BACKGROUND

Ten of the twelve Commonwealth Caribbean countries are island states. Belize and Guyana, located in Central and South America respectively, are the two exceptions. While Jamaica has a population of 2.6 million and Trinidad & Tobago has 1.3 million, all the other countries have a population of less than one million.

In spite of the growing number of tertiary institutions in the region and the growth of distance education, there is a huge unmet demand for tertiary qualifications. This has attracted private and cross-border providers. In order to document this phenomenon, COL, in collaboration with UNESCO and the University of the West Indies, published a book, *Foreign Providers in the Caribbean: Pillagers or Preceptors?*, edited by Stewart Marshall, Ed Brandon, Michael Thomas, Asha Kanwar and Tove Lyngra, in 2008. This can be downloaded from the COL website.

CARIBBEAN CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICERS MEETINGS

The Chief Education Officers (CEOs) of the Caribbean hold annual meetings sponsored by COL. As well as an opportunity for a briefing on COL’s activities in the region, the meetings provide the CEOs with a chance to discuss new developments in open and distance learning (ODL) and education technologies, in their countries, both planned and in progress.

In March 2008, the CEO Meeting was held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica. A quality assurance institute was organised and there were discussions on the issue of school children at risk and the underachievement of boys. The meeting identified two critical issues needing immediate attention, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and violence and the underachievement of boys.

In TVET, COL is assisting in the development of ODL material for relevant courses such as autotronics, agro processing, graphic design, entrepreneurship, and the visual and performing arts including training for teachers to develop ODL material for TVET and to deliver ODL programmes effectively.

For violence and underachievement, COL is assisting in documenting good practices, the development of motivational material and the distribution of research findings. Recent reform efforts in the Caribbean were discussed and noted. COL also created a “BaseCamp” to facilitate ongoing dialogue among the CEOs.
REGIONAL FOCAL POINTS MEETING

The first in a series of Regional Focal Points Meetings was held for the Caribbean region, in Ocho Rios in March 2008. These meetings are planned to take place every three years. During the meeting, each participant reviewed, on behalf of their country, the progress that had been made at the mid-term of COL’s current Three-Year Plan 2006-2009. They provided feedback on COL’s planning process and concrete inputs for developing the next Three-Year Plan 2009-2012. The meeting was also a valuable opportunity for updating information on the status of ODL in each country and for inter-country networking that will facilitate future collaboration.

The role of the COL Focal Points was discussed and a number of key aspects of this valuable role were agreed. The Focal Points will be a one-stop window in each country for COL, will coordinate with other ministries and stakeholders and will disseminate COL-related information to relevant constituencies. The Focal Points will also meet visiting COL staff and arrange appointments with ministry officials and others as necessary. In particular, they will keep their Minister briefed and will ensure timely payment of contributions to COL. Finally, the Focal Points will be advocates for ODL and for COL in their countries and will provide advice and guidance to COL from time to time.

COL created an online “BaseCamp” for the Caribbean Focal Points to encourage online dialogue and the exchange of ideas and information.

REGIONAL INSTITUTE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

A regional institute on quality assurance in teacher education was held for policy makers and administrators in education/teacher education in conjunction with the Caribbean CEO Meeting in Jamaica in March 2008. COL’s Quality Assurance for Teacher Education and Development Toolkit was distributed and discussed at the meeting.

TVET DEVELOPMENT

A meeting of Caribbean School Principals was held in Christ Church, Barbados, in November 2008, to discuss and identify projects in skills development in the area of building construction and disaster mitigation and management. The workshop was designed to assess the current state of TVET in the region and to develop a strategy and action plan for the short and long term.

This was a follow-up workshop to the CEO’s Meeting that was held in March. At that gathering, the CEOs put TVET at the top of their agenda.
The workshop came up with a long list of areas in which COL could help. They were prioritised into high, medium and low priorities. A log frame and action plan were developed. Twenty one heads of technical institutes, community colleges and vocational training NGOs in the Caribbean attended the workshop.

**EDUCATIONAL USE OF MASS MEDIA AND ICTs CAPACITY BUILDING**

COL is working throughout the region to develop capacity for the educational use of mass media and information and communication technologies (ICTs). Projects include upgrading media unit facilities and training staff in the development of multimedia materials as well as supporting the set-up of FM radio stations in several countries.

COL held a regional workshop on the use of media for learning in the Caribbean. Held in November 2008 in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, it was attended by representatives from across the region. The focus was on sharing good practices in educational media as well as frameworks and processes for developing new learning programmes for community and public media. By the end of the workshop, the participants were familiar with the programme development framework and had applied it to a community development priority. Over 60% of the participants indicated that they would use the approach to develop new programmes. Sixteen media workers from across the region participated in the workshop.

COL also held a well-attended regional workshop in Ocho Rios, Jamaica in March 2008 on Media Empowerment for Livelihoods. The workshop was part of COL’s support for educational institutions, NGOs and community organisations to produce educational media content and develop non-formal ODL programmes related to livelihoods.

**DEVELOPING CAPACITY IN CURRICULUM WRITING**

In June 2007, working with the Commonwealth Youth Programme’s Caribbean Regional Office, COL jointly facilitated a Curriculum Development Workshop with Jamaica’s National Training Agency/HEART Trust. For curriculum writers from across the Caribbean, the workshop focussed on upgrading participants’ skills in writing a competency-based curriculum. The training standards qualification framework was developed by the HEART Trust and has been adopted by many other Caribbean countries. The writers were assisting in the development of CYP’s diploma programme into a certificate programme that uses the new training standards qualification framework for youth development work.

**REGIONAL BROCHURES**

COL has regional brochures which summarise its activities in each of the four regions of the Commonwealth. These can be found on COL’s website at: www.col.org/regional.