

Connections



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Keynote speakers announced

Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning — Durban in July

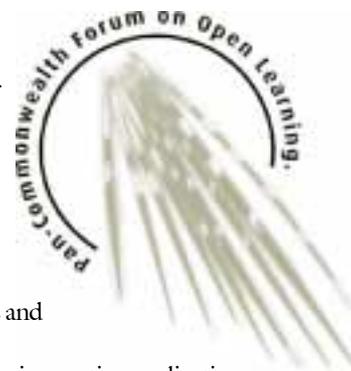
The second Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning will feature these keynote speakers:

- *The Honourable Professor Kader Asmal*, National Minister of Education, South Africa, will give the opening keynote;
- *Mr. Stephen Lewis* will deliver the *Asa Briggs Lecture* – see sidebar article, page 3;
- *Sir John Daniel*, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO, and former Vice Chancellor of the U.K. Open University will speak on “Development as freedom: the contribution of the open universities”;
- *Mr. Gopal Rajagopalan*, Managing Director, Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services Limited, India, and former Managing Director, SchoolNet India Limited, will lead off discussion on “Overcoming barriers to access and success”;
- *Professor Munzali Jibril*, Executive Secretary, National Universities Commission, Nigeria, will introduce the theme, “Overcoming the digital divide: innovative applications of technology in ODL”;
- *Professor Teboho Moja*, Professor of Higher Education, New York University, and former Special Adviser to the South African Minister of Education and Executive Director of the National Commission on Higher Education, South Africa, will provide background for the session on “Open learning, the community and social development”;
- *Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan*, President and Chief Executive Officer, The Commonwealth of Learning; and
- *Mr. Tony Mays*, President of National Association of Distance Education Organisations of South Africa (NADEOSA).

The Forum will be held in July in Durban, South Africa, and will be on the theme, “Open Learning: Transforming Education for Development”.

Organisers have accepted 225 parallel session abstracts from 280 submissions reflecting a cross-section of open and distance learning experience from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Caribbean, North America and Europe. These presentations and the resulting discussions will contribute to an exploration of the following sub-themes:

- Open learning, the world of work and economic development
- Education for all: Open and distance learning (ODL) and the global agenda on poverty alleviation
- Overcoming barriers to access and success
- Overcoming the digital divide: innovative applications of technology in ODL
- Open learning, the community and social development
- Making ODL work – its leadership, management and administration



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Canadian Government doubles financial support for COL

The Government of Canada will increase its annual contribution to The Commonwealth of Learning from CDN\$1.1 million to \$2.2 million.

In making the announcement, Canada’s Minister for International Cooperation, The Honourable Susan E. Whelan, said that, “Canada’s support for The Commonwealth of Learning will improve educational materials, expertise and technologies that are made available to developing countries. Making educational tools more accessible helps people around the world begin to build a better life for themselves, their families and their communities.”

“Canada’s increased contribution to improve access to education in the Commonwealth through COL is much valued and needed,” said COL’s President and Chief Executive Officer Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan on receiving the news. “It is an expression of confidence in the agency and its ability to make valuable contributions to literacy and other human resource development priorities that world leaders have identified.” He added that, “Open and distance education, together with communications technology tools, can provide access to learning for those, especially women and girls, who are beyond the reach of conventional education systems.”

COL is funded on a voluntary basis by the 54-member Commonwealth and Canada is one of its major contributors.



VIRTUAL
UNIVERSITY

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FOCUS ON
TRAINING

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RESCUED FROM
SNOW STORM

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ED-TECH
NEWS

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Pre-Forum virtual conferences are underway. Moderators of the six monthly topics (from February to July) will present reports for further discussion in Durban on 28 July. The moderators represent six of the member associations of the Federation of Commonwealth Open and Distance Learning Associations (FOCODLA), co-organisers of the virtual conference series. Each of the two-week long discussions have attracted between 120 and 275 subscribers and between 100 and 300 postings. Subscription and participation in the virtual conferences is open to all and there is no cost. A web-based archive of discussions is available to subscribers. www.col.org/virtualconferences

The Pan-Commonwealth Forum will also feature an awards banquet, where COL's Excellence in Distance Education Awards will be presented (www.col.org/edea) and a book launch for the third volume in the *World review of distance and open learning* series, published jointly by COL and Routledge/Falmer Press: *Teacher education through open and distance learning* (www.col.org/worldreview).

An exhibition to showcase distance learning organisations and providers of courseware and educational technologies will also be featured at the Forum.

The Forum will be held at the International Convention Centre in Durban, from Monday, 29 July to Friday, 2 August 2002. It is being hosted by COL, NADEOSA and the South African Department of Education, in collaboration with the Commonwealth's open and distance learning professional associations.

Further information and registration procedures are available at <http://colforum.mweb.co.za> or by contacting Helene Du Toit at Event Dynamics: tel: +27 11 706 5010 fax: +27 11 463 7195 e-mail: helene@eventdynamics.co.za To become an exhibitor, please contact Dee Reuvers at NichePro (Pty) Ltd: tel: +27 11 805 5940 fax: +27 11 805 5944 e-mail: deer@nichepro.co.za

Experts see merits of a virtual university for the Commonwealth's small states

Experts meeting in Vancouver in April agreed on the merits of establishing a "virtual university" to serve the small states of the Commonwealth and recommended an operating structure that COL will take to Commonwealth Ministers of Education for their endorsement.

COL convened the meeting as a part of its process in responding to a request by Commonwealth Ministers of Education that it explore the creation of a virtual university to support higher education in small states.

At the end of four days of discussion, the group of educational leaders from small state regions and Commonwealth organisations concluded that there are several ways that a new virtual university could support the work of the institutions that are currently providing higher education in the small state regions of the Commonwealth.

The Technical Advisory Committee noted that there are three important functions that a consortium of existing higher education institutions, operating collaboratively as a "virtual university", could perform that would enhance their current capacity.

The first, deemed as "most critical" by the Committee, is to provide a vehicle for collaboration in the development and use of the emerging subject matter, databases and learning management systems. The Committee noted the absence of small state institutions in the membership of the many consortia that are involved in the development of content databases and concluded that, "without assistance, the small states will continue to be unable to participate in this development, which is expected to be the hallmark of virtual education in the future." The orientation and training of policy makers, institutional leaders and faculty was identified as essential related activities.

"Providing leadership in the planning and design of programmes, curricula and courses that are pertinent to the human resource development needs of the states involved," was the second function called for by the Committee. "While these programmes may be more urgent in the context of continuing professional education, award-bearing programmes at the certificate, diploma, degree and advanced degree levels should also be considered." The Committee

members also expressed their view that the Commonwealth virtual university, should it be established, must consider out-sourcing virtual courses and programmes from a growing number of institutions worldwide. However, they also said that it must still be able to design and develop programmes of its own if it is to ensure that the unique needs of the small states are met.

The third function would involve the provision of "support services" to students, such as assessment of current skills and knowledge, advice about academic plans, quality-assured access to courses, record of learning and the provision of awards where these are not available from individual member institutions."

A survey and analysis of current practice was also conducted to assist with the discussions.

COL will present an initial report, including these recommendations, to a committee of Commonwealth education ministers later this year. If the ministers endorse the recommendations, the next phase will be for COL to prepare an implementation plan for presentation to Commonwealth education ministers at their next meeting in Edinburgh in September 2003.

Small states and small island developing nations account for 32 of the 54 Commonwealth members and are vulnerable to national disasters, weak economies and isolation. In their *Halifax Statement on Education in the Commonwealth*, issued at their last meeting in December 2000, Commonwealth Ministers of Education requested COL to pursue the establishment of a virtual university designed to serve small states.

"Responding quickly to changing and newly identified needs of the Commonwealth, is one of the main reasons that COL exists," said Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, the COL's President and Chief Executive Officer and chair of the Technical Advisory Committee. "As an instrument for collaboration, we are pleased to help with this initiative."



MEMBERS OF THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE COMMONWEALTH VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: VIS NAIDOO (COL STAFF), USHA REDDI (DIRECTOR, COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA), GOOLAM T.G. MOHAMEDBHAJI (VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS), ANDREA HOPE (COL STAFF), MICHAEL GIBBONS (SECRETARY GENERAL, ASSOCIATION OF COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITIES), GAJARAJ DHANARAJAN (PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF COL AND CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE), RAJESH CHANDRA (DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR, THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC), DR. GLEN FARRELL (COL SENIOR CONSULTANT AND SECRETARY OF THE COMMITTEE), HENRY ALAMANGO, (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMONWEALTH NETWORK OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT, COMNET-IT), PAUL WEST (COL STAFF), BADRI N. KOUL (DIRECTOR OF DISTANCE EDUCATION, DISTANCE EDUCATION CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES, REPRESENTING LAWRENCE CARRINGTON, PRO-VICE CHANCELLOR, DISTANCE EDUCATION AND NON-CAMPUS TERRITORIES, UWI). UNABLE TO ATTEND VANCOUVER MEETING: DONALD EKONG (VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF THE GAMBIA) AND DAVID SOUTER (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMONWEALTH TELECOMMUNICATIONS ORGANISATION).

Funding for rural poverty reduction

COL has launched a new programme that provides financial support for innovative initiatives that will build capacity for educational delivery to the rural poor in the fields of food security, environmental protection and rural development. COL welcomes proposals from not-for-profit organisations/institutions in developing Commonwealth countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia that are seeking to adopt open, distance and technology-mediated learning methodologies to help alleviate rural poverty.

Further information on applying for funds through COL's Poverty Reduction Outcomes Through Education Innovations and Networks (COL-PROTEIN) programme is available at www.col.org/protein or through info@col.org. This year's application deadline is 15 August 2002.

Working with NGOs

COL is working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in South Asia to help build their capacity to offer community education programmes.

In Bangladesh, COL is facilitating collaboration between NGOs and Bangladesh Open University's Open School in the delivery of basic education to disadvantaged street children, rural women and other disadvantaged groups, using open and distance learning methodologies. A stakeholders' workshop was convened by COL in March and a follow-up session, focussing on training, will take place later this year.



SALAAM BALAAK TRUST (INDIAN NGO) EMPLOYEE WITH STREET CHILDREN UNDER HER CARE IN DELHI.

In collaboration with the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation in India, COL is developing training materials for self-learning use by NGO staff members, focussing generally on the management of NGOs and specifically on working with street children. Training workshops were held in March for in-house tutors, that have been identified by selected NGOs, on delivering and providing support for a "Business English" course and for potential course writers for a course on "Business skills for staff of NGOs that have a responsibility for street children".



COL'S NEW WEB SITE IS AVERAGING OVER 1000 UNIQUE VISITS PER DAY. OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, COL HAS SIGNIFICANTLY EXPANDED ITS ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING PROGRAMME AND HAS BECOME RECOGNISED AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S FOREMOST SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE ON OPEN, DISTANCE AND TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED LEARNING AND ITS APPLICATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

Media empowerment

COL's Media Empowerment programme (COLME) is active in all regions of the Commonwealth. In March 2002, a workshop was conducted in collaboration with the St. Kitts & Nevis Ministry of Agriculture that focussed on desktop, digital audio and video production techniques to use as training tools in crop diversification for farmers. COL supplied the technology and training for the initiative. In The Gambia, COL is working in collaboration with the Nova Scotia Gambia Association (NSGA) on a peer health education model that is reaching many Gambians throughout the nation through radio and television. www.col.org/colme



SETTING UP DESKTOP VIDEO PRODUCTION FACILITIES IN ST. KITTS & NEVIS FOR AGRICULTURAL TRAINING PROGRAMMES. LEFT TO RIGHT: DAVID WALKER (COL STAFF); THE HONOURABLE CEDRIC ROY LIBURD, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES, CO-OPERATIVES, LANDS, & HOUSING; AND STEPHEN DUGGINS, CHIEF EXTENSION OFFICER.

Writing effectively for UNAIDS and WHO

COL has been commissioned by the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to develop and deliver the course *Writing Effectively for UNAIDS and WHO*. This course is to be adapted from *Writing Effectively for UNHCR*, which COL developed for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 2000 and has been, to date, delivered to 600 UNHCR staff based in 70 countries around the world.

UNAIDS and WHO belong to the United Nations System of Organisations and share similarities in their writing culture, house style and formats. The need for the agencies to communicate effectively internally and externally has become increasingly important. The *Writing Effectively* course helps learners to apply "plain English" principles to write clearly and succinctly. UNAIDS and WHO learned about the UNHCR course, saw it as relevant to meeting

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STEPHEN LEWIS TO DELIVER ASA BRIGGS LECTURE IN DURBAN

Canadian politician, diplomat and media personality, Mr. Stephen Lewis, will deliver the *Asa Briggs Lecture* at the second Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in Durban on 1 August 2002.

The *Asa Briggs Lecture* honours the founding Chairman of COL's Board of Governors and renowned British historian, The Rt. Hon. Lord Briggs of Lewes, who was instrumental in COL's establishment. COL invites renowned speakers to deliver the lectures on topics of relevance to education in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Lewis' work with the United Nations has shaped the past two decades of his career. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Mr. Lewis as Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa in June 2001. From 1990 to 1999, he was with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), first as Special Representative for UNICEF and then Deputy Executive Director, acting as a spokesperson for UNICEF's passionate advocacy of the rights and needs of children, especially children of the developing world.

In the 1980s, Stephen Lewis was Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations. In this capacity, he chaired the Committee that drafted the Five-year UN Programme on African Economic Recovery. He also chaired the first International Conference on Climate Change, which drafted the first comprehensive policy on global warming.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Mr. Lewis was an elected member of the legislature of the Canadian province of Ontario, becoming leader of the New Democratic Party and leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Lewis holds honorary degrees from 15 Canadian universities and is a noted radio and television commentator. He has a reputation as one of Canada's finest speakers.

From COL's partners

IRFOL becomes COL's research affiliate

The Cambridge-based International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL) recently became an affiliate of The Commonwealth of Learning. COL and IRFOL will together determine an agenda for research that will enhance COL's capabilities in this aspect of its work. Priority research areas for the next three years include the use of open and distance learning in basic education (including the development of alternative forms of schooling), teacher education, higher education and vocational education and training, as well as the changing use of information and communication technologies in education. The research will have a policy and applied orientation and will be evidenced based. There will be five critical themes: cost effectiveness, political economy, pedagogy, curriculum and organisational and structural issues in effective delivery.

IRFOL was established in 1995, following a proposal made a year earlier by the late Lord Michael Young (see "People", page 9), then Director of the Institute of Community Studies and inventor of the name "open university". In a speech for its 25th anniversary he argued that, while open and distance learning had grown dramatically in the last quarter century, research had lagged behind. He called for a research foundation that would serve as a lookout tower for open learning.

Dr. Hilary Perraton, former Commonwealth Secretariat Chief Education Officer, was



JAMAICAN PARTICIPANTS IN THE CANADA-CARIBBEAN DISTANCE EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME (CCDESP) AT THEIR COMPLETION CEREMONY HELD IN MANDEVILLE ON 16 DECEMBER 2001.

IRFOL's founding Director. Later this year, Terry Allsop, currently Senior Education Adviser, Central Africa, for the British Department for International Development, will take over as Director. Dr. Perraton will continue to be associated with IRFOL as a Senior Research Fellow. www.col.org/irfol

COL/UNESCO in Africa

UNESCO's Regional Office for Education in Africa – better known by its French acronym, BREDA – and COL have signed a collaboration agreement on a joint programme for Sub-Saharan Africa, which focuses on open and distance learning (ODL) initiatives. The programme will include work in the areas of advocacy for open schooling, in-service teacher training for West Africa, recognition and transferability of higher education qualifications, non-formal health education through community radio and institutional staff training and development in ODL. COL is also assisting UNESCO with the development of a regional strategy in distance education.

CCDESP grads in Jamaica

A Ceremony of Completion was held for the second cohort of students in the Canada-Caribbean Distance Education Scholarship Programme (CCDESP) at Church Teachers' College in Mandeville, Jamaica on 16 December 2001. The students were all participants in Athabasca University's Bachelor of General Studies programme: Eleven received degrees and University Certificates in Computing and Information Sciences; the remaining 14 are continuing their studies. All of the students are working teachers.

Representatives from the Government of Jamaica included The Honourable Burchell Whiteman, Minister of Education and Culture and Mr. Wesley Barrett, Chief Education Officer. The Government of Canada was represented by Mr. Robert Richards, Counsellor (Political/Economic), from the Canadian High Commission in Jamaica. Athabasca University Vice President, Academic, Dr. Alan Davis, and Associate Professor Mahmoud Abaza were also in attendance along with Mr. Brian Long, Vice

President, and Ms. Helena Fehr, Governance and Programme Officer, for COL.

CCDESP's Jamaican component was offered by Alberta's Athabasca University in conjunction with the Jamaican Ministry of Education and Culture. COL administers the distance education-based CCDESP, on behalf of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (International Academic Relations Division), as a new dimension for the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Programme.

CCDESP modelled for the U.K.

Building on the success the CCDESP (see above), the U.K.-based Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) has engaged COL to assist with developing the policy direction and implementation strategies for a new category of Commonwealth Scholarships by distance learning. As implementers of Britain's Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Scheme, ACU was provided funding and endorsement by the British Secretary of State for International Development to introduce a distance-learning component. COL will advise on the selection of the initial courses and identification of themes and issues to be considered in the development of long-term policy and strategy for the distance learning awards.

Samoa to develop small business studies for Pacific

Samoa Polytechnic is developing a special distance education pilot programme to improve the earning power of its beneficiaries and could form the basis for small business studies in the Pacific. The aim is to prepare a self-instructional package that can be adapted locally to teach would-be entrepreneurs how to set up their small businesses.

The programme is designed for students who are illiterate or barely literate such as people who have had little time or opportunity to study, school leavers and small-business owners. It will target individual communities and reflect their specific needs.

At the Distance Education Association of New Zealand's conference in Wellington, New Zealand, in April 2002, Samoa Polytechnic's senior business lecturer, Tertia

WRITING EFFECTIVELY FOR UNAIDS AND WHO
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their needs and invited COL to develop and deliver a similar programme for their staff.

While the UNHCR course is a print-based self-study package, the UNAIDS/WHO course will be designed as an online programme – but each learner will be given a CD-ROM to ensure that access to the course materials will not be hindered by connectivity constraints. Both courses are supported by individualised tutoring through e-mail ("e-tutoring").

Ms. Maree Bentley, writer and developer of *Writing Effectively for UNHCR* will adapt and customise the course for UNAIDS and WHO. Educational technologist, Mr. Neil Butcher of the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), will ensure that the design is appropriate for web/CD-ROM delivery media. The materials will be piloted in August 2002 with substantive delivery planned to begin in November 2002.

Stunzner-Ryan, presented a paper detailing the pilot programme, which is supported through a joint initiative of COL and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

The project has its origins in a COL workshop in September 2000 where delegates from Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, New Zealand, the Pacific and the U.K. gave COL the task of producing the "Learning About Small Business" materials. COL commissioned the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand to undertake the work in collaboration with COL and UNESCO. The product was a three-part package consisting of a participant's workbook, a tutor's pack and an adaptation guide for the delivering institution.

"We are working with small business owners involved in retail, handicraft, fishing and agriculture. The materials will be tested in the villages and we will adapt the content of the course further to suit the needs expressed by potential and small business people," explained Ms. Stunzner-Ryan.

Online ODL training for Southern Africa

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) signed a *Protocol on Education and Training* that calls for the establishment of various Technical Committees to develop regional programmes. The Technical Committee on Distance Education (TCDE) has been charged with implementing the provisions of the Protocol in the area of open and distance learning (ODL).

COL has participated in all the meetings of the TCDE and supported the development of an online course that focuses on developing and improving the skills and knowledge of distance education policy makers from Ministries of Education and educational institutions. Working in the first instance with a service provider, the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), and in collaboration with TCDE, COL has provided an online educational experience for policy makers in Southern Africa. A five-day, face-to-face pilot training session (in Mozambique) ensured that the best educational strategies are combined to create a training course for distance education policy makers. Two regional experts, Dr. H. Manthoto Lephoto (Institute of Extra Mural Studies, National University of Lesotho) and Ms. Judith Kamau (Distance Education Unit, Centre for Continuing Education, University of Botswana) teamed up with Mr. Neil Butcher (SAIDE Project Manager) and others to construct and deliver the course.

The first offering of the course commenced in September 2001 and lasted four and a half months. Eighteen participants from Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Swaziland, South

Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe enrolled and 10 completed the course.

An evaluation was then conducted by Professor Cisco Magagula (Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Swaziland). The following comments can be found in his report:

- The online course was well conceived and managed. The layout was simple and easy to follow. The hyperlinks were clear, very directive, simplified and easy for participants to follow. The learning activities were challenging, stimulating and relevant to the social context and work environment of participants in the SADC region. At the same time, the activities depicted real-life situations and attempted to tap, enhance and build on participants' work experience.
- Most participants found the instructions on the CD-ROM about the purpose, content, structure, expected outcomes and mode of delivery of the online course very helpful. The comments they received from colleagues and/or course facilitators were also helpful, encouraging, supportive, constructive and confidence building. The online system was very user-friendly. However, online discussions were not fully used as expected, despite facilitators' efforts and encouragements.
- Concerning the face-to-face workshop, most participants felt that facilitators clearly stated the workshop objectives. The quality of the content and the extent to which facilitators presented it was quite good.
- Overall, participants were satisfied with the online course and it met their expectations. The course content, handouts, supplementary readings, assigned activities and course delivery format (i.e., online and face-to-face workshop) were critical features to the success of the course.

Encouraged by the positive evaluation results, COL is now working with SADC, its TCDE and educational institutions in the region to develop another online professional development course for practitioners, which is expected to be available by 2003. The online course for ODL policy makers will be offered again and is also being reviewed with the view of adapting it for delivery in other Commonwealth regions.

Canada sets action plan on basic education

The Honourable Susan Whelan, Canada's Minister for International Cooperation, has released Canada's plan to help achieve universal primary education in developing countries. Speaking at the National Press Club in Ottawa, Minister Whelan outlined Canada's plan in response to the goals set at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000, which include free

access for all children to basic and primary education by 2015.

"Despite significant progress over the past decade, approximately 130 million children, two-thirds of them girls, have never seen the inside of a school," Minister Whelan said. "Lack of basic education prevents people from realising their full potential as productive members of society – education is a human right and an essential element of sustainable development and poverty reduction."

The *Action Plan on Basic Education* was developed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). In the five-year period between 2000 and 2005, Canada is investing \$555 million in basic education programming, representing a quadrupling of CIDA's spending on basic education. The Action Plan incorporates feedback received by Canadian and international stakeholders who responded to an earlier draft during a wide-reaching consultation process, much of it e-mail based. COL and COEs stakeholders appreciated the opportunity afforded by CIDA to participate in this way, are encouraged to see that the Action Plan recognises a role for both distance education and non-formal education and stand ready to collaborate with CIDA on the execution of its plan.

At last year's Genoa Summit, the G8 reaffirmed its commitment to help developing countries meet the goals set in Dakar. CIDA President, Dr. Len Good, is chairing the G8 Task Force on Education – a group that is preparing recommendations, in co-operation with developing countries, international organisations and other stakeholders, on how the G8 can best support achievement of the Dakar goals. www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/education-e/plan

U.K. launches Commonwealth education fund to mark Queen's Jubilee

The Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) was officially launched in March by British Chancellor of the Exchequer, The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, to mark Her Majesty The Queen's Golden Jubilee year. It aims at helping Commonwealth developing countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in education so that every child in the Commonwealth completes a primary education by 2015.

In addition to the £10 million Government commitment to the fund, money raised by business will be matched pound for pound by the U.K. Government. The Government will also match pound for pound funds raised for education in Commonwealth developing countries by Sport Relief, the joint venture programme run by Comic Relief and BBC Sport.

ActionAid, Oxfam and Save the Children will jointly administer the majority of CEF

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Training: a major emphasis for COL

Educators and others engaged in today's global economy recognise that upgrading knowledge and skills in the course of one's career is vital for success, and in some cases, for survival. In developing countries, knowledge and skills upgrading are increasingly important in the development of human capital beyond the needs addressed by basic and formal education.

One of COL's four major roles is that of a resource for training in the policies, methodology and practice of open, distance and technology-mediated learning, responding to Commonwealth member countries' desires to develop and/or strengthen national capabilities in this area.

A resource for training

Training for open and distance learning (ODL) practitioners has been key to COL's work since its inception in the late 1980s, when the need was identified as a major concern for the new Commonwealth agency to address. With the rapidly changing environment of education and the incorporation of educational technologies there is a continuing demand for an enlargement of the required skill sets.

Commonwealth Heads of Government and Ministers of Education have continued to endorse this role in reviewing COL's achievements and plans, while renewing and increasing funding pledges for COL. The current Three-year Plan budgets CDN\$6 million for training over three years, or about one-third of the CDN\$21 million total for 2000-2003.

Responding to needs

COL focuses on training the trainers, and encompasses web-based to print-based delivery of formal education, regional or national seminars and workshops, and study and professional exchanges. Additionally, many education professionals are trained as a matter of course in other COL collaborative and information-providing projects.

While the emphasis on training in COL's objectives has not changed, the type of training programmes and services it provides

has evolved with the educational landscape and with the demands of the global economy. COL seeks to use information and communications technologies (ICTs) innovatively and cost-effectively in programme delivery, and fosters and undertakes collaborative relationships in achieving its goals. COL's efforts are aimed toward anticipating where education will go next, and are fine-tuned to be responsive to the needs and requests of individual nations and regions.

In 1998, COL began a series of training initiatives involving the use of ODL beyond traditional and formal schooling. Designed for individuals at the early or mid-point of their careers, they address needs in the wider work environment and embrace diverse topics from agricultural research to gender studies.

Internships

Internships are a rewarding way for young graduates to acquire work experience in different social and cultural environments. Employing an intern, and tapping into their enthusiasm and skills, is a smart strategy for organisations involved with special or large-scale projects.

COL is a participant in Canada's Youth International Internship Programme, or YIIP (www.col.org/internship/YIIP_info.htm), that provides opportunities for young Canadian graduates to benefit from practical, hands-on international experience. The Government of Canada sponsors the programme through its Youth Employment Strategy (YES) initiative and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DEAIT).

Under YIIP, COL's interns are placed in partner organisations, that are located in or serving developing Commonwealth countries, in collaborative training efforts focussing on ODL in line with COL's mandated objectives.

Increased DEAIT sponsorship has allowed COL's YIIP internship programme to grow in three years from eight positions for a six-month period in 2000/2001 to 11 positions for a period of up to a year in 2002/2003. Participating organisations include the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association in London, England, the Musokotwane Environment Resource Centre for Southern Africa (IMERCSA), The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, and Commonwealth Youth Programme



Regional Centres. Internships are available in fields as

diverse as broadcasting, agriculture and gender and youth affairs. Thus far, COL's Youth Internship Programme has placed interns in Guyana, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nigeria, the U.K., Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Attachments

COL's attachment programme (www.col.org/internship) provides an opportunity for mid-career distance education professionals from developing Commonwealth countries to upgrade their skills and thereby contribute to increased ODL capacities in their institutions. Modest financial assistance is available from COL to fund attachments to ODL organisations in other parts of the Commonwealth.

COL's efforts are aimed toward anticipating where education will go next

Attachments normally run for about a month, and both the host organisation's profile and the focus of the proposed attachment must reflect COL's Three-year Plan

objectives, e.g., training in the use of ICTs, instructional design, non-formal education, copyright or learner support systems. Funding is available for six to ten placements per year. Participants have come from administrative and teaching positions in many parts of the Commonwealth and been hosted by organisations such as the Co-operative College of Kenya, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU, India), Radio Australia and the University of Regina in Canada.

Linking expertise to need

COL's new *Sharing our Services* programme (www.col.org/sharing), is a self-serve, web-based database that connects experienced or retired distance educators as senior advisers/trainers to distance education organisations seeking development or project assistance.

Both advisers and requesting institutions register their information independently on



the secure, online database. Consultants have an opportunity to offer their services gratis, or for a nominal fee, on short-term assignment. Organisations with developing distance education programmes have a forum to post requests for assistance and a context for their consultant search. The self-regulated programme also encourages initiative and dialogue. On approval of an application, COL can offer modest assistance for costs such as airfare and daily expenses.

Toolkits and guides

The comprehensive *Training Toolkits* series of practical manuals, including case studies, provides a facilitator with a set of materials, handouts and exercises for use in training workshops on the specifics of managing and implementing a distance education programme (www.col.org/programmes/training/toolkits.htm). Produced in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank and the International Extension College, U.K, topics tackled cover the study spectrum from an overview of open and distance learning, designing materials and using media, to quality control and learner support in ODL. Toolkits are available for a nominal CDN\$12 each, plus shipping.

COEs *Knowledge Series* of succinct start-up guides in distance education practice and delivery (www.col.org/knowledge) was recently profiled in the December 2001 issue of *Connections* (www.col.org/connections). Freely available on COEs website, the expert-authored, ongoing series is designed to introduce distance education's potential benefits and applications to education professionals unfamiliar to the field. A recommended reading list and detailed bibliography accompany each guide, providing the reader with a handy reference for further information. Initiated in 2000, topics in the series have included the general areas of editing, learner support, audio-conferencing and online learning in distance education. There are currently 11 titles and more are produced each year.

Thinking regionally

Regionally co-ordinated training is an efficient way to help streamline the educational development of individual countries within a region. The annual

Managing Change – Leadership and Strategic Change in Higher Education conference series for heads of African academic institutions is designed to help leaders provide effective leadership in times of rapid educational and economic change. COL is collaborating with the University of Abertay Dundee, the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the Association of African Universities on this series.

A similar professional development series for heads of African teacher training institutes had its first presentation in 2001, with the co-operation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Singapore and the National Institute of Education in Singapore. Also initiated in 2001 was an annual management institute for senior managers and executive officers in the technical/vocational education and training (TVET) sector of the Pacific island nations, made possible with funding support from

COL stays committed to a "training the trainers" approach

New Zealand's Official Development Assistance Programme. The institute will increase access to skills development training in the region.

Rajiv Gandhi Fellowships

The Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme, initiated in 1993 and piloted in 1995 with 100 students from 15 countries, is a two-year, distance-delivered Masters of Distance Education degree programme for education administrators. It is delivered in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), on-site tutors and the Ministries of Education of participating countries. Sixty of the first 100 students, from 15 countries, graduated in 1998. The Scheme's original rationale was to help create a Commonwealth-wide group of trained distance education professionals to join the vanguard of development in the ministries and schools of their respective nations.

The need for such trained professionals remains relevant today, and favourable participant feedback from the first Scheme has encouraged COL to offer the



programme for a second time after an evaluation and update of

course materials. Invitations to participate have been extended to Ministries of Education in 19 Commonwealth countries that were not included in the first round. Students are usually employed in a publicly funded institution offering distance-learning options or in a governmental policy function, and local tutors are contracted to provide learner support. A level of sponsorship from the nominating Government is required.

Asian media centre

Another example of ICT use and collaborative effort is the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), a broadcast training and media library facility as well as COEs regional arm (www.cemca.org). Established in 1993 and housed in premises provided by IGNOU, CEMCA holds seminars and workshops in the educational applications of broadcast media and produces a newsletter and programming for India's national education network. Its media library of about 10,000 educational broadcast programmes, contributed by 150 international organisations in six countries, provides resources for all of Commonwealth Asia.

Looking ahead

Existing programmes will continue, as the need exists, with revision, expansion or updating as necessary to anticipate emerging educational trends and ICT usage. COL stays committed to a "training the trainers" approach, will continue to explore ICT use in programme delivery, and will organise more training activities that include distance education professionals from both the academic and non-academic arena. Also, currently in development on the agenda for the next Three-year Plan is the formation of a Commonwealth Masters of Distance Education Programme.

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT TRAINING RESOURCES CAN BE ACCESSED ON THE COL WEBSITE AT www.col.org/programmes/training AND www.col.org/resources/startupguides. FOR GENERAL INFORMATION OR TO ORDER MATERIALS, PLEASE CONTACT info@col.org. YOU ARE ALSO WELCOME TO CONTACT HELEN LENTELL, EDUCATION SPECIALIST IN TRAINING AND MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT, AT hlentell@col.org.

resources through a strategic fund. The Government will also expand its work to develop links between schools in Commonwealth countries and the U.K., to raise children's development awareness.

At present, 75 million primary school-age children in the Commonwealth do not attend school.

Thousands enrol in new Botswana ODL college

About 7,000 people have already enrolled with the new Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL), revealed The Honourable George Kgoroba, Botswana's Minister of Education, at a groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of a P18 million (US\$3 million) BOCODOL headquarters in Gaborone in January.

Mr. Kgoroba, who also officiated at another ground breaking ceremony for the construction of a P33 million (US\$5.4 million) building of the examinations council, said the facilities will improve service quality and support once they are completed. Enrolments will be high, he added, due to the on-going social demand for education.

Senior secondary examinations are being run in partnership with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES). The Minister noted that the new examinations council building is designed to enhance the security of all operations associated with examinations.

Both buildings are slated for completion by mid-2003.

People

Jamaican Education Minister joins COL Board

His Excellency, the Rt. Hon. Donald C. McKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary-General, has announced that The Honourable Burchell Whiteman, Minister of Education and Culture, Jamaica, has joined COL's Board of



BURCHELL WHITEMAN

Governors as the member representing the Caribbean region. The appointment is made on the advice of Commonwealth Ministers of Education. He succeeds Dr. Marlene Hamilton, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Administration and Special Initiatives, University of the West Indies, who served on the Board for several years.

Also stepping down from the Board after several years of service is Mrs. Esi Sutherland-Addy, Research Fellow, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana.

Mr. S.K. Tripathi, newly appointed Secretary, Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Government of India, succeeds former Education Secretary, Mr. M.K. Kaw, as India's representative on COL's Board.

Dr. Tara de Mel, who joined COL's Board in January 2002 as the representative for the Asian Region, has been appointed

Adviser to Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of Sri Lanka. Dr. de Mel was formerly Secretary to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and also Vice Chairperson (Policy) of the National Education Commission of Sri Lanka.

COL's Board of Governors provides policy direction for the agency. Special appreciation is expressed for the years of dedication provided by Dr. Hamilton (from 1996), Mr. Kaw (from 1999) and Mrs. Sutherland-Addy (from 1996). Service on the Board is non-remunerative. www.col.org/board

Field staff

COL in the Pacific: Ms. Jenny Williams, Course Design Portfolio Manager at The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (TOPNZ), has been engaged on a one-year secondment to COL as project manager for COL technical/vocational education and training (TVET) programmes in the Pacific. Ms. Williams will continue to be based at TOPNZ and function with support from the host institution.

COL in Africa: Former Pro-Vice Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU, India), Professor Asha S. Kanwar, has accepted a one-year secondment from IGNOU to the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa. As COL/UNESCO Co-ordinator, Professor Kanwar will work on several projects that are included in a newly formed joint COL/UNESCO programme for Sub-Saharan Africa. (See "From COL's partners", page 4)

In memoriam

Dr. Judith Calder, 1943 – 2002

On March 31 2002, many of us involved in open and distance learning lost a good friend and a respected colleague. Her associates at the Open University will miss her scholarly contributions, recently recognised by her promotion to full professorship. The many students with whom she worked will miss the stimulus of her knowledge and experience, and her supportive mentorship. Those who benefited from her interest in, and commitment to, international education will miss the vision and cultural sensitivity she brought to the projects she was involved with.

Judith Calder was one of the first to research the interaction of adult learners with open and distance learning systems. She explored the often-contradictory nature of short-term and long-term goals for the learner and the providing institutions and other stakeholders. Recently, she assisted COL as the evaluator and member of the Project Advisory Panel for the Technology and Literacy Project, the evaluator for the *Writing Effectively for UNHCR* (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

course and a chapter author in COL's soon-to-be-published book, *Skills Development through Distance Education (Perspectives in Distance Education series)*.

I expect that everyone who worked with Judith in any of these contexts had the sense of a "special" relationship. She had that quality of making one feel that your project was particularly interesting, that she was learning more than she was teaching, and that every member of a team had important contributions to make. Remarkably, she was able to do that without compromising her commitment to the concepts of validity and reliability and the expectation that arguments would be supported with evidence. Those of us associated with The Commonwealth of Learning knew her best in the context of international education – most often in connection with projects in the developing world where she seemed particularly comfortable. To the people in villages she was "Dr. Judith", surrounded by people that wanted to talk and show her their accomplishments. To us she was the consummate "pro" – the sort of person who

seemed particularly able to see the good in people and the opportunity in chaos. We all grieve her passing – and celebrate her life!

GLEN FARRELL
COL SENIOR CONSULTANT AND
FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE OPEN LEARNING
AGENCY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



JUDITH CALDER PRESENTING GIFT ON BEHALF OF COL IN JAIPUR, INDIA, WHILE VISITING LOCAL PARTNER SITES INVOLVED WITH THE COL TECHNOLOGY AND LITERACY PROJECT (FEBRUARY 2001).

LEFT TO RIGHT: GLEN FARRELL (SENIOR CONSULTANT, COL), JUDITH CALDER, ANITA PRIYADARSHINI SINGH (DIRECTOR, RAJASTHAN STATE RESOURCE CENTRE)

Events

COL at WEM

The third World Education Market (WEM) was held in Lisbon, Portugal, this year (21 – 24 May). COL partnered with WEM organisers to host three invitational presentation/round-table sessions for senior policy makers. The “Governments Advising Governments” series featured sessions on “Transforming Education”, “Involving the Private Sector” and “Reconfiguring Education Financing”. COL’s President and Chief Executive Officer, Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, served as moderator for two of the sessions. www.wemex.com

Strategic planning for COL

COL’s Board of Governors has invited four eminent Commonwealth educators to a strategic visioning exercise as a follow-up to the publication of the document *Reflections on Ten Years of The Commonwealth of Learning*, a report by COL’s President (www.col.org/resources/publications/#reflections). The group includes two COL Board Members, Ms. Shona Butterfield, Chief Executive of The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, and Professor Michael Omolewa, Ambassador/Permanent Delegate for Nigeria to UNESCO, as well as two non-Board members, Sir Keith Hunte, Principal, Cave Hill Campus, University of the West Indies, Barbados and Professor Dato’ Dr. Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin, Deputy Director,



Quality Assurance Division, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Malaysia. The Chairman of COL’s Board, Dr. H. Ian Macdonald and senior COL staff will also participate.

The group’s task is to consider the future directions of education and open and distance learning and how The Commonwealth of Learning can continue to make contributions by supporting Commonwealth member states. Although the visioning timeframe is ten years, participants will also help COL consider its new Three-year Plan (2003 – 2006) as well as how it might incorporate elements, such as the proposed establishment of a commonwealth virtual university for small states, into its current mandate. The need to ensure the agency has a clear strategic vision becomes ever more critical as COL strives to incorporate issues from the Millennium Development Agenda and other global agendas, such as Education for All, into its long-term planning.

AT WEM “GOVERNMENTS ADVISING GOVERNMENTS” SESSION, LEFT TO RIGHT: MR. MANFRED SHUELLER, DEPUTY HEAD OF DIVISION, FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, GERMANY; GAJARAJ DHANARAJAN; AND MS. INGEBORG BOE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, REPRESENTATIVE CONSULTATIVE BODY FOR THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, NORWAY, AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORWEGIAN ASSOCIATION FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION.

IN NORWAY, THE GOVERNMENT’S COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION EXTENDS TO LEGISLATION THAT ENCOURAGES EMPLOYEES TO TAKE UP TO THREE YEARS’ LEAVE TO PURSUE LIFELONG LEARNING AND REQUIRES THEIR EMPLOYERS TO GUARANTEE THEIR JOBS BACK UPON THEIR RETURN.

Gender barriers to ICT

COL and its network are continuing work in addressing gender barriers, such as those encountered by women, to the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for education and training, and especially for open and distance learning.

An invitational meeting for regional representatives from the developing parts of the Commonwealth is being organised to take place in Ottawa from 24 – 26 June 2002 in partnership with Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Participants will review a report that summarises the outcomes from four regional meetings held earlier to examine the issues. The final report from this consultation will form the basis for the main theme of a conference on “Gender Issues and the Digital Divide” that COL and IDRC will be hosting in Ottawa in September 2003.

Global “digital divide” discussions have identified the particular need to address the implications of the ICT revolution for women, recognising the importance of taking measures to ensure that they are not deprived of the opportunity to participate in the emerging economy that is likely to shape the 21st century.

COL attends DOT Force meeting

COL was invited to a meeting of the Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force) in Calgary, Canada, in early May. Participants reviewed the progress of initiatives developed during the past two years, by nine teams, that will be presented to the governments of the G-8 countries at their upcoming meeting in June in Kananaskis, near Calgary.

The teams (www.dotforce.org/teams) have worked on identified information and communications technologies-related (ICT) goals to:

- support development of national e-strategies;
- improve connectivity, increase access, and lower costs;
- enhance human capacity development, knowledge creation and sharing;
- foster enterprise, jobs and entrepreneurship;

Lord Michael Young of Dartington, 1915 – 2002

Michel Young brought the world’s attention to and engendered a new respect for open learning. His creative mind spurred a government to think differently about education, its purpose, value and importance not for a few but for a whole nation and through that reflection consider methods of delivering education to people in a way that would enable all to have access to it. When historians look back to our century, Michael’s open learning will stand out as the most outstanding and successful innovation in education in modern times.

Michael Young passed away peacefully surrounded by family on 14 January 2002. With his passing, a remarkable life of giving came to an end. He gave his wealth freely, he gave his time freely and he gave his intellect freely to those noble causes that all decent women and men of the world subscribe to. Though Michael’s fame among distance educators is legendary I only met him in the mid-1990s. Despite his stature as a giant among social reformers Michael was the very

epitome of humility and grace.

While those of us in the community of distance educators know Lord Young for his advocacy of open learning and founding force behind the National Extension College, the International Extension College, the British Open University and more recently the International Research Foundation for Open Learning (now affiliated with COL), his influence went far beyond education. He contributed extensively to British thinking on social policy as well as to the foundations of Britain’s welfare state. He was a champion of citizens’ rights as well as the consumer movement in Britain, pioneering the much read Consumer magazine, *Which*.

In his passing the world has been deprived of a great thinker and doer and, in the open learning community, a great champion.

GAJARAJ DHANARAJAN
PRESIDENT AND CEO
THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING



MICHAEL YOUNG

- establish universal participation in global ICT governance;
- dedicate “least developed countries” initiatives for ICT inclusion;
- encourage ICT for health care and support against disease;
- support local content and applications development; and
- prioritise the contribution of ICTs in “overseas development agency” programmes.

The DOT Force is seeking collaborative partnerships among governments, development agencies and the private sector to fully implement the proposed initiatives, which are all aimed at using ICTs to assist development and reduce poverty in accordance with the internationally

agreed-upon Millennium Development Goals (between 1990 and 2015) to:

- halve extreme poverty and hunger;
- achieve universal primary education;
- promote gender equality;
- reduce under-five mortality by two-thirds;
- reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters;
- reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis (TB);
- ensure environmental sustainability; and
- develop a global partnership for development, with targets for aid, trade and debt relief.

The DOT Force was established by the G-8 countries at their Genoa summit in

2000 and subsequently met in Japan, South Africa and Italy, before this most-recent meeting in Calgary. Much of the international teamwork has been through e-mail and teleconference. Representatives of country governments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector chaired the various teams. The DOT Force has also aligned itself with development initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) in areas such as developing national e-strategies, developing entrepreneurship and improving access to the Internet and connectivity.

COL will collaborate with those teams whose work can benefit from the development of open and distance learning strategies in support of the Millennium Development Goals. www.dotforce.org

Course development workshop in Mokhotlong An adventure in the snow!

EARLY IN 2001, THE LESOTHO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION CONTRACTED WITH COL TO ASSIST IN THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-LEARNING MATERIALS AND THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF A LEARNER SUPPORT SYSTEM TO ENABLE THE NATIONAL TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE (NTTC) TO LAUNCH ITS DISTANCE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME (DTEP) IN JANUARY 2002. THE INTRODUCTION IN 2001 OF UNIVERSAL FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION IN LESOTHO HAD CREATED AN URGENT NEED FOR ACCESS TO IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING WHICH FAR OUTSTRIPPED THE CAPACITY OF THE EXISTING FACE-TO-FACE PROGRAMMES.

UNDER THE TERMS OF ITS AGREEMENT WITH THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, COL APPOINTED A FULL-TIME (EIGHT MONTHS) TECHNICAL ADVISER, AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL CONSULTANTS TO HELP TO EXPEDITE THE WORK. THESE INCLUDED INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS, EDITORS AND LEARNER SUPPORT SYSTEMS EXPERTS WHO SPENT PERIODS OF TIME IN LESOTHO TO COMPLETE THEIR ASSIGNMENTS. THE COURSE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS WAS DESIGNED AROUND A SERIES OF COURSE WRITING WORKSHOPS OF TWO-WEEK’S DURATION. TO ENABLE THE PARTICIPANTS TO FOCUS EXCLUSIVELY ON THE TASK IN HAND, THEY TOOK PLACE IN FACILITIES IN REMOTE LOCATIONS. THE FIRST WORKSHOP TOOK PLACE IN SEPTEMBER 2001 IN THE MOUNTAINS AT MOKHOTLONG....



SANTOSH PANDA CONSULTING WITH AGRICULTURE COURSE AUTHORS, MRS. QHOBELA AND MRS. KHITSANE

THE TASK WAS ENORMOUS, here we were in the remote Lesotho mountains, with an almost impossible brief: to prepare 18 distance learning modules across a range of subject areas for the first presentation of Lesotho’s Distance Teacher Education Programme to perhaps as many as 500 students (teachers) in the following January.

It was already September and we needed to have draft materials ready by October with final manuscripts available in December for printing. And at this stage the curriculum was not yet approved, we had willing but novice writers and very limited facilities and extreme weather conditions! So what did we achieve and how?

Participants at the workshop included about 35 academic staff members from the National Teacher Training College, three typists, Professor Peter Kinyanjui (the Technical Adviser), Professor Santosh K. Panda (Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University), two local instructional designers and myself. The equipment and resources amounted to two PCs and a laptop with uncertain electrical supply – so often they were not operational – pens and paper and whatever books and journal articles staff had been able to bring with them. In most cases these were very limited and old. However, armed with lots of experience and resource materials from COL and other organisations, we achieved an amazing amount under duress caused by unexpected weather.

We were very much in the mountains! Mokhotlong is at the top of the Drakensberg Ridge which includes Southern Africa’s highest mountain, Thabana Ntlenyana, at 3482 metres (Mokhotlong means “Place of the Bald Ibis”). The workshop location is eight hours drive by coach from Maseru, and Spring was just beginning ... but then Winter came back! If things weren’t bad enough with very limited telecommunications and no chance of a mobile phone network, we awoke to about five inches of snow! This completely wiped out any road or phone



KEEPING WARM WITH BLANKETS AT INFORMAL EVENING FUNCTION, LEFT TO RIGHT: PETER KINYANJUI, SANTOSH PANDA, MRS. MOKHETHI, PROFESSOR BRAIMOH AND PROFESSOR BWATWA



RESCUED BY THE LESOTHO DEFENCE FORCE

access; the roads were completely unusable by any means other than possibly a four-wheel drive truck. Once the novelty of all this white stuff and wearing two or more blankets and many layers of clothes had worn off, then the anxiety started to set in. The end of the week arrived and things were still not looking good, everyone was getting more and more anxious about returning to their families and, with such limited communications, tensions were running very high. It could be weeks...

But help was at hand – the Lesotho Defence Force was despatched to rescue us! Saturday morning we were to be at the landing strip, such as it was, and a plane would arrive...which it duly did, after a rather cold wait, and then to much relief, jubilation, singing and dancing. Strapped into fold down seats, military style, we hardly had the comforts of modern day

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11



Going wireless?

Compared to conventional cable and “hub” systems, wireless local area networks (LANs) allow organisations to reduce the restrictions and expense associated with the movement, relocation and addition of computer and peripheral equipment. The increased freedom and flexibility compared to a wired network is significant because wireless LAN technology can transmit and receive data through walls, ceilings and even cement structures.



SOHOWARE CABLEFREE II WIRELESS ACCESS POINT

In an educational environment, students and teachers can stay connected as they move throughout various buildings, accessing information in classrooms, common areas, school grounds or during lab projects.

Access to a wireless LAN using the IEEE 802.11b international standard, the most common wireless connectivity for a LAN, is typically at a speed of four to seven megabits per second (Mbps). Although this is not as fast as most wired LANs, which can offer speeds of up to 100 Mbps, a wireless LAN bandwidth is fast enough to allow the use of a wide range of standard applications and services. The downside is its limitations with multimedia and other demanding

applications, but ongoing advancements with wireless standards continue to increase the achievable data rate.

In a typical wireless LAN configuration, a transmitter/receiver (transceiver) device, called an access point or base station, is usually connected to an existing wired network using standard cabling. The access point receives, buffers, and transmits data between the wireless LAN and the wired network infrastructure, using radio frequencies. A single access point can support a small group of users, normally within a range of up to 100 metres, depending on the local environment.

A technical site survey needs to be undertaken to determine the number of access points required to give the desired coverage for the wireless LAN. Larger spaces generally require more access points. The antennae attached to the access point in a classroom, for example, will usually be mounted high in a corner.

The other component of the system is a wireless network interface card (wireless NIC) that is either built into or added to handheld, laptop or desktop computers, or to a printer, fax machine or any other piece of equipment.

While the initial investment required for wireless LAN hardware can be higher than the cost of conventional systems, ongoing installation expenses can be significantly lower. Long-term cost benefits are greatest in dynamic environments requiring frequent moves and changes.

However, wireless LANs can only operate at a limited distance from an access point and, due to the ease of adding users, LAN performance can be quickly reduced. Also, security is more difficult to guarantee; currently no wireless LAN can offer the same level of security as a wired LAN.

D-Link Systems: www.dlink.com

Hawking Technology:

www.hawkingtech.com

Linksys Group: www.linksys.com

Netgear: www.netgear.com

SOHWARE: www.sohware.com

Your next laptop may be a tablet

Developments at Microsoft, Compaq, Toshiba and others are predicting mainstream “tablet” computers entering the market in 2003. Tablet computers (or “tablet PCs”) fall between a PalmPilot and laptop computer in size and feature touch-screens, voice recognition software, and wireless communications technology.

According to Microsoft CEO, Bill Gates, tablets will overtake the laptop market by



AQCESS TECHNOLOGIES QBE TABLET COMPUTER

RESCUED FROM THE SNOW STORM IN LESOTHO — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

flying but we were just pleased to be on our way. This was pretty scary, and a real experience for some who hadn't flown before. We took off over the mountains and had a surprisingly easy but very dramatic journey back to civilisation – or at least the military airfield outside Maseru! And it was warm, what a relief, and our mobile phones worked again!

And during those days in the snow, the curriculum information was completed for Senate approval; module objectives and outlines, unit breakdown and objectives and in many cases first and even second drafts of some units were

prepared. *Guidelines for Authors* detailed the plan and design of the materials, and we even managed to get as far as a *Style Guide*. The authors did brilliantly to be so creative and productive with all the problems of getting their materials typed up, the day-in-day-out nature of this type of writing, the extreme physical conditions and with many suffering from ill health. But despite all this, they were a delight to work with, worked hard and responded well to help with developing distance learning materials and instructional design.

— CHRISTINE SWALES

THE DTEPWAS LAUNCHED IN LESOTHO AS PLANNED IN

JANUARY 2002 WITH ABOUT 500 STUDENTS (IN-SERVICE TEACHERS) ENROLLED. ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH, THE HONOURABLE A. LESAO LEHOHLA, MINISTER OF EDUCATION, EXPRESSED HIS “HIGH APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE TO OUR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, PARTICULARLY THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING FOR PROVIDING EXPERT GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING FOR THE PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT”. COL HAS NOW BEEN ASKED BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, LESOTHO, TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE CONSULTATIVE SERVICES IN ESTABLISHING LEARNER SUPPORT, QUALITY ASSURANCE, MONITORING, EVALUATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS AND IN DEVELOPING COURSES AND MATERIALS FOR THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME.



2005. His company has spent seven years developing the software that will run these machines, which will employ touch-screen handwriting recognition technology and operate silently when needed. This silence will be a welcome change at meetings where the noise of tapping at keyboards can become distracting. Also welcome will be the elimination of the visual “barrier” that laptop computer screens can cause at meetings.

With these many advantages, it is expected that the use of computers at meetings will grow substantially with availability of tablets.

Good news for long-term Windows users is that Mr. Gates says that they want to ensure that the tablet’s operating system is stable before going to market.

Acess Technologies: www.qbenet.com

Windows XP Tablet PC Edition:

www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/tabletpc



Measuring Internet use in Africa

Bits per capita is a relatively new measure of Internet use. The size of the Internet in a country indicates an element of its progress towards an information-based economy. International Internet bandwidth provides a measure of Internet activity because many people share accounts, or use corporate and academic networks along with cyber cafes and business centres. Outgoing bandwidth also takes better account of the wide range of possible use, from those who write a few e-mails each week, to users who spend many hours a day on the net browsing, transacting, streaming and downloading. Because of this, the often-used “Number of Internet Users” indicator may have less relevance in the developing world than in other places.

The Acacia Initiative, a programme supported by Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC), has prepared an exact-scale map of the international bandwidth in bits per capita (BPC) available in mid-2002 from publicly accessible IP networks in Africa.

The resource is available on the Acacia web site (www.idrc.ca/acacia/divide).

Bandwidth availability in Africa varies tremendously, but is generally very low compared to developed countries. Although there are few intra-African links, the marine fibre cables, shown on the map on the website, are now all operational and should provide faster and cheaper routes within and out of Africa.

The Acacia initiative is an international programme to empower Sub-Saharan African communities with the ability to apply information and communications technologies (ICTs) to their own social and economic development. www.idrc.ca/acacia

Leadership in a technological world

Does your institution’s CIO (Chief Information Officer) or CKO (Chief Knowledge Officer) have representation at the top decision-making level? The use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in education can improve of quality of delivery and help to reach more learners but does this mean that we have integrated these concepts into our management structures?

The person heading up ICT applications in an educational institution needs to understand the implications of technology from the overall systems that support the registration clerks through to the learner who only occasionally can get access to a computer at a shared resource. This person needs to have the personality to be able to guide professional colleagues who may feel less comfortable with high-tech equipment and with all the pressures of finding ways for learners to access even basic computing and the Internet. Decisions will frequently alienate a CIO or CKO from their colleagues and financial constraints will ensure that they never satisfy everyone in the organisation.

Investment in technology is highly unlikely to be reduced in future years. The rapid advancement of technology over the last 20 to 30 years is sure to continue. The decision is not whether or not to invest, but rather, to invest in what? Which technology will last the longest, be the most suitable and reliable and upgrade with the least organisational pain. This is where highly skilled ICT teams are needed to compliment other executive teams who bring their skills to the management of organisations.

The “dot bomb” failures and near-failures have not been limited to the e-commerce world. Consortiums of universities have also run into major setbacks and business models are still being developed and tried. A combination of “new skills” is needed to

help educational institutions to continually re-align their business processes without losing what they have – a complex operation when finances are limited and technology slows for no one.

Presidents, principals and vice chancellors of institutions now have to ensure that they are far more technologically and business-aware than in any previous period. Traditional leadership strategies, where each person in the top team surrounds themselves with the most competent and knowledgeable people they can, now need to include ICT expertise.

Educational institutions, especially those involved in distance education and e-learning, need strong technological leadership and management at the top level.

EDTECH NEWS IS WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY DAVID WALKER, PAUL WEST AND DAVE WILSON. DESCRIPTIONS OF PRODUCTS ARE PROVIDED FOR INFORMATION ONLY AND DO NOT CONSTITUTE ENDORSEMENT BY COL.

CORRECTION: IN THE DECEMBER 2001 ISSUE OF *CONNECTIONS*, THE CAPTION ACCOMPANYING A PHOTOGRAPH ON PAGE FIVE INCORRECTLY IDENTIFIED SIR PETER MORRIS, PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE OF SURGEONS, AS MR. CHRIS RUSSELL.

Connections

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