

Connections



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COL wins accolades and financial support from education ministers

At their recent triennial meeting in Botswana, Commonwealth education ministers paid warm tribute to The Commonwealth of Learning and to its efforts to meet the educational needs of their countries. They noted its impressive record of achievements, since they met three years ago, and endorsed a three-year plan and budget.

The education ministers also endorsed a three-year funding structure, tied to three-year commitments from each Commonwealth government, in order to provide financial stability and to enhance COL's ability to plan effectively. COL has been strengthened by these events and given a renewed mandate to assist developing countries to adapt their educational systems in an age when communications technologies are revolutionising education.

Canada speaks first

Leading off remarks by education ministers, the Honourable Chester Gillan, Prince Edward Island Minister of Education and Head of the Canadian delegation, announced a further three-year commitment for Canada:

... we are fortunate, and we should all take considerable pride, in the fact that the Commonwealth embraced the idea of employing knowledge and information technology as an instrument for development nearly a decade ago, when heads of government established The Commonwealth of Learning in 1988 in Vancouver.

While COL is a relatively young organisation, it has achieved international recognition for its expertise and its professionalism... This unique institution is at the cutting edge in terms of its capability to help developing countries improve access to quality education through the use of distance education and appropriate information technologies.

...Canada is proud to be the host and a significant contributor to COL and is deeply committed to improving COL's financial position so that it can get on with what it does



best. If COL is to be truly a Commonwealth organisation, its programmes must be sustained by contributions from as many Commonwealth countries as possible... This level of commitment in the present Canadian budgetary context bears witness to the importance that Canada attaches to this organisation.

In conclusion, Canada welcomes the opportunity to reaffirm its strong commitment — not just to The Commonwealth of Learning — but to the ideal of making knowledge and learning the keystones for development in the modern age.

Numerous delegation heads followed expressing their appreciation and support for COL. Major donors, including Australia, Britain, India and New Zealand, also announced three-year commitments. And representatives of several smaller countries pledged increased and first-time contributions. Among them was the Honourable John Mutorwa, Namibian Minister of Basic Education and Culture:

We thank The Commonwealth of Learning for... assisting us to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for open and distance education with particular reference to the co-ordination of nation-wide physical and human infrastructure. COL was extremely helpful in providing consultancies and advice. All of these resulted in the founding of the Namibian College of Open Learning.

... We are therefore willing, as a "tier-three" country, to pledge US\$25,000 per annum for the next three years. We look forward to COL growing from strength to strength.

Message to CHOGM

The following is excerpted from the "Message to Commonwealth Heads of Government" that education ministers agreed to send to the October 1997 CHOGM as a result of their deliberations in Botswana. The theme of the ministers' conference was "Education and Technology: The Challenges of the 21st Century."

"The revolution in information and communications technology (ICT) presents us with challenges and opportunities. Our competitiveness and prosperity depend on our capacity to respond. We believe resources must be found for investment in education and training to prepare our people for the new world of work and life-long learning. Commonwealth Governments should aim to enter the 21st century having achieved higher levels of literacy.

"The Commonwealth's special attributes equip it well to confront this challenge. Its existing network of values, institutions and culture and its tradition of learning from each other in many fields lends itself to exploiting the new technological networks opening up for the 21st century.

"The new technologies create unprecedented opportunities to enhance the quality and accessibility of education, as COL has most ably demonstrated. We recognise that technology is a means and not an end and that the latest technology is not always the most appropriate technology for all countries. The financial costs of transformation will weigh more heavily on some than on others, and there is a risk of disadvantaged member countries being marginalised further. But Commonwealth countries are well-placed to work effectively together to prevent these disparities growing.

"We accordingly invite the Commonwealth to... ensure a predictable flow of resources to COL so that, amongst other things, it can work to correct gender inequality and meet the other demands placed on it by Commonwealth developing countries, especially its 31 small states."

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Communiqué

Among the conclusions and recommendations reached by Commonwealth ministers of education at their Botswana conference, were the following pertaining to COL:

Ministers noted COL's work and accomplishments of the past three years, endorsed the three-year plan (1997-2000), approved the three-year funding proposal, and agreed to take the necessary action to implement their commitment to COL's core budget (C\$16.95 million) for the next three-year period to enable it to fulfill its mandate.

Many delegations recorded their gratitude for the assistance COL had given them over recent years, and expressed a desire to see COL

play a significant role in their use of technology to enhance access to education for their peoples. Ministers also recognized the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of distance education systems, especially in the fields of teacher training and educational access for girl children and women as well as basic education for all.

After the meetings, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, President of COL, expressed his appreciation for the support and encouragement that was extended by ministers and their delegations. "The hopes for COL are very high," he said, "bolstered by the strong support of the governments in Botswana, we feel that we can meet these expectations."



Participants at the COL/ADB training workshop in Jakarta

COL completes ADB work

COL has successfully completed three workshops in the final phase of a contract with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the area of *Training for Capacity Building in Distance Education for Primary Teacher Training*. This initiative is in response to a request by ministers of education for the Nine High Population Countries at their meeting in New Delhi in 1993. The ADB agreed to finance certain activities for five of those countries, namely Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Peoples' Republic of China. ADB awarded the contract to COL in May 1996. The first phase of the contract consisted of COL selecting four researchers to prepare working papers on the following topics:

- Cost effectiveness in primary teacher training through distance education,
- Current trends, methods and technologies in distance education for training primary school teachers,
- Development of monitoring and evaluation systems for primary teacher training through distance education, and
- Evaluative research on the quality of primary teacher training through distance education.

The papers were prepared with the help of a regional seminar, which took place in Bangkok in October 1996. This phase was concluded with the submission of the reports to ADB in December 1996.

The final phase consisted of organising three workshops to assist in the provision of primary teacher education through distance learning. "Training toolkits," designed to provide comprehensive manuals for use in training distance educators, were developed in collaboration with the International

Extension College (UK) and ministers of education in the five selected countries were invited to nominate three delegates to attend each workshop. Each delegation was asked to prepare a presentation on the status of distance education for primary teacher training in their respective countries.

The first workshop, entitled *Instructional Design for Open and Distance Learning*, was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in May 1997 and was jointly hosted by the Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO and the Bangladesh Open University. The trainers were Dr. Mavis Kelly, of The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and Dr. K.S. Yuen, from The Open University of Hong Kong. All participants agreed that the workshop was a good forum for distance educators to compare and contrast their operations, and to share experiences with each other. Much was gained by both organisers and participants about the merits of the toolkits and their effectiveness for use in Asia. Useful recommendations were also made for future workshops.

The second workshop covering the *Planning and Management of Open and Distance Learning*, was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in July 1997 and was hosted by the Universitas Terbuka. The trainers were Dr. Bruce King, a consultant based in Australia, and Ms. Judy Roberts of Roberts & Associates, Canada. Particular emphasis was given to the role of leadership in management and planning; the distinction between production and duplication of teaching resources in terms of cost; and the role of management information systems in service, quality and accountability. The participants made valuable comments to modify and

enhance the toolkits for their particular use.

The third workshop was on the *Use and Integration of Media in Distance Education*. It was held in New Delhi, in August 1997, and was hosted by the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). The trainers were Dr. Abdul Khan, COL's Principal Communications Specialist, and Mr. Jim Bizzocchi, of British Columbia's Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology. In the instructional design portion of the workshop, participants prepared detailed plans for production of audio/visual materials on selected topics. The response was positive and enthusiastic about further exploration of the role of media in distance education materials.

The toolkits and workshop materials will now be available for use in other COL programmes. COL would like to sincerely thank all involved in the workshops for their valuable contributions. A generous note of appreciation also goes to the host institutions for their remarkable efforts in handling local arrangements.

COL in Africa

Tech/Voc

A workshop was held in Namibia in September to discuss the potential within Southern Africa to collaborate on the implementation of technical/vocational education and training (TVET), using distance education or alternate delivery mechanisms. The workshop was a collaborative initiative, involving COL, the Namibia Ministry of Basic Education and Culture and the Namibian College of Open Learning. It brought together a group of 25 TVET educators from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as from Ghana.

Representatives from each of the countries presented at least one paper illustrating aspects of technical and/or vocational education as delivered in their country. From this, common issues emerged. As the intent of the workshop was to collaborate on finding solutions to some of these common problems, an action plan was drawn up, which will start a process of collaboration. The first stage involves teacher training by distance education, in the agriculture subject area, and ultimately should establish a model, which will demonstrate the feasibility of offering vocational subjects by flexible delivery mechanisms.

Co-ordinated national policies

National Forums on Distance Education were held in July and August in Tanzania and Malawi. The meetings were well attended by ministers of education, senior educational policy officials and educational administrators, as well as by experts with experience in other countries and representatives of aid agencies operating in the region. Participants reviewed the development of distance education at all levels and established frameworks for co-ordinated national policies together with recommendations for their ministries of education.



The Honourable Clara Bobitile, Deputy Minister of Basic Education and Culture (Namibia), delivers opening remarks at the Southern Africa TVET workshop. To her left is Professor Tony Dodds, Director of the Centre for External Studies at the University of Namibia (workshop chair)

This important and very successful initiative was sponsored and facilitated by COL, and has now resulted in requests for similar assistance from other countries in the region.

DE associations meet

"This meeting has provided the first opportunity for all Commonwealth professional associations in Africa to meet together," remarked a participant in the African Regional Consultation on Training held in Accra, Ghana in April 1997. COL convened this meeting of African distance education associations for the purpose of attaining consensus on what areas of training merit the most concentrated efforts, and on which COL should base its future activities in this area. In attendance were representatives from DEASA (Southern Africa), DEATA (Tanzania), NADEOSA (South Africa), WADEA (West Africa), ZADE (Zambia) and ZINADOL (Zimbabwe) as were heads of distance education departments of universities and members of the ministries of education from six African countries. Discussions ranged from establishing common concerns throughout the regions to suggesting workable solutions that included enhancing methods of sharing information.

The meeting report (available from COL) includes a list of recommendations. As a result of this initiative, COL will conduct a series of training workshops in Africa to introduce and test the recently developed training toolkits (see "COL completes ADB work" above) and to evaluate their usefulness in the African context. The planning of the workshops is underway and will take place in 1998.

GHADEA, the Ghanaian Distance Education Association, was inaugurated in Winneba on May 19, 1997. This follows the establishment of a National Distance Education Council in Ghana late last year.

Non-formal education

An African Consultation on Open and Distance Learning for Development Communications and Non-formal Education was also convened by COL earlier this year in Ghana.

The discussion group was comprised of representatives from ministries of education, departments of non-formal education, universities, non-governmental organisations and the Commonwealth Secretariat. A number of action items and activities were proposed in the areas of advocacy, research and collaboration.

It was concluded that a closer liaison with the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) on non-formal education would be of mutual benefit, and several participants agreed to attend the ADEA Working Group General Assembly in Senegal in October 1997.

Another priority was to seek funding support for an action research project jointly proposed by COL and the International Extension College to provide comprehensive documentation and in-depth analyses on a range of non-formal education projects using distance education techniques.

A follow-up workshop is scheduled for December 1997 in Namibia to investigate low-cost communication technology for non-formal education.

Digital radio

Opening New Frontiers in Learning, a pan-Africa conference held in Accra, Ghana, in April 1997, was the result of a successful partnership between The Commonwealth of Learning, the Ghana Ministry of Education and WorldSpace Inc., a world leader in digital radio technology (see *Connections*, April 1997).

The conference was organised to identify the needs of each sector of education and to explore appropriate technology vehicles to assist in improving access to and quality of education. WorldSpace introduced their digital radio system with a view to its application in Africa. The format of the conference accommodated both anglophone and francophone countries and attracted over 200 delegates. The conference proceedings are being prepared and distributed by WorldSpace.

From the partnerships forged at this conference, two new task forces were established. COL will be leading the Anglophone Task Force in setting up a plan of action for the coming year. Ms. Patricia McWilliams and Dr. Abdul Khan are coordinating COL's professional contributions.

People

Regional Advisers

COL is pleased to announce two new appointments as Regional Advisers to the President.

Mr. Peter R.C. Williams, Regional Adviser to the President (UK and Europe). Mr. Williams has been an independent consultant on international education since 1984. Previously, he headed the education programme at the Commonwealth Secretariat (1984-94) and was Professor of Education in Developing Countries at the University of London's Institute of Education (1978-84). He has also been an education planning adviser to the ministers of education in Ghana (1968-72) and Kenya (1966-68).

Ms. Madeleine Woolley, Regional Adviser to the President (Australia and New Zealand). Ms. Woolley is Director of the Adelaide

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COL's Regional Advisers to the President meet in Vancouver. From left to right, standing: Mr. Peter R.C. Williams (UK and Europe), Professor N. Kofi Pecku (Western Africa), Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan (President of COL), Professor Geoffrey Mmari (Eastern Africa), Dato' Dr. Sharom Ahmat (Southeast Asia) and Mr. Jakes Swartland (Southern Africa). Seated: Professor Ram G. Takwale (South Asia), Dr. Dennis H. Irvine (Caribbean) and Ms. Madeleine Woolley (Australia and New Zealand)

Employment opportunities

The Commonwealth of Learning invites applications for three new Education Specialist positions. The positions will serve to facilitate the exchange of skills, knowledge and technological know-how required in the design, development, delivery, management and evaluation of distance and open education activities in the Commonwealth. Incumbents will design and manage programmes and projects in the field of distance and open education in response to identified needs by Commonwealth governments, their institutions and agencies, and formulate strategies and plans to advance the mission of COL.

Opportunities exist in the areas of:

- Teacher training—to design, develop and help co-ordinate the delivery of in- and pre-service teacher training, with experience in Africa a distinct advantage.
- Technical/vocational education and training—to develop co-ordinated operational plans for TVET initiatives at the post-secondary level through the use of flexible delivery systems.
- Higher education—to provide leadership and management skills in spearheading efforts to identify and co-ordinate efforts in the design and development of post experience professional development programmes and building Commonwealth networks of professionals in pursuit of common goals of research and instructional design.

Applicants must be citizens of a Commonwealth country and should have a postgraduate degree and a minimum of ten years experience in the respective areas. A knowledge and understanding of the role of distance education in fostering human resource development is a distinct advantage. **The originally posted deadline has been extended to December 15, 1997.** Candidates should submit their curriculum vitae and application to:

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Fax: 604.775.8210
or via electronic mail to:
administration@col.org

Initial appointment will be made on a fixed-term gratuity bearing contract beginning no sooner than March 31, 1998.

COL is committed to an equal opportunities employment policy.

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Institute of TAFE and has had nearly thirty years of experience in both secondary and tertiary education. She has held the position of Director at a large, multi-campus Institute of TAFE in South Australia, which involved developing strong partnerships with businesses and industry. The Adelaide Institute has national and international status for leadership in development and use of innovative technologies in open and distance learning.

With the addition of Mr. Williams and Ms. Wooley, COL now has designated advisers in eight regions that have agreed to take on additional responsibilities on COL's behalf. Full biographical data and contact details are available upon request or through the World Wide Web at <http://www.col.org/senstaff.htm>.

COL's Regional Advisers gathered in Vancouver during October to meet with headquarters staff and help plan specific activities, regional priorities and co-ordinated efforts for COL's work.

Mr. David Petitpierre has been appointed a COL Adviser to assist the Chairman and the President in a number of areas, including developing strategies and implementing initiatives to seek non-governmental project funding for COL. Mr. Petitpierre has a life-long enthusiasm for the Commonwealth, having lived and worked in the UK, India and Canada. He has worked in the tea industry (in India), transportation, natural resources and health care. Living in Vancouver for the past 29 years, he has most recently been a professional consultant with KPMG Canada. Mr. Petitpierre has travelled extensively in Commonwealth countries and has been an active member of the Royal Commonwealth Society since 1959.

In memoriam

With sadness, we report that **Mr. Julius Odurkene** passed away on June 6, 1997. As Director of the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education at Makerere University in Uganda, Mr. Odurkene was instrumental in developing the Institute's Department of Distance Education and its External Degree Programme. He was also a member of COL's Board of Governors from 1993 to 1996. He will be missed.

Welcome back Fiji!

Fiji rejoined the Commonwealth on October 1, after a ten-year absence. Member governments received and accepted Fiji's application for readmission, following the approval of a new Fijian constitution earlier this year. Commonwealth membership now stands at 54.

COL has always worked closely with the University of the South Pacific, which is based in Fiji's capital, Suva. USP is a regional university, serving all of the Commonwealth's members in the South Pacific with distance education programmes, local learning centres and student services. In this way, and in many others, Fiji has demonstrated its leadership and support for its small island neighbours. COL is very pleased to welcome Fiji back as a full and active member of the Commonwealth.

Now available

ET2000 Conference Papers. Educational Technology 2000: A Global Vision for Open and Distance Learning, held in August 1996, was an opportunity for nearly 200 educators and technologists from 38 countries to gather in Singapore to share, discuss and debate many of the important issues in open and distance learning. This collection of keynote addresses and conference papers is rich in diversity, containing thoughtful analyses and challenges for the future. The list of papers, opening remarks by COL Chairman, Dr. H. Ian Macdonald, and other details are available from COL or through COL's web site at: <http://www.col.org/et2000.htm>. (387 pages; Cdn. \$25.00 plus shipping)

Requests for COL publications may be sent directly to: COL Customer Service, c/o the Open Learning Agency of BC, 4355 Mathissi 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.



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