS NOTED THE PROGRESS REPORT ON VUSSC'S RECENT ACTIVITIES.

- C. COL's Gender Action Plan – Update COL/BD/25/12

MEMBERS CONGRATULATED COL ON ITS PROGRESS IN MAINSTREAMING GENDER INTO THE ORGANISATIONAL AND PROGRAMME LEVELS. COL MANAGEMENT WILL WORK WITH GENDER EXPERTS FROM CIDA TO REFINE THE GENDER ACTION PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY.

- D. Critical Success Factors and Risk Management COL/BD/25/13

MEMBERS NOTED THE RISK MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY COL TO MITIGATE THE RISKS IDENTIFIED IN THE THREE-YEAR PLAN, 2006-2009 AND THOSE RELATED SPECIFICALLY TO VUSSC, AND ALSO NOTED THE EMERGING CRITICAL ISSUES THAT HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED.

- E. Approval of Budget for 2008-2009 COL/BD/25/14

MEMBERS APPROVED THE PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITY AND BUDGET AT A LEVEL OF \$11,915,600 FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2009, CONTINGENT UPON COL ACHIEVING THE FUNDING REQUIRED TO SUPPORT THE BUDGET.

MEMBERS WILL CONSIDER A THREE-YEAR BUDGET APPROVAL PROCESS, WHICH WOULD INCLUDE SANCTIONING ON AN ANNUAL BASIS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COL'S MOU.

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IX. PROPOSAL ON FUTURE OF COL INTERNATIONAL

COL/BD/25/15

(COL/AU/11/4)

CONSIDERING THAT THE BOARD HAS DIRECTED THAT COL INTERNATIONAL WILL NO LONGER BE UTILISED BY COL AND SHOULD BE CLOSED DOWN, THE DEBT FROM COL INTERNATIONAL TO COL SHOULD, ACCORDINGLY, BE WRITTEN DOWN AS UNCOLLECTIBLE AND THAT THE ENTITY BE CLOSED DOWN

COL HAS BEEN ABLE TO GENERATE INTEREST FROM ITS CASH INVESTMENTS OVER AND ABOVE FUNDING RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS AND CAN USE SOME OF THIS INTEREST INCOME TO WRITE OFF THE UNCOLLECTIBLE DEBT FROM COL INTERNATIONAL WITHOUT REDUCING THE CORE FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR COL'S OPERATIONS.

X. GOVERNANCE MATTERS

- A. Follow-up from the Governance Workshop
(reference: appendix to the minutes from the June 2007 meeting)

No follow-up was discussed.

- B. Review and Ratification of revised Governance Manual

COL/BD/25/16

MEMBERS RATIFIED THE REVISED GOVERNANCE MANUAL.

- C. Orientation for new Board members and new Board Chair

New Board Members found the orientation session to be very valuable. COL management will continue the practice in future.

- D. Terms of Office and Appointments for Board of Governors and
Committee Membership

COL/BD/25/17

THE BOARD NOTED THE TERMS OF OFFICE AND APPOINTMENTS FOR THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR, H.E. THE HONOURABLE BURCHELL WHITEMAN WILL CONTINUE TO ACT IN HIS CAPACITY AS ACTING CHAIR UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE NEW CHAIR IS APPOINTED. AT THAT TIME, MS. JENNIFER GLENNIE'S APPOINTMENT AS THE NEW DEPUTY CHAIR WILL TAKE EFFECT. THE TERM WILL BE FOR ONE YEAR.

MEMBERS WILL CONTINUE TO SERVE OF THE RESPECTIVE COMMITTEES UNTIL THE NEW CHAIR RECONSTITUTES THE MEMBERSHIP.

- E. Update from Commonwealth Secretariat

The Deputy Secretary-General provided an update at the Board/Staff retreat.

XI. IN-CAMERA SESSION

- A. Approval of the In-Camera Minutes

COL/BD/24/MIN/2

- B. Matters Arising from the Minutes

- C. Report of the Performance Committee

XII. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

XIII. NEXT MEETING OF THE BOARD

The Acting Chair thanked Board Members for their participation, particularly the new Members.

Following a brief discussion, it was agreed in principle that the next meeting of the Board take place in the margins of the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) in Malaysia, June 15-19, 2009 provided scheduling could be accommodated around this event.

The President also thanked Members for their contributions at the Board/Staff retreat, noting that their comments would be very useful in the preparation of the next three-year plan.

The meeting concluded at 16hrs10 Pacific Daylight Time.