

44 The government of British Columbia has generously offered to provide to the headquarters of the Agency up to 15 000 square feet of office space in central Vancouver for the first five years of the Agency's operation. As far as we can foresee, this will provide ample space and would allow for the employment of up to about 50 staff members. The cost of renting whatever portion is utilised, as the headquarters staff increases, will be part of the proposed contribution in kind from the British Columbia government to the establishment of the Commonwealth of Learning. The Government of British Columbia is prepared to add to its intended cash contribution to the operational budget of the Agency monies realised from the sub-letting of that portion of the total allocated space which is not utilised by the Agency. Canada has also offered to provide communication equipment for the Headquarters office and selected regional units.

45 The headquarters of the Agency will need easy communication, by whatever channels are most appropriate, with all parts of the Commonwealth and facilities to enable it to make use of information and teaching materials communicated to it in any form. These will include telex, electronic mail and facsimile, and facilities for reviewing audiovisual materials and computer software in a variety of formats and arranging for their copying and reproduction. Its communications and audiovisual centre will need to be equipped so that it can handle communications and materials in various different formats (e.g. floppy disks of the main standard sizes and standards; video recordings for PAL, NTSC and possibly SECAM). Facilities will also be required to allow it to take part in exchanges of voice and data with co-operating agencies. Any location where decentralised activities are undertaken for the Agency will similarly require communication facilities on a more modest scale.

46 The Agency will require normal office services including some facilities for printing and reproduction of documents including desk-top publishing. Appropriate arrangements for audit and for legal services will be needed as specified under the headquarters agreement with the Government of Canada.

47 The British Open University has confirmed that it will accommodate the information service of the Commonwealth of Learning. The University has adequate computer facilities and communication links for this service.

48 For a centre in Malta ample accommodation is available in the University of Malta's original building in Valletta which already houses the University's Foundation for International Studies and the International Ocean Institute.

49 Free physical facilities for regional units offered by India and Nigeria will be used for regional co-operative activities that are consistent with emerging policies for future developments of the network.

7 PRIORITIES

50 The Agency's programmes will derive from its purpose and functions, and the priorities they entail (see section 2). In the light of these we are led by the assessment of human resource development needs reported by the Briggs committee, and by our own experience, to suggest certain important activities on which the Commonwealth of Learning could usefully embark. We believe they meet the criteria of appropriateness to socio-economic conditions, considerations of sustainability, relevance to the development priorities of member countries and the existing state of their communication technology, the need to develop institutional capacity, and the enhancement of impact through

possibilities open to the Commonwealth of Learning. As noted in para 4 it will be necessary to ensure that the Agency's plans are for an economic and cost-effective approach to the meeting of educational needs. We would not wish to constrain its choices in advance, for in practice the Agency would need to develop and adapt its work responsively in the light of priorities of member countries and evolving opportunities and on the basis of evaluation of the effectiveness of its own first activities. Our presentation of these possibilities follows the order of functions set out in paras 8 to 11 and should not be read as giving an order of priority.

51 As noted in para 15 it is intended to base information activities for the Commonwealth of Learning primarily at the International Centre for Distance Learning (ICDL) housed at the British Open University with the aid of funds from the British government. An early task for the Governing Board will be to agree terms that ensure the Commonwealth of Learning's policy direction of this service. The Commonwealth of Learning's information activities could include:

maintaining contact with distance-teaching institutions in the Commonwealth and providing a free information service to them based on ICDL's databases and documentation centre;

expanding the existing collections at ICDL in order to maintain a comprehensive collection of documentation on institutions, on programmes and courses, on appropriate technology for distance education, and on the developing practice of distance education;

building up a collection of sample course materials so that it is comprehensive in terms of the representation of Commonwealth institutions;

developing and maintaining its communication links with institutions in the Commonwealth so that the collection is readily accessible to them;

supporting the development of information activities at the Commonwealth of Learning's regional units;

designing and developing systems for the effective cataloguing of teaching materials and for arranging that hard copies of these can be made readily available to institutions within the Commonwealth of Learning network.

Particular attention will be necessary to strengthening the capacity of individual distance-teaching institutions, including regional centres, to participate effectively in the exchange of information. This will include the development of information and library services, acquisition of appropriate equipment, and staff training and consultancy.

52 Information will generally be provided free of charge insofar as it is a service supporting the developmental ends of the Commonwealth of Learning. It will, however, be appropriate to draw up for the information centre a scale of user fees that could be applied in respect of enquiries needing an unusually large amount of staff time, or enquiries from industrialised countries, or from outside the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth of Learning may in some cases choose to waive a user fee to take account of the offsetting value of information provided by the enquiring institution.

53 Two categories of training can be identified. First, there are many needs for the full-time staff of distance-teaching institutions to obtain training in the techniques of distance education, including administration, counselling, the organisation of student support services, research and evaluation and the production of print and audiovisual materials. Second, many academic staff require training in the writing of distance-teaching materials in order to help them adapt their skills in face-to-face teaching to a different medium. There are demands for training of both kinds throughout the Commonwealth and there is already some experience of providing it through face-to-face courses and through distance-teaching methods. Courses on distance education, mainly to meet the first group of needs, are available from a considerable number of distance-teaching institutions within the Commonwealth. In the light of these developments and of a review to be undertaken of these materials and of training needs the following are proposed as initial training activities for the Agency:

arrange to make as widely available as possible existing materials for training in the techniques of distance education;

support, where necessary, the development of further training materials to meet needs not covered by existing materials;

provide tutorial back-up in association with regional units and institutions in the network for such training;

promote appropriate seminars and workshops and facilitate staff exchanges and secondments;

develop a long-term regional training programme with regional units with the aim of making each region self-sufficient in training as far as possible;

within this programme work with institutions initially in two regions to develop a regional programme for the training of academic staff in the techniques of distance education as these apply to particular subject areas;

launch training programmes for staff working on distance-teaching materials for nonformal education.

54 The University of the South Pacific and the University of the West Indies have extensive experience of using modern forms of communication technology for linking scattered campuses. It is proposed that the Agency should begin working in this domain in co-operation with these two Universities. Preliminary consideration suggests that it will be possible to build on their experience with a view to developing joint programmes of teaching and research that use links between their centres and campuses and educational institutions in other regions.

55 We recommend a programme of research and evaluation with activities of three kinds. The first will be to continue the investigations already launched by the Secretariat into educational problems to which the work of the Agency may be relevant and into current Commonwealth activities in distance education. The second will be to provide formative evaluation of the effectiveness of the Agency's own work. This will require continuing educational and financial monitoring of the work of the Commonwealth of Learning. Among other issues there could usefully be examination of access and student performance as affected by programmes supported by the Agency, of

the use of courses, of costs and organisational structures. Third it will monitor the development of research at institutions in the network and elsewhere on distance education and on the use of communication technologies in education, and support such research as it can. Thus the Agency's initial aims will be to use research as a way of informing and developing policy both for itself and for co-operating institutions.

56 In promoting the shared use, adaptation, and where appropriate development of teaching materials, the Commonwealth of Learning will need to consider issues of three kinds: about the demand for materials; about their supply, examining what already exists and what needs to be developed; and about the modalities of their exchange and distribution, taking account of the media they use and constraints on their reproduction and use including issues of licensing and copyright. In order to gain experience of all three kinds of issue studies have been commissioned for the group of the potential for Commonwealth co-operation in materials in four areas that seemed to us of widespread significance: science, accountancy, rural development and education. In these studies, and in particular in the study on rural development, particular attention will be paid to the basic educational and vocational needs of women. Studies are also being initiated on mathematics, engineering, and health. These case studies are looking at the availability of existing materials, at the extent to which these might be of use at institutions other than those at which they were developed, at the needs for further materials development, and at the narrower and more technical issues. The case studies, which will be completed later in the year, will be made available to the Agency once it is established. In examining these subject areas we are not, of course, arguing that they are the only ones on which the Agency should launch work, but believe that they would make possible an early start that would be of significant value to human resource development in a range of Commonwealth countries. We note, too, that Education Ministers saw co-operatives, environmental education and population education as priorities and assume that the Board of Governors will take this into account in shaping its programme.

57 Preliminary enquiries confirm both the existence of demand for distance-teaching materials in these areas of human resource development and of the practicability of co-operation in the use of teaching materials. In accountancy a significant proportion of the content is common to a large number of Commonwealth countries and teaching materials are already being developed by one of the professional bodies which is interested in making them available through the Commonwealth of Learning. In science a number of universities already teaching externally are limited in the range of science subjects they can offer and there have been expressions of support for collaborative work in this area. In teacher education and in rural development there are indications of widespread and unsatisfied demands for in-service training; while the context of these subjects requires that materials should be closely related to national conditions, there is also scope for a Commonwealth approach based on elements that are common to a number of different countries.

58 While electronic technologies are used by some Commonwealth distance-teaching institutions, a programme of co-operation and exchange based mainly on printed materials is both the simplest to get off the ground and one that meets the needs of most countries. Studies carried out for the Briggs group showed that print was the dominant medium for distance education in most developing Commonwealth countries. At the same time we recognise the need for the Commonwealth of Learning to play an innovative role in exploring the appropriate use of advanced communication technology.

59 Work to facilitate credit transfer and the mutual recognition of credit is expected to grow as the Commonwealth of Learning develops programmes for the sharing and exchange of teaching materials. There are, however, initial steps to be taken in order to make these possible. One is to ensure that, as information about course materials is compiled and made available, this contains the most appropriate information about the level and possible credit-rating of that material. This process needs to be closely related to the development of the information service (see para 51). More broadly, it is necessary to investigate in detail how the existing experience of recognising credit within institutions can be adapted to cover the needs of the Commonwealth as a whole and of the particular circumstances of distance education. In order to do this, we support a proposal by the British Open University for a feasibility study, to be undertaken as soon as possible after the establishment of the Commonwealth of Learning, with the following terms of reference:

to identify the number of higher education institutions to be covered and the extent to which these cover both conventional and distance-teaching institutions;

to identify the range of data to be collected;

to examine existing arrangements for intra-country and inter-country credit transfer;

to estimate potential demand for inter-country credit transfer;

in the light of the above to examine the most cost-effective way of disseminating information on credit transfer to enquirers.

We recommend that, as part of its contribution to the Commonwealth of Learning, the British Government be asked to fund this study.

8 IMPLEMENTATION

60 If our report commends itself to governments the first step in implementing their decision to establish the Commonwealth of Learning will be the acceptance by governments of a Memorandum of Understanding establishing the constitution and governing structure of the Agency (see paras 26-35). We hope that Governments will find it possible to signify their agreement to our report by the end of July and that the Memorandum of Understanding will have been formally adopted by September 1988.

61 We are concerned that action to implement the recommendations in this report should be taken with due consideration but without delay. The key steps that will need to be taken in the near future include the establishment of the Board and arranging for its first meeting, the identification of a president and key staff, the completion of preliminary planning work, and preparing for the Agency's first activities. We note that this work is being undertaken by the Secretariat which will continue to pursue it until the Commonwealth of Learning is in a position to take it over. We have ourselves already constituted a planning sub-committee which stands ready to assist the Secretary-General in any way he wishes.

62 Thereafter we would urge that the first meeting of the Governing Board should be held in Vancouver at the earliest possible date in order to provide a framework for the Agency's activities and would hope that this might be