

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out plans for a Commonwealth institution to promote co-operation in distance education to be called the Commonwealth of Learning. Its purpose is to respond to the needs of human resource development through co-operative activity which will widen access to educational opportunity for students, will extend the range of programmes available to those who need them, will improve quality through the sharing of resources, will seek cost-effective solutions to large-scale educational needs and will focus on governmental and individual needs of high priority. This will be achieved by means of co-operative activities in distance education. The priority activities will include:

strengthening national capacity in distance education through staff training, improved communications, a better awareness of existing distance-education programmes, and collaboration in evaluation and research;

sharing of existing distance-education materials and developing new ones, possibly for use in several countries;

helping distance-teaching institutions to provide better services to students by facilitating the transfer of credit and improving study-support systems.

It will operate through a co-operative network of colleges, universities and other institutions and will use the most appropriate communication technologies to promote direct exchanges between them.

The Commonwealth of Learning will have its Agency headquarters in Vancouver and an information service based at the Open University in Britain. Regional activities will be promoted through a variety of structures. It is proposed to take advantage of the existence of the regional universities of the South Pacific and the West Indies and of the offer by the governments of India and Nigeria to host regional units. A unit in Malta concerned with the particular educational needs of small states is proposed.

The resources available for the first quinquennium already total £9.5m in convertible currency, and at least £5m in earmarked or in-kind contributions. Further contributions from member countries are expected and other funding will be sought on a project basis.

The Commonwealth of Learning will have a Governing Board comprising nine government appointees of whom five will represent the largest donor governments, three members appointed by the Board, two members appointed by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, together with a Chairman, the Secretary-General or representative and the president of the Agency. The Board will work under the authority of a Memorandum of Understanding between Commonwealth governments. A draft of this is included as an appendix.