

Connections



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A “Commonwealth master’s degree” in business and public administration

A programme of study leading to a “Commonwealth master’s degree” in business and public administration may soon be available by distance internationally. The programme would be developed and delivered through a consortium of Commonwealth universities and co-ordinated by The Commonwealth of Learning.

Representatives of The Commonwealth of Learning, the Commonwealth Secretariat and seven Commonwealth universities met in London in November to discuss the development of such a joint master’s programme. Based on the success of two previous meetings which examined the feasibility and desirability of such a programme, funding for this final consultation and some initial programme development was provided by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) under agreement with COL.

The London meeting was chaired by **Dato’ Dr. Gajaraj Dhanarajan**, President and CEO of COL, and attended by Vice-Chancellors and other experts from four major open universities (Bangladesh Open University, Indira Gandhi National Open University, the Open University of Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom Open University) as well as representatives from Deakin University (Australia), the University of Victoria (Canada) and York University (Canada). COL’s Director, Programmes, **Dr. Ian Mugridge**, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General, **Mr. Nick Hare**, and other Commonwealth Secretariat staff also contributed to the consultations. Unfortunately, representatives from Pakistan’s Allama Iqbal Open University were prevented at the last moment from attending.

Based on a pre-conference proposal prepared by **Professor Rakesh Khurana** of IGNOU, discussions on the first day of the London meeting focused on curriculum matters. By the end of the day, participants had agreed on the feasibility of the proposal, common private/public sector administrative elements and potential sources of individual courses to be developed and delivered Commonwealth-wide.



The second day was devoted to more practical matters related to the delivery of the programme. There was agreement that a operating model could be developed that would allow institutions to contribute courses which they would deliver, providing their own guarantee of quality. These courses could then be fully accredited by a local institution or by COL. Specific arrangements would need to be varied from place to place around the Commonwealth depending on local needs and on the commitments of provider institutions.

Finally, participants expressed their support for the development of a detailed programme proposal with a view to launching a pilot in South Asia. If successful, the programme could then be expanded to include other Commonwealth countries, particularly the small states, where there is considerable demand for such opportunities. The programme would be an ideal complement to COL’s Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme which provides access to master’s degrees in distance education.

COL will continue to take the initiative in this area and hopes to involve additional partners both in Asia and elsewhere. Interested institutions are invited to contact The Commonwealth of Learning. Comments and suggestions are also welcome.

Funding Update

Africa and Australasia

Since the last issue of *Connections*, new contributions to COL’s 1996/97 core budget have been received from the Governments of Australia, Botswana, Kenya and Sri Lanka.

Caribbean

Additional pledges and funds have been received from the Caribbean states of The Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Caribbean Education Ministers have also pledged to speak “with one voice,” in support of secured funding from member Governments, at the 13th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers to be held in Botswana in July 1997.

Bermuda – for the record

For the record, in the June issue of *Connections*, in summarising 1995/96 contributions to COL’s core budget by Commonwealth member governments, no mention was made of the Cdn. \$7,000 donation received from the Government of Bermuda, a Commonwealth “associated state” operating under the auspices of Britain. While this was technically received by COL in its 1994/95 fiscal year, and is reported as such in COL’s *Summary Report 1994 – 1996*, it could be recorded in some books a 1995/96 entry. COL particularly appreciates this important gesture as there has been no particular onus placed on such a state to do so. To date, Bermuda is the only Commonwealth associated state to make a contribution in recognition of COL’s work.

Province of British Columbia

As host to COL’s international headquarters, the Canadian Province of British Columbia provides funding for COL that matches that of the Canadian Government – a partnership that, in 1987, helped to convince Commonwealth

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At the National Correspondence College, Luanshya, Zambia

Slow start but sustainable

Establishing a computer training centre in northern Zambia

On the Copperbelt in northern Zambia, within the National Correspondence College (NCC), is a unique and surprising facility. Upstairs, in a building characteristic of the austerity given to government buildings, behind a heavily barred door, you will find probably the most up-to-date computer training centre in Zambia. Air conditioned and scrupulously clean, the facility is the pride of the college. How did it happen that the Correspondence College is home to such a facility?

“South-South” co-operation

In 1990, at a conference hosted by COL in Hong Kong on *Technical and Vocational Education and Training by Distance*, representatives of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) were demonstrating their Computer Awareness programme, which is offered by distance education. The two Zambians that were present saw the potential for a programme of this nature on the Copperbelt. With COL acting as a co-ordinating body, the two institutions collaborated to enable the NCC to offer the OUSL programme.

Since training in computer awareness requires computers – and the NCC did not own any – COL mobilised its resources to establish a facility that houses ten “486”-grade computers and the supporting peripheral equipment and training manuals. NCC provided the space, the security screens on the doors and windows, and the Zambian Distance Education Centre provided the air conditioning. OUSL was contracted to provide its modified course materials and training for the Zambian staff.

Overcoming obstacles

The early years were beset with problems, with hardware maintenance and lack of trained staff being the most significant. Trying to convert the staff of a correspondence college into computer instructors, from a near zero skill base level, required training, training and

more training. Additional support came from surprising avenues. A young American, working with the Zambian Christian Fellowships, who happened to have a PhD in computer science, was one of the most significant supports the staff had in the beginning when panic was a constant companion. His presence in the centre, at no cost, not only offered technical assistance, but also the moral support that having an expert on call promoted.

Toward sustainability

Today, nearly six years from its beginning in Hong Kong, the centre is a thriving hub of entrepreneurial activity. With a well trained and dedicated staff, the centre is not only offering training to individual students, but has attracted contracts with industry and Government agencies. Despite the loss of staff to promotion within the Ministry of Education, the centre has maintained a strong core of excellent trainers, who are providing a service to the community that is affordable, accessible and flexible. And, compared to commercial enterprises, its fees are minimal.

The most recent move to ensure a lack of dependence on external assistance was to train two members of the computer centre staff in basic computer operational maintenance. This was achieved by an attachment of two NCC staff to the Technical College of South Africa (Technisa), which provided a unique training opportunity, geared to the needs of the centre.

A second development has been the installation of Internet access and the capacity to utilise electronic-mail for better communication. COL provided the necessary hardware and subscription to the local carriers, which included training. The frustration of long delays in communication between COL and the NCC is hopefully over as the computer centre takes this next step forward in becoming part of the communications network of the nineties.

At this point, the centre is now considered sustainable which bears witness to the dedication of the staff concerned, the institution itself and the Ministry of Education.

Ministry support

Projects such as this cannot succeed without support from within. The Ministry of Education has been totally supportive and has continued to liaise with COL on the development of both the staff and the promotion of

the centre. **Mr. Chabwe Chisunka**, Director, Department of Continuing Education, Ministry of Education, (and Principal of NCC at the time the centre was initiated), wrote:

The computer centre at the National Correspondence College has become the pride of the Ministry of Education, and in particular, my Department. In view of that we should at all costs endeavour to maintain it because it is a flag carrier of vocational training through distance education.

Other international support

The centre has also attracted support from an international service organisation in the form of scholarships offered to women. A recent recipient of one of these awards, a thirty-year-old unemployed woman with three children, wrote:

I am so thankful for [you] offering me such an opportunity as it will help me a long way. This course is expensive in our country and had it not been for your sponsorship I would not even dream of taking such a step. I strongly feel if I can complete this course I will be able to get employment and this in turn will benefit me and my family, since my husband is out of employment on medical grounds. I once again thank you so much for your kind assistance and I wish you God's blessings in your work.

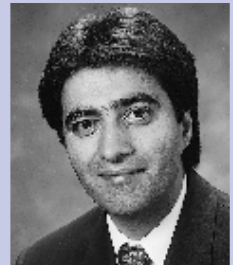
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Governments to establish the agency and locate it in Vancouver.

As part of ongoing consultations with the province, COL's President and CEO, **Dato' Dr. Gajaraj Dhanarajan** accepted an invitation in November to meet with BC's then Minister of Education, the **Honourable Moe Sihota**, to discuss matters of mutual concern. The level of BC's contribution, in light of current budget limitations on both parties, was high on the agenda.

COL has taken pride in its ability to work with Canadian and especially British Columbian constituencies, both public and private, in promoting wider use of distance learning methods and educational technologies. Through COL, the province gains international recognition. Its experience and expertise in materials development, training and technology have been put to use by COL on several occasions to mutual benefit. The Open Learning Agency of British Columbia has also recently won an administrative contract covering world-wide distribution of publications on COL's behalf.

As a major sustaining contributor to COL's core budget, the Province joins Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Britain, Canada, and India in having a nominee as a member of COL's Board of Governors.



The Honourable Moe Sihota, BC Minister of Education, 1996

COL in Action

Collaboration with ACU

The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and COL intend to co-operate on offering several programmes for the benefit of Commonwealth higher education institutions.

Discussions are underway that would involve COL developing and co-ordinating orientation and training activities designed for CEOs and key staff of ACU member institutions that are conventional in nature but may be moving toward a dual-mode structure. COL would draw on its extensive experience in the field to provide a training framework that would address key issues such as:

- designing and developing distance education courses;
- using and integrating media in distance education; and
- planning and managing distance education.

COL and the ACU's Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS) have also agreed to collaborate on the development of a study of quality assurance practices in selected Commonwealth countries as a companion to the CHEMS publication, *The Real World of Performance Indicators: A review of their use in selected Commonwealth countries*. The new study would include Australia, Hong Kong, India, New Zealand and the United Kingdom and should be published by mid-1997.

COL has also agreed to collaborate with CHEMS on promoting the use of performance indicators by Commonwealth universities and on the development of distance education training materials for university administrators.

Discussions with the ACU have been led COL's President and CEO, **Dato' Dr. Gajaraj Dhanarajan**; its Director, Programmes, **Dr. Ian Muiridge**; ACU's Secretary General, **Professor Michael Gibbons** and CHEMS Executive Director, **Mr. John Fielden**.

Leadership in education

COL's President and CEO, **Dato' Dr. Gajaraj Dhanarajan**, continues to be in high demand as a keynote speaker at events throughout the Commonwealth. His presentations have been well received and will be made available through COL's World Wide Web site, or can be sent to interested parties upon request. Recent and upcoming presentations include:



Gajaraj Dhanarajan

- **Partnerships or Paternalism**, a presentation made at *Universities in the 21st Century: Education in a Borderless World* (August 1996, Singapore; IDP Education Australia/British Council)



Orientation workshop for tutors assisting with the second year of the Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme, conducted by the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education at IGNOU in New Delhi.

- **New Technologies for Distance Education**, delivered at the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association General Conference (August 1996, Malaysia)
- **Open Learning: The Distance Ahead**, a keynote address delivered on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the International Extension College (October 1996, Cambridge, UK)
- **Education: Equalising Opportunities**, on receiving an Honorary Fellowship, and presenting the vote of thanks on behalf of all honourees, at the College of Preceptors Fellowship Award Ceremony (October 1996, University of London, UK)
- **Technology: An Opportunity Not a Threat**, a paper presented to the 10th Australian International Education Conference (October 1996; Adelaide, Australia; IDP Education Australia)
- **Student Learning and Support on a Virtual Campus** presented via video conference to the Fifth Asia Pacific Conference on Student Affairs (October 1996, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia)
- **Distance Education: Status and Issues**, presented at a regional seminar on capacity building in distance education for training of primary school teachers (October 1996, Bangkok; Asian Development Bank/UNESCO)
- **Education in the New Millennium – Supporting a Learning Society**, a keynote address given at an international symposium on post-secondary education hosted by the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong on the occasion of the "grand opening" of its new campus (November 1996)
- Dr. Dhanarajan led a staff seminar at the University of Abertay Dundee, UK, in conjunction with being conferred with an **Honorary Degree of Doctor of Education** (November 1996)
- **From Reality to Virtuality: Commonwealth Education in Transition**, delivered as the Council for Education in the Commonwealth's *Annual Lecture* (November 29, House of Commons, UK)
- **Distance Education in Developing Countries**, to be presented at the 18th World Conference of the International Council for Distance Education (June 1997, Pennsylvania State University, USA)
- Dr. Dhanarajan will speak on the theme, **Educational and Technological Challenges for the 21st Century**, at the 13th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (July 1997, Gaborone, Botswana)
- Dr. Dhanarajan will present a paper on **International Perspectives**, addressing the theme, *The Convergence of Distance and Conventional Education* at the Cambridge International Conference on Open and Distance Education (September 1997, Cambridge, UK)

News from CEMCA

The Commonwealth of Learning is pleased to announce that **Mr. Gopal Saksena** has been appointed as the first Director of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). Mr. Saksena has worked in mass media communication for over 35 years, most recently as Controller (Video Documentation) for the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, in New Delhi, and previously as Director, Central Production Centre, Doordarshan (Television India), New Delhi. He has served both All India Radio and Doordarshan in several posts, including educational broadcasting, and has also contributed to education and training as a faculty member of Bareilly College and the Film and TV Institute of India. He has written and produced several television documentaries and is well known for his articles that have appeared in both industry and public forums world-wide. His book, *Television in India: Changes and Challenges*, has been recently published by M/s Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi. Mr. Saksena's appointment was effective November 1, 1996.

Also in November, CEMCA joined forces with Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) to offer a four-day, participant-paid workshop on the management of non-print media resources. Nineteen representatives of 17 organisations from throughout South Asia took part in discussions on the importance of this rapidly expanding field.

Among the recommendations made at the workshop was a call for CEMCA to take the lead in developing a common format for documentation of non-print media resources and in organising related training courses.

CEMCA was established by COL in July 1994 and is housed at the Indira Gandhi National Open University in New Delhi. It operates a media library and exchange programme.



From left: OLI Director Professor Tam Sheung-wai, Hong Kong Governor Christopher Patten, Hong Kong Jockey Club Chairman Wong Chung-hin and OLI Council Chairman Peter Wong at the cake-cutting ceremony marking the grand opening of the Hong Kong Institute's new campus.

News from Hong Kong

Hong Kong's Open Learning Institute (OLI) has recently achieved several significant milestones as it continues to break new ground on its way to university status.

On October 1, 1996, the Government of Hong Kong announced it had granted self-accreditation status to the Institute. The decision followed a rigorous validation and review exercise conducted by the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation.

Professor Tam Sheung-wai, Director of OLI, welcomed the decision, which he said confirms "OLI's commitment and ability to live up to the substance of a renowned institution after seven years' hard work and dedication by its staff, students and supporters." Professor Tam is confident that the government will also approve full university status and a change of name to the "Open University of Hong Kong" before the end of the current legislative year in June 1997.

One month after this announcement, OLI held a "grand opening" of its new campus in conjunction with hosting an international symposium on post-secondary education entitled, *Vision 21 - Paradigm Shifts in Tertiary Education in the 21st Century*. Keynote speakers included **Professor Ram Takwale**, President of the Association of Asian Open Universities and Vice Chancellor of India's Indira Gandhi National Open University, and **Dato' Dr. Gajaraj Dhanarajan**, former Director of OLI and now President and CEO of COL.

OLI also announced in October that its 20,000 students would be able to read books and journals and obtain comprehensive library services from a personal computer at home when OLI completes its "electronic library" in early 1998. This is thanks to the Government of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and the Croucher Foundation.

A long-time supporter and benefactor of OLI, the Jockey Club Charities Trust has pledged to donate HK \$10 million toward the establishment of the electronic library, after giving nearly HK \$74 million to help build the Institute's permanent campus and equip its Centre for Disabled Students and environmental laboratory. The electronic library will be open 24 hours a day, providing equal access to the majority of OLI's students, who work full-time, or are disadvantaged through being disabled, housebound or institutionalised.

And on December 19, 2000 adult students were awarded degrees at the Institute's fourth convocation ceremony. Honorary degrees were also conferred on three long-standing supporters of open education in Hong Kong: **Professor David Murray**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the UK Open University; **Sir John Swaine**, a Hong Kong lawyer and promoter of support for education; and **Dr. Ian Mugridge**, COL's Director, Programmes.

Master's degrees in open and distance education

The Institute of Educational Technology at the UK Open University has announced that it will be offering a programme of study leading to a master's in open and distance education starting in February 1997. This brings to five the total number of institutions offering such an opportunity to both national and international students, all of which were not in existence until this decade.

Distance education master's programmes are also available through Indira Gandhi National Open University (India), Athabasca University (Canada), Deakin University (Australia), and the University of London/International Extension College (UK).

COL's Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme has sponsored enrolment in the IGNOU programme for government nominees in selected developing Commonwealth countries.

Publications

Requests for COL publications may be sent directly to: COL Customer Service, c/o the Open Learning Agency of BC, 4355 Mathiess Place, Burnaby BC V5G 4S8 Canada; tel: 604.431.3210; fax: 604.431.3381; e-mail: catalogue@ola.bc.ca. Nominal charges apply to orders from *developed*, *newly developed* and *non-Commonwealth* countries - usually Cdn.\$12.00 plus shipping. Orders must be accompanied by an institutional purchase order, be pre-paid in either Canadian or US funds, or charged to VISA or MasterCard accounts.

Raising Awareness on Biodiversity: Commonwealth Examples Edited by Walter Leal Filho, Clare Dykes, and Zena Murphy. In this book, readers will find critical analyses of the means that need to be employed to ensure that an environmental education dimension is implemented as part of biodiversity conservation projects. It describes state-of-the-art initiatives aimed at raising awareness on biodiversity in Commonwealth nations in South America (Guyana), Asia (India), the South Pacific and Africa. Special emphasis is also given to environmental education in the context of teaching systems in Africa. This book has recently been published jointly by The Commonwealth of Learning and the European Research and Training Centre on Environmental Education. (134 pages)

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Further details on any news item that appears in *Connections* may be obtained by contacting COL's Public Affairs Office, or visiting our World Wide Web site.

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