



BOARD OF GOVERNORS President's Quarterly Progress Report: July – September 2009

1. Board Matters

The Board met for its annual meeting in Kuala Lumpur on June 18-20 following the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (17CCEM). Minutes of the meetings held in Kuala Lumpur have been circulated. Having received comprehensive updates on COL's work in the 2008-2009 year and over the 2006-2009 triennium at this meeting, the Board decided that a Quarterly Report for the period April through June 2009 would not be necessary. This report therefore focuses on the first quarter of COL's 2009-2010 financial year, from July to September 2009.

For the record, however, I note that COL's participation in 17CCEM achieved very satisfactory results. The Ministerial Communiqué reads:

“Ministers commended the Commonwealth of Learning on its work since 16CCEM; endorsed the three year plan for 2009-12 “Learning for Development”; and reiterated commitments to continued financial support. Ministers especially praised the work of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), and encouraged its expansion in terms of capacity-building in the use of ICTs in education, and the development and delivery of courses, with particular emphasis on mechanisms for quality assurance.”

I am sure that the presence of the members of COL's Board of Governors at 17CCEM was an important element in this happy outcome and I express my warm appreciation of their contribution.

2. General

Following the Board's approval of the 2009-2012 Three-Year Plan, *Learning for Development*, and its ratification by Ministers at 17CCEM, much of the work in this quarter has been aimed at putting in place arrangements for its implementation. I report in the Programme section below on various aspects of this planning.

It is good to note that we now have a full complement of Education Specialists following the arrival of Ms. Trudi van Wyk (eLearning) and Ms. Alison Mead Richardson (Skills Development). Each of the eight programme initiatives in the plan now has its own Education Specialist and there is a high level of collaboration between them.

2.1 Distinguished Visitors

On September 21, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, made a detour to COL on his way to the UN General Assembly in New York. My colleagues and I were delighted by this special visit – the first time that an S-G has come to COL other than for a Board meeting. For part of his visit we linked him by teleconference to seven members of the Management Committee of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) located in the Bahamas, Lesotho, Maldives, Mauritius, Samoa and Trinidad & Tobago. They told him about the impact of the VUSSC and presented him with a bid to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation for further funding of the programme. He also received an update from CEMCA.

Addressing the staff at the end of his visit, the S-G said that COL had achieved great credibility and was well placed to help the world respond to some of the crises that faced it. Earlier he had urged us to aim to increase COL's size and impact substantially by drawing on support from corporations and foundations that were looking to support organisations like COL with a successful track record of addressing key global issues. Since COL's work was now in the mainstream, and education will continue to be a central priority in the future, COL should raise its game further and develop a vision paper that would outline an enhanced role in the coming years.

The Secretary-General's comments reinforced views expressed by Mr. Nick Hopton, Deputy Director and Head of the Intergovernmental Organisations Department, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, on a visit to COL the previous week. He said that the UK viewed COL as a model of what a successful and effective intergovernmental organisation should be.

Later I report on a visit by the Prime Minister of Lesotho who was accompanied by the First Lady and his Ministers of Foreign Affairs & International Relations and Health & Social Welfare. I simply note here his comment to COL staff that: "I assure you that the work you are doing here is making a difference – is changing and improving the lives of men and women in Lesotho".

Such comments are an encouraging endorsement of our work but will not make us complacent.

2.2 President's activities

In July, I took part in the 1,500-delegate World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) at UNESCO. Prior to the WCHE, all COL's Education Specialists contributed to a text on *ICTs in Higher Education* commissioned by UNESCO and distributed to all delegates. At a policy forum on higher education in small states held by the International Institute for Educational Planning before the main event, I presented an account of the VUSSC co-authored with John Lesperance and Paul West.

At the conference proper I gave a short address in an early plenary and also shared a parallel session on tertiary education in small states with Dr. Emma Kruse Vaai (University of Samoa) who chairs the VUSSC Management Committee. Following the WCHE, I presented a paper on *Higher Education, Service to the Community and ICTs*, co-authored with Dr. Balasubramanian, (COL Education Specialist for Agriculture and Livelihoods), at a Global Education Leaders Forum organised by Microsoft. I believe that all these contributions helped to heighten knowledge of COL's work among the ministers, senior officials and institutional leaders attending the WCHE.

Each year the Commonwealth Foundation organises a four-day conference/seminar for diplomats newly posted to High Commissions in London (or newly assigned to the Commonwealth portfolio) and COL is invited to make a presentation at this event. This year I made the presentation and stayed for the whole meeting as a way of refreshing my knowledge of Commonwealth activities and getting to know diplomats from the 15 countries represented.

From London I went on to Botswana to chair the steering committee of COL's six-country (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia) initiative for the preparation, as open educational resources, of senior secondary curricular materials for open and conventional schools. I am impressed by the transformative impact of this work and the capacity building and enthusiasm that it generates.

Texts of these presentations (and a video of the WCHE plenary) are available at www.col.org/speeches.

Finally, I am pleased to say that in August I submitted to the publisher (Routledge), three weeks ahead of schedule, the manuscript of a book *Mega-Schools, Technology & Teachers: Achieving Education for All*, which will appear in the winter of 2010. It focuses on two aspects of COL's work, open schooling and teacher education, arguing that the world will never achieve universal primary education, let alone universal secondary education, without more extensive recourse to ODL. By agreement with the Chair of the Board, royalties from this book will be shared with COL.

3. Programme

This quarter marks the beginning of the current Three-Year Plan 2009-2012. Our Education Specialists have done the ground work for the next triennium by elaborating Logframes for each initiative and identifying activities that will be tracked over the period of the plan for their impact in the field.

We have signed a collaborative memorandum with the Commonwealth Secretariat for work in four areas: Teacher Education; Healthy Communities; VUSSC; and Respect & Understanding (www.col.org/col-comsec). An MOU has also been signed with the University of the South Pacific (USP) for collaboration on VUSSC; Healthy Communities; Teacher Education; Skills Development; Higher Education; and a review of the Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL) at USP. (Even though Fiji has been fully suspended from the

Commonwealth, organisations can engage with 'professional and non-governmental counterparts in Fiji' according to the official circular from the Secretary-General's office.)

3.1 Education Sector

3.1.1 Open Schooling

Three activities within the Open Educational Resources for Open Schools (OER4OS) project occurred during this quarter. The OER4OS initiative receives funds from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and has significant implications for enhancing access, improving quality and cutting the costs of secondary schooling. Workshops were held in Botswana and Namibia, where the master teachers were trained to transform print-based material into online material (using COL's newly created Moodle Template). The Project Steering Committee's second meeting was held in Gaborone, Botswana in the same period. It provided the senior institutional members, ministry officials, and COL project leaders from the six countries an opportunity to focus on the progress so far, discuss key issues, make necessary adjustments and refine strategies for ensuring that all the outcomes of the project will be fully achieved on time. The participants are key to the project's success and left the meeting re-energised and fully committed both to the importance of the project and to the critical role that they must play in its successful completion and implementation (www.col.org/openschooling).

3.1.2 Teacher Education

A two-day Partners' Consultative Meeting on Teacher Education was organised by COL at which some of the key actors in the field were present. These included Dr. Cream Wright, UNICEF; Dr. Freda Wolfenden, TESSA (Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa consortium); Dr. Caroline Pontefract, ComSec; Ms. Kathy Nicholson, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation; Dr. Lucio Sia Jr., UNESCO, Paris; and Professor Jophus Anamuah-Mensah, West African Consortium for Teacher Education (WACTED). The aim was to share our plans so as to avoid duplication of effort. A Statement of Commitment was agreed by the partners present. Two areas for future collaboration include: (i) strengthening the existing Teacher Resource Centres; and (ii) ensuring that teacher training materials developed by partners would be widely disseminated (www.col.org/teachereducation).

3.1.3 Higher Education

COL has developed a low-cost model for conducting institutional quality audits. The COL Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM) has been designed so that it can be applied regardless of the programme delivery mode of an institution. The model has been pilot-tested in the Caribbean during this quarter.

3.1.4 Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

A Management Committee is now directing VUSSC's activities, supported by COL's Education Specialist. The committee includes representatives from small states in all regions of the Commonwealth. At its first meeting, which was held in August in Vancouver, the VUSSC Management Committee agreed on its Terms of Reference, drafted a funding proposal to the CFTC and agreed on a budget and plan of action. The Management Committee also approved the implementation plan for the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF), which had been finalised earlier in the week by the TQF Management Committee, which also met in Vancouver (www.col.org/vussc; www.vussc.org).

3.2 Livelihoods & Health Sector

3.2.1 Skills Development

This was a quiet period for skills development as the transition was made between two Education Specialists at COL. Curriculum and materials development for an ODL degree in Nursing in Kenya continued, with plans being made to validate the programme with the Nurses Council of Kenya. This work is being supported by COL through the African Medical & Research Foundation (AMREF). Following a consultant's visit to Samoa, planning is taking place for a workshop on vocational literacy for three Pacific countries in the next quarter.

3.2.2 Learning for Farmers

In collaboration with the University of British Columbia, COL has developed a Learning Management System called LIVES (Learning Through Interactive Voice Educational Systems). The goal is to provide communities with a learning tool based on voice mails using mobile phones. This will allow COL to scale up its interventions because more than a thousand learners can be reached through this system, which can provide automated feedback and can be used to transmit voicemails in any language or dialect. It is also a nice example of collaboration with a local institution in British Columbia (www.col.org/l3farmers).

3.2.3 Healthy Communities

A new community ODL programme on healthy environments was developed in Jeffrey Town, Jamaica. Foundations have been laid for community learning programmes in Tanzania and Solomon Islands, on HIV/AIDS and community health respectively. More than 100 African media and rural development workers are taking an online scriptwriting course about smallholder innovation.

3.2.4 eLearning

COL conceptualised the Commonwealth Computer Navigator's Certificate (CCNC) two years ago and I am happy to report that all seven modules of the materials are now complete. The CCNC materials were developed as a free resource for ICT skills training in the Commonwealth and the wider world along the lines of the International Computer Drivers Licence (ICDL). The materials are now available on COL's website. The Commonwealth Secretariat has shown great interest in the CCNC and plans to announce it at CHOGM in November (www.col.org/ccnc).

3.3 CEMCA

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) facilitated the training of 12 participants from the National Institute of Education (NIE), Sri Lanka in managing an educational TV Channel and converting the materials into eContent. During this reporting period, CEMCA also completed baseline studies and capacity building in ten community radio stations under the ongoing Science for Women's Health and Nutrition project of the Government of India.

3.4 Presentation to WITFOR

Our Vice-President, Professor Asha Kanwar, was invited and funded by the UN organisers to give a keynote address to the World Information Technology Forum (WITFOR) held in Hanoi, Vietnam in August. Her title was *Open and Distance Education in the Twenty-first century: a Commonwealth perspective*.

4. Stakeholder Relations

4.1 Member Governments' Support

This quarter we received contributions from 19 countries, compared to 11 contributions by the same time last year. I give the full list of contributions, which includes the three major developing-country donors, India, Nigeria and South Africa, below under 'Finance'. Given the Board's concern in June about a potential falling off of contributions due to the global economic downturn, this pattern of prompter payment is reassuring. I believe that it can be attributed to our strategically-timed despatch of invoices and adjustments we have made to the levels of contributions requested from some countries. It must also reflect these countries' satisfaction with COL's work for them.

4.2 Focal Points Update

Ms. Trudi van Wyk, previously our Focal Point for South Africa, left her position with the South African government to join COL as Education Specialist: eLearning in succession to Dr. Wayne Mackintosh. Mr. Ghaleeb Jeppie, Chief Director, International Relations, Ministry of Basic Education replaces her as South Africa's Focal Point.

4.3 Honorary COL Advisors

COL Focal Points and staff helped to identify nominees for this newly created role. Twelve of the 30 names received were shortlisted by a committee that I chaired and approved by the Chair of the Board. The following have accepted this honorary designation to date: Professor Dato' Dr. Ansary Ahmed (Malaysia); Dr. Rama Kondapalli (India); Dr. Abdul Mannan (Papua New Guinea); Professor S.A. Mbwette (Tanzania); Professor Ajaga Nji (Cameroon); Dr. Caroline Seelig (New Zealand); Professor Hazel Simmons-Macdonald (Barbados); Mr. Rod Tyrer (UK); Ms. Ruby Vaa (Samoa); and Ms. Jenny Williams (New Zealand).

4.4 Congratulatory Letters

Congratulatory letters were sent to four newly appointed High Commissioners and Ministers/ministerial officials, as well as to three new appointees: the Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Sri Lanka, Nigeria's Permanent Delegate to UNESCO and the Chairman of the National Institute of Open Schooling (India).

Letters of condolence were sent to the Samoa Ministry of Education on the passing of its Chief Executive Officer and to the President of Botswana on the passing of Mr. George Kgeledi Kgoroba, a former Minister of Education and close friend of COL.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenue

COL has received a total of \$2.6 million in voluntary member government funding since the beginning of the financial year on July 1, 2009. This represents over 30% of the annual funding forecast from member governments for this fiscal year.

Contributions in the following sums were received from member governments: Antigua & Barbuda - \$6,194; Bahamas - \$64,800; Belize - \$32,400; Botswana - \$48,600; Grenada - \$5,440; Guyana - \$16,320; India - \$936,004; Jamaica - \$48,600; Lesotho - \$73,541; Malaysia - \$50,531; Mauritius - \$60,000; Nigeria - \$750,000; Pakistan - \$35,000; Papua New Guinea - \$16,200; Samoa - \$64,000; South Africa - \$250,000; Trinidad & Tobago - \$81,000; Tuvalu - \$10,800; and Zambia - \$32,400.

As I noted earlier, we remain optimistic that the economic downturn will not impact COL's funding levels adversely and we were encouraged by the call from Ministers in the 17CCEM communiqué for countries to continue their financial support to COL.

Additional contributions are of two types – Grants (and special projects) and Fee-for-service contracts. They continue to form an integral part of the budget for 2009-2010 and we estimate that at least 20% of COL's overall revenues will come from this source.

Grants and special projects: Work is ongoing under three major grants with expected revenues as follows: from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) for VUSSC (£300,000 in 2009-2010); from UNICEF for Mainstreaming Child Friendly School Models (\$700,000 in 2009-2010) and from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for Open Educational Resources (\$450,000 in 2009-2010).

Fee-for-service contracts: COL entered into two new agreements this quarter with UNHCR to provide more eLearning services, totalling US\$92,000. Over \$600,000 in revenues is forecast for the year from this service with over \$200,000 recognised in the first quarter. Full cost recovery was achieved in 2008-2009 with a surplus of about \$20,000 generated. We hope that a similar or greater surplus will be possible in 2009-2010.

5.2 Cash Flow

COL's cash position remains strong despite global economic pressures and fluctuating currencies. COL began the new fiscal year on July 1, 2009 with cash of \$10.5 million. A portion of this amount was restricted in accordance with the cash reserve policy to protect against any shortfalls in expected revenues (\$1.7 million) and another portion was on hand to meet approximately four months of activity should revenues not materialise (up to \$3 million to be available).

This level of cash will enable COL to deal with any downturns in funding, should they occur, while ensuring that activity levels are maintained. We will continue to monitor the health of the banks/financial institutions that we use and limit our exposure to foreign currencies while making prudent financial decisions about the use of COL's resources.

5.3 Expenditures

Using July and August 2009 figures (the September data is not yet finalised), approximately \$2 million of the \$11.2 million budget is estimated to have been spent or committed to meet programme and organisational management activities, staff costs and office, site and IT costs. Similar levels of expenditure were reported in the first quarter of the previous year. The budget for 2009-2010 includes \$2.15 million of expenditures related to additional contributions.

6. Human Resources

6.1 Staff Changes

6.1.1 Arrivals

Ms. Trudi van Wyk joined COL on September 1, 2009 as Education Specialist – eLearning.

Ms. Hema Iyer joined COL on September 14, 2009 for a temporary appointment as Project Assistant.

Ms. Alison Mead Richardson joined COL on September 15, 2009 as Education Specialist – Skills Development.

6.1.2 Movements

Ms. Sharmila Gracieuse, who joined COL in March 2009 on a temporary appointment, was appointed to Programme Assistant on September 1, 2009 to work with the eLearning for International Organisations initiative, replacing Ms. Kari Karlsberg who left COL at the end of August.

6.1.2 Recruitment

Recruitment has begun for the Knowledge Management Coordinator position which will become vacant for a one-year period while Ms. Helen Askounis is on maternity leave.

7. Information Technology & Knowledge Management

The new Knowledge Base, a system for capturing and delivering all data reported from meetings, conferences, travel, contracts, consultant reports and programme updates is now nearing completion. The design of the system allows for aggregation of data from sources that have previously been in disparate locations.

COL changed its IT service provider in July and the new company has been settling in. New projects such as the replacement of the Intranet with a SharePoint system are now underway. When combined with future upgrades they will provide a more powerful online work environment for staff.

A workshop manual to support the training of IT managers in open source software in eLearning institutions was produced and is now available on COL's website.

The Director, Knowledge Management and Information Technology presented a seminar on Creative Commons licenses in support of Open Educational Resources in a Vice Chancellors meeting of the African Council of Distance Education (ACDE) and a keynote address to the 44th Conference and AGM of the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA).

8. Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF6)

PCF6 will be held from 24 to 28 November 2010 at Le Méridien Cochin Resort & Convention Centre, Kochi, Kerala, India. The theme will be: *Access & Success in Learning: Global Development Perspectives*.

With COL's concurrence, the Indira Gandhi National Open University, our local partner for PCF6, has named Professor P.R. Ramanujam, Director of the Inter-University Consortium and Professor of Distance Education at IGNOU's Staff Training and Research

Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) as Programme Chair/Manager for PCF6. He is now liaising with COL staff and our PCF5 partners in the early stages of developing a programme.

9. Visitors to COL

By COL's standards this was a bumper season for visitors. Visitors in July included Professor Uma Coomaraswamy, former Vice Chancellor, Open University of Sri Lanka; Mr. Jerry Watkins, Swinburne University, Australia; Dr. Cream Wright and Ms. Maida Pasic, UNICEF; and Professor Rajesh Chandra, Vice Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific. We also received a four-member delegation from the University of Belize led by Dr. Santos Mahung, President of the University. His Excellency Mr. S.M. Gavai, the new High Commissioner of India to Canada and Mr. Ashok Das, Indian Consul General in Vancouver came to be briefed on our work.

Mr. Desmond Bermingham, Visiting Fellow of the Centre for Global Development (and a former UK Board Member), was at COL during part of July and August under the COL Executive Secondment Programme. His report, entitled *Changing the technology of learning: the role of open and distance learning in the changing international aid architecture*, was circulated to the Board.

In August, Dr. Fred Mulder, Rector of the Open University of the Netherlands gave a presentation to COL staff on Open Educational Resources (OERs). Professor Abdul Khan, Assistant Director General, Communications and Information, UNESCO, and a former staff member of COL called on us. Mr. Alex Budden, the UK Consul-General in Vancouver visited COL accompanied by Ms. Louise Boyle, Head of Change for British Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Mr. Dean Pogas, Policy, Projects & Communications Officer. Mr. Moshe Kao, Minister/Counsellor, Lesotho High Commission, Ottawa, came to COL for a briefing and was instrumental in organising the later visit to COL of his Prime Minister.

September drew some high profile visitors, most notably the Commonwealth Secretary-General and The Rt. Honourable Prime Minister of Lesotho, Mr. Pakalitha Mosisili.

Lesotho's very senior delegation to COL also included the First Lady, the Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Dr. Mphu Ramatlapeng, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, Mr. Mohlabi Kenneth Tsekoa. I first met Kenneth Tsekoa at the Delhi Conference of the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE) in 1978 when he was at the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre. We then worked together on the programme committee for the next ICCE conference in Vancouver in 1982. Before becoming Foreign Minister he served as Minister of Education and High Commissioner in London. He has spoken in support of COL at a number of Commonwealth meetings.

We invited eight children from Deep Cove Elementary School, North Saanich, BC, which had raised \$10,000 to rebuild a school in northern Lesotho, to come to COL and

meet the Prime Minister and his colleagues. The presence of the children created a pleasant family atmosphere.

I should also note that we intercepted the Rt. Honourable Lord Alderdice, who was a member of the Sen Commission on Respect and Understanding, when he passed through Vancouver. We made a video recording of his presentation at COL for inclusion in a collection of interviews on respect and understanding (see below, Publications/Resources).

10. Publications/Resources

The following is a list of recent publications and resources that have become available since the June Board meeting:

10.1 Video recordings on Respect and Understanding:

Seven interviews on different aspects of the Commonwealth report on 'Civil Paths to Peace' were conducted during the 17th CCEM in Kuala Lumpur by CEMCA in partnership with the Open University of Malaysia (OUM).

These 'conversations' with Dr. Sam Egwu, Minister of Education, Nigeria; Honourable Susil Premajayantha, Minister of Education, Sri Lanka; Honourable Zahiya Zareer, former Minister of Education, Maldives and current Board Member, COL; His Excellency Tan Sri Hasmy Agam, Executive Chairman, Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, Malaysia; Mr. Duncan Hindle, Director General, Ministry of Basic Education, South Africa; Professor Tan Sri Dr. Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hassan Shahabudin, Vice Chancellor, University Kebangsaan, Malaysia, are available at www.cemca.org/civilpaths. These, along with earlier recordings, were presented to the Secretary-General during his visit, and will be available for institutions to use as course materials.

10.2 Other publications

Connections/EdTech News, June 2009, Vol. 14, No. 2 (www.col.org/connections)

Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation at the Commonwealth of Learning by Dr. Glen M. Farrell. A resource for COL staff, consultants and partner organisations, this handbook outlines COL's approach to and expectations for results-based monitoring and evaluation (www.col.org/MEHandbook).

Quality Assurance Toolkit for Distance Higher Education Institutions and Programmes. Edited by Dr. Kondapalli Rama, Ms. Andrea Hope and Professor Uma Coomaraswamy (www.col.org/QAToolkit_HE).

Perspectives on Distance Education: Open Schools for the 21st Century. Edited by Dr. Dominique A.M.X. Abrioux and Ms. Frances Ferreira (www.col.org/psopenschooling).

Learning to Live Together: Using Distance Education for Community Peacebuilding. Edited by Ms. Rawwida Baksh and Ms. Tanyss Munro (www.col.org/LiveTogether).

ICTs for Higher Education. Backgrounder prepared by COL for the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, Paris, July 2009. Authors (COL staff): Dr. K. Balasubramanian; Dr. Willie Clarke-Okah; Sir John Daniel; Ms. Frances Ferreira; Professor Asha Kanwar; Ms. Angela Kwan; Mr. John Lesperance; Mr. Joshua Mallet; Dr. Abdurrahman Umar; and Mr. Paul West (www.col.org/resources/publications/conferenceReports).

10.3 Search tool

COL has introduced an online search tool for open courseware (OCW) and open educational resources (OERs). Anyone can use it to search for open learning materials from higher education institutions and OER repositories (www.col.org/oer).

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

*Sir John Daniel
President & Chief Executive Officer
September 30, 2009*