

# CONNECTIONS



LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



## PCF9 welcomes brightest minds in open and distance learning

More than 500 policy makers, practitioners and thought leaders from across the Commonwealth and beyond arrived at the historic BT Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh, Scotland for opening day of the ninth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF9) on 9 September 2019.

The energy of the first day was palpable and the early-morning registration abuzz with delegates networking and preparing for the formal programme to begin. The opening ceremony marked the official start of the four-day forum and included welcoming addresses from Dr Linda Sissons, Board Chair, Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Mr Malcolm Sweeting, Pro-Chancellor, The Open University (OU), Professor Mary Kellett, Vice-Chancellor, OU, Ms Dee Bradbury, President of the Scottish Rugby Union, and Professor Asha Kanwar, President and CEO, COL.

“Every Pan-Commonwealth Forum informs the subsequent work of COL and sets the pace for developments in open education. We are confident that the inputs of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers who are joining us at PCF9 will continue this trend,” said Dr Linda Sissons.

Professor Mary Kellett shared similar sentiments about the value of these collective efforts, saying, “In an era of unprecedented change, our community of educationists has much to contribute.”

In her address, Professor Kanwar gave an overview of the education challenges facing the Commonwealth and noted that 17 million primary aged children and 16 million lower secondary youth are not in school. “We need to change the business as usual approach and the brick-and-mortar mindset if we want to achieve SDG4,” she said.

“Lifelong learning is no longer an option, but an imperative for sustainable development.” Professor Asha Kanwar

## COL's Pre-Forum Workshops, 7-8 September



**The Open Schooling** workshop built on the work started in 2018 to reimagine and reinvigorate the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA) and explored how open schooling can address the challenge of out-of-school youth.

Directors of national quality assurance (QA) agencies and QA units in universities attended a **Higher Education** workshop to discuss the integration of employability guidelines in national frameworks. COL presented its Employability Model and various employability tools and strategies.



**The Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)** session involved setting targets and creating strategies for scaling up to the meso and macro levels. Participants established plans for extending their reach and impact through innovative modes of delivery and the rigorous tracking of results.



**The Regional Centres Meeting** focused on compatibilities in research, deepening engagement and acquiring data and outcomes from partners, and devising a joint communications plan to augment the collective visibility of the regional centres.



**The TEL Partners** meeting included representatives of partner institutions implementing TEL projects and several consultants. Participants discussed the outcomes evaluation of the TEL initiative and strategies to achieve the targets.



**The Teacher Education** workshop focused on new and emerging technologies. COL President and CEO Professor Asha Kanwar noted partners' commitment to innovative teacher professional development and called for more research on the use of new technologies in improving learning outcomes.

A milestone towards wider acceptance of the **Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)** Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) was announced at the meeting of the TQF committee, when it was reported that the new CARICOM Qualifications Framework was now referenced to the TQF.



Jennie Lee

## Origins of the "University of the Air"

The OU's origins are inextricably linked to Scotland; it was Jennie Lee, the daughter of a miner from Lochgelly, Fife who was the minister charged with delivering the "University of the Air" by Prime Minister Harold Wilson and it was Dundee's Walter Perry, previously Vice-Principal at the University of Edinburgh who became the first Vice-Chancellor and established this 'radical' university with no entrance requirements and no students on campus.





## AROUND THE FORUM



### Re-envisioning the 5-day work week

Film producer and educator Lord Puttnam of Queensgate delivered a thought-provoking Asa Briggs lecture on day one. Lord Puttnam spoke of how digital literacy and re-skilling must become the core building blocks in every 21st century society. To prepare students and employees for the changing workforce, and to provide them with the help and expertise they need to learn, Lord Puttnam proposed that every working week – a fifth day – should be dedicated to the ‘re-skilling’ task.

Lord Puttnam emphasised the importance of avoiding a cookie-cutter approach to learning. “Have we really got education right? Do we make the right judgements, in the right way, about the right people, at the right time?” “...The important thing is that we constantly ask ourselves that question.”

“If we don’t create platforms and opportunities for all of our citizens, we will reap the whirlwind.”

### Plenary panel explores PCF9 theme



The first plenary panel featured lively discussions on the forum theme, ‘Innovations for Quality Education and Lifelong Learning.’ Sir John Daniel, former President and CEO of COL, expertly moderated the session. Panelists included Professor Abdalla Uba Adamu, Vice-Chancellor, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN),



Professor Nageshwar Rao, Vice-Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), and Dr Caroline Seelig, Chief Executive, Open Polytechnic, New Zealand.

Professor Adamu spoke about how NOUN moved its focus from education to learning and described an innovative programme that reaches correctional institutions and is free of charge to inmates. Professor Rao noted that, with cumulative enrolment of 3 million students, studies at IGNOU are spread all over the country. He also spoke about learner support activities as the focus of innovation. Dr Caroline Seelig provided an overview of the radical design of education that is underway in New Zealand.

## Dinner reception closes day one

Delegates were officially welcomed to Edinburgh with a dinner reception and evening entertainment. Attendees dined on a traditional three-course Scottish meal and various speakers addressed the room to close out the first day of PCF9.



## Jane Constance delivers stunning performance

Singer Jane Constance, UNESCO Artist for Peace and winner of French television competition *The Voice Kids*, treated the PCF9 audience to a moving performance of songs *The Prayer*, *The Change Is Going To Come* and *We As One*. Born in Mauritius, Jane Constance was blind at birth and began singing at the age of five. After nurturing her talent, she went on to study at the Royal School of Music in London (UK). She was named a UNESCO Artist for Peace in 2017 in recognition of her commitment to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and for her efforts towards empowerment and inclusion. She released her debut album, *A travers tes yeux*, in 2016.

The Foot Stompin' Ceilidh Band also delivered an energetic, foot-tapping performance of traditional Scottish music.



## Thank you to our sponsors and forum partners



## Who is the Commonwealth of Learning (COL)?

Did you know COL is the world's only intergovernmental organisation solely concerned with the promotion and development of distance education and open learning?

COL's mission is to help Commonwealth Member States and institutions harness the potential of distance learning and

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technologies to expand access to education and training and address the education challenges of today. For COL, learning is the key to sustainable development and must lead to opportunities for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

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