

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

arranged for October. We assume that the Board will at that meeting establish the committee structure necessary for the Agency's critical first year's work and future development. Action will then be necessary on three fronts: on staffing (paras 63-65); on logistical arrangements for both the Vancouver and other offices (paras 66-67); and on the programme (para 68).

63 At our request the Secretary-General is taking steps to identify candidates for the post of president so that the Board could consider making an appointment at its first meeting. We recommend that this should be immediately followed by a search for applicants for other key positions.

64 There will, inevitably, be a period between the formal establishment of the Commonwealth of Learning and its recruitment of an initial complement of regular staff. In order to support planning activity, on lines to be agreed by the Board and in consultation with the president or president-designate work can be undertaken by staff seconded by participating countries and institutions, and by the Secretariat, on a temporary basis.

65 As noted above (para 34) the Board will need to adopt staff regulations. The Secretariat is preparing a draft of these which will take appropriate account of precedents and of Canadian practice.

66 The Vancouver office of the Agency will operate under a headquarters agreement to be signed with the Government of Canada once the Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed. The Secretariat and Canadian authorities are preparing a draft and holding preliminary discussions on this with a view to the agreement's coming into effect as soon as possible after the acceptance of the Memorandum of Understanding.

67 As noted in para 58, most distance-teaching programmes in the Commonwealth make substantial use of print. Much of the work of the Commonwealth of Learning will reflect this so that implementation in so far as it is concerned with the exchange of materials will not demand heavy investment in advanced communication technologies. At the same time, a study carried out on behalf of the Canadian Department of Communications shows that electronic communication between Vancouver and some member institutions is still restricted by lack of access to facilities for electronic mail and telefax. The effective establishment of communications within the network will therefore require both some investment in equipment at the regional level and the training of staff in its use. In this connection we are pleased to note that the Canadian government has expressed its willingness to fund the purchase of some communication equipment for regional units (see para 44).

68 Detailed proposals for the Commonwealth of Learning's programme for its first year must await the establishment of the Board. In the meantime we recommend activities of two kinds in order to facilitate and expedite the Board's work. The first is to continue the preparatory studies and analysis of issues outlined in section 7 above and to make the findings of these available to the Board when constituted. The second is to advise distance-teaching institutions throughout the Commonwealth of the proposals we have made and, in due course, of the decision of governments on them so that the early plans can be informed by a wide-ranging debate on needs and opportunities to which the Commonwealth of Learning will respond.