



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

President's Quarterly Progress Report: January – March 2016

1. Board Matters

The 34th Audit Committee Meeting was held via teleconference on February 10, 2016 to review progress to December 31, 2015.

The 40th Executive Committee Meeting was held via teleconference on February 29, 2016 to review the progress of and provide the final inputs to the revised Communications Strategy.

Preparations are underway for the upcoming meetings of the Board of Governors which will be held in Burnaby, British Columbia (BC) during June 9-10, 2016.

I am delighted to welcome Mr. Rob Whitby as the new Board member representing the United Kingdom and to acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Chris Berry during his term, particularly his valuable inputs which guided the development of the Strategic Plan 2015-2021.

I would like to place on record COL's thanks to His Excellency Mr. Kamallesh Sharma for his support and inspiration during his term as Commonwealth Secretary-General and as a valued member of COL's Board. He took a keen interest in COL and guided us to strengthen our role in the Commonwealth. We welcome his successor, The Right Honourable Patricia Scotland, as the first woman Secretary-General of the Commonwealth who took office on April 1, 2016.

2. General

A Human Resources review was initiated during this quarter. Virginia Goodings, a former Head of Human Resources at Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC) and currently a BC resident, was commissioned to assist COL with the process. The objective was to (i) determine if the existing policies and practices were effective to ensure optimal efficiencies; and (ii) review the current compensation package and assess whether it was comparable to similar organisations/institutions. COL's Director of Finance, Administration and Human Resources carried out the review with the CEMCA staff in New Delhi. The findings of the meetings and focus groups held have been shared with COL staff and CEMCA staff will be apprised by the end of April. A full report will be made available to the Board in June.

COL signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Faculty of Education, University of Pennsylvania to advance research in learning for sustainable development. The

university will place research interns at their own expense either at COL headquarters or with partners to work on specific projects of mutual benefit.

2.1 President's Activities

COMSEC organised a meeting of the Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG) at Marlborough House in January. The reports of COL's work in each of the eight countries were distributed: The Bahamas, Fiji, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Namibia and Solomon Islands. I joined the meeting via Skype to present examples of what had been achieved in these Member States and what COL could offer within the framework of the new Strategic Plan.

UNESCO invited me to moderate a policy discussion on OER at a meeting organised in Paris at the end of March. At this meeting, Dr. Maja Makovec Brenčič, Minister of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia, announced that her government would host the second World OER Congress 2017 in partnership with UNESCO, COL and the European Commission. COL is planning to lead the seven regional consultations that will feed into the main conference. Governors will recall that COL played a key role in organising the first World OER Congress in Paris in 2012. I also used the opportunity to call on Her Excellency Mariam Katagum and to meet with colleagues in UNESCO to fast track the finalisation of the joint COL-UNESCO Work Plan.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Hewlett Foundation) has been a consistent supporter of COL over the years in its OER work. The Director, IT & KM and I participated in their Grantees meeting in New Orleans and have requested their further support for the proposed regional consultations.

The Virtual University of Pakistan, a leading provider of quality learning, had invited me to deliver a keynote at the 3rd E-Learning and Distance Education conference in Lahore, where Professor Atta-ur-Rahman gave a very inspiring inaugural address. Immediately thereafter, I travelled to Kuala Lumpur to facilitate the High Level Roundtable of Vice Chancellors/Senior Administrators of Open Universities in the Commonwealth. Hosted by Asia e University (AeU), the Roundtable attracted participants from 19 countries in all four regions of the Commonwealth. The objective was to share best practices from the participating institutions, forge links for collaboration and make recommendations for further action relating to leadership, quality and technology. AeU has developed a website, the COL University Network, to provide a platform for ongoing discussion and sharing of resources and ideas (<http://col-un.aeu.edu.my/>). I also had a meeting with members of the PCF8 organising committee at the Open University of Malaysia.

COL's in-house video studio continues to work well. I recorded video messages for Commonwealth Day, International Women's Day and Open Education Week. Since I was unable to join a conference on Disciplinary Discourses in the Use of Technology organised by the University of Hyderabad, India, I sent a video message instead. All the messages are available at www.col.org/videos.

From all the invitations, visits and interactions with key stakeholders around the Commonwealth, while it is gratifying to note the high esteem that COL enjoys, it is also

important to remember that this places a high responsibility on us to ensure that stakeholder expectations are always met.

3. Programme

The New Year began with the launch of two major projects supported by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia and the Hewlett Foundation. The projects supported by GAC and DFAT resulted in the 'GIRLS Inspire' project in two African and three Asian countries. The project supported by Hewlett Foundation will strengthen Open Educational Resources (OER) for skills development. The launch of these projects signifies the confidence of international development agencies and the private sector in COL's ability to achieve development impact.

3.1 Education Sector

The Education Sector continued its activities in all four regions of the Commonwealth as follows:

3.1.1 Open/Innovative Schooling

Two studies were completed: one on 'Cost analysis of options for material reproduction and delivery' at the Malawi College of Distance Education and the second on 'Education and Career Trajectory of Open and Distance Learning Students' in India. The latter showed that most of the students in Open Schooling came from the lower middle class and the majority of them went on to pursue higher education.

Notesmaster provided a learning platform for the members of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association to share OER for secondary school materials.

Bangladesh, Botswana, India, Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia participated in a workshop in Maputo on developing Criteria for Peer Auditing which led to the development of an inter-institutional framework for Quality Assurance. Another outcome of this workshop was the signing of a Letter of Intent by Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre and the Instituto de Educação Aberta e à Distância to collaborate on quality assurance.

3.1.2 Teacher Education

A series of training workshops were held at Karnataka State Open University, India; Kyambogo University, Uganda; and the National Open University of Nigeria to provide capacity building in integration of ICTs in teaching and learning and in the development of online learning materials. A total of 67 teacher educators were trained and 44 modules are in development. In Tanzania, 60 teachers were trained as trainers in the use of OER for English Language Teaching. The Education Specialist led a session on 'ICT and Distance Learning for Teacher Development' at the International Teacher Task Force Policy Dialogue Forum organised by UNESCO in Mexico City.

3.1.3 Higher Education

Three institutional ODL Policies for the University of Buea, Cameroon; University of Zambia; and Busitema University, Uganda were completed. Baseline studies on the status of ODL in Cameroon and Rwanda indicated that the current demand for higher education in Cameroon will double by 2020 and that there was an urgent need for stronger capacity building in Rwanda. Quality Assurance Certificates of Recognition for successfully implementing the COL Review and Improvement Model (COL-RIM) were issued to eight institutions in Africa and Asia. A high level Roundtable on quality and credibility of ODL for Vice Chancellors/ Heads of ODL institutions was held in Malaysia.

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

Thirty seven senior officials from nine countries have enrolled in a VUSSC developed online Postgraduate Diploma in Quality Assurance. The programme is being offered in partnership with the University of Mauritius.

The recently developed Vanuatu Qualifications Framework (VQF) has now been referenced against the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF).

A workshop was held at the University of Swaziland (UNISWA) to develop OER policy. Representatives of Hewlett Foundation met UNISWA staff to assess OER development and use for nursing.

Through COL facilitation, the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK) and the Centre for Advanced Development Computing (CDAC), India offered training in MOOCs and ICT use to the University of Seychelles staff through the Indian Seychelles Centre of Excellence in ICT.

3.2 Skills Sector

Interesting outcomes emerged in the Skills Sector from activities completed in previous quarters. Some of these are:

3.2.1 Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

Draft policy guidelines in Zambia and a national action plan in Kenya were produced. Forty five officials from these countries are now members of the online community of practice for flexible TVET. The total membership of the Community Learning Network exceeds 1,500 from 46 countries.

Online capacity building continued with three online courses reaching 110 teachers, managers and policymakers. The Flexible Skills Development course is being offered to a cohort in West Africa and to the first lusophone cohort in Mozambique.

In Bangladesh, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) offered skills training in three new subjects with 160 women trained. Two other NGOs took up the five skills courses previously

developed by DAM and trained 2,400 people through Community Learning Centres and mobile libraries. A print-based and online resource in carrying out tracer studies was developed and is being piloted with partners to determine how many trainees improve their livelihoods.

An extensive country study of Tuvalu was completed and sets the agenda for COL support. The Education Specialist presented at an expert meeting at UNESCO-UNEVOC on ICT in TVET.

3.2.2 Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)

New partnerships began to emerge in India and Kenya, especially with the private sector. In India, Mann Deshi Foundation signed an MOU with two major private organisations to promote learning and sustainable development practices among women participants in L3F. The programme aims at strengthening the use of solar energy in agriculture.

The partners of L3F established a relationship with Kenya Union of Saving and Credit Cooperatives Ltd to expand the L3F programme in Kenya.

In Uganda, Makerere University developed business plans for two of the Savings and Credit Cooperatives established under L3F and these plans are being converted into course materials for the members. In Tanzania, our partner Matumaini Mapya trained 200 resource persons from the community in ICT based ODL and agriculture to support 4,500 women.

In Tamil Nadu, India, 1,114 L3F participants, of whom 80% were women, received credit amounting to \$800,000 after undergoing financial literacy training.

3.2.3 Technology-Enabled Learning

Four Eastern Caribbean Commonwealth countries (Antigua & Barbuda, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines) started developing open textbooks, and a course development workshop was held in March 2016.

A workshop on 'Technologies for Open Textbooks' was held in Bhubaneswar, hosted by the Odisha State Open University, the youngest open university in India.

COL organised a strategy meeting to collaboratively develop advanced ICT skills courses in Mauritius. Experts from six open universities in Africa and Asia participated and agreed to develop two programmes. COL assisted in developing an OER policy at the Open University of Tanzania, Dar es Salam.

The online course on 'Understanding Open Educational Resources' attracted 1,170 additional individuals and has so far reached over 3,000 people, 45% of whom are women. COL actively participated in the International Open Education Week, March 7-11, through sharing OER resources developed by COL, a video message and a blog post on COL's website.

3.3 Special Projects

3.3.1 Girls Inspire

The COL project team and an internal Steering Committee have been established. Five partners across Bangladesh, India and Pakistan have initiated staff training and mobilisation meetings.

The brand of the project, GIRLS Inspire, was developed and the Community of Practice launched on March 8, International Women's Day. Since then, there have been over 1,500 unique page views. The GIRLS Inspire Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts have received good responses with Facebook alone reaching 5,202 persons until the end of March.

Two capacity building sessions were held and partners were trained on how to use social media. A Monitoring & Evaluation Strategy was developed and the baseline tools were tested and translated in local languages. Project teams were trained to use the online platform for field surveys.

3.3.2 OER for Skills Development

A capacity building workshop on the use/reuse of OER took place in Sri Lanka in collaboration with the Open University of Sri Lanka. Twenty four academics participated in the workshop with 50% female participation.

A template was developed to conduct quality assurance reviews on ODL/eLearning courses. The review template is an easy to use tool, which has a special emphasis on evaluating the appropriate use/reuse of OER including criteria for evaluating the use of multimedia. The tool was reviewed by experts before being released as an OER.

3.4 Cross-cutting Themes

3.4.1 Gender

A Gender Equality Policy for the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) in Jamaica was developed and adopted. This policy will guide RADA in its efforts to mainstream gender in policies, research and extension activities.

The first draft of the study on the current status of boys' underperformance in the Commonwealth has been prepared. The study reinforces the view that 'creating family and community support for boys and programmes that create relationships between schools, communities, and parents' can help to strengthen the achievement of boys.

An online gender equality course for COL staff was launched.

3.5 eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO)

eLIO secured a new contract worth \$59,950 to deliver the course 'Writing Effectively' to the International Labor Organization. eLIO launched the third offering of UNHCR's 'Advanced Programme Management eLearning Course'. Completion rates of two World Bank cohorts were an exemplary 84%.

3.6 CEMCA

CEMCA supported OER policy development in three universities in India and helped the fourth institution to implement OER policy. Learning materials for the Post-Graduate Diploma in Cyber Security were developed as OER in collaboration with Uttarakhand Open University in India. Indian Institute of Skills Management joined CEMCA in organising a workshop on activity-based learning and employability.

CEMCA has renewed its work in Community Radio (CR). With the support of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, CEMCA organised two CR awareness workshops. The Department of Science and Technology and CEMCA conducted meetings for the CR organisations in 'Science for Women's Health and Nutrition' and 'Radio Mathematics'.

The academic and technical staff of Bangladesh Open University were trained in the development of e-content for Open Schools. A workshop on the development and use of Android applications was held for 25 Teacher Educators in Maldives.

3.7 Vice President's Activities

The Vice President led the intensive Monitoring and Evaluation training for COL and CEMCA staff, made possible by generous support from Hewlett Foundation. This involved working closely with staff to help sharpen focus and enhance impact. Dr. Bala also organised a workshop for CEMCA staff to better align their work with COL's Strategic Plan.

Dr. Bala represented COL at a consultative meeting organised by the BC Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC) and Global Affairs Canada to discuss the role of Canada in achieving sustainable development. He emphasised the need to perceive the Sustainable Development Goals in a holistic manner, where each goal interlinks with the others.

The Vice President has followed up on the MOU signed with the University of Pennsylvania by interviewing interns for placement with a partner in India.

4. Stakeholder Relations

4.1 Member Governments Support

During this fiscal year, contributions totalling \$7.8 million were received from 30 countries (as compared to 35 countries as at the same time in the previous year). See 5.1 for a listing by country for this quarter.

4.2 Congratulatory Letters

During this quarter, 17 congratulatory letters were sent to Heads of Government, Ministers of Education and Foreign Affairs, High Commissioners and heads of institutions.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenue

COL has received over \$9 million in revenue between July 1, 2015 and March 31, 2016 comprising member government contributions, additional contributions and miscellaneous income. This total represents 80% of the forecasted revenue.

Close to \$2 million of the \$9 million was received during this quarter as follows:

- Voluntary contributions in the amount of \$93,350 from five countries: Cyprus – \$18,510; Grenada – \$7,112; Kiribati – \$28,410; Seychelles – \$19,839; and Sierra Leone – \$19,479;
- The final instalment of \$1.28 million from the United Kingdom; and
- Additional contributions in the amount of \$400,000 from grants and \$145,000 in fee-for-service.

COL signed a three-year funding agreement with the Government of New Zealand for 2015-2018 at the same level of support as the previous agreement for 2012-2015.

5.2 Cash Flow

At March 31, 2016, COL held \$10.8 million in cash and cash equivalents which will enable COL to meet operational costs for the balance of the current financial year, maintain a positive cash flow into the following financial year and increase the internally restricted reserve to approved levels.

COL continued to maintain a restricted reserve of \$7.7 million to provide for unexpected expenses and shortfalls in funding, if needed.

5.3 Expenditures

At the end of the third quarter, over \$7 million was spent or committed to meet programme and organisational management activities, staff and office costs. This amount represents 67% of the annual budget of \$10.68 million approved for 2015-2016.

6. Human Resources

6.1 Staff Changes

6.1.1 Arrivals

Dr. Ishan Abeywardena from Sri Lanka joined COL as the Adviser: Open Educational Resources on January 1, 2016.

Dr. Johannes Hendrikz from South Africa joined COL as the Senior Adviser: Open Schooling on February 1, 2016.

Dr. Elizabeth (Betty) Mitchell from Canada joined COL on April 1, 2016, as Learning and Business Development Manager.

6.1.2 Departures

Mr. Roy Thorpe-Dorward, Communications Manager, left COL on February 19, 2016.

6.1.3 Recruitment

Mr. James Onyango Adedi from Kenya has been appointed Education Specialist – Agriculture & Livelihoods and will be joining COL on April 16, 2016.

Ms. Sparrow McGowan from Canada has been appointed Communications Manager and will be joining COL on May 9, 2016.

Dr. Shahid Rasool from India has been appointed Director of CEMCA and will be joining by June 6, 2016.

7. Information Technology & Knowledge Management

The MOOCs in Agriculture offered by our partner, the IITK, concluded in March with 13,700 sign ups. Of this number: 68% were active in the courses; 62 countries were represented (the top three being India, Kenya and Nigeria); and 2,159 qualified for certificates, a fairly high completion rate for a MOOC.

The first phase of trials of Aptus and Tablets in three schools in the north western region of Pakistan were completed. These trials show that Tablets, when deployed with Aptus, can

contribute to improved learning outcomes and the report will be available soon. This project is supported by Qatar Foundation through its Reach Out To Asia (ROTA) division.

In terms of IT support, an important development was the large scale replacement of all desktop computers to contribute to improvements in productivity and staff convenience.

8. Eighth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF8)

Arrangements for the successful conduct of PCF8 are on course and it is a delight to work with our partners the Open University of Malaysia (OUM). Three of the four keynote speakers have been confirmed: Professor Martin Bean (Technology and Innovation); Professor Anuwar Ali (Quality); and Dr. David Wiley (Efficiency and Effectiveness). OUM has created a new web site (<http://pcf8.oum.edu.my>) which enables participant registration. The first of the four online forums planned as a lead-up to the main conference is already underway and can be accessed at <http://pcf8forum.col.org>. Three hundred and thirty experts from 48 countries have signed up, 44 of which are in the Commonwealth. These discussions will enable those who may otherwise not be in a position to attend the conference in November, to have a voice and a view on each of the sub-themes of the conference.

9. Visitors to COL

Some of the recent visitors to COL include:

- Mr. Neil Ford, Director, Communications Division, Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Mr. Alan Kennedy, Chief Executive Officer and Ms. Felicity Hosking, Senior Programmes Manager, Prince's Trust International, London, UK.
- Professor Dan Wagner and colleagues, University of Pennsylvania.
- His Excellency Dr. Sulley Gariba, High Commissioner of Ghana to Canada and wife; Mrs. Florence Akonor, Minister/Head of Chancery; and the Honorary Consul-General of Ghana, Mr. George Addei-Piprah.

10. Publications/Resources

The following are recent publications and resources of note:

- Publications (<http://oasis.col.org>):
 - *Connections*, March 2016, Vol. 21, No. 1 ([Newsletter](#)).
 - The Impact of ICT on the Costs and Economics of Distance Education: A Review of the Literature (<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2047>).
 - Open and Distance Learning Quality Assurance in Commonwealth Universities (<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2046>).
 - The State of Open Universities in the Commonwealth: A Perspective on Performance, Competition and Innovation (<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2048>).

- Open Educational Resources (OER) Guide for Students in Post-Secondary and Higher Education (<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2093>).
- COL: GIRLS Inspire (<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/1763>).
- One issue of the *Journal of Learning for Development* was published with three research papers, one report from the field and a book review (www.jl4d.org).
- Videos at www.col.org/videos.
- Speeches and presentations at <https://www.col.org/news/speeches-and-presentations>.
- COL Blog at www.col.org/blog.

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

*Professor Asha S. Kanwar
President & Chief Executive Officer
April 15, 2016*