

Convocation Address



22 September 2020

COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative
Virtual Convocation – Caribbean

Professor Asha Kanwar
President & CEO, Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

Honourable Colin E. Jordan, Minister of Labour and Social Partnership Relations, Barbados; Honourable Emmalin Pierre, Minister of Education, Human Resource Development, Religious Affairs and Information, Grenada; Honourable Ms Priya Manickchand, Minister of Education, Guyana; Honourable Dr Gale T. C. Rigobert, Minister of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development, St. Lucia; Jeff Maggioncalda, Chief Executive Officer, Coursera:

Welcome to this exciting event where we can see the future of education unfold before our eyes. This virtual convocation is a sign of the times when we have had to adopt new models of teaching and learning almost overnight. Since the students cannot go to the university, the university is coming to the student, and that, too, free of cost!

And for this, we must thank Jeff Maggioncalda, and his team members, in particular Kevin Mills and Chad Pasha, for making this possible for 100,000 Commonwealth citizens across the globe. The Commonwealth is young with 60% of its population under the age of 30. Youth unemployment in the Commonwealth at 17% is already higher than the global average. The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to further exacerbate youth unemployment in the 54 Commonwealth member states which need skilling and reskilling of their work force. That is why the “Coursera Workforce Recovery Programme” is both timely and critical.

Let me also thank the Hon Ministers for joining us today to encourage our learners. In Barbados, Hon. Minister, you’ll be pleased to note that today the maximum number of graduates are from your country. In Grenada, hosted by the Ministry of Education, the Help Desk is providing support to over 3,000 learners. The uptake in Guyana has exceeded all expectations at over 30,000 registrants, and the numbers continue to grow. St Lucia was the first country in the region to enthusiastically take up this offer. Hon Ministers, your personal leadership has been a key to this success.

Warm congratulations to all the 3,000+ from 11 Commonwealth Caribbean countries on your well-deserved success. I hope this will encourage you to complete many more courses before the new year. I am especially happy to note that over 60% of those graduating are women and girls. In my view, you who have understood the power of online learning are any employer’s dream. Why? Because you have demonstrated that you are motivated, focused, disciplined, digitally literate and above all lifelong learners. All these are attributes for success in the uncertain world that lies ahead. All these are also the attributes of the ideal CARICOM citizen.

It is also my pleasure to thank the ministries who have provided on-site academic and administrative support to our learners. This has been especially valuable for first-time online learners, many of them located in rural and remote areas. I am sure this has also been a very fulfilling experience for you as it was for me—a proud Coursera graduate. What I really liked was the variety of the well-researched course

content taught by top professors; the small chunks in which the content was presented, instant feedback, interesting assignments and, of course, success which is always a great motivator!

As we celebrate your success, dear learners, let us look at the infinite possibilities that lie ahead. As the great Caribbean Nobel laureate VS Naipaul said: ‘After all, we make ourselves according to the ideas we have of our possibilities’. Why limit our ideas or our possibilities? Let the imagination soar and reach for the stars!