



BOARD OF GOVERNORS President's Quarterly Progress Report: April – June 2008

1. Board and Board Committee Meetings

The Board and its Committees (Audit Committee, Executive Committee and Performance Committee) held meetings in Vancouver from June 15-18. The Acting Chair, HE The Hon. Burchell Whiteman, had to leave for an important engagement in Jamaica on June 16. I am most grateful to Mr. Ransford Smith, Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, for chairing the meetings on June 17 and to HE Professor Michael Omolewa for chairing the Board meeting on June 18.

The Board welcomed to their first meeting two new members: The Honourable Dame Carol Kidu, Minister for Community Development, Women, Religion and Sports, Papua New Guinea, as the Regional Representative for the Pacific, and Dr. Linda Sissons, Chief Executive Officer, Wellington Institute of Technology, representative of New Zealand; as well as Shri R.P. Agrawal, representing India, and Professor John Tarrant, Secretary-General, Association of Commonwealth Universities, in his role as Advisor.

A half-day planning retreat for Board members and Education Specialists was held on June 17. Draft notes have been circulated to participants for their review; the final version will be posted at www.col.org/govinfo.

With the proviso that the formal texts of these decisions will be captured in the full minutes of the meetings that will be circulated for later approval, I note here certain Board decisions. The Board:

- Elected Ms. Jenny Glennie as Deputy Chair for the period from the appointment of a new Chair until June 30, 2009.
- Confirmed that HE The Honourable Burchell Whiteman will continue as Acting Chair until a new Chair is appointed.
- Ratified the audited Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ended June 30, 2007, which are posted at www.col.org/govinfo.
- Noted the preliminary interim consolidated financial statements for the period ended March 31, 2008.
- Noted a proposal for a funding strategy beyond 2009.
- Received a progress report on the Three-Year Plan 2006-2009.

- Resolved to close COL International.
- Approved a revised version of the Governance Manual.
- Approved a Programme of Activity and Budget for 2008-2009 at a level of \$11,915,600 for the year ending June 30, 2009, including financial provision for Performance Management.

2. President's Activities

In my previous Quarterly Report, I noted the success of the meeting of the Caribbean focal points as a mechanism for obtaining input to our planning for the region and as a useful professional development opportunity in its own right. In this quarter, focal points from 16 of the 18 African Commonwealth countries attended a similar meeting in Malawi, which was also very successful.

In April, I visited Canberra to make contact with the new Australian Government and had good meetings with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and AusAID. I was told that the Government is placing a new emphasis on multi-lateralism and partnerships. In May, Professor Kanwar and I also called on the Acting Australian High Commissioner in London. Although I have not yet received a reply to my subsequent letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Stephen Smith, inviting Australia to renew its financial support to COL, we were delighted when AusAID announced an allocation of AUD\$50,000 to support the attendance of representatives from the Pacific at PCF5.

Whilst in the Pacific, I visited Papua New Guinea to address the conference of the PNG Association of Distance Education. There was a powerful speech from the British High Commissioner, who said that 'the combination of ODL, ICTs and Education is the most important issue in development'. Equally memorable was the speech given by COL's new Board member, Dame Carol Kidu, PNG's Minister of Community Development, Women, Religion and Sports. Dame Carol likes to turn important words into acronyms and *vice versa*. For her, OPEN means Ownership, Partnership, Empowerment and Networking and she has gathered around her what she calls her MAD CAT TEAM (Make A Difference, Change Agent Trainers, Together Everyone Achieves More).

Professor Kanwar and I visited the Commonwealth Secretariat in May where we had our first formal meeting with the new Secretary-General, The Honourable Kamallesh Sharma, and took him to lunch afterwards. He evinced great interest in COL's work and urged us to lead other Commonwealth bodies in producing multi-media learning materials to give greater reach to the report of the Amartya Sen Commission on Respect and Understanding, *Civil Paths to Peace*. He has also offered to try to secure additional funds for the extension of COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative in Africa.

I presented a report on COL's work to the annual meeting of the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Secretary-General paid a warm tribute

to our former chair, Lewis Perinbam, before my remarks. Afterwards, ten countries commented warmly on the impact of COL's work.

Finally, on a visit to India I was able to take part in a meeting of non-governmental providers of tertiary level distance learning jointly organised with CEMCA. I also attended the formal creation of I-CONSENT, the Indian Consortium for Educational Transformation, a group with which COL has worked for several years. This allowed me to pay a brief second visit to the Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Limited (MKCL), a truly impressive organisation dedicated to the use of ICTs in development.

On a more personal note, I was especially pleased to receive an honorary doctorate from the Université de Montréal, where I began my career almost 40 years ago. I was also flattered that one of my speeches was picked up by the 70-year old US monthly *Vital Speeches of the Day* and published in the same issue as Barack Obama's celebrated campaign speech on race (see: <http://www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/5236>).

3. Programme

The Board received a full update on programme implementation from July 2006-December 2007 at its June meeting so I shall simply note here some other relevant and recent developments.

3.1 Education

The three-month capacity-building project at the Bangladesh Open School was successfully completed with the training of 25 staff members who have developed 26 lessons on the Wiki Educator, which are also available in print format.

About 200 people have been trained online in basic Open Education Resources development skills during this period.

In addition, COL assisted Seychelles in reviewing its higher education sector and developing a policy framework, options and strategies for the establishment of a national university.

Working with governments, institutions and individuals to develop capacity in ODL and ICTs is one of our major ongoing activities.

3.2 Learning for Livelihoods

COL in partnership with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) conducted a workshop in Abuja, Nigeria, where 17 coordinators from all 12 geo-political zones of Nigeria have been trained in the application of ODL and ICTs for TVET delivery in schools and polytechnics. The coordinators will assist the Federal Ministry of Education in a national skills and vocational education project.

COL organised a monitoring site visit for the L3 Farmers (L3F) partners from India, Mauritius and Sri Lanka to Tamil Nadu, India, in May. The aim was to review and share experiences of the L3F – Community model in India that is based on building cognitive social capital and the L3F – Institutional model in Mauritius and Sri Lanka that is based on strengthening university capacity in extending their outreach to rural communities.

COL not only responds to the requests of Member States but is also very mindful of the specificities of context and modulates its approaches accordingly.

3.3 Human Environment

Major steps have been taken to concretise the strategic partnership with UNESCO in the area of community media and ICTs for learning. Key activities completed in this quarter were: 1) a feasibility study, commissioned by UNESCO and executed by COL, for a national network of community multimedia learning centres in St. Kitts & Nevis, the first of its kind in the region; and 2) a “Designing an Effective Learning Programme” workshop for a new community radio in Jamaica. Joint planning meetings in May identified nine items for media cooperation between COL and UNESCO, which include capacity development in community media for ODL, innovations in the use of mobile telephony, ODL for media/ information literacy and ODL in journalism.

We work with key partners to leverage the impact of our initiatives.

3.4 CEMCA

COL's regional office in Delhi released the first draft of the Quality Assurance Guidelines for Multi-Media materials which have been developed after intensive consultations with a range of stakeholders in Malaysia and India. The objective is to contribute to the improved quality of multi-media content.

Over the years we find that the materials we develop often assume significance for unintended target groups and are adapted in ways that were not envisaged in the first instance. There is increasing demand for COL to develop a repository of free content.

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

A very important meeting of the interlocutors (officials designated by the Minister of Education of each participating country to represent them in policy and planning discussions on the VUSSC) will take place in London before PCF5. I see this meeting as an important tipping point in the process of getting the participating states to play a stronger role in directing and managing the initiative.

Meanwhile, a final version of the Concept Document for the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) for the VUSSC has been sent to Ministers of Education and the TQF Management Group will also meet in London to finalise the detailed annex to the concept document showing qualifications equivalencies.

We shall take advantage of these meetings to progress the evaluation of the VUSSC initiative. It is having many unintended positive spin-offs in the participating countries and we shall try to capture these in systematic ways.

4. Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning

More than 600 delegates are registered to attend our Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning taking place in London next month. As noted above, AusAID – the Australian Government's overseas aid programme – has now joined COL, the UK Open University, the UK Department for International Development and the University of London External Programme as major sponsors, allowing us to sponsor the attendance of over 200 delegates from developing Commonwealth countries. More than 350 papers have been accepted for inclusion in the proceedings.

The other late news is that Commonwealth Chair and President of Uganda, His Excellency Lt.-Gen. Yoweri K. Museveni, has responded to our invitation to address delegates. His Prime Minister and former education minister, the Rt. Hon. Professor Apolo R. Nsibambi, will represent him in London. He is also a former Chancellor of Makerere University and Director of its Institute of Social Research.

PCF5 is being hosted by COL in partnership with the University of London, forming a part of the University's celebration of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of its External Degrees initiative. The Forum Co-Chairs are Sir Graeme Davies, Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, and Sir John Daniel, President and CEO of COL (www.col.org/pcf5).

5. Stakeholder Relations

5.1 Member Governments' Support

During this quarter, we have received contributions from Bangladesh, Cyprus, The Gambia, Maldives, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka; increasing the number of countries contributing to COL to 39 – a record. We also received second instalments from Mauritius and Uganda and I am pleased to say that 13 countries have increased their funding to COL this year.

5.2 Focal Points Update

In my previous Quarterly Report, I noted the success of the meeting of Caribbean focal points as a mechanism for obtaining input to our planning for the region and as a useful professional development opportunity in its own right. In this quarter, focal points from 16 of the 18 African Commonwealth countries attended a similar meeting in Malawi, which was also very successful. The Vice President and Programme Director,

Professor Kanwar, presented the conclusions of both these events to the Board/Staff Planning retreat held on June 17.

6. Finances

6.1 Revenues

Member Governments contributions totalled \$7.8 million by June 30 with \$0.2 million of this amount received in the fourth quarter as follows: Bangladesh - \$30,000; Cyprus - \$18,700; The Gambia - \$9,881; Maldives - \$5,000; Mauritius - \$10,000 (second instalment); Papua New Guinea - \$88,800; Sri Lanka - \$30,000; and Uganda - \$12,236 (second instalment).

Receipts to date represent over 92% of forecasted member government revenues for the 2007-2008 year. Nigeria's pledge of \$750,000 for this year and its arrears of \$500,000 from 2006-2007 remain outstanding.

Of the target of \$2 million in additional contributions for 2007-2008, close to 90% has been confirmed or received to-date from grants and contract services. Grants include: \$450,000 of the revenue deferred at June 30, 2007 that will be recognised in this year towards the target; £250,000 has been received from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (second year of a four-year grant for VUSSC); £15,000 from the Commonwealth Secretariat for the Commonwealth Computer Navigator Certificate; US\$100,000 from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for a *Learnng4Content* activity. Over US\$450,000 has been received for contract services since July 1, 2007 for COL's eLearning for International Organisations programme. In addition, COL recently completed a contract for \$20,000 to evaluate the CUPIDE programme for UNESCO and was contracted for \$80,000 by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan to organise a study tour for visiting vice chancellors and senior officials. CEMCA has also received additional contributions from the following sources: Department of Science and Technology, Government of India for capacity building through community radio - \$100,000; and from UNESCO, Paris for training in mixed-media - \$30,000.

In addition, interest revenue earned on cash and cash investments for the year to date is about \$225,000.

6.2 Cash Flow

COL estimates that cash on hand at June 30 is about \$8.2 million (including the cash reserve of \$1.6 million held in accordance with the cash reserve policy). The cash on hand will be used to settle accounts payable and accrued liabilities at year end and to support operations in the next fiscal year based on the approved plan of expenditure.

COL's cash reserve policy also requires that COL have enough cash on hand at the beginning of each fiscal year to meet approximately four months of activity of that year.

The cash on hand at June 30, 2008 will also be counted toward this requirement for 2008-2009 where a minimum of \$4.0 million should be available.

COL continues to hold cash in the form of US dollars, Great Britain pounds and Indian rupees with over 50% of the cash on hand held in these currencies. COL is exposed to the risk of loss depending on the relative movement of these currencies against the Canadian dollar. Recent exchange rates have seen the Canadian and US dollar continue trading roughly at par from last quarter, with little overall change in the movement of the Great Britain pound and Indian rupee to the Canadian dollar. Overall, these movements will result in a net unrealised foreign exchange loss for the year of about \$150,000.

6.3 Expenditures

The annual budget for 2007-2008 was approved at a level of \$10.26 million, inclusive of expenditures from additional contributions of \$2 million. At June 30, approximately \$9 million or 90% of the approved budget is estimated to have been spent (final year end figures in progress) or committed through contractual obligations with 85% of these expenditures attributed to the programme for the year. There were underspends in the programme sectors as well as in governance, management and office costs.

7. Human Resources

7.1 Staff Changes

7.1.1 Arrivals

There were no new staff arrivals in the quarter but the following posts were confirmed in the quarter:

- Ms. Pema Eden Samdup, currently with IGNOU, will join CEMCA in July 2008 as Programme Officer.
- Dr. Abdurrahman Umar, currently Director of Academic Services at the National Teachers' Institute in Nigeria, will join COL in August as Education Specialist, Teacher Education.
- Ms. Anna Lee, Programme Assistant at COL, has been appointed IT Manager from July 1, 2008.

7.1.2 Recruitment

Recruitments are currently under way for the following positions: two Education Specialists – one for VUSSC and the other for Food Security & Environment; and an Information Resource Centre Manager.

7.1.3 Departures

Professor Mohan Menon, Education Specialist for Teacher Education, left COL in April 2008 to take up a new post with UNESCO/UNRWA in Amman, Jordan.

Mr. Dele Omueti, IT Manager, left COL in June 2008 to take up a new position with the Provincial Health Services Authority in British Columbia.

8. Publications/Resources

Connections/EdTech News, June 2008, Vol. 13, No. 1 (www.col.org/connections).

Perspectives on Distance Education: Foreign Providers in the Caribbean: Pillagers or Preceptors? (E. Brandon, A. Kanwar, T. Lyngra, S. Marshall, M. Thomas, eds.).
www.col.org/ForeignProviders

Costs and Financing in Open Schools, Ed Du Vivier, ed., resource book and CD-Rom.
www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/5305

Education for a Digital World, collaborative resource and course materials, co-published with BCcampus. www.col.org/DigitalWorld

A Prospective Vision for Universities: The role of the technology transfer units and distance education by Luis Miguel Romero Fernández, Ph.D., Rector, Universidad Técnica Particular De Loja – Translated from Spanish and published in English by COL.
www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/5313

Updated COL resource CD-ROM, June 2008. www.col.org/cdrom

Transnational Qualifications Framework for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth: Concept Document (see report on the VUSSC at 3.5 above)

www.col.org/publications

www.col.org/consultancies

9. Information Technology & Knowledge Management

COL is reviewing its internet and backup services with a view to updating the technology and improving the reliability of the systems.

The COL News Service is proving to be a popular source of news with over 20,000 visits per month. Being the kind of service most people would only visit once a day and many only occasionally, this number is surprisingly high. This service is on COL's homepage.

A new service for finding open educational resources has been started and is now being fine-tuned. The service is currently at:

http://pipes.yahoo.com/pipes/pipe.info?_id=35d37e599d3d6dec9b56dcf8b20c8760

In addition, a service for information on degree mills has been started and is at:

http://pipes.yahoo.com/pipes/pipe.info?_id=5331c593919aa6298ce9a4f6d8dd462d.

There is a search field on each of these pages to find the information that has been gathered.

10. Visitors

The Board may be interested to note the variety of visitors who come to our Vancouver office. In this quarter some of the visitors we received were:

- A Delegation of Vice-Chancellors and Registrars from Pakistan; COL organised a study tour of Canadian educational institutions and meetings with experts, funded by Pakistan's Higher Education Commission. Many of the strategic planning experts from Canadian institutions met the Pakistani delegation in COL's offices.
- Representatives from the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN) met COL staff as part of a Canadian tour.
- Dr. Gamini Kulatunga, Senior Lecturer, Agricultural Engineering, The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), was on an attachment programme at COL during May and June.

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

*Sir John Daniel
President & Chief Executive Officer
June 30, 2008*