Commonwealth of Learning

Strategic Plan

2015–2021
COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

This is my first message as Chair of the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). It is significant that for the first time in the history of COL, both the Chair and the President are women. This demonstrates that today it is possible for women to achieve positions of high responsibility and be an inspiration to many other women.

The fact that the above is still something to be remarked on reminds us that even today the majority of women in many parts of the Commonwealth continue to be disadvantaged in various ways. Discrimination against women and girls has led to the feminisation of poverty, increased violence and general disempowerment. How can this be changed and what will COL do to make a difference? Investing in the education of girls and women yields high returns in achieving development outcomes. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said, “educating girls and giving them the tools to shape their own future has an incredible multiplier effect on economic growth.”

COL has identified “education” and “skills development” as the two pillars of its Strategic Plan 2015–2021. The theme is “Learning for Sustainable Development” and reflects COL’s commitment to strengthening human capital through quality learning opportunities that lead to livelihoods and empowerment. COL will draw on its expertise and experience in open, distance and technology-enhanced learning to increase access, reduce costs and enhance the quality of learning for all.

The Commonwealth is a very diverse association of nations in various stages of development. There are differences in the needs of the regions, with the Pacific and the Caribbean being different from Africa and Asia. Wide disparities exist between countries within the regions and there are enormous differences in development within countries. In order to address this issue, COL has developed this Strategic Plan by adopting a needs-based participatory approach and by holding systematic consultations in each region of the Commonwealth. COL will focus on achieving the outcomes identified and will continue to evolve to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to the needs of its different stakeholders.

As you can see, COL has an ambitious agenda and high targets to meet. I’m confident that its small complement of dedicated staff will find innovative ways to ensure every dollar contributed by Commonwealth governments is spent to maximum effect. I commend this plan to Commonwealth governments and stakeholders for their support.

Dr Linda Sissons, CNZM
Chair, Board of Governors
FOREWORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

COL’s Strategic Plan 2015–2021 comes at a very important juncture in history: 2015 is the target date when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) draw to a close. A new set of post-2015 development goals has been identified by the international community. This plan takes into account the unfinished agenda of the MDGs, the priorities of Member States of the Commonwealth and the new concerns identified in the successor framework.

The Strategic Plan 2015–2021 has been developed after wide consultations and two external evaluations. From those reviews, one clear message emerged: COL must build on past strengths and continue with current initiatives in education and skills development to achieve longer-term impact.

While the new plan provides continuity, a subtle but significant change is evident.

1. COL has made a transition from “Learning for Development” to “Learning for Sustainable Development” to align itself to the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” COL will use its expertise in distance education and technology-based approaches to promote lifelong learning that leads to sustainable development. COL will refocus its interventions in education and learning to integrate the concerns relating to economic growth, social development and environmental conservation.

2. Education and skills development will be the two priority sectors for COL, with gender as a cross-cutting theme that underpins all its work.

3. By moving to a cycle of six years instead of three years, COL is confirming its commitment to delivering outcomes and impact rather than outputs alone. Development outcomes take time, and a three-year window is insufficient to measure long-term results.

What will COL do in the next six years?

- As the only intergovernmental organisation with the mandate to promote open and distance learning (ODL), COL will use its expertise to promote the use of ODL and technology-based approaches to promote the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. ODL has been used primarily to expand access to formal education. However, more development partners need to be aware of how the use of ODL can support learning in the non-formal and informal sectors. COL will expand this awareness through evidence-based advocacy.

- COL and its partners will develop innovative models of sustainable development and help Member States replicate, scale up and institutionalise these models. COL will be a thought leader and knowledge broker to influence policy and practice in Member States.

- COL will remain at the forefront of technology developments to advise Member States on how technologies can be adapted to local contexts. Given the uneven development of technology in the Commonwealth, COL will develop appropriate options to address the varying needs of its diverse stakeholders.

Learning can empower citizens to take greater responsibility for their own well-being and that of their societies and the environment. Through this Plan, COL will join global and national efforts to transform the idea of sustainable development into a concrete and actionable reality.

Professor Asha Kanwar
1.1 Evolution of COL

It is a very different world from when COL was first established. When Commonwealth Heads of Government met in Vancouver in 1987, they decided to create an organisation that would use distance learning and information and communication technologies (ICTs) to promote education and training in Member States and to strengthen Commonwealth cooperation.

In 1987, COL started out with the mandate to strengthen higher education using open and distance learning (ODL). With the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) goals in 2000, COL aligned its work to the global development agenda. In the last 27 years, there has been a clear progression from higher education, teacher training and secondary education in the formal education sector to non-formal learning related to skills development, agriculture and health. In short, COL paid attention to the learning and development needs of its stakeholders and embraced a lifelong learning perspective.

The theme of COL’s previous two strategic plans was “Learning for Development,” which focused on how education and learning add value to the development process. That approach encouraged COL to think beyond outputs to outcomes. COL has grown and developed from being an organisation with an output orientation to one that is outcomes based.

The post-2015 education agenda reflects the organisation’s further evolution. COL is committed to promoting equitable access to quality lifelong learning for all — believing, in effect, that access to learning opportunities will lead to progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

COL’s new motto will therefore be “Learning for Sustainable Development,” which is also the theme of this Strategic Plan.

1.2 Learning for Sustainable Development

Learning is more than formal education. It can take place in non-formal and informal settings and can continue throughout life. Technologies have made it possible to make learning ubiquitous.

If the post-2015 development goals are to be achieved, learning must lead to sustainable development. The Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This definition is as relevant today as it was nearly 30 years ago. The development achieved must be sustainable and demonstrate that all factors — social, economic and environmental — have been considered.

COL recognises the role of education and learning as an important step towards achieving sustainable development.

1.3 Achieving Impact

As COL embarks on its new Strategic Plan, the organisation will continue to build on its comparative advantages as a world leader in ODL and open educational resources (OER), its expertise in learning technologies, and its Commonwealth-wide network of partners. It will align its work to national priorities and balance extensive coverage with in-depth interventions. This will mean putting a greater focus on fewer key activities for the longer term so that outcomes and impact are achieved.

Providing access to learning alone will not be enough. COL will focus on quality learning that leads to positive outcomes. That means learning that leads to secure livelihoods and economic opportunities, greater harmony among all members of society as global citizens, and protection of the environment.

These are the impacts that the current Strategic Plan seeks to achieve, with the ultimate goal of securing our common future.
This Six-Year Plan sets the strategic direction and provides the overall framework for guiding COL’s programme from 2015 to 2021.

2.1 Developing the Programme

The programme for this Strategic Plan was developed through extensive consultations with Focal Points, stakeholders and the Board of Governors. It is located within the framework of the post-2015 development agenda and the Commonwealth priorities of peace, equality, democracy and good governance.

Focal Points Meetings

COL convened four Focal Points meetings, one each in the Caribbean, Africa and the Mediterranean, Asia, and the Pacific regions, where the following needs were expressed:

• The Caribbean highlighted the need for strengthening ODL to improve the livelihoods of young people, especially boys, and to develop the capacities of teachers to help young boys and girls become responsible citizens.

• In Africa and the Mediterranean, the need for further strengthening the skills sector in order to support the economic empowerment of marginalised groups was identified.

• In Asia, the importance of OER and massive open online courses (MOOCs) was stressed, as was the need for more work in quality assurance and qualifications frameworks.

• The emphasis in the Pacific was on skills development and entrepreneurship, and capacity building in ODL and eLearning.

Overall, Focal Points recommended that ODL and technology-based approaches be institutionalised within national education and training systems. Other areas of need included reforming curricula, engaging with civil society and the private sector to support non-formal learning, and helping governments and institutions develop lifelong learning policies and systems.
COL has integrated these needs into its programme and will address them through its initiatives in the education and skills development sectors. It will take a targeted approach to gender and focus on the needs of girls/women and boys/men, wherever they are disadvantaged.

Stakeholder Consultations

COL held consultations with various partners and stakeholders to ensure that the needs and perspectives of governmental, non-governmental, private and civil society organisations were included in the Strategic Plan.

COL conducted two Board retreats that discussed the global development goals and the initiatives that COL should implement. The Board members expressed the view that COL should remain true to its mandate and build on its expertise in ODL and OER. COL should also be able to respond to the varying needs of a range of stakeholders and reach the unreached with quality learning opportunities. COL should expand its strategic partnerships at both the international and the grassroots levels. The Board directed COL to strengthen its thought leadership position in ODL and technology-enhanced learning.

A stakeholder survey showed that COL must prioritise quality education and lifelong learning with a focus on youth, particularly girls and women. The survey endorsed the relevance of COL’s current initiatives and reiterated the need for skills development, sustainable livelihoods and better organisational capacity.

Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals

The post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals include poverty eradication, lifelong learning for all, gender equality, food security, jobs and livelihoods, and environmental sustainability.

The principle of sustainable and inclusive development is based on the belief that education is a fundamental human right that “contributes to economic growth, improved health, women’s empowerment, gender equality and strengthened social cohesion as well as [mitigating] inequality and the reduction of poverty” (UNESCO, 2013). COL is committed to expanding access to quality education and training so that learners have the values, knowledge and skills to contribute to sustainable development.

External Evaluations

During 2012–2015, COL undertook two evaluations: one, to assess its impact over the nine years 2006–2015 (Appendix 1), and two, to assess the outcomes over the three years 2012–2015 (Appendix 2).

The Impact Evaluation found that COL has had a major impact on individuals, institutions and society. The Outcome Evaluation report states that COL has achieved and exceeded most of the performance targets.

The Impact Evaluation recommended that COL needs to:
1. be more ambitious and set challenging goals;
2. become more systematic and focused on the development of communities of practice;
3. move to scale;
4. become more of a social impact organisation than an educational development organisation; and
5. secure sustained investment over time in order to have a strategic impact.

The Outcome Evaluation recommended that COL focus on:
1. clustering activities around a limited number of strategic areas to avoid duplication of effort and to promote better collaboration between initiatives;
2. tracking the relationship between costs and developmental outcomes, using indicators to measure cost efficiency, cost effectiveness and other factors; and
3. integrating monitoring and evaluation (M&E) into project design.

The reports also recommended that COL align itself more strongly with national priorities for stronger impact. COL needs to be more strategic and focused and to concentrate on fewer activities to achieve greater depth. COL also needs to position itself for the emerging context and to rethink its communications strategy.

In light of these recommendations, COL will i) build on its comparative advantage and invest in in-depth interventions based on country/stakeholder priorities, ii) play a more influential role in supporting Commonwealth governments to develop policies...
and strategies; iii) strengthen and expand its circle of partners externally and promote better team work and collaboration internally; iv) track evidence of results achieved through rigorous M&E and demonstrate value for money; and v) disseminate COL’s achievements through a systematic communications action plan.

2.2 Programme Framework

COL’s mandate is to help governments, institutions and organisations expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate ODL and technology-enabled learning. COL will continue to deploy these methodologies to promote not just formal education but non-formal and informal learning that leads to development which is sustainable. The programme will be guided by the following goals and priorities.

COL’s strategic goals:

• Human resource development in the Commonwealth
• Harnessing of ODL/OER and technology to promote equitable access to learning for sustainable development
• Promotion of Commonwealth cooperation

COL’s priorities:

• Development and promotion of open educational resources (OER)
• Education and training for women and girls

COL believes that OER can expand access to quality learning materials and reduce the costs by using and reusing available resources. Through collaborative content development and sharing across countries and cultures, OER can foster and promote Commonwealth cooperation.

COL recognises that advancing the goals of both women’s empowerment and gender equality are central to “Learning for Sustainable Development,” and that ODL can be especially helpful in enabling women and girls to access educational opportunities while they also fulfil their other responsibilities.

Programme Sectors

COL will work in two sectors — Education and Skills — with Gender as a cross-cutting theme. In order to sharpen its focus and build on existing strengths, COL has narrowed the number of initiatives and cross-cutting themes from nine to eight. One initiative from the previous plan has been scaled back to enable COL to have more impact in the skills sector.

The Education sector focuses on developing formal education through four initiatives:

• Open/Innovative Schooling
• Teacher Education
• Higher Education
• Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

The Skills sector supports institutions and organisations through both formal and non-formal learning. It has three initiatives:

• Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)
• Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)
• Technology-Enabled Learning (TeL)

Gender as a cross-cutting theme underpins and complements all seven initiatives.

2.3 Education

Open/Innovative Schooling

“If girls are not educated, they are compelled to early marriages. Most of these girls, who enter into early marriages, cannot even take care of themselves, so how can they take care of the hygiene of their children?”

Interview with a religious leader in the Bihar State, India (2012)

Access to quality education remains inequitable, especially in rural areas, with girls being particularly disadvantaged. Despite the encouraging progress made to increase access to schooling, an alarmingly high number of children are repeating grades and leaving school before completing primary or lower-secondary education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). The challenge is both in dealing with the out-of-school children and in addressing the issue of student retention and the achievement of learning outcomes.

COL has worked with Ministries of Education and organisations to refine the open schooling model. Open schooling has evolved from being print-based to using television, radio and online means to complement print. COL has also promoted the use of OER.

Open schooling has proved itself to be an effective vehicle for innovation, and COL will identify new opportunities to support the inclusion of technical and vocational education (TVE). Research has shown that TVE skills gained in school not only increase retention and completion but result in a transition to work (Guison-Dowdy, 2012). Open schooling costs about one-third to one-sixth of the formal education system (Rumble and Koul, 2007).

COL will work with governments and institutions to:

• Develop quality curriculum content in TVE subjects (aligned to skills needed for the world of work) using OER and various educational technologies.
• Enhance the quality of conventional schooling through the introduction of viable and cost-effective models, including virtual schooling.
• Improve learner retention and success rates through open schools.
• Develop policy briefs and evidence-based research to enhance organisational capacity.
**Teacher Education**

“The school is located in rural Meru…. Initially the learners would not speak in class because the moment their colleagues laughed at their poor English, they shied away…. This has changed with the introduction of the ORELT modules in the classroom. The modules are very effective, the learners are motivated. Some of the activities given are playful and fun, and this makes the learners attempt to speak in class.”

Kenyan teacher, commenting on the Open Resources for English Language Teaching (ORELT), Kenya (2014)

Teachers are critical to any education system and a great deal remains to be done to address the issues of teacher deficit, untrained teachers and poor quality of teaching. UNESCO has projected that, by 2020, Sub-Saharan Africa alone will need close to 1.3 million new teachers if Universal Primary Education (UPE) is to be achieved (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013).

Improvements are needed in the institutions’ capacity to train more teachers, to increase the capacity of teacher educators to teach, and to raise the quality of programmes and materials. Ensuring well-qualified teachers and trainers in vocational subjects in secondary schools contributes to improved livelihoods for the learners. To achieve these improvements, teacher education needs innovation across the spectrum of teacher preparation, teacher deployment and teacher support. ODL can play a major role in scaling up quality teacher training.

COL will continue to focus on school-based in-service models to increase the number of teachers trained and to enhance the quality and development of teachers and teacher educators. Additional focus will be on the training of teachers for vocational subjects.

COL will support teacher education institutions to:

- Develop relevant context-based and pedagogically sound programmes for teachers and teacher educators.
- Improve institutional capacity to use ODL and ICTs effectively so that more teachers can be trained in academic and vocational streams.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to ensure positive learning outcomes.
- Develop OER materials and scale up the adoption and adaptation of OER.

**Higher Education**

“As many economies transition from a focus on production to one founded on knowledge, the role of universities is ever more important. But gone are the days when universities have been able to focus solely on their national contexts. Graduates can be expected to work in all corners of the world and the need to be ready for this reality puts pressure on universities to ensure that curricula and teaching facilitate students gaining appropriate skills and knowledge.”

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Universities Association (2014)

Many developing countries seek to increase participation in higher education but lack the resources to do so. The average participation rate is under 10% in Sub-Saharan Africa, under 15% in South Asia and about 25% in the Caribbean (OECD, 2012). Both ODL and technology-enhanced learning can provide a cost-effective means of increasing access to quality higher education.

COL has been working with Commonwealth governments and institutions to develop national and institutional ODL policy, improve the quality of systems and enhance staff capacity to develop and deliver quality programmes. COL will continue to promote good practices and support Member States as they seek to strengthen the credibility of ODL as a viable means of developing human resources for economic and social development.

As technologies continue to grow and new educational delivery modes, such as MOOCs, are developed, several global trends are emerging. Higher education is being internationalised; labour market demands are shifting; and expectations are growing that higher education will lead to employment and entrepreneurship. COL will provide technical advice to stakeholders as they work to respond to these changes by reforming their curricula, diversifying provision and enlarging their networks.

COL will work with governments and higher education institutions to:

- Support the development and implementation of national and institutional ODL policies and systems.
- Promote curriculum reform in support of labour market needs.
- Provide technical assistance to new open universities and support the transition of conventional institutions to dual-mode provision.
- Facilitate institutional networking and collaboration in the development, adoption and use of ODL, MOOCs and OER.
- Support the professional development of policy-makers and practitioners.
Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

“VUSSC can enable institutions to provide relevant programmes and thereby enhance the quality of human resource development within the various economic sectors.”

Antigua & Barbuda, VUSSC M&E Update Report (July 2014)

The provision of tertiary education in the small states of the Commonwealth remains a challenge partly due to limited institutional capacity, small economies and small populations. However, when small states work together, size is less of a constraint and opportunities are enhanced. VUSSC provides a robust network for collaboration and encourages the sharing of expertise across the small states. It supports learning for sustainable development through capacity-building to address issues of the environment, economy and society, thus helping to increase the resilience of small states.

Small states have worked collaboratively to create programmes to address the double threats of climate change and natural disasters. Through VUSSC, small states are becoming equal partners in the generation and sharing of knowledge. As VUSSC is a pan-Commonwealth initiative, it has supported the creation of a Transnational Qualifications Framework that facilitates the sharing of programmes and the mobility of learners.

COL will continue to support the development and adaptation of OER and the delivery of needs-based courses.

COL will partner with organisations and institutions to:

- Identify industry-responsive education and training opportunities for young people.
- Support institutional collaboration in developing and sharing OER.
- Leverage ODL and technologies to address climate change and environmental issues.
- Support more institutions in adopting and delivering VUSSC programmes.
- Work with local and regional authorities to implement the Transnational Qualifications Framework and promote a credit transfer system to increase learner mobility across countries and regions.

2.4 Skills

Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

“The reality of skills acquisition in Africa, which is informal-sector dominated, calls for a paradigm shift in skilling Africa from a school-based formal TVET system to a holistic and inclusive system of technical and vocational skills development (TVSD).”

Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) (2014)

The core challenges that the TVSD programme seeks to address are inadequate quality in, and low access to, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), especially for women. In developing countries, 341 million young people are not in education, employment or training (World Bank, 2012). This has put great pressure on providers of TVET to expand their enrolments.

Formal TVET systems rarely provide skills training to support the informal sector, although this may be where most women and young people earn a living. There are not enough training institutions and facilities, especially for practical work. Current TVET curricula are often not linked to industry and the community. Teachers require upgrading in new technologies and teaching approaches for competency-based education and training for sustainable development. COL has been working in all Commonwealth regions to promote the adoption of flexible and blended (FaB) approaches to skills training.

The programme will have a stronger focus on policy and the development of models to meet the needs of sustainable livelihoods. Disadvantaged communities, youth and women will be the focus. Capacity in partner organisations will be strengthened to create new courses that enable learners to gain or strengthen skills for sustainable livelihoods.

COL will partner with organisations and stakeholders to:

- Train policy-makers, managers, and teaching and administrative staff in the FaB TVSD model to achieve scale.
- Assist in national and institutional policy development and strategic planning.
- Support the development of new curricula and learning resources in support of livelihoods in the formal and informal economies.
- Promote more women’s participation in the TVET sector.
**Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)**

“We found that the household food security of HIV/AIDS affected women in female headed households improved after they joined the L3F programme.”

Dr Rosemary Atieno, University of Nairobi (2013)

Inadequate human resource development among millions of farm families in many Commonwealth countries has been one of the major causes of livelihoods insecurity. The didactic mode of agricultural extension has limitations in addressing this challenge. Capacity-building can strengthen livelihoods if linked to social capital and financial capital.

The L3F approach in Africa and South Asia shows that using ODL and ICT can build the capacity of large numbers of farmers at lower costs than conventional approaches. Studies have found that every $1 invested yielded $9 worth of social returns to the farming communities. Financial institutions realised that they earned eight times more income from L3F participants than from non-L3F farmers. Furthermore, the cost of capacity-building using ODL has been shown to be a sixth of that using conventional face-to-face training. These results have attracted the attention of major government and international agencies, private sector organisations and financial institutions.

The focus will be to scale up L3F at the provincial, national and international levels by convincing partners and stakeholders about the viability and advantages of the L3F approach. Partners and stakeholders will be encouraged to reach more farming communities and to provide them with opportunities for strengthening their livelihoods in a sustainable manner. There will be a transition from the local-level model to a self-sustaining model at the macro level. The focus on “good agricultural practices” will support environmental sustainability as well as better economic and social returns.

COL will:

- Work with governments, the private sector, financial institutions and civil society in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean to replicate and scale up the L3F approach at the provincial, national and regional levels.
- Continue to promote sustainable development with an emphasis on livelihoods security, social and gender equity, and environmental sustainability.
- Establish models in small Pacific states to address issues related to agriculture, forestry and fisheries within the context of climate change.

**Technology-Enabled Learning**

“Students today need access to the digital tools and media-rich resources that will help them explore, understand, and express themselves in the world they will inherit tomorrow.”

Partnership for 21st Century Skills (n.d.)

Despite the phenomenal growth of access to mobile technologies, access to ICTs for learning is inequitably distributed in Commonwealth developing countries. While many governments are making special efforts to increase bandwidth and distribute computing devices, effective policies are lacking. At the same time, continuing and new efforts must be made to develop the capacities of teachers and learners to make effective use of appropriate technologies for learning.

Technology-enabled learning aims to increase access to quality teaching and learning by supporting policy formulation and innovation in the application of ICT in education and the development of ICT skills. COL believes that for technology to have a transformative effect in teaching and learning, a focus on Policy-Technology-Capacity is needed and practice must be based on research evidence. COL works with a range of technologies for teaching and learning, from online modes and mobile devices to lower-cost technologies such as audio and video, radio and TV.

COL will promote skills development and innovation in the areas of ICT to help Commonwealth governments improve the livelihoods of their citizens.

COL will work with governments, industry and academic institutions to:

- Develop ICT in education and OER policies and strengthen policy implementation.
- Strengthen research on technology-enabled learning for evidence-based advocacy and decision-making.
- Develop relevant and innovative courses for developing 21st-century skills.
- Use technology-enabled learning for programme delivery.
- Promote the use of open technologies and OER for skills development.
- Implement tested models at scale and develop new models.
2.5 Cross-Cutting Theme

Gender

“We recognise that gender equality and women’s empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights. The advancement of women’s rights and the education of girls are critical preconditions for effective and sustainable development.”


Gender disparities in the ability of girls/women and boys/men to participate in and benefit from quality learning opportunities are a key challenge. In the Commonwealth, significant inequality exists between women and men in four critical areas: economic participation; educational attainment; political empowerment; and health and survival (World Economic Forum, 2014). Compared with boys/men, girls/women generally have a limited voice in decision-making and less control and access to resources. This greatly hinders the ability of women and girls to realise their human potential.

Two-thirds of the poor in the Commonwealth are women and girls (Jones, 2009). At the same time, gender disparities can sometimes adversely affect boys and men. In some Commonwealth Member States in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, boys’ academic underperformance and high drop-out rates are a matter of concern.

Gender equality will continue to be a cross-cutting corporate goal for COL. In COL’s experience, gender mainstreaming can be an important and effective strategy for addressing gender inequality. Gender mainstreaming ensures that the views, interests and needs of both women and men shape policies, plans and programmes. COL is well positioned to help its partners mainstream gender perspectives in ODL. However, gender equality in learning requires that both girls/women and boys/men experience the same level of quality and equitable outcomes. This emphasises the need for COL to focus on ODL practice, delivery and outcomes.

COL will:

• Harness the potential of ODL to expand access and improve learning outcomes for girls/women and boys/men.
• Support partners to integrate a gender equality perspective in their work.
• Provide technical assistance and support in the design and development of gender-responsive curricula and teaching/learning materials.
• Generate research and policy briefs to inform strategic directions in gender mainstreaming in ODL.
• Develop a gender mainstreaming model for further replication.

2.6 Regional Support

Recognising the diversity and spread of the Commonwealth, COL promotes the development of leadership and expertise in the field through various regional centres. The activities of these centres contribute to the achievement of COL’s programme outcomes and impact, and serve to enhance COL’s viability.

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

“Armed with training inputs from CEMCA, MDTV developed a series of 70 learning programmes on various health issues that were identified collectively by the team. These include safe drinking water, healthy and balanced diets, special diets for pregnant women, cleanliness and general hygiene, common infections, common diseases, tuberculosis among others.”

Sinha and Yadav (2013)

CEMCA promotes the meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of media and technology to serve the education and training needs of the Commonwealth Member States of Asia. Over the years, CEMCA has widened its scope to embrace emerging educational technologies to cover formal, non-formal and informal learning at all levels.

CEMCA fully aligns itself with the COL programme while retaining its regional focus. It works to devise appropriate learning solutions that maintain a balance between the aspirations of its diverse stakeholders and available resources. Promoting appropriate and low-cost technology options underpin all of CEMCA’s strategies.

CEMCA will work with partners to:

• Promote the development, adoption and use of OER through policy support and capacity-building.
• Integrate ICT in teacher education programmes.
• Support the development of OER-based courses for skills development.
• Empower marginalised communities, including women, through the use of community media.
• Undertake research in emerging technologies, including mobile devices.
• Collaborate to develop communities of practice for the sustainability and scalability of projects.

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

In partnership with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), COL promotes ODL capacity-building by supporting RETRIDOL, a regional institute for West Africa.

The RETRIDOL mandate includes:

• engaging in and supporting ODL research activities;
• addressing the capacity-building needs in ODL; and
• serving as a centre of expertise in ODL for Nigeria and West Africa.

COL will continue to support and strengthen these areas of focus through specific interventions.
2.7 Fee-for-Service

eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO)

“The eLIO achieved its intended results, yielding significant benefits. ... It developed a model for potential application in a variety of different (but possible) organisational and educational settings or environments with some important additions to the stock of open learning pedagogical knowledge.”

McGreal (2009)

eLIO is the fee-for-service arm of COL dedicated to providing professional development services to the global staff of international organisations. eLIO’s niche is customising course materials, providing strong learner support, and managing systematic course delivery. The highly contextualised, learner-centric courses provide for seamless knowledge transfer to the workplace. The one-on-one e-tutoring results in better outcomes.

eLIO will build on its current strengths and venture into new directions to ensure long-term sustainability by:

• Continuing to partner with the UN and other international agencies to meet their human resource development needs.
• Providing personalised coaching and mentoring for professional development.
• Harnessing the potential of new and emerging technologies to expand and diversify course delivery.

Southern African Development Community-Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE)

SADC-CDE is supported by the Botswana Ministry of Education and hosted by the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL). The centre was established to:

• undertake and promote training and development in ODL;
• engage in and support research activities in ODL;
• increase the provision of quality distance education in Southern Africa; and
• build and maintain a resource base on ODL with up-to-date information.

COL will continue to support and strengthen these areas of focus.

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

PACFOLD is hosted by the University of the South Pacific and is a “network of networks.” The aim of the centre is to “empower[s] Pacific communities through lifelong learning to live free and worthwhile lives.”

PACFOLD’s priorities include:

• advocacy and capacity-building for flexible and open learning for sustainable development;
• development of regional and national policies on open, distance and flexible learning; and
• research in flexible and open learning.

COL will support PACFOLD to achieve its objectives.

Regional Centre in the Caribbean

COL will also continue its work with partners in the Caribbean region to establish a centre that focuses on regional issues, including boys’ underperformance and the need for strengthening sustainable livelihoods.

The priorities for this centre will be:

• building models and developing capacity in ODL, particularly for the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) and skills development; and
• developing ODL policy, materials and capacity.
2.8 Core Strategies

COL will employ five core strategies — partnerships, capacity, materials, models and policies — to achieve its outcomes and impact.

Partnerships

COL leverages its modest resources through partnerships that are fundamental to everything that it does.

COL has two main types of partnerships:

- **Strategic partnerships** enable COL to broaden its reach and engage at global, regional and national levels. Such partnerships include multilateral organisations (e.g., UNESCO, COMSEC), regional bodies (e.g., CARICOM, ECOWAS), national governments, foundations and the private sector.

- **Implementation partnerships**, which support COL’s work on the ground, include government agencies, civil society organisations, and public and private (not-for-profit) institutions.

COL will:

- Strengthen existing partnerships and networks and build new partnerships by promoting both south-south and north-south collaboration.
- Build communities of practice and purpose by using technologies.
- Leverage public and private partnerships and international and regional co-operation to accelerate progress for sustainable development.

Capacity

Capacity development pervades all COL activities and focuses primarily on human resource development.

COL will continue to:

- Build the capacity of its partners to develop gender-responsive learning resources, deliver courses and programmes, and manage policies and systems.
- Develop capacity in the use of appropriate technologies.
- Promote the transition from capacity-building to the development of capability that leads to sustainable development.

Materials

COL supports the development of learning and teaching materials that include course materials, toolkits, research publications and guidelines.

COL will:

- Publish all its materials as OER.
- Promote the development and use of OER by others.
- Build capacity in developing gender-responsive open materials.

Models

COL defines a model as a coherent set of structures and processes that is seen to work in more than one context to achieve specific results. COL has been developing models that range from broad approaches, such as the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) and Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F), to specific approaches, such as COL’s Review and Improvement Model (COL-RIM) to provide quality assurance in higher education institutions.

COL will:

- Develop and test new models that are replicable and scalable.
- Scale up tested models.
- Use a range of approaches and technologies to develop innovative models to promote learning for sustainable development.

Policies

COL supports the development of policy for countries, organisations and institutions that focus on ODL, OER and technology-enabled learning.

COL will:

- Support policy advocacy for ODL, OER and ICT in education and training.
- Support regional and national development of policies and strategies.
- Promote capacity development to enable stakeholders to implement policies.
**Vision:** To be the foremost global agency that promotes learning for sustainable development

**Mission:** To help governments, institutions and organisations to expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open, distance and technology-based approaches

**Core Strategies:** Partnerships, capacity, materials, models and policies
RESULTS-BASED MANAGEMENT

COL has adopted a results-based management (RBM) approach to promote efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency. Integral to COL’s RBM approach is its “theory of change” and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework.

COL applies a theory of change to capture the key development challenges that its programme seeks to address. The Logic Model (see pages 26–27) summarises the organisation’s initiatives, the outcomes and impact it expects to achieve, and the performance indicators by which those outcomes and impact will be measured.

The progress of the programme initiatives and the cross-cutting theme will be monitored through specific logic frameworks that will capture the outputs and indicate how those contribute to achieving the intermediate- and long-term outcomes. These logic frameworks are dynamic documents that will be reviewed and may be redefined each year — unlike the higher level outcomes that will be reviewed at the mid-term. COL will be responsive to needs as they emerge.

3.1 Theory of Change

The Challenges

Human resources play an important role in economic growth and social development. Formal education, non-formal learning, in-service training and lifelong learning contribute to strengthening human capital development. Globalisation, the emergence of new economies and the ICT revolution are demanding both new skills and the refinement of traditional skills and knowledge. Studies show that a lack of quality education in many developing countries affects their growth and sustainable development. A large proportion of the population — particularly marginalised communities, women and youth — lack access to primary, secondary and tertiary education and to non-formal learning.

Many countries are trying to address these challenges through ODL and blended approaches in the formal education sector. In the agriculture and TVET sectors, both of which are key to sustainable development, non-formal learning interventions have started integrating the use of ODL and ICTs.

The experience of COL and its partners shows that ODL and ICTs can influence the development process. While there are still questions about the quality of human resource development that ODL can achieve, ODL is increasingly being recognised as an important part of a country’s education system, providing personal and social returns, as well as contributing to sustainable development (e.g., social equity, economic viability and environmental sustainability). Nevertheless, ODL as a methodology requires further understanding, advocacy and institutionalisation.
How ODL Can Address the Challenges
Open, distance and technology-enabled learning needs to foster linkages between the labour market, economic imperatives and community needs. ODL institutions in formal education and non-formal learning need to move from an institution-centric focus to a multi-stakeholder participatory approach and from a supply-driven system to one that is demand driven. Involving diverse stakeholders will enable ODL institutions to become more dynamic, innovative and demand driven. Targeted programming will help identify the marginalised constituencies, such as women and youth. ODL institutions need to look beyond conventional pedagogy and identify methods that support learners who are increasingly becoming autonomous, self-directed and technology-adept. ODL and flexible and blended (FaB) learning should be harnessed for human resource development activities such as extension/outreach, agriculture, in-service teacher training and capacity-building to prepare individuals and communities for lifelong learning and sustainable livelihoods.

How COL Can Address the Challenges
As an intergovernmental organisation, COL has long promoted ODL in many Commonwealth countries. COL has strong linkages with governments, particularly with ministries of education and human resource development. It is actively associated with various formal and non-formal educational institutions such as universities, TVET institutions, secondary schools and research institutions. Its partnership with international agencies such as UNESCO and its association with industry, ICT organisations and civil society have created a large and robust network that COL can build on. COL has evolved innovative models and supported policy development in higher education, teacher education and open schooling to enhance access to quality education at low costs. This work has opened up opportunities for learners, particularly marginalised communities. COL has also had a special focus on using ODL and blended approaches in the non-formal and informal learning sectors, thereby strengthening livelihoods for large numbers of people.

COL’s models and approaches have proved to be effective (solutions that work) and efficient (low cost with higher benefits). The successful models need to be documented and replicated, and new models need to be developed. Integrating environmental sustainability — along with social equity, financial feasibility and economic efficiency — in COL’s models will help address the issues of sustainable development. COL believes that convincing policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders of the effectiveness and efficiency of ODL and of COL’s innovative models will enable stakeholders to accelerate progress towards achieving sustainable development.

3.2 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)
COL has been developing and improving its M&E, which is central to its RBM approach. COL will carry out M&E at four levels:

1. COL will monitor the implementation of its initiatives primarily through logic frameworks. The frameworks will have annual targets at the output level and appropriately spaced milestones and targets at the outcome levels. Data collection will focus on indicators, but will also capture wider results, including those that are unexpected — positive and negative. Gender-related data will be collected and analysed at all levels. Implementation and results data will be regularly assessed by programme staff and partners. Additionally, for every initiative, an external evaluation will be commissioned of one of its key components in each half of the six-year plan period.
2. COL will put a stronger focus on research, using results to contribute to development discourse and provide evidence for advocacy.
3. COL will undertake a formative strategic evaluation in the third year, using the results to provide feedback to the Board and the Commonwealth Education Ministers on how well the organisation is doing and what adjustments to the Strategic Plan, if any, are required.
4. COL will undertake a summative evaluation in the fifth year, using the results to provide strategic direction to the next planning process and provide accountability to the Board and the Commonwealth Education Ministers on what has been achieved during the plan.

COL will work with its partners to implement a strong M&E plan. Their participation is critical to M&E success and to the usefulness of the M&E results for both COL and its partners. COL will support partners and also learn from them. The results of the four levels of M&E will be reported to different stakeholder groups in ways that are meaningful to them. COL will report to countries via the Ministers of Education and their appointed Fiscal Points. COL will also report quarterly and annually to the Board of Governors on the progress made with outputs and outcomes. These reports will be made available to other stakeholders and the public on the COL website.
Effective stakeholder engagement enables COL to leverage its resources and to enhance its impact. Stakeholder engagement for COL is accomplished through both institutional networks and focused communications and branding for a wider audience.

COL maintains close links with a diverse range of stakeholders, including Member States, development partners, institutions and organisations, donors and individuals. To develop a more systematic and interactive relationship with Member States, COL has established a network of Focal Points, Honorary COL Chairs and COL Advisors. These three networks complement each other and provide COL with advocates and experts, as well as increasing COL’s visibility in the field.

4.1 Focal Points
Each Minister of Education in the Commonwealth nominates a senior official as the COL Focal Point. The role of the Focal Point is to interact with COL, co-ordinate with other ministries, disseminate COL-related information to interested stakeholders, and keep the Ministers and other senior officials briefed about COL’s work.

This network extends to all Commonwealth countries and has become an important feature of COL’s planning and reporting processes. Triennial regional meetings of Focal Points enable COL to get first-hand information of country priorities that contribute to the development of COL’s next plan (Appendix 6).

COL will continue to engage with the Focal Points, encouraging them to act as in-country advocates.

4.2 Honorary COL Chairs
The network of COL Chairs seeks to establish COL’s academic presence in the field by encouraging research activities in ODL, OER and technology-enabled learning. Chairs are honorary positions, supported by COL for specific activities, and are often implemented in collaboration with UNESCO.

COL will further strengthen this network with a more focused research agenda.

4.3 COL Advisors
COL has a network of Advisors across the Commonwealth, made up of eminent ODL and development professionals. They are goodwill ambassadors for COL, providing expertise in ODL, OER and development.

COL will strengthen and renew this network over the next six years.
4.4 Country Reports

COL develops Country Action Proposals based on stakeholder consultations. These are then discussed with Focal Points before being confirmed as Country Action Plans against which progress is tracked annually. COL will balance in-depth activities in specific countries with more extensive regional and Pan-Commonwealth coverage. At the end of each triennium, COL prepares Country Reports, which consolidate and present the work that COL has done in each individual country. These country reports are presented to Ministers of Education at their triennial meetings and provide a basis for continued funding. COL will present one report for each country at the mid-term and at the end of the current Strategic Plan.

4.5 Communications

COL has one core message: learning is fundamental to achieving sustainable development. COL is funded by voluntary contributions from Member States and operates in a high-risk environment. As such, COL must not only deliver on results; it must also be seen to be doing so. An effective communications strategy is an important element to ensure that stakeholders know what COL does and understand how to benefit from COL’s expertise and resources.

During this Strategic Plan, COL’s communications strategy will focus on raising COL’s global profile and helping the organisation achieve its funding objectives. This strategy will strengthen COL’s position as a thought leader and as the organisation of choice for promoting “Learning for Sustainable Development” through the use of ODL and OER. COL will communicate clear and targeted messages to reach its diverse stakeholders. COL has identified the following strategic goals to support its communications work:

1. Engage all relevant ministries and development partners on an ongoing basis and maintain a robust presence within the Commonwealth family.
2. Strengthen branding and scale up communications. COL will streamline its overall branding design and messaging and increase its digital communications via social media.
3. Nurture a lively communications culture at COL and with partners. Staff and partner understanding, buy-in, and active support of the communications strategy are essential to capture and disseminate the stories needed for effective communications and brand consistency.

COL will:

• Develop a detailed Strategy and Action Plan that will be monitored regularly.
• Maintain a dynamic and interactive Web presence.
• Promote open access.
• Portray COL as an effective partner and an employer of choice.
• Promote the Commonwealth and its values.

4.6 Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning and COL Awards

COL’s Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF) has become one of the world’s top international conferences on learning for development. Forums are generally held every three years and each is co-hosted with a partner in a different region of the Commonwealth. The programme is designed to address the role of ODL, OER and technology in widening educational access, bridging the digital divide, and advancing the social and economic development of communities and nations. The forums combine many events, including academic presentations, networking and capacity development sessions. The PCF theme is based on COL’s programme, regional interests and priorities.

COL presents its Excellence in Distance Education Awards (EDEA) and confers the title of Honorary Fellows to recognise outstanding contributions in ODL and OER around the Commonwealth. COL will hold two PCFs during the period of this Strategic Plan.

4.7 Attachments and Conference Support

COL contributes to professional development and training in ODL and OER knowledge and skills by providing individuals with opportunities to work in COL’s areas of competence. COL also supports conferences where the aims and objectives are consistent with COL’s mission and values. COL will continue to support professional development during the Strategic Plan.
This section identifies the risks that will be managed during the next six years, and outlines the plan for the deployment of financial, human and technology resources to achieve the objectives of this Strategic Plan. It also outlines how COL is governed.

5.1 Risk Management

An organisation that depends on voluntary contributions from Member States operates in a high-risk environment. For COL, risk is understood as covering both the possibility of a negative or adverse outcome and the magnitude or severity of the consequences of that outcome. For three categories of risk — strategic, operational and financial — COL scores the risks according to their impact, probability of occurring, and COL’s ability to mitigate and manage them. COL will mitigate the following risks to the extent possible through advanced awareness and action.

Strategic

Strategic risks are those associated with sources external to COL and with internal decisions that could lead to serious disruptions of the organisation’s work.

Strategic risks are:

- Unfavourable change in the value placed on the Commonwealth as a whole
- Inability to manage country and donor expectations
- Adverse change as a result of social and political upheaval
- Failure of COL to maintain its reputation

Mitigation strategies:

- Deliver results to Member States and stakeholders to demonstrate the value of both the Commonwealth and COL.
- Maintain strategic communications with Ministers of Education, Focal Points and institutional leaders.
- Identify new strategic partners interested in COL’s work.
- Demonstrate thought leadership.
- Monitor reputation.

Impact: High
Probability: Moderate to High

Operational

Operational risks are those associated with losses from inadequate or failed internal processes, people or systems or from external events. These risks may arise from internal or external factors.

Operational risks are:

- Inadequate capacity to implement the programme
- Inability to recruit and retain talent
- Technology as an emerging issue

Mitigation strategies:

- Maintain a flexible approach.
- Have a succession management plan in place, and identify in advance possible talent for unplanned departures.
- Identify affordable and appropriate technologies for efficiency and scale.

Impact: Moderate to High
Probability: Low to Moderate
5.2 Resource Management

Comprehensive, results-based operational plans will guide COL’s allocation of resources. The alignment of these operational plans with the Strategic Plan and attainable levels of resources will provide for coherent planning overall, balanced budgeting and effective reporting. COL will foster responsible financial management to achieve value for money — the underlying principle for the use of resources.

COL is committed to leveraging resources, cost-sharing with partners and conducting ongoing monitoring. COL will make use of national and regional expertise and technologies, wherever possible, to build capacities for addressing country priorities. COL will also ensure that its priority of promoting gender equality and girls’ and women’s empowerment will receive adequate resources.

5.3 Human Resource Management

COL aims to create a culture of excellence and thought leadership by tapping into the pool of talent available in the Commonwealth. COL remains committed to non-discrimination and equal opportunities in all its recruitment policies. It endorses professional merit as the primary guiding principle, combined with gender equity, and maintains an appropriate balance of regional and national backgrounds from around the Commonwealth for internationally recruited positions.

COL’s staff — its major strength — must continue to be world-class development professionals. Staff must contribute to innovation and research and must have a passionate commitment to making a difference in the field. Each and every staff member has a role to play in achieving the results outlined in this plan, and is expected to do so through shared responsibility and accountability for the delivery of the plan and a commitment to the success of COL.

To enhance delivery and effectiveness, human resources must be aligned with the needs of the organisation so that the skills mix and staff capacity meet operational requirements. COL will continue to operate with a small core staff at its Headquarters in British Columbia, Canada, and at CEMCA in New Delhi, India. Human resources will be supplemented by short-term positions and consultancies as needed, and the rotation policy will be followed. This will give COL the ability to respond to emerging needs, to rationalise the staff complement when circumstances warrant, and to have the appropriate expertise when needed.

COL will adhere to a culture of performance-based pay by recognising staff performance through annual pay increments. COL will also respond to any inflationary pressures, subject to availability of resources and approval by the Board.

COL will continue to:
- Strengthen human resource practices, tools and capacities.
- Recruit and retain a competent and representative workforce with the appropriate skills.
- Focus on succession planning, professional development and knowledge transfer.
5.4 Financial Resources: Needs and Flows

Delivering on COL’s Strategic Plan requires stable levels of voluntary funding from Member States of the Commonwealth. COL assumes that the funding levels for this plan will be similar to those maintained over the past six years, and that the number of countries contributing annually over the period of this plan will also remain relatively constant.

The average annual funding received from Member States over six years was $8.5 million per annum (see Figure 1). The number of countries contributing annually over the same period peaked at 46 countries in 2013/2014. COL achieved this number by nurturing close links with each Member State, and by ensuring that the programme responded to stakeholder needs within the framework of its own mission and mandate.

Figure 1: Member countries’ contributions, total revenue and number of countries contributing to COL, 2009–2015

A list of member countries’ annual contributions from 2012 to 2015 is provided in Appendix 3. However, COL also recognises that this level of support cannot be taken for granted. A sudden cut in funding from a major donor could have a significant impact on COL’s financial stability and reputation. COL remains vulnerable to unforeseen reductions in funding that would have a major impact on its ability to implement the programme. Because COL is committing to a six-year Strategic Plan, it will have to invest in pursuing an outreach strategy to diversify the funding base and attract new funding partners, and to maintain a cash reserve to withstand changes in funding levels.

In developing an outreach strategy, COL will step up its work in sourcing new networks for initiatives and the fee-for-service work. These sources are expected to make up close to 20% of revenues in 2015–2021.

COL’s policy for additional contributions ensures that funds will be received and spent in accordance with the priorities of the plan and will deepen COL’s in-country work. An appropriate level of costs will be recovered as overheads from these additional activities. Grants must cover the additional costs of the extra work involved and fee-for-service activities will aim for full-cost recovery. Increasing additional contributions is essential if COL is to increase the impact of its programme and reach its $12 million annual resource target. A list of the additional contributions made annually from 2012 to 2015 is provided in Appendix 4. COL will continue to maintain and build its reserve fund to respond to unexpected events.

Table 1: Resource requirements for 2015–2021 (estimated) compared with 2009–2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>$52.0</td>
<td>$52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional/miscellaneous</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$62.7</td>
<td>$65.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figures to May 20, 2015.

COL will:
- Continue to liaise and follow up with all Member States for contributions.
- Aim to grow the number of major donors and to seek multi-year funding agreements.
- Pursue additional contributions from non-traditional donors.
- Seek in-kind support from countries where direct funding is not possible.
- Rationalise resources, as necessary, in line with funding.

5.5 Knowledge Management and Technology

COL is fully aware of the ongoing global shift in ICT from desktop to more network- and mobile-centric computing (cloud services, wider use of tablets and smartphones) and must keep abreast of emerging developments. Such changes will have a significant impact on learning technology in the coming years, especially in the developing countries of the Commonwealth. Total costs and ownership of software, whether open source or proprietary, are in a state of flux. New technologies continue to emerge. ODL institutions will find new and increasing value in obtaining neutral advice and tried and tested models for making informed choices. COL’s role as an informed intermediary, knowledge broker and catalyst will be important.

COL’s knowledge management framework emphasises the importance of both people (their tacit knowledge, wisdom and networks) and processes (those involving knowledge capture, preservation and dissemination). Knowledge flows occur through various pathways in the organisation, and harnessing those flows effectively is important to enhancing their overall impact.

In addition to providing knowledge management and technology support services to COL’s programme, COL also promotes global discussions about, and models for, “MOOCs for Development” (MOOC4D) and technology innovations such as low-cost tablets and Aptus (an OER micro-server).
COL will:

- Engage in research and analyses of changes in learning technology, and build models that contribute to the organisation’s efforts to be a thought leader.
- Provide state-of-the-art technology services to staff and partners in an affordable and sustainable way.
- Maintain a variety of information services to the public (e.g., Open Access repository for COL publications, Directory of OER, weekly news digests).
- Build innovations in mobile and learning technologies (e.g., Aprus, MOOC4D).

5.6 Governance

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by Commonwealth Governments that established COL in 1988 provides for a Board of Governors with general responsibility for determining the principles, policies and priorities that guide COL in its activities.

The Board has provision for up to 17 members, consisting of the Chair, up to nine major donor representatives, regional representatives from the four regions of the Commonwealth, as well as the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Secretary-General’s appointee and the President of COL (ex-officio). This provides for regional spread complemented with rotation of representation.

The MOU was amended on June 10, 2014, to make provision for up to nine major donors (previously up to six), thereby enabling more countries to contribute at the level of a major donor and have representation on the Board of Governors.

In fulfilment of its accountability to Member States, COL reports to the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) and to the foreign ministers at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings (CHOGM).

Current membership on the Board of Governors is shown in Appendix 5.

APPENDIX 1
The Impact of COL, 2006–15 — Executive Summary

Key findings

1. COL has had a major impact on individuals including farmers, senior and junior faculty members, institutional leaders in formal and non-formal learning, selected policy makers and educational administrators, individuals working directly with COL through partnerships and alliances and related institutional members, such as key individuals in UNESCO, Ford Foundation and others.

2. COL has some limited impact on formal post-secondary and school institutions within the Commonwealth – in some cases substantial, in others modest.

3. COL has had significant impact on selected non-formal and informal learning organisations and networks, especially through its work in Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F), Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD), Community Health and community based learning.

4. COL’s impact on public policy is modest at the national level, except in relation to the Small States of the Commonwealth. The Transnational Qualifications Framework represents a major opportunity for such states to increase learner mobility and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is also a nascent opportunity to increase access to quality learning in affordable ways for each of these States (but see below at recommendation 5).

5. COL needs to respond to the changed context and challenging conditions so as to increase the impact of its work.

Increasing impact

The following recommendations suggest areas in which COL needs to significantly change or improve so as to increase its impact.

1. Have More Ambition – COL needs to be more ambitious and set challenging goals. This is especially needed in the case of formal education programmes and VUSSC.

2. “Less Really is More” – So as to have significant impact, COL needs to focus significant efforts to demonstrate the value of COL in 4-6 nations in which it can demonstrate the impact of its work in both formal and non-formal (and sometimes informal) challenges.

3. Better Alignment with National Goals – COL needs to articulate how its activities support the development goals of nations.

4. Partnerships Need to be More Encompassing – COL needs to expand its partnership horizons to look for strong partnerships whose values are aligned and who can bring additional resources to a specific challenge. In particular, COL should seek stronger links with the private sector, major development agencies and NGOs working in the Commonwealth.

5. Capacity Building Needs to be Matched by Strategy Building – COL needs to do much more to help Commonwealth nations develop strategies for education, health and development which leverage flexible approaches to learning, including ODL and OER.

6. Effective Communities of Practice – COL needs to become more systematic and focused on the development of communities of practice where doing so supports the strategic intent of an initiative.

7. Moving to Scale – COL needs to dedicate real resources to the development and strategic communication of the models that work and the conditions necessary for them to work. COL’s strategic communication is currently very weak.
8. Becoming More of a Social Impact Organisation than an Educational Development Organisation – COL is in transition from an educational development organisation to a backbone organisation\(^1\) focused on social impact. COL should accelerate this transition.

9. Rethinking its Funding Model – COL needs to seek out a group of major donors who support its mission and strategy, developing strategic funds for each region of the Commonwealth, no strings attached.

10. Rethinking its Strategic Communications – A major rethink of COL’s strategic communications and its web presence is urgently needed.

Stephen Murgatroyd, PhD with Janet Tully, MSc
May, 2015

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\(^1\) For a description see www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/understanding_the_value_of_backbone_organisations_in_collective_impact_1

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**APPENDIX 2**

**Outcome Evaluation, 2012–2015 — Executive Summary**

**Key findings with recommendations**

The study covered the first two years and nine months of the COL 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan (3YP) and addressed four primary questions.

**Question 1: What has been the performance of COL in this triennium against the identified outcomes and indicators?**

1. All the Initiatives moved successfully forward, on time and within budget. The large majority of the agreed Performance Indicators (PIs) were met by March 2015. The fact that many of the PIs for the period were achieved early begs the question as to whether there was too much caution when setting the original targets. **Performance Indicators need to be ambitious, with a stronger focus on outcomes rather than outputs.**

2. While it is not possible to suggest that some Initiatives have ‘run their course’, there is little evidence of any exit strategies that would enable COL to ‘hand over’ the Initiative to appropriate stakeholders. **Initiative plans for the next period should include at least the exit criteria that would need to be met.**

3. There is a need to assess how best, within COL teams, to minimise overlaps, exploit synergies and enhance the effectiveness of planning and delivery in the development of future plans. For example, within the education sector there is overlap of activities for teacher education, higher education, VUSSC, Open Schooling, eLearning and, to a lesser extent, TVSD. Similarly the relative roles of CEMCA staff and the Vancouver-based teams re activities in Asia should be clearly demarcated. A review should be undertaken to consider where and how COL best adds value and how more integrated teams might enhance synergies among staff and the various Initiatives.

**Question 2: How appropriate are the two strategic sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health, in realizing the aims of the current Three-Year Plan?**

1. There is no evidence that dividing the Initiatives into two Strategic Sectors has enhanced delivery, rather Initiatives tend to operate independently, with the staff involved sharing experiences and common concerns mainly on an informal basis. **Consider dropping the concept of Sectors and establish mechanisms promoting greater formal and informal teamwork between staff.**

**Question 3: Have the core strategies and strategic goals been useful in support of achieving the aims of the current Three-Year Plan?**

1. The Strategic Goals are appropriate and important; they have provided an overarching framework for the individual initiatives and link to the Mission Statement. **Future plans should continue to use Strategic Goals as the overarching framework for integrating programme initiatives.**

2. The added emphasis of the Cross Cutting Themes, Gender and eLearning, has improved understanding and outcomes. The support for gender mainstreaming has been given fresh impetus with an internal professional resulting in greater staff understanding and commitment. However, the application of eLearning is an inherent feature within each initiative and therefore questionable as a cross-cutting theme. **The Gender Specialist should continue to add value to COL; however, the need for a dedicated Cross Cutting Theme to support eLearning as currently defined should be reviewed.**

3. COL’s core strategies, ie partnerships, capacity, materials, models and policy, continue to be appropriate. But they are not all ‘core’; partnerships are a core business process and therefore part of each Initiative while materials and capacity building are necessary strategies for achieving outputs and ultimately outcomes. Enabling policies are essential if interventions are to be sustainable.
The strategy less used is that of ‘models’, ie developing operating models to pilot test and demonstrate successful implementation to prospective adopters. Seeing an innovation in operation allows them to assess how the employed strategies might need to be modified to fit the local operating environment. A good example was the adoption and scaling up of LFiP in this plan period.

COL should define the concept of ‘model building’, the contexts when it might be applied and encourage its strategic use.

Question 4: What lessons can COL, its Board of Governors and partners, take from the operation of the plan into the next Plan period?

1. A significant success of this 3YP has been engagement with all countries in the developing Commonwealth. However several stakeholders expressed concerns that COL activities are being spread too thinly around many countries.

2. COL should focus on fewer activities but deliver them in greater depth.

3. While COL’s brand currently enjoys strong equity value in terms of respect and loyalty, the application of ICT and OER in the international delivery of education is fast changing, with many new players and new approaches to delivery, and involving both public and private sector.

4. COL has many partners including governments and their institutions as well as non-governmental civil society organisations. The most frequent challenge to effective delivery was the availability of partner support resources – staff availability (for support and as participants), infrastructure, equipment and funds. It was with government organisations, and in particular those in the formal education sector, where these problems were seen as most acute. ODL and OER activities are new and often perceived as marginal activities.

5. The relative cost-effectiveness of COL has been commented upon favourably by external consultants, citing the many activities delivered and outcomes achieved for modest investment.

6.COL needs to monitor closely innovations, review frequently where it might add most value and/or leverage in its endeavours.

7. COL has successfully attracted funds in addition to those from donor countries. The need to diversify and grow revenue will likely escalate as demand for services continue to grow. On one hand COL’s track record and strong brand equity has positioned the organisation for success while, on the other, there is very limited capacity among current staff to mount a fund development programme.

COL should consider appointing a business pursuit manager.

Neil Kemp, PhD and Glen Farrell, PhD
April, 2015

APPENDIX 3
Member Countries’ Contributions, 2012–2015

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<th>Country</th>
<th>2013</th>
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$ 8,697,639     $ 9,182,371     $ 9,558,054     $ 27,438,064

*Figures to May 20, 2015.
APPENDIX 4
Additional Contributions, 2012–2015
Years ended June 30

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<th>2015*</th>
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<th>2014</th>
<th>2015*</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>$ 971,476</td>
<td>$ 1,565,233</td>
<td>$ 1,133,018</td>
<td>$ 3,669,727</td>
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</table>

*Figures to May 20, 2015.

APPENDIX 5
Board of Governors

CHAIR
Dr Linda Sissons, CNZM

MEMBERS
Commonwealth Secretary-General
His Excellency Mr Kamalesh Sharma

Appointments by Major Donors

Government of Canada: Ms Janet L. Ecker, ICD.D, President, Toronto Financial Services Alliance

Government of India: Mr Satyanarayan Mohanty, Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development

Government of New Zealand: His Excellency the Right Honourable Sir Lockwood Smith, KNZM, High Commissioner, New Zealand High Commission, London

Government of Nigeria: Her Excellency Mrs Mariam Yalwa Katagum, Ambassador/Permanent Delegate, Permanent Delegation of Nigeria to UNESCO

Government of South Africa: Professor Narend Baijnath, Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of South Africa

Government of the United Kingdom: Dr Chris Berry, Head of Profession, Education, Education Department, Department for International Development

Regional Appointments on the Advice of Commonwealth Ministers of Education

Africa: The Honourable Mr Danny Faure, Vice-President and Minister of Finance, Seychelles

Asia: Professor Dr Arta-ur-Rahman, FRs, Chief Patron, International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences, University of Karachi, Pakistan

Caribbean: His Excellency Hubert John Charles, Ambassador of Dominica to the Organization of American States and the United States

Pacific: Letuimanu’asina Dr Emma Kruse Vaai, Deputy Vice Chancellor, National University of Samoa

Appointment by the Commonwealth Secretary-General

Mr Martin Bean, CBE, Vice-Chancellor and President, RMIT University, Australia

President (Ex-Officio)
Professor Asha S. Kanwar, President and Chief Executive Officer, Commonwealth of Learning

Advisor
Professor John Wood, CBE, Secretary General, Association of Commonwealth Universities
APPENDIX 6
Focal Points
April 30, 2015

Antigua & Barbuda Mrs Patricia Benn
Australia Ms Bethany Wellings
The Bahamas Ms Michelle Sears
Bangladesh Mr Md. Nazrul Islam Khan
Barbados Mr Laurie King
Belize Mr Christopher Aird
Botswana Mrs Fancy Amey
Brunei Darussalam Mr Adrin Bin Md. Saleh
Cameroon Professor Ivo Leke Tambo and Dr Daniel Akume
Canada Represented on COL’s Board
Cyprus Professor George Papadopoulos
Dominica Mrs Chandler Hyacinth
Ghana Professor Jophus Anamah-Mensah
Grenada Mr Andrew Augustine
Guyana Ms Inge Nathoo
India Shri S.P. Goyal
Jamaica Dr Phylricia Marshall
Kenya Mr Charles Obiero
Kiribati Ms Tererei Abete-Reema
Lesotho Dr H.M. Leiphero
Malawi Mr Henry Svede
Malaysia YBhg Dato’ Professor Dr Asma binti Ismail
Maldives Ms Aminath Namza and Mr Ramiz Ali
Malta Mr George Borg
Mauritius Mrs Neima Devi Ghocrah
Mozambique Ms Lurdes Nakama
Namibia Mr B.U. Ngatjizeko
Nauru Dr Maria Gaiyabu
New Zealand Ms Frances Kelly
Nigeria Mrs Nonnyem Gadya Obichikwu
Pakistan Professor Dr Mansoor Akbar Kundi
Papua New Guinea Mr Bob Kiakari and Mr Charles Mabia
Rwanda Dr Evode Mukama
St. Kitts & Nevis Mr Darryl Lloyd
St. Lucia Ms Marietta Edward
St. Vincent & The Grenadines Ms Lou-Anne Gilchrist
Samoa Dr Ioana Chan Mow
Siychelles Ms Marie-Reine Hoareaux
Sierra Leone Mrs Musu Goree
Singapore Ms Cindy Eu
Solomon Islands Dr Franco Rodie
South Africa Ms Trudi van Wyk
Sri Lanka Mr S.U. Wijerathne
Swaziland Mr Peterson Dlamini
Tanzania Dr Fideline Mafumiko
Tonga Lady Siatukimoana Va’a
Trinidad & Tobago Ms Karen Rosmin and Ms Saleema Hyattai
Tuvalu Ms Katalina P. Taloka
Uganda Mrs Elizabeth K.M. Gabona
United Kingdom Represented on COL’s Board
Vanuatu Mr George Jonathan Mafutika
Zambia Mrs Rhoda N. Mweetwa

APPENDIX 7
Abbreviations Used in the Report

BOCDOL Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning
CARICOM Caribbean Community
CEMCOM Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers
CEMCA Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
CHOGM Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
COL Commonwealth of Learning
COL-RIM COL Review and Improvement Model
COMSEC Commonwealth Secretariat
ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States
EFA Education for All
FaB flexible and blended
ICT/ICTs Information and Communication Technologies
IDRC International Development Research Centre
L3F Lifelong Learning for Farmers
M&E monitoring and evaluation
MDGs Millennium Development Goals
MODC massive open online course
MOC4D MOOCs for Development
DOL open and distance learning
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
DER open educational resources
PACFOLD Pacific Centre for Open and Flexible Learning for Development
PCF Pan-Commonwealth Forum
RBM results-based management
RTRIDOL Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning
SADC-CDE Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education
TVET technical and vocational education and training
TVSSC Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth
REFERENCES


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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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|Product|30%|30%|25%|75%

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