Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Reference: ExCo/CM-10

Association of Commonwealth Universities

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING: 13 June 2009
COUNCIL MEETING: 14 June 2009

STRATEGIC PLAN: REVIEW JUNE 2009

Strategic Plan: Review June 2009 Amended 17 April 2009

Executive summary

The strategic plan of the ACU was approved by the Council in July 2008. This report is therefore on the first year of the five year Plan period.

The Plan included 62 objectives grouped under 12 categories of our work. This report recommends small changes to four of the objectives and adding four new objectives.

The objectives (including the proposed new ones) have been categorised as red, amber or green according to their importance, from essential, through important to less important. Progress against each objective has been briefly described and also given a score of red, amber or green standing for limited or no progress, through some progress to good progress or completion. The 9 objectives on which no progress is yet required are allocated no colour.

Of the 11 essential objectives, we record good progress for 7, some progress with 3 and there are none where no or limited progress has been made. Of the 22 important objectives, 11 are showing good progress, 5 some progress and 2 limited or no progress. Of the 33 less important objectives, 21 are showing good progress, 4 some progress and 4 limited or no progress.

Summary of Progress towards objectives (including additional objectives proposed at the end of this review)

		Importance			
		Vital	Important	Less important	**Total**
Progress	Problems	0	2	4	6
	Some progress	3	5	4	12
	Good progress	7	11	21	39
	Not yet needed	1	4	4	9
	Total	11	22	33	66

There are some areas of concern but at the end of the first year of a five year planning period much has been achieved

Progress towards objectives

	Membership	Progress	Importance	Progress
2.1	*We will increase membership to 700 by 2013 through a concerted membership drive, emphasising the growing range of services to members.*	Since the start of the plan period in July 2008 we have recruited 33 new members and have accepted applications from, and invoiced, a further 10. However, we have expelled 14 for non-payment and have lost a further 5 through resignation. We might expect 45 new members by the end of the plan year and a net gain of about 25. We need to keep up the pressure. A change to the Plan is proposed at the end of this report	🔴	🟠
2.2	*We will use this opportunity to invite into membership a broad range of institutions in order the better to reflect the inclusive objectives of the Charter.*	Some progress but private universities proving more difficult to persuade than expected	🟠	🟠
2.3	*The membership recruitment leaflet setting out the advantages of ACU membership and this Strategic Plan will be updated and published annually.*	Leaflet update planned for late 2009 Strategic Plan does not need to be rewritten	🟢	⚪
2.4	*A redesigned ACU website will be operational in 2009.*	Website ready to launch at KL	🔴	🟢
2.5	*During 2008 we will introduce a common house style to all our publications to ensure that together they reinforce the significance and brand of the ACU.*	Done and generally well received	🟢	🟢
2.6	*A membership working group will be used to plan and coordinate all recruitment efforts across the whole of the ACU.*	The group was formed but has not met regularly. It quickly became clear that we do not have the staff capacity for this – people are too busy. Further investment is essential and will be more so when DG leaves as DSG	🟢	🔴
2.7	*We will increase subscriptions only in line with UK inflation during the plan period.*	No increase in 2007/8 and in line with inflation in 2008/9. No increase proposed for 2009/10. Subject to annual review and decision by Council	🟢	🟢

	Identifying the needs of the membership	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
3.1.1	*We will conduct a rolling annual survey of one third of the membership each year, covering the whole membership over a three year period.* *We will use this survey to assess our performance and usefulness and to seek guidance on our portfolio of services and priorities.*	First survey published as "Shifting horizons". Quite widely cited. Resurvey to start early summer 2009 and we will resurvey all members rather than a one third sample.		
3.1.2	*We will adopt an open door policy to suggestions from the membership at any time.*	Some suggestions received, mainly about new networks		
3.1.3	*We will also be proactive, making suggestions for new and improved services to members as a part of our annual assessment of our performance and at other times as appropriate.*	We have made considerable progress in establishing partnerships – with Qatar Foundation (for the ACU participation in the World Innovation Summit for Education), with Malaysian Ministry of Education (for the Vice Chancellor's Forum as a part of the 17th Commonwealth Education Minister meeting) and with others over conferences organised by the networks		

	Contacts and networking	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
3.2.1.	*We will hold at least one major international conference each year addressing a theme of concern and interest to our membership.*	Hyderabad November 2008 KL June 2009 South Africa April or November 2010		
3.2.2	*We will continue to expand and develop our professional networks in Research Management, Human Resource Management, Public Relations and Libraries.*	Membership numbers healthy and growing and activities well supported. The new Libraries network which was launched in November 2008 now has 380 members. HR has 528, PR has 376, RM has 385. These members are individuals not universities.		
3.2.3	*We will seek opportunities to expand the number of such networks. Finance and funding, estates and facilities management, international offices and student welfare will be among those considered as we aim to double the number of such networks by the end of the plan period.*	A new network for extension services has been established and one for careers and employment is being developed. Gender will become a network in July 2009. At that time the ACU will have seven networks.		
3.2.4	*We will continue to play our part in the drive to empower increasing numbers of academic and administrative women with the confidence and competence to bid for, assume and sustain positions of leadership and management in their universities.*	Two training the trainers sessions have been held – one in Botswana and one in London. Demand remains high for these courses. The training materials are being made available online and linked to the ACU website. A network of experienced women is being developed to ensure sustainability. Gender will become a network of the ACU in July 2009.		
3.2.5.	*We will develop a new version of the CUDOS searchable database. This will be in place during 2008 and updated annually and the response rate to that updating will improve from the present 57% to at least 75% by 2010.*	Delayed. CUDOS will be online by late summer 2009. Data collection is now in the hands of Studylink and bonus and penalty clauses are in place to encourage improved response rates.		
3.2.6	*This database will also be available during 2008 as a searchable CDRom.*	Yearbook published in 2008 so CD Rom not needed until Annual Report 2009		
3.2.7	*We will continue VCNet, expanding its circulation and clearly branding it as an ACU publication.*	Transfer of responsibility from an external consultant to the in-house Policy Research Unit was completed in 2008. VCNet is widely circulated and appreciated.		

	Visibility	Progress	Importance	Progress
3.3.1	*We will develop an ACU branded online course-advertising service directed at students attempting to choose where to study at home and overseas within the Commonwealth.*	Ready to launch in KL		
3.3.2	*We will expand and publicise the online Commonwealth higher education news service run in partnership with the Guardian Online (subject to a review of the 2008 pilot programme).*	The review showed the service to be not very successful with a low take-up rate. We will consider re-launching this scheme through the ACU PR network. It remains potentially a valuable service. We will seek external funding to cover the ACU costs.		
3.3.3	*If the market research is favourable, during 2009 we will develop an online job advertising service across all universities in the Commonwealth.*	The job advertising service continues to be quite widely used and has a considerable turnover but it does not cover its direct costs. Discussion with third parties about a shared and expanded service has been slower than expected. Discussions are still continuing		
3.3.4	*We will replace the Yearbook with an improved CUDOS and a searchable CDRom (see 3.2.5 and 3.2.6). The 2008 edition of the Yearbook will be published in September 2008 and will be the last one in its present form.*	The 2008 Yearbook was published in October 2008 and has sold reasonably well. This will be the last printed version. See 3.2.5 and 3.2.6		
3.3.5	*From 2008 the Annual Report and the new website will include a full list of members.*	List included in new website and Annual Report will be prepared towards the end of 2009.		
3.3.6	*Other ways will be sought to publish membership lists.*	Lists used to invite members to KL meeting and by the Qatar Foundation to invite members to WISE but other opportunities to publish member lists have not been found		

	Endowment and staff mobility	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
3.4.1	*Making a contribution to the fund from the proceeds of the sale of the ACU flat in Kensington*	Not done. Financial circumstances required that cash be held in ACU reserves. This will be reviewed in 2010		
3.4.2	*Using the fund to lever matching support from other sources, such as our current joint grants with the British Academy*	This practice has been continued. We allocate about £120k of income from the fund annually and this is matched by about £70k from the BA		
3.4.3	*Launching a major Centenary appeal in support of this fund – see 9.3*	This will not be started until 2010 at the earliest.		
3.4.4	*Ensuring that policies and procedures for awarding grants from the fund are transparent and reviewed regularly, to meet the needs of members, the strategic priorities of the Association and the requirements of charity law.*	A paper on the arrangements for awarding grants has been accepted by the Council. We will set up a selection committee in time for the 2009 round. The awards matched by the BA are scrutinised by the BA process as well as by our own.		

	Advocacy	Progress	Importance	Progress
3.5.1	*We will bring together, and coordinate through the establishment of a research group, the research and policy analysis capability of the ACU and its professional networks.*	There are now regular meetings alongside the ACU wide seminar programme. There is still further to go in bringing the different parts of the work of the ACU closer together.		
3.5.2	*As finances allow we will rebuild the research and policy analysis capability of the ACU. We will increase the staff numbers in the Policy Research Unit from one to three by 2013. By 2009 the Unit will be publishing at least three reports a year on topics of major concern to the membership. (There will be two reports during 2008). These reports will be widely publicised and circulated as a way of advocating the importance as well as the concerns of higher education and our membership.*	Finances have not yet allowed any increase in staff numbers. It is useful to show all ACU publications together and these are listed against a new objective 3.5.5 at the end of this report.		
3.5.3	*We will ensure that the ACU represents the views of its membership in other international and Commonwealth meetings, including Commonwealth Heads of Government, Education Ministers, Commonwealth of Learning, UNESCO, the World Bank, OECD and others. We will also use such meetings to gather and communicate information to our members.*	Members invited to 17CCEM. ACU will make a presentation to Ministers in addition to the communiqué from the VC's Forum. SG will not go to CHOGM as there is very limited opportunity to take part. SG attended CoL Board in 2008 and will do so again in 2009. SG and DSG will attend UNESCO conference in July.		
3.5.4	*We will undertake studies and consultancy services on behalf of other organisations provided that they are germane to higher education and that they are undertaken on a full cost recovery basis.*	Opportunities have not yet arisen. We continue to work with the Commonwealth Secretariat over a possible Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility.		

	Benchmarking, training and sharing best practice	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
3.6.1	*We will continue and, if there is sufficient demand, expand the benchmarking programme. Using our experience in such programmes we will examine opportunities to undertake benchmarking for other organisations.*	Benchmarking programme in 2008 was successfully completed and made a small surplus. Programme for 2009 in Stellenbosch, SA organised and booked at same level as last year, The demand has not been sufficient to expand the programme. We have investigated undertaking benchmarking for others but no progress to date.		
3.6.2.	*We will actively investigate opportunities to provide, with others as appropriate, institutional reviews and high level training programmes.*	We agreed a joint training programme with the Leadership Foundation for Pakistan VCs but the programme was scheduled at the same time as the ACU's Hyderabad conference. We continue to look for opportunities for cooperation		
3.6.3	*The networks will develop other opportunities to organise benchmarking, best practice exercises and training within their memberships.*	Almost all of the network activities are directed to these ends. Training and benchmarking events are planned for Canada and India. RM activities in Africa are supported by the Carnegie Foundation and the Libraries network is supported by the Arcadia Foundation.		
3.6.4	*In a context in which, although many organisations are involved in HIV/AIDS related projects, there are very few impact studies, we will endeavour to fill that gap by focusing on the evaluation of outputs and activities in the higher education sector.*	Not yet proceeded with.		

	Working together for market advantage	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
3.7.1	*We will develop the online job advertising service in 3.3.3*	See 3.3.3		
3.7.2	*We will continue the Journal purchase discount scheme with publishers to benefit our less well resourced members.*	Continued and inclusion of at least one further publisher is planned. We currently include 13 publishers and cover 4,600 journals in the scheme.		
3.7.3.	*We will use our Libraries network better to inform publishers of the circumstances and needs of our members' libraries and to examine ways of reducing the costs of subscriptions to printed and electronic media.*	An initiative "Publishers for Development" has been launched in November 2008. The ACU will make a presentation at the Association of Learned Society Publishers conference in September 2009.		
3.7.4	*We will actively seek other opportunities for market advantage, including conference organisation.*	No proceeded with. We do not have the staff capacity at present		

	Scholarships	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
4.1	*We will work to ensure that the contract with the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission is retained. We will do this by running an efficient and effective programme and requesting feedback from both funders and scholars at least once a year.*	Contract management and relationships continue to be good. The ACU, with the CSC, led a campaign for the reinstatement of the portion of the funding for the scheme which the UK government decided to discontinue. This was partially successful with half of the lost funding being made available for two years, subject to the other half being matched funding from UK universities. This campaign gave high visibility to the ACU.		
4.2	*We will ensure through our membership leaflet, website and other publications that the ACU continues to be publicly associated with the CSFP*	Continuing		
4.3	*We will continue to ensure that the contract for administration of the Plan covers its full costs to us.*	It does		
4.4	*As space and capacity allows we will continue to seek to administer other scholarship and fellowship schemes.*	No opportunities have arisen.		
4.5	*Where we are administering other schemes with no direct Commonwealth connections we will, over time and as contract renewal allows, aim to earn more than full costs in order to provide a modest net income stream into the Association.*	First scholarships contract renewal is in 2010		

	Hosting and servicing other organisations and programmes	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
5.1	*We will ensure that by the end of 2008/9 we are recovering sufficient overheads from our hosted organisations and programmes to cover the full costs of their accommodation and the services they require.*	We are now recovering full overheads on all contracts. This is producing an additional c£120k of income to the ACU over 2007/8 figures.		
5.2	*Through the hosting of other organisations and programmes and through the letting of meeting rooms we will recover at least £100,000 annually towards the accommodation costs of our space in Woburn House.*	We have let two offices on floor 5 but day letting of meeting rooms is proving difficult. We already exceed the set target but there is plenty of capacity to increase letting income. A change to this objective is proposed at the end of this report.		
5.3	*We will work together with these organisations and programmes to find ways in which they can directly benefit ACU members. Where space and opportunity allows we will seek to host other organisations where there is a close synergy with our work.*	There is increasingly close cooperation between the ACU and OBHE and the Africa Unit. There are limited opportunities with SEDA. We have had no opportunities for further hosting (except the sub-letting of office space on floor 5.)		

	Communications	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
6.1	*The Bulletin will be published four times a year and the Secretary General will report to all members at least twice a year.*	The Bulletin continues to be published four times a year and to be well received by the membership. The SG has not reported separately to the membership but has used the Bulletin		
6.2	*During 2008 we will update and then maintain our email list to reduce the "bounce-back" rate.*	There is now a single source of email lists for members and for sub-groups of members. Bounce-back rates continue to be quite high but this is almost always a result of receivers changing their email account and/or server problems at the receiver's end.		
6.3	*The new ACU website will be developed in stages during 2009 and will be managed and updated throughout the plan period.*	See 2.4		
6.4	*During 2008 we will introduce a common house style to our publications to ensure that together they reinforce the ACU brand.*	See 2.5		

	Governance	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
7.1	*We will ensure that both the Council and the Executive Committee meet at least twice a year (one of these meetings to be face-to-face).*	Done		
7.2	*Agenda and papers will be dispatched at least two weeks before meetings and the minutes prepared and circulated within four weeks of the meetings.*	Agenda papers circulated on time. The minutes have been delayed somewhat as a result of pressure of other work but have always been ready well in advance of the meeting at which they will be approved. A change to this objective is proposed at the end of this report.		
7.3	*A full set of Terms of Reference, devolved responsibilities and Operating Procedures will be approved and implemented by June 2008.*	Nearly completed		
7.4	*To ensure compliance with recent changes in UK charity law, during 2008 the ACU will appoint a Board of Trustees. The Board will advise the Council and may act on its behalf. The Council will, however, maintain its overall authority over the strategy of the Association.*	The need for, and the practicality of, a Board of Trustees that has only advisory powers will be reconsidered at the KL Council meeting		
7.5	*Audited financial accounts will be produced within four months of the end of the financial year and quarterly management accounts will be prepared and circulated to the Senior Management Team and to the Executive Committee within six weeks of the end of the quarter.*	Audited financial accounts have been produced and approved on time. Management accounts are being produced quarterly – but slightly delayed. A change to this objective is proposed at the end of this report.		

	Operations	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
8.1	*We will continue to reduce the operating costs of the Association aiming to balance the budget in 2009/10.*	A surplus is forecast for 2008/9 and a budget with a small surplus has been prepared for 2009/10		
8.2	*In later years of the planning period we will utilise increased membership income to provide a wider portfolio of improved services to members within a balanced budget.*	Not yet		
8.3	*We will reintroduce staff appraisals from May 2008.*	Complete for 2008 and started for 2009		
8.4	*We will consider the advantages and costs of entering the ACU for the Investors in People standard aiming for a possible entry during 2009.*	This has been considered and is not yet a priority. We will keep it under review		
8.5	*The present mix of eight separate data bases and multiple mailing lists will be replaced by a new single database (including a single mailing list) with online updating capability. This complex task will be completed as soon as possible and no later than 2009.*	The databases and mailing lists have been streamlined but it has not been practical to reduce these to a single database. Most of the database functions are now provided by Studylink. The system is becoming more efficient, secure and reliable.		

	Centenary	**Progress**	**Importance**	**Progress**
9.1	*A major conference*	Not yet started		
9.2	*A reception at Buckingham Palace (as for the fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1963)*	Not yet started		
9.3	*A fund raising programme to raise the endowment to a size where the total income which we distribute to members equals our total subscription income (see 3.4). This programme will be launched during 2009.*	Not yet started		
9.4	*An anniversary publication celebrating 100 years of higher education in the Commonwealth. This study will be commissioned during 2008.*	Preliminary discussion held with author		

Proposed additions and changes to Strategic Plan

	Additions	Progress	Importance	Progress
2.8	We will work with other national, regional and international associations of universities to recruit new members, to add to the visibility of the ACU and to develop joint working where appropriate	We have successfully cooperated with Universities UK, Universities Australia, The New Zealand Vice Chancellor Committee, the Canadian Association of Universities and Colleges, the Indian University Association, the Association of Francophone Universities and the Association of African Universities		
3.2.8	We will work with others to ensure that our members are invited to important higher education events	We are in partnership with the Qatar Foundation to ensure that our members are invited (as speakers and delegates) to the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) to be held in Doha in November 2009		
3.3.7	See 2.8	See 2.8		
3.5.5	We will continue the flow of ACU publications from our Policy and Research Unit and from our contracts to help meet the objectives of advocacy, visibility and the sharing of best practice.	In 2008 and 2009 the ACU has published: Whispers of change: Female staff numbers in Commonwealth Universities, Jabir K.S.Singh Shifting Horizons: Issues facing universities in the Commonwealth, Jay Kubler and John Tarrant Unlocking the Potential: New opportunities for Commonwealth libraries, Jonathan Harle Commercialisation and HE: an online report, Ellen Offers Briefing: Higher Education (DFID practice papers series Oct 2008) Jonathan Harle, Nick Mulhern, John Kirkland The Nairobi Report: Frameworks for Africa-UK research collaboration in the social sciences and humanities, the British Academy and ACU (Each of our networks produces a magazine and our hosted organisations SEDA, OBHE and the scholarships programmes, produce their own publications)		
5.4	We will continue to search for new contracts to increase the level of activity and contribute to the ACU's overhead costs	During the Plan period we have received grants from the Arcadia Foundation (£74k) and the Carnegie Foundation (£144k) and smaller grants from the Commonwealth Secretariat. We are working jointly with the AUF on a programme which will be launched in July 2009 at the UNESCO international conference. It will seek funding for a series of projects on governance in African universities.		

	Changes
2.1	We will increase membership to 700 (change to 650) by 2013 through a concerted membership drive, emphasising the growing range of services to members
5.2	Through the hosting of other organisations and programmes and through the letting of meeting rooms we will recover at least £100,000 annually towards the accommodation costs of our space in Woburn House. Change to: Through the letting of surplus space in Woburn House we will contribute £50k pa towards meeting premises costs
7.2	*Agenda and papers will be dispatched at least two weeks before meetings and the minutes prepared and circulated within four (change to eight) weeks of the meetings.*
7.5	Audited financial accounts will be produced within four months of the end of the financial year and quarterly management accounts will be prepared and circulated to the Senior Management Team and to the Executive Committee within six weeks (change to eight weeks) of the end of the quarter

Annex: Publications by ACU staff

Whispers of change: Female staff numbers in Commonwealth Universities, 2008, Jabir K.S.Singh

Shifting Horizons: Issues facing universities in the Commonwealth, Jay Kubler and John Tarrant

Unlocking the Potential: New opportunities for Commonwealth libraries, Jonathan Harle

Commercialisation and HE: an online report, Ellen Offers

Briefing: Higher Education (DFID practice papers series Oct 2008) Jonathan Harle, Nick Mulhern, John Kirkland

The Nairobi Report: Frameworks for Africa-UK research collaboration in the social sciences and humanities, the British Academy and ACU

Research management at the ACU, *National Council of University Research Administrators Magazine*, April 2009, 30 – 33, John Kirkland, Julie Stackhouse, Liam Roberts and Patrice Ajai-Ajagbe

Framing research between Africa and the UK, *NORRAG News No 41*, December 2008, Jonathon Harle

Universities: Essential for Economic and Social Development, Commonwealth Ministers Reference Book, 2009 John Tarrant