1. Board Matters

The annual meetings of the COL Board of Governors took place in The Bahamas on June 19-20, 2015 to coincide with the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (19th CCEM) which was held during June 22-26, 2015, where COL presented to Senior Officials and then to Ministers who ratified the new Strategic Plan. COL also organised a number of events alongside these meetings:

- A pre-conference meeting of ministers and officials from the small states was held to brief them about the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). The Honourable Jerome Fitzgerald, Minister of Education, Science and Technology in The Bahamas, chaired the event and His Excellency Danny Faure, Vice President of Seychelles, gave the keynote address.

- Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, presented a cheque for USD200,000 to Dr. Linda Sissons, Chair, COL Board of Governors in the presence of His Excellency Kamalesh Sharma, Commonwealth Secretary-General, Ambassador Katagum and COL staff.

- A Roundtable on MOOCs was held to brief ministers and senior officials about this new development in online learning. This event was chaired by the Honourable Dr. Robert Lewis, Minister of Education, Human Resource Development and Labour, St. Lucia with three speakers – the President and Co-Founder of Coursera, Professor Daphne Koller, Vice Chancellor and President of RMIT, Mr. Martin Bean and COL’s Director of Technology and Knowledge Management, Dr. Venkataraman Balaji.

- A Memorandum of Understanding with the Commonwealth Secretariat, University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus and COL was signed at the Youth Forum. This partnership will make the resources for the Degree and Diploma in Youth Development Work programmes available as Open Educational Resources (OER) and will support quality assurance and validation of qualifications using the Transnational Qualifications Framework.

The Nassau Declaration recognised the ‘significance of online learning as a universal tool for lifelong learning … and the key role of the Commonwealth of Learning in driving innovation in this field …’. Ministers welcome[d] the role of the Commonwealth

We welcome Shri Vinay Sheel Oberoi, Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development as the new Board Member representing India and are grateful to Shri Satyanarayan Mohanty for his advice and contributions to COL during his term on the Board.

The next meeting of the Audit Committee is planned for November 18, 2015 to be followed by the Executive Committee on November 19, 2015. Both meetings will be held by teleconference.

2. General

This quarter got off to a flying start with a high profile visit of two senior Canadian ministers. The Honourable Robert Nicholson, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Honourable Kerry-Lynne Findlay, Minister of National Revenue visited COL to launch a project on preventing Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM). Canada will contribute $2.3 million over the next three years to train 25,000 girls in relevant skills that will lead to opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship in four countries: Bangladesh, Mozambique, Pakistan and Tanzania. Gender equality is a key priority in COL’s efforts to promote ‘learning for sustainable development’. Twenty thousand girls in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan will receive education and training through a contribution from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia.

Another priority for COL is to promote the development and use of Open Educational Resources (OER). COL has received a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to help Commonwealth countries and institutions to develop and use OER.

These additional grants have made it possible for us to appoint a Senior Adviser for the Women and Girls project and an Adviser for the OER project. These two positions will strengthen COL’s current capacity to not just achieve but exceed outcomes. As the Plan unfolds, we will continue to recruit staff with the appropriate skills and expertise.

COL’s expertise in Technology-Enabled Learning is well-recognised. Mr. Joseph Caruana, Permanent Secretary and Dr. Alex Grech, Advisor to the Minister of Education and Employment, Malta visited COL to explore the possibilities of collaborating in this area. The discussions were initiated during the 19th CCEM, when the Honourable Minister Evarist Bartolo attended the COL Roundtable on MOOCs. The two-day visit resulted in a draft Memorandum of Understanding which will be signed in the wings of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) being hosted by Malta on November 27-29, 2015.
In the past, COL’s role at CHOGM had been limited to a presentation to Ministers of Foreign Affairs. This year, we have been invited to organise a panel discussion in the Women’s Forum and to speak at two other parallel forums: the Youth Forum and the Business Forum. The COL delegation will be led by our Chair, Dr. Linda Sissons and will comprise Dr. Balasubramanian and myself. It will be a small but busy delegation.

The review report from the Department for International Development (DFID), UK for the previous financial year was received during this quarter. You will be pleased to know that we continue to maintain our A+ rating for having ‘met or exceeded the output milestones for 2015’.

2.1 President’s Activities

The Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC) jointly organise an annual induction programme for newly transferred diplomats to London. This year, 13 countries were represented and received the Country Reports that captured COL’s work in their respective countries over the past triennium. I made two presentations on COL’s governance and programme and facilitated a session on ‘Pulling Together as the Commonwealth’. Diplomats appreciated COL’s work and said that such concrete outcomes reassured members of the relevance and value of the Commonwealth. Former Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Right Honourable Don McKinnon, said that ‘the Commonwealth’s credibility will be sustained if the ‘have nots’ believe you continue to work in their best interest’ (*In the Ring*, p. 298). COL’s targeted approach to serve the ‘have nots’ has resulted in a better appreciation of the Commonwealth as a whole. These annual events enlarge our circle of allies among the London-based diplomats, who represent their countries at the COMSEC Board meetings.

A series of meetings were held with the High Commissioners of India, Malta Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, St. Lucia and Tonga and with senior officials at the Australian and Canadian High Commissions. Discussions were held with colleagues at DFID and COMSEC regarding updates and follow-up actions. As we develop a new Communications Strategy, we will need to devise a systematic approach to keeping key stakeholders engaged on an ongoing basis.

From London, I travelled to Swaziland to deliver a keynote address at the fiftieth anniversary conference of the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA). In addition, I facilitated an advocacy workshop on OER at the University of Swaziland. I met the Minister of Education and Training, the Honourable Dr. P. Magagula and his senior officials. They were pleased to note that COL was training 500 of the 12,000 current teachers in the country in the first phase and that an OER workshop for policy makers and practitioners was being organised the following month. These activities link with the priorities identified in Swaziland’s Vision 2022. The Minister particularly appreciated COL’s focus on environmental sustainability as part of its new Strategic Plan.
COL continues to use video technology when a physical presence is not possible. I recorded two video presentations on OER and the role of open and distance learning in skills development, the latter presented at a major conference in Saskatchewan.

The global distance learning community has elected me to the Executive Committee of the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) for a four-year term. This will extend COL’s reach beyond the Commonwealth and create useful synergies with international bodies and national institutions.

3. Programme

We are three months into the new Six-Year Plan. Partners and stakeholders have responded positively to COL’s theme of ‘Learning for Sustainable Development’ and this aligns well with Goal 4 of the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030. Education and learning will be central to achieving poverty eradication, food security and gender equality as well as addressing climate change. These elements are integral to our new Plan and provide a roadmap for the next six years on which activities have been initiated under two sectors – Education and Skills.

3.1 Education Sector

Working in all regions of the Commonwealth and building on its achievement over the last triennium, the Education sector continues to make good progress. The activities include capacity building and development of learning materials with a strong focus on OER. Discussions were initiated to integrate sustainable development approaches into policies and programmes.

3.1.1 Open/Innovative Schooling

The Canada Caribbean Chapter of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA) in collaboration with COL held its first regional conference on Open Schooling in Belize with 130 participants. The theme was ‘Innovative Schooling: Transforming Pedagogy, Increasing Access, to Ensure Learning’.

A partnership was initiated with the Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute (CFTDI) for repurposing their learning materials to reach the inaccessible fishing communities in the Caribbean. This marks a beginning in addressing the issues of the Blue Economy in small island states.

Five new OER subjects were completed in three countries: Botswana, Malawi and Namibia. Three OER workshops were held in Malawi, Mozambique and Seychelles to enable partners to develop effective and cost-efficient learning materials.
3.1.2 Teacher Education

A capacity building workshop for teacher educators was held at the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) for integrating Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in teaching and learning. A baseline survey of teacher training for Special Needs Education in the Caribbean was completed, which will inform further activities in this area of education in the region.

3.1.3 Higher Education

Three research studies on Open and Distance Learning (ODL) were completed during this quarter. These studies addressed issues such as quality assurance systems, costs of ICT in distance education and the performance of open universities.

A delegation of 13 officials of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh was hosted at COL and discussions focused on strengthening ties and sharing of experiences on higher education and open and distance learning.

A learner support and assessment workshop was successfully conducted for 22 academics at the Open University of Mauritius. One recipient from Nigeria of the 2015 Brunei Darussalam government scholarship offered through COL commenced his Masters of Public Health at the Universiti of Brunei Darussalam.

3.1.4 Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

The Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) enrolled more than 20 students in the Postgraduate Diploma in Quality Assurance being offered under VUSSC. COL, in collaboration with Microsoft Africa, conducted training for 28 teacher educators in Seychelles on the integration of ICT in teaching and learning using Microsoft tools. In collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat (Youth Division) and the University of the West Indies (Open Campus), VUSSC participated in a workshop to convert the Degree in Youth Development Work into OER. This programme is now available to more institutions and will be offered on the VUSSC online learning platform. VUSSC has started to pilot MOOC technology in order to reach more learners.

3.2 Skills Sector

The Skills sector redefined its approaches in addressing the issues of sustainable development and at the same time continued the activities of the earlier Three-Year Plan to bring them to a logical conclusion.

3.2.1 Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

There is increasing interest and leadership being shown by national authorities with new country programmes in four African countries implementing the flexible and blended (FaB) TVSD model. Proposals for support have been received from policy advisers in
Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and Zambia. Country baseline studies have been completed for Mozambique and Zambia. Introductory workshops to plan for country FaB models and monitoring protocols were held in these four countries with a total of 155 participants from 80 institutions plus national policy advisers.

The INVEST Africa online community of practice now has over 1,300 members. A new online course has been developed in Blended Online Teaching Strategies and an existing course in Flexible Skills Development is being translated into Portuguese.

In the Pacific, TVSD is supporting the Ministry of Education and Training to adapt an existing COL OER course in small engine maintenance for the Vanuatu context and assisting with the process of registration of this course in the Vanuatu National Qualifications Framework.

3.2.2 Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)

With the focus on scaling up the L3F activities from meso level to macro level, efforts were made to develop new partnerships and evolve new institutional frameworks.

The involvement of the National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), an apex development bank in India, means that L3F can be scaled up in India. COL and NABARD organised a workshop in Pune in which NABARD recognised the potential that L3F offers the banking sector to reach the unreached.

Through COL’s financial literacy programme, 3,000 women in Kenya accessed funds from existing social schemes such as the Women’s Development Enterprise Fund, Uwezo Fund and Youth Enterprise Development Fund for setting up agricultural and agri-business enterprises. A study in Kenya compared L3F participants with two control groups: i) members in cooperatives but not involved in L3F; and ii) households neither in cooperatives nor in L3F. The results indicated that while 95% of L3F participants produced enough food on their small farms for their household consumption throughout the year, less than 30% of the two control groups produced sufficient food for their household consumption.

Mobile phone based learning facilitated by Makerere University reached 10,161 farmers (44% women) in Uganda. The online Q&A indicated that 77% of the queries are from women, suggesting a deeper engagement from women farmers.

In Tanzania, a strategic and business plan for a Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation was developed and converted into ODL material in Kiswahili. At present, 4,144 L3F participants (predominantly women) are undergoing a corporate and cooperative literacy programme using this material. The Tanzanian Federation of Cooperatives (TFC) and Mautumaini Mapeya, Tanzania organised a workshop for L3F partners from Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Tanzania and Uganda to consolidate their activities for the 2012-2015 period and plan their activities for 2015-2017. During the inauguration workshop, TFC
pointed out that the L3F approach will be integrated in the proposed National Cooperative Bank of Tanzania.

3.2.3 Technology-Enabled Learning

This initiative is new in the current Six-Year Plan and replaces the cross-cutting eLearning initiative. An online short course on ‘Understanding Open Educational Resources’ was developed and released through the Moodle platform. This course provides the basics of OER, open licensing and searching for, and using, OER. Teachers, educational leaders and policy makers can take this two-hour self-directed course in a flexible manner and print a certificate of completion. In addition, three reports were released and one issue of the Journal of Learning for Development was published.

3.3 Cross-cutting Theme

3.3.1 Gender

An environmental scan is underway to map out which development stakeholders are working on targeted interventions that address the learning needs of at-risk boys in Jamaica and what each is specifically undertaking. A draft outline of a gender scorecard for institutions was developed. Two ‘Lunch and Learn’ events were organised for staff on the topics of gender violence and religion and women.

3.4 eLearning for International Organisations

eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO) received three new contracts during the quarter. UNHCR extended the delivery contract of the Operational Data Management Learning Programme by one year to train 70 learners. WHO provided a new contract for another cohort to train up to 115 learners in the Writing Effectively for WHO course. In addition, the Council of Europe commissioned the adaptation of the Reading for the Workplace tutorial into an e-course for its global staff. This e-course will be available via the Moodle platform.

eLIO completed four cohorts with 300 learners between July to September with completion rates ranging from 74% to 91%.

3.5 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

CEMCA convened a meeting of the Vice Chancellors of State Open Universities in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Resource Development, India to discuss the implementation of OER Policy and development and sharing of OER. In addition, the Central University of Himachal Pradesh was assisted in developing an institutional OER Policy.
Capacity building training for the higher education teachers of the Central University of Punjab was conducted on e-Content Development using Moodle. The National Academy of Agricultural Research Management in India was advised on strategies for adopting technology-enhanced learning in agricultural education.

3.6 Regional Centres

3.6.1 Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL)

RETRIDOL successfully conducted a two-day regional workshop on Leadership Development in ODL and Higher Education Institutions in West Africa for 30 participants.

3.6.2 Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education

The Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education Advisory Committee meeting took place in Mozambique.

3.6.3 Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD)

The Honourable Christopher Pyne, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Australia in his speech at the University of the South Pacific commended the activities of PACFOLD and said that through PACFOLD ‘there will be many more shared conversations in future about what works well for on-line learning and what the challenges are to focus our collective efforts to develop the best quality accessible education for all’.

3.7 Vice President’s Activities

The Vice President worked with the authors from UNESCO and UNEVOC and the editor to finalise the Perspective Series on Using New Technologies and Blended Learning Models for Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

The Vice President reviewed the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy and supported the Programme team in developing their in-depth country strategies. Work plans for direct reports for the year were finalised.

A video on ‘How Technology Developments are Driving Change in Higher Education’ was produced for presentation at the Southern African Regional Universities Association Vice Chancellors Leadership Dialogue in Cape Town, South Africa during September 8-9, 2015.
3.8 Professional Development

COL provided support to the Distance Education and Teachers’ Training in Africa (DETA) Conference 2015, held at the Mauritius Institute of Education during July 20-24, 2015, on the theme ‘The Future We Want: Teacher development for the transformation of education in diverse African contexts’.

Mr. Matai Tagicaki of the Ratu Sukuna Memorial School in Fiji visited COL during July 20-24, 2015 as a Professional Attachment to COL. Mr. Tagicaki worked with staff members to learn various aspects of OER and their use in the design and delivery of educational materials. He also undertook hands-on training on Aptus for the sharing of local content.

4. Stakeholder Relations

4.1 Member Governments Support

COL is forecasting contributions of over $9.5 million from member countries in 2015-2016. In 2014-2015, a record amount of $9.99 million was received from 44 countries – our previous record was $9.2 million from 46 countries in 2013-2014. Invoicing and requests for 2015-2016 contributions were sent out to all Commonwealth Member States during the first quarter.

So far during this fiscal year, contributions have been received from 13 countries (compared to 21 at the same time in the previous year): Antigua & Barbuda, Belize, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Lesotho, Mauritius, St. Lucia, Samoa, South Africa, Trinidad & Tobago, Tuvalu and United Kingdom.

COL signed a three-year funding agreement with the Government of Canada for the period 2015-2018 at the same institutional support level as the 2012-2015 agreement.

4.2 Focal Points

During this quarter, we welcomed the following Focal Points:

- Nigeria – Mrs. Mary A. Ameh, Assistant Director, Bilateral Agreements, Commonwealth and African Affairs, Federal Ministry of Education.
- Solomon Islands – Mr. James Bosamata, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development.
4.3 Congratulatory Letters

Eleven congratulatory letters were sent to newly appointed Heads of Government, Ministers of Education and Foreign Affairs, High Commissioners and Consuls General.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenue

So far this financial year, COL has received $3.25 million in voluntary contributions from member governments towards the budget for 2015-2016.

The thirteen countries that have contributed are:
Antigua & Barbuda – $6,433; Belize – $39,500; Guyana – $19,800; India – $1,202,377; Jamaica – $58,500; Lesotho – $86,562; Mauritius – $60,000; St. Lucia – $24,069; Samoa – $75,400; South Africa – $250,000; Trinidad & Tobago – $97,000; Tuvalu – $13,149; and United Kingdom – $1,320,064 (first of two instalments).

In addition to contributions from member governments, COL is forecasting additional contributions from grants of $1.2 million and from fee-for-service activities of $700,000.

Towards meeting these additional contribution targets, COL recognised close to $200,000 in revenues from grants and fee-for-services during the period July 1, 2015 to September 30, 2015. Deferred revenues in excess of $600,000 are also available for recognition over the fiscal year as activities complete in accordance with the corresponding funding agreements where funding was provided in a previous financial year.

A number of new agreements were entered into during the quarter:

- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation – a one-year grant of USD50,000 for monitoring and evaluation and a grant of USD600,000 over three years to promote the development and use of OER for education and training.
- Reach Out To Asia (Qatar Foundation) – USD37,000 for innovative delivery of education in Pakistan using mobile technology.
- Fee-for-service contracts from WHO, Council of Europe and UNHCR totaling USD240,000 for course development and/or delivery.
5.2 Cash Flow

At September 30, 2015, COL held over $5 million in cash and cash equivalents. This level of cash and cash equivalents enables COL to meet operational costs and maintain a positive cash flow until outstanding contributions are received throughout the year.

COL also held an internally restricted cash reserve of $7.7 million (at June 30, 2015 – $4.7 million) to provide a source of funds for unexpected expenses and shortfalls in funding if needed. The cash reserve provision was recently increased from six months of operating costs to twelve months with the increase to be funded over a three-year period. To date, $3 million of the required $4.3 million increase has already been transferred to the reserve.

5.3 Expenditures

In the first quarter, approximately $1.8 million was spent or committed to meet programme and organisational management activities, staff costs and office costs. This amount comprised 17% of the annual budget of $10.68 million approved for 2015-2016.

6. Human Resources

6.1 Staff Changes

6.1.1 Arrivals

Ms. Ana Agner joined COL on October 1, 2015 as Designer & Production Coordinator.

6.1.2 Movements

Dr. K. Balasubramanian, Education Specialist, Agriculture and Livelihoods will take up the post of Vice President on October 16, 2015.

Ms. Frances Ferreira, Education Specialist, Open Schooling will take up the post of Senior Adviser: Women and Girls on January 1, 2016.

6.1.3 Departures

Ms. Denise Tremblay, Designer & Production Coordinator left COL on June 5, 2015.

Ms. Alicia Swinamer, Stakeholder Relations Manager left COL on July 9, 2015.

Ms. Alexis Carr, Project Assistant left COL on July 31, 2015.
Ms. Angela Kwan, Learning Manager – International Organisations retired from COL on September 30, 2015.

Mr. Vis Naidoo, Vice President left COL on September 30, 2015.

Dr. Ankuran Dutta, Programme Officer, Livelihoods & Health left CEMCA on October 14, 2015.

6.1.4 Recruitment

Mr. Roy Thorpe-Dorward of Canada will take up the position of Communications Manager on November 1, 2015.

Dr. Ishan Abeywardena of Sir Lanka will take up the post of Adviser: Open Educational Resources on January 1, 2016.

Two posts are currently under recruitment – Education Specialist, Open Schooling and Learning/Business Development Manager.

7. Information Technology & Knowledge Management

During this quarter, there has been considerable progress in generating outcomes for our work in both online and offline technologies.

Aptus, our main innovation for offline access to high quality OER, is now deployed on a structured project in Swat area of KPK Province, Pakistan in collaboration with Reach Out To Asia (ROTA), a wholly-owned charitable organisation of the Qatar Foundation. This is an applied research project where key learning outcomes of deploying mobile devices in higher secondary schools will be assessed. Aptus is used for the distribution of learning materials by the participating teachers to the students who use tablets. An intensive workshop was organised on the use of Aptus and tablets for teachers from Pakistan in September. ROTA hosted this event at the Qatar Foundation in Doha.

In the Pacific, we have been able to generate considerable enthusiasm for Aptus. The Minister of Education, Kiribati, during the 19th CCEM, sought COL’s support in introducing Aptus in schools. The Ministry of Education, Fiji has shown similar interest.

Our work on MOOCs for Development has made significant progress. Combining minor resources from Knowledge Management and VUSSC, an online portal (www.mooc4dev.org) was created based on mooKIT, a platform developed by the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK). An important development is COL’s collaboration, through this portal, with the University of the South Pacific which is offering a MOOC on Climate Change in the Pacific Islands. This MOOC has been open since mid-September with about 1,100 sign ups. A notable aspect is the integration of popular social media with the mooKIT platform. Because of this, course managers have observed very high levels of
activity among learners. We have received a request for a similar hosting support from the National Open University of Nigeria, a long standing partner of COL.

Several upgrades were performed to IT systems to keep with changes in the online security environment. A number of critical online services have been moved to the Cloud, ensuring that these are hosted in data centers located in Canada.

8. Eighth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF8)

In consultation with the Open University of Malaysia, the host for PCF8, we have finalised the conference theme as ‘Open, flexible and online learning: the key to sustainable development’. The sub-themes are: ‘quality and equity in learning’; ‘access and inclusiveness’; ‘efficiency and effectiveness’; ‘technology and innovation’. OUM has launched a PCF8 website at http://pcf8.oum.edu.my.

9. Visitors to COL

Some of the recent visitors to COL include:

- Mr. Joseph Caruana, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Employment (MEDE), Malta.
- Dr. Alex Grech, Advisor to the Minister, MEDE, Malta.
- A delegation of Vice Chancellors and senior officials of the Ministry of Education, Bangladesh led by Professor Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, Member, University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (supported by UGC, Bangladesh).

10. Publications/Resources

The following are recent publications and resources of note:

- Publications (http://oasis.col.org/).
  - Understanding Open Educational Resources (http://hdl.handle.net/11599/1013).
  - Tablets for Teaching and Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (http://hdl.handle.net/11599/1012).
  - Knowledge Series: Gender Mainstreaming in Learning for Sustainable Development http://hdl.handle.net/11599/1390).
• Videos at www.col.org/videos.
• Speeches and presentations at https://www.col.org/document-type/speeches-presentations.
• COL Blog at www.col.org/blog.

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

Professor Asha S. Kanwar
President & Chief Executive Officer
October 15, 2015