
Published: October 2008

Secretary General: Professor John Tarrant

Address and contact details:

Association of Commonwealth Universities
Woburn House
20 – 24 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9HF
UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 7380 6700

Fax: +44 (0)20 7387 2655

Email: info@acu.ac.uk

Web site: www.acu.ac.uk

Contact for membership enquiries and information:

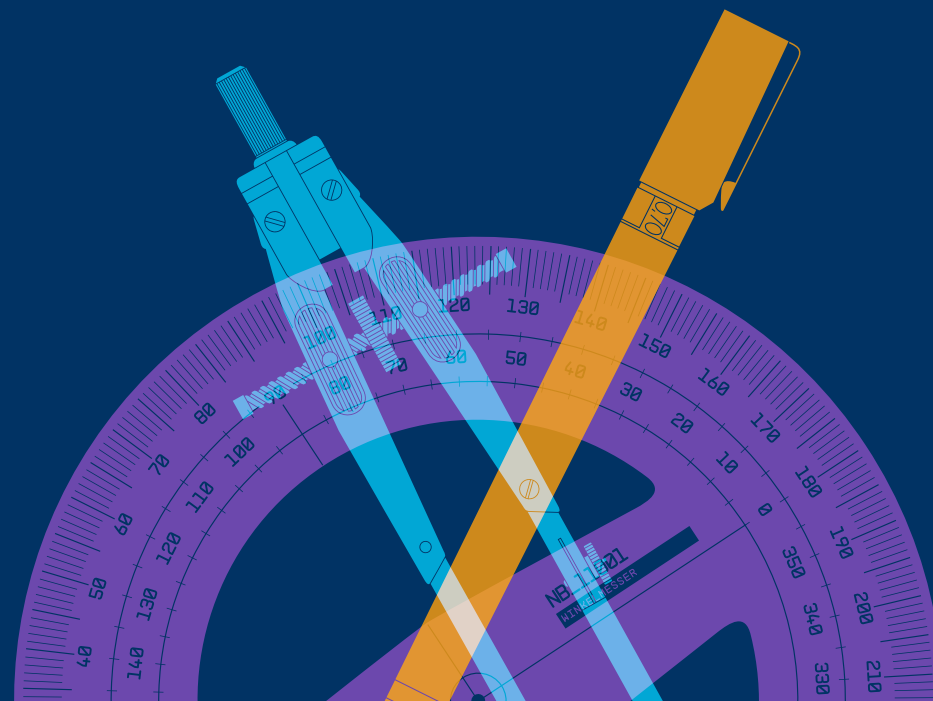
j.middleton@acu.ac.uk

The Association is a registered charity (number 314137)

The Association of Commonwealth Universities

One Hundred Years Young

**The strategic plan of the
Association of Commonwealth
Universities 2008 to 2013:
preparing for a second century.**



Contents	
Mission/Values	1
1. Secretary General's Introduction	2
2. Membership	3
3. Membership services	4
3.1. Identifying the needs of the membership	4
3.2. Contacts and networking	4
3.3. Visibility	5
3.4. The endowment fund and staff mobility	6
3.5. Advocacy	7
3.6. Benchmarking, training and sharing best practice	8
3.7. Working together for market advantage	8
4. Scholarships	9
5. Hosting other organisations and programmes	10
6. Communications	10
7. Governance	11
8. Operations	12
9. Centenary	13

Mission

Working with our members to promote and contribute to the provision of excellent higher education for the benefit of all people throughout the Commonwealth.

Values

We believe in the vital importance of higher education within the economies and societies of the countries of the Commonwealth.

We will encourage cooperation and partnership among higher education institutions of the Commonwealth.

We will work as a team towards the common goal of serving our membership to the very best of our abilities.

We will be honest, open and transparent in our decision making and treat our members, partners and staff with respect and integrity.

1. Secretary General's introduction

A recent survey of the most important issues facing our members put internationalisation at or near the top in every region of the Commonwealth. Collaboration on an ever increasing scale is a key trend of our time. Mobility of staff and students and a variety of partnerships in teaching, research and university management are key elements of internationalisation and they have been at the heart of the ACU's work for nearly 100 years. They are more important to our members now than they have ever been. A Commonwealth association brings with it the advantages of a common language and shared values and systems of university governance and management which makes mobility and partnership easier to establish.

The ACU is a membership organisation, funded largely through subscriptions from our members. We will ensure that the Association remains focussed on the needs of all of its membership, making ourselves indispensable allies in the development of higher education at all scales, local, national, regional and global.

This is a high level plan for the Association. Beneath it will be operational plans for different parts of the Association and for individuals within it. All parts of the ACU must continue to work as a team, valuing each others contributions to the joint effort. As a strategic plan it is a guide for both our members and for our staff, helping them to identify how they can benefit from and contribute to the ACU as we lay the foundations for another century of success.

2. Membership

At the start of this plan period in mid 2008 the ACU has about 480 members in 37 countries. New higher education institutions are being established in ever greater numbers throughout the Commonwealth as all countries seek to increase the number of people able to benefit from higher education. These new institutions take many forms, including colleges and campuses of existing universities, distance learning institutions, and newly established universities and colleges, both public and private. Our membership must keep pace with this rapid expansion in the number of HEIs and with the variety of institutions now providing university level education and research. The Charter of the ACU envisaged an inclusive organisation representing universities, colleges of universities, university colleges and other institutions of higher education.

- 2.1. We will increase membership to 700 by 2013 through a concerted membership drive, emphasising the growing range of services to members.

- 2.2. We will use this to invite into membership a broad range of institutions in order the better reflect the inclusive objectives of the Charter.

- 2.3. The membership recruitment leaflet setting out the advantages of ACU membership and this Strategic Plan will be updated and published annually.

- 2.4. A redesigned ACU website will be partly operational in 2008 and fully in 2009.

- 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.

- 2.6. A membership working group will be used to plan and coordinate all recruitment efforts across the whole of the ACU.

- 2.7. We will review the level and the banding of subscriptions in November 2008

3. Membership services

The value of the Association, and its financial stability, is a function of the value to our members of the services we provide. These services are the core of what we do. We will work to ensure that, over time, our work represents a balance of the needs of different members and different regions of the Commonwealth.

3.1 Identifying the needs of the membership

- 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.
 - 3.1.2. We will adopt an open door policy to suggestions from the membership at any time.
 - 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.
-

3.2. Contacts and networking

With between 500 and 700 members during this planning period and contact with upwards of 200,000 members of academic, administrative and professional staff, membership of the ACU brings an unrivalled resource to facilitate networking and partnerships across the globe. Such networks and partnerships are the bedrock of internationalisation.

- 3.2.1. We will hold at least one major international conference each year addressing a theme of concern and interest to our membership.
-

- 3.2.2. We will continue to expand and develop our professional networks in Research Management, Human Resource Management, Public Relations and Libraries.
-

- 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.
-

- 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.
-

- 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.
-

- 3.2.6. This database will also be available during 2008 as a searchable CDROM.
-

- 3.2.7. We will continue VCNet, expanding its circulation and clearly branding it as an ACU publication.
-

3.3 Visibility

A major advantage of ACU membership is that it provides visibility and recognition for member organisations.

- 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.
-

-
- 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).
-
- 3.3.3 If the market research is favourable, during 2009 we will develop a online job advertising service across all universities in the Commonwealth.
-
- 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.
-
- 3.3.5 From 2008 the Annual Report and the new website will include a full list of members.
-
- 3.3.6 Other ways will be sought to publish membership lists.
-

3.4 The endowment fund and staff mobility

The ACU Development Fellowships Endowment, established to mark the 75th Anniversary in 1988, allows the ACU to make a direct contribution to staff mobility between member institutions. Our ultimate aim is for the Fund to be in a position to return to the collective membership each year the value of their collective membership subscriptions. We will work towards this by

-
- 3.4.1 Making a contribution to the fund from the proceeds of the sale of the ACU flat in Kensington
-
- 3.4.2 Using the fund to lever matching support from other sources, such as our current joint grants with the British Academy
-
- 3.4.3 Launching a major Centenary appeal in support of this fund
-
- 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.
-

3.5 Advocacy

The ACU has the opportunity to act as a voice for higher education, bringing the strengths of the sector, as well as its concerns and needs, to an audience of governments, NGOs and the wider public.

-
- 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.
-
- 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.
-
- 3.5.3 We will ensure that the ACU retains cordial relationships with national, regional and special interest university associations and with other international and Commonwealth bodies with a special interest in higher education. The ACU will aim to add to, rather than duplicate, the work of such associations and agencies.
-
- 3.5.4 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.
-
- 3.5.5 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.
-

3.6 Benchmarking, training and sharing best practice

Membership of a large international network brings opportunities for members to benchmark the efficiency and effectiveness of the way they do things against comparator universities throughout the Commonwealth. Such benchmarking is an excellent way of sharing best practice and can lead to opportunities for the ACU to develop specific training programmes.

-
- 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.

 - 3.6.2 We will actively investigate opportunities to provide, with others as appropriate, institutional reviews and high level training programmes.

 - 3.6.3 The networks will develop other opportunities to organise benchmarking, best practice exercises and training within their memberships.

 - 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.
-

3.7 Working together for market advantage

With a membership growing towards 700 there are some areas where the market negotiating power of the whole is much stronger than for individual universities working alone. We will not duplicate the role of some national associations but will develop international opportunities.

-
- 3.7.1. We will develop the online job advertising service in 3.3.3.

 - 3.7.2. We will continue the Journal purchase discount scheme with publishers to benefit our less well resourced members.
-

- 3.7.3. We will use our Libraries network to better 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.
-

- 3.7.4. We will actively seek other opportunities for market advantage, including conference organisation.
-

4. Scholarships

The ACU continues to be closely related to the much valued Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. We administer part of this Plan on behalf of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission. This experience has allowed us to tender successfully to host other scholarship programmes.

-
- 4.1. We will work to ensure that the contract with the CSC 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.

 - 4.2. We will ensure through our membership leaflet, website and other publications that the ACU continues to be publically associated with the CSFP.

 - 4.3. We will continue to ensure that the contract for administration of the Plan covers its full costs to us.

 - 4.4. As space and capacity allows we will continue to seek to administer other scholarship and fellowship schemes.

 - 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.
-

5. Hosting and servicing other organisations and programmes

The ACU has strong common interests with other organisations and programmes and we take advantage of such synergy by hosting; the Observatory for Borderless Higher Education, the Africa Unit and the Staff Educational Development Association.

-
- 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.

 - 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.

 - 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.
-

6. Communications

Good communication with our membership is essential to both explain what the ACU is doing on their behalf and to gather feedback on the nature and the quality of our services. We will continue to improve our communication with members.

-
- 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.

 - 6.2. During 2008 we will update and then maintain our email list to reduce the “bounce-back” rate.
-

-
- 6.3. The new ACU website will be developed in stages during 2009 and will be managed and updated throughout the plan period.
-

- 6.4. During 2008 we will introduce a common house style to our publications to ensure that together they reinforce the ACU brand.
-

7. Governance

Excellent standards of governance will be maintained as befits a charity devoted to higher education in the Commonwealth.

-
- 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).

 - 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

 - 7.3. A full set of Terms of Reference, devolved responsibilities and Operating Procedures will be approved and implemented by June 2008.

 - 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. The Council will, however, maintain its overall authority over the strategy of the Association.

 - 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.
-

8. Operations

We will be an effective and efficient organisation, with full financial accountability and probity, utilising our resources wisely and in the interests of our members. We will aim to be regarded as an employer of choice for our present and future staff.

-
- 8.1. We will continue to reduce the operating costs of the Association.

 - 8.2. In later years of the planning period we will utilise increased income to provide a wider portfolio of improved services to members.

 - 8.3. We will reintroduce staff appraisals from May 2008.

 - 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.

 - 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

9. Centenary

During this planning period, and with accelerating pace towards the end of the period, the ACU will prepare for its Centenary celebrations. These celebrations are planned to include:

-
- 9.1. A major conference

 - 9.2. A reception at Buckingham Palace (as for the fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1963)

 - 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.

 - 9.4. An anniversary publication celebrating 100 years of higher education in the Commonwealth. This study will be commissioned during 2008.
-

Approved by Council July 2008