It has been six years since the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, launching a global call to action to end poverty, eliminate inequalities and ensure peace and prosperity for all. COL has aligned its work to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aspires to achieve inclusive and equitable education for all.

While some progress has been made since 2015, many of the gains have been threatened by the pandemic. According to UNESCO, the 2020 learning losses equal the gains made in the last 20 years. Close to 59 million learners are still impacted by school closures, and Covid-19 has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable and the marginalised. It is estimated that the number of school dropouts will increase, with 11 million girls not likely to return. Deficits in targeted support, Internet connectivity, accessible software and learning materials are likely to widen the gap for students with disabilities.

COL has taken a needs-based approach, offering bold and innovative solutions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Its new policy brief on quality and equity in digital learning offers recommendations for governments, institutions and teachers to build educational resilience while meeting the needs of learners in a digital age. Targeted resources and courses have been developed to address the needs of practitioners who support women, girls, students with disabilities, as well as family and intergenerational literacy. COL has also developed OER to increase equitable access to learning via mobile phones and Aptus devices, to reach people in remote areas.

The new Strategic Plan 2021–2027 has been developed within the framework of SDG4 and against the backdrop of Covid-19. With gender equality and inclusion as one of its strategic goals, COL will continue to help Member States move closer to achieving the ambitious Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“COL has taken a needs-based approach, offering bold and innovative solutions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.”
Covid-19 has had a significant impact on education and training. If we want to build resilient education systems, we must address the issues of learning loss due to school closures, and shortcomings in access to technology for teaching and learning. A gender-sensitive system focusing on the social, emotional and economic contexts of learners is required. Additional support for vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities and girls who have faced challenges, is needed to bring these learners back to school.

The Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF10) will be a platform for reflections and discussions on reimagining education systems that will foster lifelong learning and empower people to make positive life choices and improve their livelihoods. Such systems will be based on innovative uses of technology for teaching and learning, and ethical practices for equity and inclusion.

COL welcomes stakeholders across the globe, and particularly in the Commonwealth, to join PCF10 to discuss, debate and showcase how innovations can develop resilience in our education systems.

**Forum sub-themes**

Within the Forum’s main theme, the sub-themes cover a wide range of areas that are of interest to COL’s stakeholders. The Forum will address issues and challenges in formal, non-formal and informal learning, reflecting a spectrum of ideas — from policy interventions to practical innovations — for building resilience and supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4. Presentations will be grouped around four sub-themes:

- Building resilience
- Fostering lifelong learning
- Inspiring innovations
- Promoting equity and inclusion

There will be a special focus in each of the sub-themes on (i) educating girls and (ii) using emerging technologies for education and training (e.g., applications of artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality, and robotics).

For more information, visit: https://pcf10.org
**COL at Global Education Summit**

COL hosted an online panel titled Getting Girls Into and Back to School as part of the 2021 Global Education Summit. The panel was moderated by COL President and CEO Professor Asha Kanwar, and participants included The Honourable Priya Manickchand, Guyana’s Education Minister; Dr Unity Dow, lawyer, human rights activist and a former Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and Minister for Basic Education, Botswana; and COL’s Education Specialists Ms Frances Ferreira and Dr Tony Mays.

The panellists spoke about the importance of creating safe spaces for children to provide for girls’ return to school and ensure good learning and personal outcomes. They noted that an investment in girls’ education has significant national development benefits. Participants emphasised the importance of having wide community support and empowering mothers to improve girls’ access to learning opportunities.

You can watch the panel discussion here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0vT3zoFSWU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0vT3zoFSWU)

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**Award for C-DELTA**

COL’s Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) won a prestigious Brandon Hall Group Gold Excellence in Learning Award 2021 in the category of Best Advance in Learning Technology Implementation.

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**COL’s AI course available worldwide**

COL’s popular online course Introduction to Artificial Intelligence for IT and Non-IT Professionals is now available across the Commonwealth and beyond via a Moodle open-source learning platform. It is being offered in partnership with the Virtual University of Pakistan.


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**Soaring above the pandemic**

COL’s innovative and creative practices to ensure that no learners are left behind during Covid-19 were virtually presented at two conferences in Malaysia — the first International Conference on Society and Technology and the 2021 International Conference on Education. Available on [https://www.col.org/news/speeches-and-presentations/](https://www.col.org/news/speeches-and-presentations/).
Building OER capacity in Bangladesh

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) has partnered with the University Grants Commission, Bangladesh to build the capacity of higher education institutions in teaching and learning with open educational resources (OER). Many learners in Bangladesh have limited access to relevant, quality educational resources, and the new initiative aims to fill this void.

Two online workshops brought together 1,000 teachers from 20 private and public universities. They focused on raising participant awareness about different facets of OER — from searching to using and creating these resources. Creative Commons licensing and the integration of OER in teaching and learning were also discussed.

A key takeaway for participants was the opportunity to create a network among academics from the participating universities. CEMCA will continue to support the universities in Bangladesh by offering faculty training on developing institutional OER policies.

COL app to boost food security in Nauru

COL has supported Nauru to launch the Kūā Oangam kitchen garden app to improve nutrition and diversify food production in the country. It is a result of collaboration with Nauru’s Department of Commerce, Industry and Environment (CIE) and Department of Education, and the Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM). The app was launched at a virtual ceremony, with participation from the Honourable Rennier Stanislaus Gadabu, Minister of CIE, and Professor Asha Kanwar.

COL led the app development through a participatory design process to gather information on needs and user requirements and worked with TTM to develop technical content. Nauruan government officials and TTM staff have been trained in monitoring and evaluation as well as aspects of using and maintaining the new app. It offers nutritional information and recipes, as well as various useful tips for planting, fertilising, and pest management. It will be regularly updated with new content.

Empowering girls through skills development

Providing learning opportunities for vulnerable, hard-to-reach women and girls is one of the best investments we can make towards sustainable development. COL aims to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment through skills development for livelihoods.

In Malawi, COL has supported 1,200 women and girls from the traditional authorities of Simphasi, Kazoyozi and Kapondo to develop livelihood skills. Most recently, learners were engaged in a training to build their own mud cooking stoves. Due to the time spent on household chores, including firewood collection, women and girls had been unable to attend vocational skills training. The time freed from these activities allowed them to focus more on gaining vocational skills. “I am now able to generate my own income,” said Veronica Zulu, who recently graduated from training in welding and fabric making. The project, which is supported by local community leaders, is managed by COL’s local partner CERADI. Aiming to reach 3,000 households, it also develops business management and entrepreneurship skills.

In South Africa, COL’s partner SchoolNet South Africa is building digital literacy in out-of-school women and girls. With unemployment especially dire for 15- to 24-year-olds, the initiative builds awareness about digital technologies, provides access to entrepreneurial and education resources, and nurtures learners’ confidence and other essential skills. Important facets are to build the foundation for what typically are considered “male skills” and to encourage young women to pursue careers in a range of IT fields.

“My favourite part was coding with Scratch,” said one participant, who plans to study other programming languages to be able to code her own projects. The blend of in-person and virtual training has reached over 300 women and girls across the country.
Skills for work in Trinidad and Tobago

COL is working with the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme, an agency of the Ministry of Education, Trinidad and Tobago, to improve employment opportunities for young people in the country. A comprehensive programme gives learners free access to a range of Coursera online courses that are aligned to the development goals of Trinidad and Tobago. The focus areas include information technology, entrepreneurship/small business development, agriculture, tourism, healthcare, as well as the blue and green economies. It builds on the initial success of the COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Programme, which aimed to skill and reskill citizens across the Commonwealth who had been affected by Covid-19. After Guyana and Barbados, this is the third government in the Caribbean to take ownership of this COL initiative.

Improving livelihoods in Zambia

With COL support, Zambian furniture makers are acquiring new skills to improve their livelihoods. A workplace training with a focus on quality furniture making and ergonomics has been organised by Luanshya Technical Business College for members of the Nakadoli Furniture Co-operative. The goal is to contribute to increasing household incomes and reducing poverty among local furniture makers. The sofa created during the training recently sold for ZMK 7,000, well above the average for outdoor display markets, making it among the project’s early successes.

Using a blend of workplace and online learning, COL helps train informal apprentices towards formal qualifications. The project builds on the existing centuries-old apprenticeship model and supplements it with the use of technology. Furniture making is a priority skill in Zambia, and COL plans to scale the training across other furniture co-operatives.

Towards resilient education systems in the Pacific

Open, distance and flexible learning is an important channel for increasing education opportunities, especially in the wake of Covid-19. Through a multifaceted project, COL is helping build the resilience of education systems in the Pacific small island states and support youth employment in the region. The four-year Open, Distance and Flexible Learning in the Pacific project is funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and is administered in partnership with the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development.

During the first year of the project, more than 1,400 teachers from nine Pacific small island states had an opportunity to build their capacity in online teaching via three targeted online courses. Using free and open software, they developed teaching materials for their classrooms and learned how to share these as open educational resources (OER). Two guides were subsequently produced on how to re-version and integrate OER in teaching. A regional OER website has been developed with over 250 resources for teachers; it is now undergoing tailoring for national curriculum frameworks.

An online TVET toolkit has been developed after a series of consultations with stakeholders in the Pacific. It aims at building the capacity of TVET teachers and leaders and those supporting TVET education to increase access to quality skills training at reduced cost using open, distance and flexible learning approaches. The toolkit has a wide range of OER, including e-learning modules and case studies.

To learn more about the online TVET toolkit, visit: https://pacific toolkit.col.org
Blended learning for teachers in India

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia has been supporting universities in India to build teacher capacity in blended learning. Recently, two virtual programmes were organised in partnership with the Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Bihar, and Ravenshaw University, Odisha, respectively. A total of 250 teachers and research scholars from the two universities were empowered to develop blended learning designs.

ICT for smart education

What are the key features of smart education? How can it help overcome the challenges of the pandemic and build resilience for the future? Professor Kanwar addressed these issues at the Global Smart Education Conference 2021, hosted by Beijing Normal University (BNU), China. In a virtual keynote address, she said that smart education “must harness the potential of technologies to increase access, improve quality, reduce costs and support inclusion, all with a low carbon footprint.”

In advance of the conference, COL also hosted an international online forum for participants from 28 countries to explore the prerequisites for improving education quality through better ICT integration.

In partnership with BNU and the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education, COL is implementing the project Rethinking and Redesigning National Smart Education Strategy. One of the key goals is to assist in developing standards and guidelines for implementing national ICT in education projects in Member States.

“Designing and Developing Online Assessment” at CMU

Professor Brown is Vice President, Academic Affairs and Accreditation, at the Caribbean Maritime University (CMU) in Jamaica. Recently, he participated in a COL course titled Designing and Developing Online Assessment to hone his own skills and strengthen faculty capacity to administer assessments online.

Q. What did you find most interesting/relevant about the course?
A. Team relationships and trust are critical for online assessments. Students and instructors have similar roles to play and have to trust each other. There is also a strong camaraderie among students who have to peer-review each other.

Q. How has it contributed to building CMU capacity to design and administer assessment online?
A. In 2020, when we were thrust into the virtual environment, most of us did not have any training in delivering and assessing online courses. We selected a strategic group of participants from different departments to participate in COL training, and they are now able to assist their colleagues to prepare fit-for-purpose assessments. We also now have in-house trainers, and this is an effective method to ensure that most of our lecturers can build their capacity.

Q. What is the future of online learning and assessment at CMU beyond Covid-19?
A. Our flagship programme is open to candidates across the world, and our focus is on the Caribbean region as a whole. Our online footprint will increase our visibility, and we will be able to recruit more lecturers who can stay in their own countries while sharing their knowledge and experience for the benefit of our students.

Q. How can it contribute to greater equity and inclusion?
A. Interestingly enough, more female than male instructors have participated in the COL project, and their completion rate was also higher. Going forward, if we become more active in the online space, this will increase access to learning opportunities for those who might otherwise not be able to afford higher education.
The Commonwealth of Learning, in partnership with the Tamil Nadu University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences and the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, offered an agMOOC aimed at improving animal husbandry practices in developing countries. The course Management of Infertility in Cattle targeted practising veterinarians, as well as veterinary students and interns, with over 3,500 participants from 18 countries. The MOOC contributed to improving the capacity of personnel engaged in delivering veterinary extension services.

COL has supported Botswana Open University (BOU) to launch an Open Schooling Portal to improve various learners’ access to quality education. While the primary purpose of this new e-portal is to enhance skills training for out-of-school children, youths and adults, the content will also be used in conventional government schools.

COL helped train BOU content developers to find and revise or remix relevant OER and then to mediate active engagement with this content within the BOU Open Schooling Moodle platform. Forty-seven lessons were subsequently created in three subjects — Accounting, Commerce, and Office Procedures. The new portal will provide more options for learners, and more interactive and engaging content, to help improve retention and completion.

The new portal can be accessed here: https://openschooling.bou.ac.bw/moodle

Top 5 Tips for designing assessments

Educators across the Commonwealth have been challenged to provide more authentic learning for students, and there has been an increasing need to relate assessment to real-world experiences that will stay with students during the course of further study or employment.

Key considerations for designing authentic assessments include:

1. Ensuring that assessments contribute to building competencies and skills that are transferable to the workforce.
2. Incorporating an opportunity for feedback or self-reflection.
3. Providing for a demonstration of knowledge or skills, sometimes as a product such as a report, presentation or video.
4. Allowing for collaboration and teamwork among learners.
5. Understanding that assessments help engage students in learning and also create the foundation for academic integrity.

For more information, check out this publication from COL:
Designing and Implementing Micro-Credentials: A Guide for Practitioners
http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3279
An agent of change for inclusive education in Jamaica

Nicola Jones is the principal of a primary school in Kingston, Jamaica. Having recently participated as a learner and facilitator in two COL courses, she has become an implementer of inclusive practices not only in her institution but also at neighbouring schools.

The two courses — Inclusive Teaching and Learning, and Creating an Inclusive School — developed in a partnership between COL, The Open University (UK) and the Kenya Institute of Special Education, drew a total of 1,265 participants from across the Commonwealth and beyond.

Nicola said, “The training has taught me the relevance of being a reflective teacher as well as how to develop individual plans for students with special needs.”

Knowledge gained about OER has helped her to source relevant materials not only for use with students but also for sharing with other teachers.

Two teachers from the same school also participated in COL’s inclusive education training. As the chief administrator of the school, Nicola sees an opportunity to harness their knowledge and experience to create an inclusive ethos and culture in the school. In addition, she has formed a plan for a series of professional development seminars on inclusive education, covering topics learned in the course.

Nicola appreciates the value of learning alongside teachers from other parts of the world. She concluded, “The training can definitely promote one to be a resource person and an agent of change for inclusive education.”

Through Siaya Seed SACCO, Pius received education in financial literacy and was able not only to improve his livelihood but also to discover his leadership potential. He set up a self-help group in his village to promote poultry and other agricultural livelihood enterprises.

The group now has 40 members, the majority of them women, and some are living with disabilities.

“With COL support, Pius has become a true community mobiliser and role model to other youth.”
- Evans Martine Owiye, Siaya Seed SACCO business officer

All group members have expanded their knowledge through the training and have been able to access credit. They are working together to breed chickens and grow vegetables for sale to hotels and restaurants. They were able to keep the business running during Covid-19, and some members earned enough money to pay for their children’s schooling.

“With COL support, Pius has become a true community mobiliser and role model to other youth,” said Evans Martine Owiye, a Siaya Seed SACCO business officer who facilitates financial literacy.

“We greatly admire his commitment to involving all generations in learning and enterprise development.”
Leaving no one behind

COL is supporting the Tongan Ministry of Education and Training (MET) to build a cadre of teachers and trainers who can assist learners with disabilities to be more independent and productive. A new project provides insights into conducting needs assessments, as well as selecting and using appropriate assistive technologies to support learning for students with disabilities.

Matelita Taufa is a MET Inclusive Education Co-ordinator who has contributed to the Tonga Disability Survey. According to the survey, persons with disabilities face numerous difficulties when trying to access activities and services in many areas, including employment, transport, education and health. She noted that learners joined COL’s project “with the intention to help disabled people” but then realised that it was also helping them. “We learned that our computers have the assistive technologies suitable for us,” said Matelita. “For example, we learned how to use the natural reader and are now using it in our workplaces.” For some participants, the project provided a platform to study online for the very first time. With limited access to computers and the Internet, they had to find innovative ways to complete the assignments — for example, via their mobile phones.

“The project lifted our knowledge of assistive technologies to a higher level,” added Matelita, who is now looking forward to using training workshops to teach others what she has learned. According to Matelita, there is also a need to customise relevant resources and apps for local needs. “All the apps are in English, but there are people who only use the Tongan language in their everyday work,” she added.

Mr Gnanavel firmly believes that lifelong learning makes a difference. This Tamil Nadu farmer cultivates cotton and maize on his 2.5 acre plot. Through the COL-led Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programme, he has been able to expand his knowledge and increase outputs.

Over the years, Mr Gnanavel has received regular voice messages on his cell phone about local and season-specific agricultural practices. He has also enjoyed in-person support from local extension workers and has benefited from information exchange via a farmers’ social media group.

Improved agricultural practices have helped Mr Gnanavel prevent significant farming losses. “In 2020, I was getting ready to sow maize when I was told to wait for a week because the forecast indicated rains only after a week,” he says. Together with other farmers in his village, Mr Gnanavel postponed sowing and had a successful crop.

Mr Gnanavel meticulously follows L3F tips on soil testing, water management and fertiliser application, as well as weed, pest and disease control. “Ever since I became a mobile learner, I have been able to avoid unnecessary expenditures and wastage of inputs, and my crop yield has increased,” he proudly notes.

Mama Makuo, a villager in southeast Nigeria, sells roasted cashews at a local market for a living. She has not had a chance to learn to read or write and welcomed an opportunity for two of her children to receive education through a COL-led mobile learning project. Using motorcycles, two workers from PIECHARTS, COL’s partner in Nigeria, delivered OER to 140 out-of-school children in Enugu State, including Mama Makuo’s daughters.

For 17-year-old Makuochukwu Eze, the short lessons on how to make a life plan were especially valuable. She now wants to pursue higher education and become a science lecturer. Her 16-year-old sister, Chinazaekpere Eze, who wants to be a trader, enjoyed learning about the ways the Internet can help sell products and services.

The project pilot proved successful in addressing a demand for learning that relates to lives and livelihoods. With COL’s support, it will be upscaled to reach 2,000 out-of-school children and guide some of these learners from informal to formal learning.

Mama Makuo herself has learned a lot through the project, especially about recycling and keeping her family protected against waterborne diseases. “Many of the things you people are teaching my children are not even taught in schools,” she says.

Lifelong learning empowers Indian farmer

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COL’s project in Nigeria benefits whole family

Building the capacity of disability practitioners in Tonga
Open University Malaysia (OUM) is Malaysia’s first open and distance learning (ODL) institution. Established in 2000, what really sets OUM apart is its pledge to leverage technology to provide a seamless, learner-friendly environment that allows anyone to pursue higher education, irrespective of lifestyles, locations or commitments.

Over the years, the university has introduced innovative ways of delivering academic programmes. Through the myINSPIRE e-learning platform, learners can interact with facilitators and peers, and gain access to self-instructional modules and digital library resources. Together with lesson plans, these enable learners to study comfortably at their own pace. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a series of e-tutorials on a videoconferencing platform has now replaced face-to-face classes and seminars. Assessments, presentations and viva voce sessions have all moved online as well.

Although owned by a consortium of the country’s first 11 public universities, OUM operates as a private institution. By leveraging the consortium, OUM can tap into a diverse pool of subject-matter experts across these universities. Today, OUM offers more than 50 programmes, from diploma to PhD, that are accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency and recognised by professional bodies.

One of the ways the university adds value to programmes is through professional certification. The Master of Facility Management and Master of Quality Management are great examples of this, as they comprise the most current curricula, as well as professional certification by SIRIM, Malaysia’s authority on standards and industrial research. The Master of Occupational Safety and Health Risk Management is also another in-demand programme that is fully accredited and has been recognised by the Department of Occupational Safety and Health Malaysia since 2015.

Apart from making it possible for working adults to study on a part-time basis, OUM has also been instrumental in the development of human capital through collaborative engagements with government agencies to upgrade the qualifications of teachers, nurses and armed forces personnel. It also counts among its learners and graduates people from the public and private sectors, entrepreneurs, and prison inmates.

Currently, the university’s cumulative enrolment stands at almost 200,000, and graduates exceed 88,000. This year, about 4,400 learners have completed their studies and will also proudly bear the title of OUM alumni.

While maintaining a firm foothold in Malaysia through the establishment of more than 30 learning centres nationwide, OUM also offers programmes to a global audience. Its international reach involves partnerships spanning countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. One of its most successful collaborations is with the International Institute of Health Sciences (IIHS) of Sri Lanka. Together, OUM and IIHS have produced more than 800 graduates, the majority of whom are in the nursing profession.

In its efforts to contribute to the global ODL community, OUM is actively involved as a member of the Asian Association of Open Universities. The university is also proud of its longstanding relationship with the Commonwealth of Learning, as well as its membership in the OU5 group, which focuses on the joint development of programmes and research in Southeast Asia, involving institutions from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

OUM’s commitment to embracing digital transformation has enabled the university to continue providing education to the masses with relative ease during the pandemic. From programme delivery to assignment submissions and examinations, its 21 years of experience in e-learning have enabled a smooth transition to the online environment, thus truly allowing learning to happen anytime and anywhere. By responding not only to the needs of its learning community but also to global shifts at large, OUM hopes to ensure its sustainability and growth for many years to come.
AptusPi: enabling mobile learning

COL’s low-cost Aptus/AptusPi device allows educators and learners to connect to digital learning platforms and content without the need for grid electricity or Internet access. The result is a “classroom without walls” that can be set up within minutes and accessed with a laptop, tablet or mobile phone. COL has successfully deployed Aptus/AptusPi across the Commonwealth to ensure learning continuity in Member States stricken by natural disasters and the pandemic, and to provide support to out-of-school children.

In Malawi, Mozambique, Vanuatu and Zambia, these devices are helping meet the challenges caused by the exponential increase in the cost of proprietary textbooks and printed study materials. In Ghana, AptusPi aids in providing access to learning resources for out-of-school children who may only be able to visit a school or a support centre occasionally.

In response to a request from the Maldives Ministry of Education, COL has provided 200 devices with uploaded Grade 1 to 8 textbooks, over 100,000 Creative Commons licensed articles from Wikipedia for Schools and Simple English Wikipedia, over 1,000 Creative Commons licensed educational videos from Khan Academy, as well as PhET Interactive Simulations in Biology, Physics, Chemistry and Math. Training on AptusPi deployment and use of the devices is being planned.

COL is supporting the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to develop attributes of employability, which can enhance a graduate’s productivity in the workplace and provide benefits for the entire economy. A recent workshop hosted by the university focused on the concept of employability and familiarised 60 participants with methodologies for measuring its progress. It mapped out key competencies and skills that NOUN should impart to students and set the foundations for staff to conduct institutional employability audits. The key workshop outcome was the establishment of an Employability Task Force to develop an institutional framework for NOUN.

Online continuing education for nurses in Botswana

In Botswana, over 9,200 nurses and midwives have enrolled in an online continuing education programme offered by COL on the World Continuing Education Alliance Platform. Each participant has taken an average of 15 courses, with Covid-19 care and vaccination management being the most popular. Last year, COL partnered with the Seychelles Nurses and Midwives Council to provide online, context-specific continuing professional development modules for over 500 nurses and midwives.

More than 70 representatives from tertiary institutions and the National Accreditation Council in Guyana completed a series of COL-supported online workshops designed to familiarise them with national standards for approving and accrediting ODL programmes. Key outputs from the training include Draft Quality Assurance Standards for Open and Distance Learning in Guyana as well as six tools and templates to support their implementation. The workshops have strengthened the council’s capacity to assist participating institutions in the implementation of ODL standards.

COL’s new website with accessibility features

COL has launched a new website equipped with assistive technology.

Check it out at: www.col.org
Capacity building in Belize

COL is supporting the Ministry of Education, Belize to build staff capacity to track and assess the progress of open schooling in the country. An innovative hybrid model integrates a new course, Introduction to Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E), with a consultant-facilitated workshop. A total of 19 ministry staff have built skills in M&E, and COL has supported the development of a customised M&E strategy and baseline questionnaires for 15 pilot schools in the country. Following the pilot in Belize, the model will be utilised with other partners to strengthen their capacity in M&E.

Joint Venture: Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Wayamba Technical College

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Wayamba Technical College in Sri Lanka have launched a joint venture to train vocational trainers from the country’s technical colleges. The programme aims to address the shortage of skilled workers in fields such as electric vehicles and air conditioning. The collaboration is expected to contribute to Sri Lanka’s ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Workshop for vocational trainers in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka’s goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 has increased the demand for skilled workers in electric vehicles (EV) and air conditioning. However, there is a shortage of workers experienced in EV maintenance and repair, as well as technicians for the repair of refrigerators and air conditioners. To fill this gap, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) collaborated with the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) and Wayamba Technical College to train 448 vocational trainers from various government and private technical colleges in Sri Lanka. The online workshops focused on aspects of EV, as well as refrigeration and air conditioning. TVEC plans to collaborate with CEMCA further to build trainer capacity in other areas.

Contributions are invited for the Journal of Learning for Development, which focuses on innovations in learning — in particular, but not exclusively, open and distance learning and its role in development. Contributions can take the form of research articles, case studies, commentaries, and reports from the field. Please visit the journal’s website for more details and to submit work: www.jl4d.org.

LISA FANCOTT

COL welcomes Ms Lisa Fancott as Advisor: Gender. Ms Fancott has over two decades of experience centered on gender mainstreaming in policy and programming in Canada and at the international level. She holds a BA from McGill University and a postgraduate diploma from the Asia Pacific Management Cooperative Program, Capilano University, Canada.

TERRY NEAL

Farewell to Ms Terry Neal, COL’s Education Specialist: TVSD, who completed her tenure in September 2021. She is now joining the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. All the best to Ms Neal in this new endeavour.

ALEXIS CARR

Many thanks to Ms Alexis Carr for her contributions to COL. She has served COL in several capacities for seven years, most recently as the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager. We wish her success pursuing a PhD at Simon Fraser University, Canada.

People

STAFF

BANGLADESH

Mr Mohammed Masum Ahmed
Deputy Secretary, Secondary and Higher Education Division, Scholarship & Engineering Universities Section, Ministry of Education

BOTSWANA

Dr Mmabaledi Seeletso
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Mr Mrutyunjay Behera
Economic Adviser, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education

KIRIBATI

Ms Lucy Kum-On
Principal, Kiribati Teachers’ College

COL WELCOMES NEW FOCAL POINTS

STAFF

Opening up women’s participation in STEM-TVET

COL has been supporting the Commonwealth Association of Technical Universities and Polytechnics in Africa (ATUPA) to increase women’s participation in STEM technical and vocational education and training (TVET). A comprehensive project aims to reduce the complex societal, cultural and economic barriers that impede girls’ and women’s participation in STEM-TVET. In the project framework, a practical guide has been generated to help ATUPA’s Women in Technical Education and Development regional chapters create targeted interventions. An online community of practice will be launched before the end of 2021 to assist chapters and individual members with sharing challenges, opportunities, resources and best practices.

Advanced Cybersecurity Training for Teachers

COL’s Advanced Cybersecurity Training for Teachers guided learners in ways to ensure safe and effective learning spaces while conducting blended or wholly online learning. Participants from close to 60 countries were familiarised with advanced cybersecurity techniques that can be deployed within a learning institution to minimise cyber risks for learners, teachers, parents and other users.

Here is what they had to say:

“I have started accessing online resources during Covid-19. I am now using the knowledge in my daily teaching.”
- Maria Latha Paullraj, Maldives

“There is a shortage of advanced cybersecurity expertise in my location, and the course has really helped me to get relevant knowledge.”
- Lesaare Stephen Museveni, Kenya

“The technology deployed during the training was very effective. Data recovery solutions and the benefits of a VPN were among the outstanding features.”
- Hemant Matabadal, Trinidad and Tobago

“For teacher professional development, we are on an island far away from the headquarters. I am now more aware of the dangers and how to be more secure.”
- Bettina Melanie, Seychelles

Digital education leaders trained in South Africa

In collaboration with SchoolNet South Africa, COL has built the capacity of more than 1,200 local teachers to support their students in becoming digital education leaders. Over a seven-month period, a series of workshops have been organised across nine provinces on different features of the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) online platform. C-DELTA promotes sustainable development by helping learners not only use information and communication technologies effectively but also influence others to use digital technology appropriately for learning (and earning).

COL–NAMCOL develop new courses

COL has been supporting the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) in a project aimed at building the capacity of staff and students in technology-enabled learning. While Covid-19 disruptions forced synchronous activities to be moved online, four courses on aspects of online learning have been successfully developed. The courses Introduction to OER; Learning Design; and Facilitating Online Learning have been piloted, and plans to conduct a Moodle orientation course are underway.
Supporting professional development for inclusive education

Across the world, many disabled children are excluded from education, so “inclusive education” is becoming a national priority in numerous Commonwealth countries. But disabled children are not the only ones who can be excluded. Common misconceptions are that inclusive education is about how to educate disabled and non-disabled children together and that it requires specialist teachers. It is much broader than this.

Colleagues from the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) and a team from The Open University, UK together explored the UNICEF Wave Model for inclusive education. This model recognises that children may feel excluded for many reasons, including disability but also language issues, emotional problems, a difficult home life, poverty and so on. As well, inclusion is the responsibility of all teachers, and every teacher can take steps to include disabled children, even if they don’t have access to specialist resources. Inclusive pedagogy benefits all children. By working collectively and with external agencies, teachers can provide more support, and truly inclusive schools can be created.

This model formed the basis of two MOOCs — Inclusive Teaching and Learning, and Creating an Inclusive School — which were offered by COL in partnership with The Open University in the first half of 2021. The MOOCs explored the first two waves of the UNICEF model: the contribution that individual teachers can make, and the things that can be achieved when professionals work together to create an inclusive school.

Over 1,000 participants registered for the MOOCs. The courses were co-designed with COL partners and colleagues from the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa network and were supported by a team of seven facilitators from Jamaica and Kenya, headed by the lead educator from The Open University. Completion rates for the two courses were 16% and 30% (the average for MOOCs is 12–15%). Feedback from the courses was very positive. One participant commented:

“I have never been keen on inclusive education. This is despite having been a high school teacher for over 22 years and a university lecturer for over ten years. I know I excluded my students for lack of knowledge, and I am sorry about that, but I will be an inclusive teacher going forward. I will sensitise my student teachers on this concept.”

Participants were also asked how the changes they had made in their practice had affected their students. Two responses were: “Learners now pay more attention than before; their level of interaction has also improved,” and “They are freer with me.”

So what contributed to this success? What have we learnt from this experience?

Our analysis suggests that learning design and the support provided for participants through facilitation were key.

Ironically, the Covid-19 pandemic has created new opportunities for learning design. Our aspiration is that courses targeting specific demographics will be co-designed. In this case, the aim was to work with KISE, and many of the activities in the MOOCs were tested in a workshop in Nairobi in November 2019. After an initial workshop, however, all travel was stopped. Subsequent co-design workshops were held on Zoom. We were able to involve colleagues from our networks in Jamaica, Uganda and Kenya, so a much greater range of voices was heard! Video assets were created on Zoom, saving considerable amounts of money. As a result, examples came from a variety of contexts, giving the courses wide appeal.

Support for learners is crucial, especially in online learning. The courses had discussion forums and activities, which invited participants to contribute their ideas. Our hope was that every time participants logged on, they would find more posts, replies to their contributions and new opportunities to engage. Achieving this involved a team of seven facilitators, who all studied the course themselves, logged on every day, replied to contributions and started new conversations. Their responses were always positive and encouraging and often finished with an open question to promote further discussion. In weekly meetings, the facilitators and lead educator met on Zoom to discuss the contributions, and a volunteer then posted a summary of the main points from that week. All of the facilitators thoroughly enjoyed the experience and developed new skills they have taken forward into their everyday roles.

The global pandemic has created a new awareness of the opportunities afforded by online learning for professional development. As individuals take the initiative and seek out opportunities that will meet their needs, the onus is now on governments and local officials to recognise their certificates and give formal credit for their efforts, especially when the courses concerned are co-designed in their context and reflect national priorities.
New Resources

Guidelines on Open and Distance Learning for Youth and Adult Literacy

Published in partnership with the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, the new guidelines address a gap in literacy provision by presenting open and distance learning principles and practices to illustrate how learning and education can be delivered at a distance. The publication offers practical guidance in the areas of planning, development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. It also considers various technologies that could support youth and adult literacy. The guidelines aim to help policymakers, literacy providers and educators strengthen the resilience of their literacy programmes and expand outreach and participation in the process.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3965

Leveraging MOOCs for Teacher Development in Low-Income Countries and Disadvantaged Regions

This policy brief looks at open digital distance learning and the potential of massive open online courses to deliver and support teacher development in low-income countries and disadvantaged regions. It addresses the particular barriers faced by teachers and their communities and proposes options to help overcome their challenges. Recommendations cover areas of local, national and global policy.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3980

Social Return on Investment in Open Schooling

COL commissioned an external review of its 2018–2021 interventions in open and innovative schooling (OIS) in Belize, Malawi, Mozambique, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zambia. The report is based on an online quantitative study, followed by analyses of costs versus benefits and social return on investment. It concludes that continued support of OIS initiatives will contribute to bringing children back to school and help prevent them from dropping out.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3934

Towards a New Model of Schooling in Seychelles

This report prepared at the request of the Seychelles Ministry of Education presents a new model of schooling in Seychelles and makes a case for strengthening the Seychelles Institute of Distance and Open Learning. The new model proposes to leverage the best features of open schooling, e-learning, hybrid learning, and community tutoring to improve effectiveness. It envisages 12 years of free schooling within an academic framework managed by autonomous schools under a national school development council.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3981
The world’s education systems at all levels have undergone radical transformations as a direct consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in most of these transformations, technology has played a central role. As the pandemic evolves into an endemic state, many of these changes will be here to stay. Under these new circumstances, a few basic questions need to be addressed: In the new normal, what do we expect from our education systems? What are the central issues that need to be focused on? And will the transformed approaches affect the quality of graduates for better or for worse?

Quality, at least in post-secondary education, is now evaluated on the anvil of employability, which has emerged as the key issue that should guide all analyses and determine the way forward. Employability, of course, is highly dependent on the market opportunities available to qualified individuals. In recent years, while it has become obvious that the rapidly evolving nature of the workplace will require that people become lifelong learners to remain employable, one central thread seems to be common to all endeavours: no work stream is exempt from digitalisation, and in nearly every industry, the pandemic has accelerated this transformation. It can only be seen as serendipitous that the majority of interventions in educational systems triggered by the pandemic have been digital in nature!

Students as well as teachers have had to come up to speed in the use of digital technologies, and new graduates will already be equipped with these necessary skills for the future of work.

It continues to be debated whether the introduction of technology eliminates jobs. While South Korea and Japan provide adequate counterexamples to this hypothesis, it is interesting to note that technology itself is used to identify in-demand jobs and their associated skills. Technology is also used to offer free and open access to content that helps people develop these skills. It even provides the tools that help people identify and locate relevant job opportunities!

A recent report from Coursera1 indicates that the demand for technology skills has accelerated during the pandemic. It also estimates that companies will continue to move further along the digitalisation road, regardless of whether the pandemic recedes. Microsoft’s data2 also indicate an accelerated transformation of the workplace, as well as substantial broadband growth.

Of course, digital skills are not the only ones required in the workplaces of tomorrow. However, predicting requirements to create updated university programmes is a hazardous undertaking, to say the least. Universities and their curricula are slow-moving ships. It takes time to modify existing programmes and even more time to evaluate the outcomes of such modifications. This is one of the prime reasons underlying the oft-repeated complaint that there is a disconnect between academia and industry.

Once again, technology comes to the rescue. By enabling just-in-time learning and creating new paradigms such as micro-credentials, technology enables the swift acquisition and enhancement of new skills, thereby improving the employability of the workforce. MOOCs and other online offerings have resulted in tangible career benefits and are allowing the workforce to keep pace in a rapidly changing employment landscape.

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2 See Microsoft launches initiative to help 25 million people worldwide acquire the digital skills needed in a COVID-19 economy.