

EXCERPTS FROM:

COL in the Commonwealth 2006–2009 Country Reports

FOR: UNITED KINGDOM

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freedom education
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COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

Learning for Development

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FOREWORD

COL in the Commonwealth is a companion text to *Learning for Development*, the Commonwealth of Learning's Three-Year Plan for 2009-2012. This compendium reviews COL's work over the last three years (2006-2009) country by country. Together these two documents are the springboard for the *Country Action Plans* that will guide COL's future activities in each country over the 2009-2012 triennium and ensure that they are consistent with the national priorities of governments.

Ministers were enthusiastic about the previous issue of *COL in the Commonwealth* that was presented to 16CCEM in Cape Town in 2006. That report covered only developing countries whereas this one, at the request of Ministers, covers all members of the Commonwealth, showing also what COL has done in relation to the international development priorities of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. These country reviews are grouped under four regions: Africa (and the Mediterranean), Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

COL tries to create synergy within regions and across the Commonwealth by bringing countries and institutions together in common endeavours. For this reason each grouping of countries begins with a short account of the regional activities which COL has promoted in 2006-2009.

Member States also greatly value COL's Pan-Commonwealth work, which benefits from the unifying characteristics of the Commonwealth such as a common language, similar constitutional and legal frameworks, and a shared commitment to the values of peace, democracy, equality and good government. Some of the Pan-Commonwealth activities and facilities that underpin COL's work in the regions and countries are listed in the next section.

The production of *COL in the Commonwealth 2006-2009* has been an intense collective effort. COL's advanced knowledge management systems have enabled us to exploit fully the information contained in the numerous event reports prepared by staff as they work and travel. I express particular gratitude to Jasmine Lee, for diligently updating the country profiles that provided the raw material for these reviews, and to Judith Mosley, who brought this volume together in an impressively efficient and expeditious manner.



Sir John Daniel
President and Chief Executive Officer
Commonwealth of Learning

PAN-COMMONWEALTH INITIATIVES



BACKGROUND

As a Commonwealth inter-governmental organisation, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) has the mandate to operate in all 53 member states. Its work focuses particularly on 46 developing countries across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific. COL also seeks to align its activities with the education and training priorities and the countries of particular concern for major donor agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID).

COL has developed Action Plans in consultation with Focal Points and country partners in the 46 member states, with activities specific to the individual needs of each country. However, several activities have a regional or pan-Commonwealth nature. This section looks at pan-Commonwealth activities.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION

COL provides material and capacity building support for assuring quality in higher education and teacher education in the Commonwealth. A toolkit called the *Quality Assurance for Teacher Education and Development Toolkit* includes *Quality Indicators for Teacher Education* and *Best Practices in Teacher Education*, was launched in December 2007 to be used by Ministries of Education and teacher education institutions.

COL is also developing a quality assurance toolkit for open schools. As a first step towards this, staff members from 14 countries across all Commonwealth regions have been trained in the Quality Assurance of Open Schools. A Quality Assurance Toolkit for Higher Education is nearing completion.

OPEN SCHOOLS

COL encourages the application of open and distance learning (ODL) to increase access to primary and secondary schooling. In support of this, two publications, *Perspective Series on Open Schools – Open Schools for the 21st*

Century and Handbook for Managers of Open Schools have been completed with contributions from chapter authors across the Commonwealth. Both publications will be distributed as a resource to policymakers. Other resources which have been developed include the *Evaluation Study on Open Schools* and the *Cost and Financing of Open Schools* as well as a *Learner Support Guide for Open Schools*.

In addressing the need for quality educational resources, COL has initiated the development of Open Educational Resources for Open Schools (OER4OS) in 20 subjects involving six countries. The open educational resources (OERs) will be available to all Commonwealth countries.

ELEARNING FOR EDUCATION SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

COL has two major and related pan-Commonwealth initiatives in this area: WikiEducator and Learning4Content (L4C).

COL's WikiEducator (www.col.org/WikiEducator) provides an online service to support online educational communities. Use of WikiEducator has grown rapidly during the past year with the number of registered users passing the 9,020 mark and number of hits per day now exceeding 247,653. A wiki is a website on which any user can edit and update pages. The best known is the Wikipedia, the biggest encyclopaedia ever produced. Wikis are a part of the emerging "Web 2.0" environment that includes user-contributed works such as YouTube and MySpace.

COL's WikiEducator creates online communities whose members participate from remote locations to create educational content collaboratively and to plan conferences and other events. It is one of the tools used by the Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). WikiEducator is reaching 79 % of countries around the world and COL is now supporting the installation of a French language version.

The L4C initiative aims to build capacity among educators in using WikiEducator to develop free content for education. Training is free and educators "pay" for their training by donating time to develop one free content lesson of their choice. L4C workshops have already been held in 28 Commonwealth countries and at least one face-to-face workshop will be held in each member state. In addition, 26 online workshops have been held and others are scheduled. Commonwealth teachers and educators are thus becoming WikiEducators themselves, developing and donating one free content resource back to the WikiEducator community.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation approved a grant of USD 100,000 to COL over one year as core support for this initiative.

THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH (VUSSC)

VUSSC is a collaborative network of small states that create and share materials for livelihood-related post-secondary programmes. Activities during this planning period have included capacity building and the creation, customisation and reuse of OERs. Quality assurance and cross-accreditation of learning programmes has also been an area of focus.

The VUSSC is a creation of the participating countries and their existing tertiary institutions. It is a collective mechanism for people to develop expertise in online collaboration, eLearning and information and communication technologies (ICTs). It also provides an opportunity for them to produce, adapt and deploy courses and learning materials on selected subjects identified by country Interlocutors and stakeholders.

The model that has emerged is a three-week training and course development workshop at which subject specialists from a subset of the participating states strengthen their information technology (IT) skills and begin to develop course material collaboratively online. Six workshops were held during this planning period:

1. Entrepreneurship and Tourism, hosted in Mauritius in August 2006.
2. Professional Development of Educators, in Singapore in March 2007.
3. Life Skills, hosted in Trinidad & Tobago in June 2007.
4. Disaster Management, in November 2007 in Samoa.
5. The Fishing Industry, in Seychelles in March 2008.
6. The Construction Industry, in The Bahamas in November 2008.

Orientations for the selected team leaders in preparation for the workshops took place in Vancouver six weeks before each workshop.

Senior officials from VUSSC countries met in Singapore in February 2008 to consider, refine and agree mechanisms of a transnational qualifications framework (TQF), the first of its kind. This will allow the 30 participating small states to transfer course materials, qualifications and qualified learners between countries. The South African Qualifications Authority, an organisation of the South African Government with more than twelve years experience in establishing frameworks in South and Southern Africa, helped to prepare a concept document and facilitate the proceedings.

The Ministry Interlocutors for VUSSC met in London in July 2008 to discuss the implementation of the TQF, the establishment of a management committee, the logo and branding of VUSSC, monitoring and evaluation, and copyright issues.

TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

COL designs, develops and delivers distance and technology mediated learning programmes for international organisations with a global workforce. During this planning period, COL has developed and delivered a number of new programmes including: Writing Effectively for the International Labour Organization (ILO); World Bank Writing E-mails, Memos and Letters and World Bank Report Writing; and an Operational Data Management Learning Programme for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). These eLearning courses are designed to enhance the skill of staff working in field offices and in headquarters.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

COL promotes gender equality in all its programmes. Specific gender-related issues are identified during the work-planning process with country stakeholders and addressed through appropriate research, training and materials development.

COL and the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec) are working together to develop ODL training materials aimed at promoting good governance and gender equality in the public sector. The work is based on two workshops hosted by ComSec which concluded that there was limited capacity among the majority of policy makers, senior managers and professionals to mainstream gender equality in their daily work. A critical decision was to explore the role of ICTs and ODL in delivering training on a larger scale and to support research on flexible learning opportunities. A status report on what learning materials for gender mainstreaming are currently available to the public service concluded that while there are some materials available online, the current model for accessing the materials is not adequate.

A two-day meeting was convened in July 2008 to deliberate how best COL and ComSec could develop the required content using ODL tools. Invited participants included members of administrative staff colleges and other institutions involved in training public servants such as National Women's Machineries, Commonwealth partner agencies and resource people. The focus for piloting this initiative is Africa in the first instance.

COL-PROTEIN PROGRAMME

The COL Poverty Reduction Outcomes through Education Innovations and Networks (COL-PROTEIN) programme supports innovative uses of ODL to alleviate poverty in rural areas. In particular, COL-PROTEIN supports initiatives that adapt ODL, ICTs and media to build capacities for community development, for example, in areas such as food security, environmental protection, women's empowerment, micro-enterprise and good governance. Several projects across the regions have already been recipients of a COL-PROTEIN Award.

PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUMS

More than 500 people from 64 countries and various international organisations gathered in Ocho Rios, Jamaica for COL's Fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF4) from 30 October to 3 November 2006. In his closing remarks, Sir John Daniel pointed to three key areas of progress since the Third Pan-Commonwealth Forum in Dunedin, New Zealand in 2004:

1. Better research
2. More participation from developing countries
3. Integration of technology.

COL was grateful to the local hosts of the Forum for ensuring the success of the event, in particular the University of the West Indies' Distance Education Centre, in co-operation with the Caribbean Association for Distance and Open Learning, the Jamaican Association for Distance and Open Learning, the Trinidad & Tobago Distance Learning Association and the Office of Continuing Education and Distance Learning at the University of Technology, Jamaica.

The Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5) took place in London, UK, in July 2008, with the theme "Access to Learning for Development". It was hosted by COL in collaboration with the University of London, as part of the University's celebration to mark the 150th anniversary of the establishment of its External Degrees Programme. PCF5 brought together practitioners, researchers, planners and policy makers in the fields of ODL and development to explore the contribution of ODL to international development goals. Over 700 participants from over 70 countries, the majority from the developing Commonwealth, took advantage of opportunities to share experience and expertise, and to contribute to future policy and provision.

COL NEWS SERVICE & NEWSLETTER

COL customises services provided by Google and Yahoo to provide a news service on ODL and specialised topics. The general news service is available from COL's homepage while the specialised services are available on the appropriate topic pages on the website. The news service is updated approximately every hour.

COL publishes a newsletter, *Connections*, and a companion publication, *EdTech News*, three times per year, designed to provide regular news and information to COL's stakeholders. The publications are distributed in print and electronically directly to 10,000 government officials, ODL and educational technology leaders and practitioners throughout the Commonwealth and beyond. The newsletter offers updates on COL and partner activities; ODL developments, resources and events; and educational technology reviews – all with a “development” focus. It also features an “In Focus” section which highlights a different COL programme in each issue, and periodic editorials as well as “Fair Comment” columns from external sources. It can be found on COL's website at www.col.org/connections.

COPYRIGHT FOR EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

COL has worked extensively in the area of copyright in education. The focus of COL's attention is on providing information on how learning resources may be made available at low or no cost by applying the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPS). In early 2009 COL published a book on copyright for educators and administrators titled *Introducing Copyright* which is available on the COL website at no cost.



Partner Countries

Australia | Canada | New Zealand | United Kingdom





UNITED KINGDOM

BACKGROUND

The United Kingdom (UK) is a major contributor to COL's budget and a provider of significant resources for COL's work, including leadership and expertise. As a major donor, the UK has a seat on COL's board of governors.

Institutions in the UK regularly cooperate with COL to share expertise, experience and to support projects, including the UK Open University (UKOU) which has long been involved in COL activities. The current President & CEO of COL, Sir John Daniel, is a former Vice-Chancellor of the Open University.

The UK works through the Department for International Development (DFID) to deliver assistance to priority regions, countries and projects. COL, as a programme, falls under the United Nations and Commonwealth Department of DFID.

SUMMARY

In 2006-2009, COL's work has supported DFID's priorities in three regions, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Activities in all three sectors of Education, Learning for Livelihoods and Human Environment are relevant to DFID's goals of poverty reduction and sustainable development.

The UK has provided specific support to COL in a variety of ways during this planning period. The UK hosted the Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5) in 2008, providing sponsorship, planning, content and participation for the event. The UK also supported the Fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF4) in 2006. A key meeting for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) was held in London in July 2008. UK institutions have been involved in several projects and UK consultants have contributed considerable expertise to COL activities throughout the Commonwealth.

DFID MANDATE AND PRIORITIES

DFID's primary goals are poverty reduction and sustainable development with an emphasis on helping people to help themselves and create a better future for all. For DFID, fighting poverty means working together to settle conflicts, increase opportunities for trade, tackle climate change, improve people's health and their chance to get an education. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are at the heart of DFID's work. The MDGs include goals

to achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, improve health and ensure environmental sustainability.

COUNTRIES AND REGIONS OF FOCUS

The UK provides assistance through DFID in regions around the globe, the Commonwealth.

Africa is a primary focus and DFID supports activities throughout the region, including most of the countries COL is engaged with. Priorities include education as well as agriculture, environment, governance, health and HIV/AIDS. There are still 75 million primary school-aged children not in school, of which 35 million live in Africa alone. Africa needs an extra 1.6 million teachers if every child is to be sent to school. While primary education is a priority, there is also a need to invest in secondary and higher education and vocational skills training.

In Asia, DFID focuses on the poorest people in the poorest countries, seeking to ensure more people have access to basic services including education.

For the Caribbean, where many people still face persistent poverty even though overall the region is more developed, DFID puts emphasis on gender equality and HIV/AIDS initiatives.

COL works in most of the Commonwealth countries in these regions and is active in education, skills development, agriculture and health.

EVENTS

London was the venue for PCF5 in July 2008. The event was hosted by COL in collaboration with the University of London as part of the University's celebration to mark the 150th anniversary of the establishment of its External Degrees initiative. The University of London, UKOU, DFID and Nexus Strategic Partnerships were major sponsors of the event. Over 100 delegates attended from the UK, among them presenters and two theme leaders (in addition to staff from international organisations based in the UK). Several public and private sector exhibitors took part.

The UK also supported PCF4, held in Jamaica in 2006. The University of London was a minor sponsor of the event and about 40 participants and presenters attended.

For both PCF4 and PCF5, individuals from the UK took part in pre-Forum online discussions and programme planning committees.

In July 2008, the Ministry Interlocutors for VUSSC met in London to discuss the transnational qualifications framework and several key management issues.

Every two years, an open and distance learning (ODL) conference is held in Cambridge, UK. COL supports this event by providing at least one keynote speaker and supporting five participants from developing Commonwealth countries to attend.

COL GOVERNANCE

As a primary donor to COL's budget, the UK has a seat on the Board of Governors, currently held by Dr. David Levesque, Senior Education Advisor Education and Skills in the Policy Division of DFID.

ASSISTANCE AND EXPERTISE

Since July 2006, COL has hired 16 consultants from the UK to provide expertise to projects across the regions.

In June 2007, The BBC World Service Trust, in partnership with UKOU and 13 education institutions across Africa, launched the Teachers in Africa Radio Season. Working with the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa consortium in which COL is a partner, the project aimed to help train thousands more teachers, so millions more children can receive a quality basic education.

LOOKING FORWARD

COL looks forward to its continued partnership with DFID and close collaboration with UK partners. In 2009-2012, the UK will continue to be a major sponsor of COL's activities, as well as providing valuable resources in terms of leadership and expertise through the Board of Governors, UK educational institutions and consultants.

COL will seek to engage more fully with the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda and the UK dependencies such as Anguilla, Cayman Islands and Turks & Caicos Islands.