The much-anticipated Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF10) — co-hosted by COL and Athabasca University — kicked off on 14 September 2022. And after its conclusion it was, by all metrics, crowned a resounding success. PCF, a triennial event, has historically brought ministers of education, university vice-chancellors, senior officials, plus a range of educators and open and distance learning (ODL) practitioners together from around the Commonwealth and beyond. In fact, PCF10 boasted a gathering of more ministers from more Commonwealth nations than ever before. Nearly 500 attendees from over 50 countries, including 42 Commonwealth nations, participated in-person and virtually.

The convention’s Opening Ceremony commenced with old-fashioned Calgary hospitality – the symbolic White Hat ceremony. Signature white Stetson hats are traditionally presented to visitors who are granted the status of honorary Calgarians. Just prior to the donning of the Stetsons, traditional First Nations blessings were given by Tsuut’ina Elder Bruce Starlight.

Hosted in Canada for the very first time, forum attendees gathered in the main hall to watch a virtual greeting by the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, followed by an in-person address by the Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata’a’afa, Prime Minister of Samoa.

PCF10 brought hundreds together to learn and share innovations on the application of ODL with the intent of increasing access to quality education and training in order to provide relevant skills for better employment and entrepreneurship.

With the theme of “Innovations for Educational Resilience,” the forum acknowledged how Covid-19 has made a significant impact on education and training. With a focus on how to build resilient education systems, PCF10 addressed the pressing issues of learning loss due to school closures and lack of access to technology for teaching and learning.

At the conclusion of each PCF, synthesising the outcome of the event is a tradition that articulates and encapsulates great discussions and discoveries, as well as an opportunity to take these learnings and actions back to each attendees’ home country. The Calgary Communique reflected these traditions while offering new insights and inspirations for the future of ODL.

Nearly 500 attendees from over 50 countries, including 42 from Commonwealth nations, participated in-person and virtually.
The passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II marks the end of an era. When COL was formally inaugurated, Her Majesty offered ‘a hearty welcome to this new and significant element in the fabric of the Commonwealth,’ established to foster ‘Commonwealth cooperation in distance education as an important practical step in cementing relationships between members.’ We share a deep sense of loss while at the same time celebrate her commitment to a thriving and respected Commonwealth. COL will continue to do its part to take this legacy forward.

Professor Asha Kanwar
President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning

IN BRIEF: COL pre-PCF10 workshops

The hybrid workshop, involving key partners in the Teacher Education initiative, explored current and planned action in scaling innovations for teacher development. Participants discussed concepts and models for teacher training at scale, including COL strategies and models using open, distance and technology-enabled learning.

The Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) partners discussed scaling up L3F to meet the challenges of food insecurity and agreed to improve their systems and practices in tracking the progress made through planned activities while upscaling their outcomes appropriately.

GIRLS Inspire drafted a strategy for the digitisation of learning resources, as well as enhanced its partners’ capacity in Climate Responsive Sustainable Livelihoods and Food Security. The Honourable Faustina Namutenya Caley, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Namibia joined the group with the Namibian GIRLS Inspire partner.

The Open Schooling workshop provided an opportunity for COL to strengthen its community of practice. Participants shared in the development of a new multi-institutional senior secondary-level open course on climate change and engaged in a discussion related to vocationalising the curriculum for youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs) with a view to identifying areas of common interest and potential for future collaboration.

The hybrid workshop organised by the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) was planned to initiate the collaborative design and development of competency-based courses related to Blue Economy careers. Participants agreed to develop seven courses in the areas of: Ocean Energy, Aquaculture and Fisheries, Marine Biotechnology, as well as Bluepreneurship.
Outstanding contributions and excellence in distance education

Presented at every Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, the latest conferment of honorary fellows and winners of the Excellence in Distance Education Awards were announced on 14 September at PCF10. COL conferred the title of Honorary Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning on eight eminent individuals from different corners of the Commonwealth. The designation recognises the outstanding contributions by an individual to distance education in areas such as: leadership and service, published works including courseware, lectures and presentations and mentorship.

Honorary Fellows of COL

Dr Tony Bates
Senior Advisor at the Chang School of Continuing Education, Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada, as well as Chair of the Board of the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association for his contributions to improved understanding of the role of technology in open and distance learning.

The Honourable Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun
Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, Mauritius in recognition of her contributions to the advancement of quality education.

Mr Maxim Jacques Jean-Louis
CEO of Contact North, Canada in recognition of his contributions to supporting the remotest communities in Ontario.

The Honourable Ambassador Mariam Yalwaji Katagum
Minister of State for Industry, Trade and Investment, Nigeria in recognition of her contributions to advancing education and advocating for lifelong learning.

Mr Mohammed Rezwan
Executive Director of Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha, Bangladesh in recognition of his contributions to the improvement of student access to education in fragile ecologies.

Professor Alan Tait
Emeritus Professor of Distance Education and Development at the Open University, UK for his contributions to transformational leadership, as well as research and scholarship in ODL.

Professor Ami Upadhyay
Vice Chancellor of the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University in Ahmedabad, India in recognition of her contributions to nation-building, open and higher education.

Excellence in Distance Education Awards

Through the Excellence in Distance Education Awards, COL gives due recognition to remarkable achievements and endeavours to those who emulate examples of good practice in the field.

Award of Excellence for Institutional Achievement
Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (OPNZ)
Award was accepted by Dr Mark Nichols on behalf of OPNZ.

Award of Excellence for Innovations in Distance and Online Learning
Dr Kaushal Kumar Bhagat
Assistant Professor at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur for CodAR: An Augmented Reality-Based Serious Game to Teach Programming Skills.
A ministerial roundtable session, co-chaired by the Prime Minister of Samoa and COL’s President and CEO, generated a lively discussion on how governments have addressed educational disruptions during the Covid–19 pandemic. Nine education ministers from the Commonwealth joined in the discussion. In fact, never before have this many education ministers attended a Pan-Commonwealth Forum. Together, the roundtable session revolved around open distance and flexible learning (ODFL) and building resilience and technological innovation while being inclusive. Other themes included improved access to education through ODL, service schools and how each and every community is vital to educational growth. How can technology address the challenges of distance learning and the new normal? — a reference to the Covid–19 aftermath. As overcrowding in classrooms is a global crisis, ODL can help ease these problems to ensure no student is left behind. Introducing new programmes and new ways to ensure student engagement was also discussed. The subject of ODL remained front-and-centre, as ministers from across the Commonwealth examined the many inherent benefits of ODL in a world where Covid–19 is still a major global health emergency. These included how excellence in distance education minimises one-on-one classroom contact, which can lead to increased risk of infection and where many in developing countries are still unvaccinated against the coronavirus. In closing, COL has been tasked with several actions — capacity building of teachers, developing skills for livelihoods, enhancing the quality ODL, promoting the well-being of students and empowering parents to strengthen the educational ecosystem. The ministers also endorsed the Calgary Communique and its six collective actions prioritising the challenges of climate change.

Pictured from left to right: The Honourable Ahmed Mujahid, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, Republic of Maldives, the Honourable Faustina Namutenya Caley, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture Namibia, the Honourable Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Mauritius, the Honourable Buti Kgwaridi Manamela, Deputy Minister of Higher Education & Science and Innovation, Republic of South Africa, Professor Asha Kanwar, President & CEO, COL, the Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata’a’afa, Prime Minister Samoa, Ambassador Mariam Yalwaji Katagum, Minister for State for Industry, Trade and Investment, Nigeria, Dr Joanna Newman, Secretary General, Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Honourable Dr Kilo Vivian Asheri, Secretary of State, Ministry of Basic Education, Cameroon, the Honourable Aubrey Lesaso, Assistant Minister of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology, Botswana, and the Honourable Dr Aishath Ali, Minister of Education, Republic of Maldives.
PCF10: Special session for the Pacific

Education ministers, senior officials and conference delegates attended one of PCF10’s most anticipated parallel sessions — “Strategies and solutions for ODFL in the Pacific Region.” The event, attended by about 40 participants, was co-chaired by the Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, Prime Minister of Samoa and Professor Asha Kanwar, President and CEO, COL. The partnership for open, distance and flexible learning in the Pacific is a COL project supported by New Zealand, providing professional development for technical and vocational education in the developing region.

The Prime Minister of Samoa said ODFL is an important channel for increasing educational opportunities and outcomes, and is especially relevant for the Pacific region, given the small and dispersed remote populations, plus limited access to secondary and post-secondary opportunities. Despite the importance of ODFL in the region, she stated there had been limited investment to date with a need for increased investment in multiple ways. Covid-19 further reinforced the requirement for the Pacific region to be well-prepared outside of the traditional teaching mode, as Samoa continues to experience existential challenges and gaps to Internet access, insufficient online curriculum material and the capacity of teachers and students to utilise technology.

Professor Kanwar added that, “while 15 to 20 per cent of public spending must ideally be allocated to education, this may take time. Meanwhile, ODFL is a tried and tested option to provide quality education at scale.”

Forum participants from 42 countries from all four regions of the Commonwealth, with a total of approximately 2.5 billion people, believe that it is possible to significantly accelerate progress towards the aim and targets of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in general, and SDG4 in particular, to innovate for more resilient education systems and to address at least some of the challenges of climate change by prioritising the following collective actions now: building resilience, fostering lifelong learning, inspiring innovations, promoting equity and inclusion, placing special focus on education for girls and harnessing emerging technologies to improve quality of life.

Professor Kanwar added that the Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific Trade Project, with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand (MFAT NZ), had further strengthened COL’s work in the Pacific in partnership with PACFOLD. While Covid–19 made a huge challenge during the initial stage of the Project, a good result has been accomplished.

Professor Kanwar pointed out the four reasons for its success:

- COL’s Focal Points were involved in the design phase of the Project.
- COL has social capital which has been nurtured over years of work.
- Ownership of the Project through a wide consultation.
- COL has available resources and expertise, which could be deployed immediately.

To read the full version of PCF10: The Calgary Communique visit: https://www.col.org/news/the-calgary-communique.

PCF10: Video highlights

A video round-up of all three days of the event is now available. To view, go to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyM5Ah0FzSM

PCF10: Plenary Panel Discussions

Professor Asha Kanwar introduced the very first panel of PCF10 “Innovations for Educational Resilience” by highlighting that innovation itself is not always sufficient in and of itself — especially in the context of a world that has been so deeply affected by a global pandemic. The panel included Dr Joanna Newman, Secretary General, Association of Commonwealth Universities, Dr Maxim Jean-Louis, CEO of Contact North, Dr Christina Kwauk, Social Scientist & Independent Consultant and Dr Dianne Chambers, Associate Professor, University of Notre Dame, Australia. The discussion included the importance of equity and inclusion, as well as the need for governments and organisations to invest in these priorities to bring education, prosperity and peace to those traditionally excluded from higher education.

Four prominent voices from around the world shared in the panel discussion for “Transforming Education for Climate Change” on specific topics such as the broad misunderstanding regarding the difference between weather and climate, and on the kinds of mitigations countries most susceptible to climate change — such as Maldives and Samoa — are taking to protect the health and safety of its residents. The panel included Dr Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions, the Honourable Dr Aishath Ali, Minister of Education, Republic of Maldives, Dr Christina Kwauk, Social Scientist & Consultant and Ms Peseta Noumea Simi, Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Samoa.
ENCOURAGE RISK TAKING:
Many of the major innovations in our field have been high-risk ventures, such as the UK’s Open University.

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS:
Innovation involves developing programs, courses, boot camps, technologies, processes and learning experiences WITH people, not FOR people.

BUILD ON STRENGTHS:
Keep identifying teams and groups that are keen to innovate and set priorities and environments so your chances of success are high. In doing this, break down silos and show leadership to be a champion of change.

LEARN TO TOLERATE AMBIGUITY:
We all know we will never have 100 per cent certainty that a new idea or process will work. Let’s continue to learn to live with excitement, doubt, anxiety and hope.

GET THE MINDSET RIGHT:
Encourage your colleagues to experiment, understand, embrace, and lead innovation. Having a clear process is very helpful but preparing your team with the right mindset is far more effective.

DON’T DWELL ON FAILURES:
As innovators, we know some failures are inevitable — but learning from failure is what helps us eventually be successful innovators.

DON’T SEE INNOVATION AS “A BIG IDEA”:
Sustainable innovation begins with an idea, but it then takes ingenuity, diligence, persistence, commitment and hard work to convert the idea into something that works.

DON’T LET EGO GET IN THE WAY:
Let’s continue to keep our eye on the learner and not let our egos as innovators get in the way. We too are learners, and innovation is a learning process.

DON’T BE IMPATIENT:
It takes TIME for innovation to flourish and to work through the start-up challenges.

DON’T UNDERESTIMATE THE EFFORT IT TAKES:
You’ve got to put in the work to get from idea to execution, so you must build that “effort time” into your plan for success.


COL course wins international Excellence Award

The short course on Universal Learning Design (UDL) available on the COLcommons platform recently won a coveted 2022 Brandon Hall Group Gold Award for excellence in the Best Advance in Training Programs that Require Global Accessibility Standards category.

The courses on the COLcommons platform are developed using Web Content Accessibility Guidelines while providing competency-based, professional development micro-courses on various topics.

The platform boasts over 24,000 unique users and received three international awards from the Brandon Hall Group for Excellence in 2021. The winners are listed at:
https://excellenceawards.brandonhall.com/winners
COL President & CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, gave a presentation on “Building Resilience in Small States” at a roundtable meeting with diplomats from the Permanent Delegation of the Commonwealth to the UN Office, Small States Office, in Geneva Switzerland in October 2022. The diplomats were informed of the ongoing programmes and initiatives COL is undertaking with small states designed to help Commonwealth governments and institutions use technologies to overcome some of the challenges faced by small states, while contributing to the goal of learning for sustainable development by empowering people through learning that leads to economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation. Diplomats also discussed how climate change has emerged as the single greatest environmental concern globally, especially for small island developing countries. Professor Kanwar explained the significance of COL’s most recent efforts in supporting training for the blue and green economies with a perspective of climate justice towards building resilience in small states.

President at AAOU

Professor Asha Kanwar delivered a keynote address at the 35th AAOU (Asian Association of Open Universities) Annual Conference held at Jeju Island in South Korea in November 2022, hosted by Korea National Open University. Within the conference theme of a “Opening a new path to open universities: Responding to global issues,” Professor Kanwar spoke to three key issues that the world is confronted with today — the Covid–19 pandemic, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) progress and the climate crisis — all of which have a direct link to the education sector. The conference centred on six main areas impacting open universities — repositioning in a post-Covid era, contributions to society, assessment, human resource development, student support services and innovations in distance education with an eye to continuous improvement and delivery of quality education.

COL at UNESCO-UNEVOC

COL participated at the launch of the UNESCO Strategy for TVET 2022–2029 held at the United Nations Campus, Bonn, Germany in late October 2022. The theme for the hybrid conference was ‘Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training for Successful and Just Transitions.’ During the launch event, Mr Robert Okinda, COL Adviser: Skills, was part of a panel at a plenary on TVET flagship initiatives focusing on digital transformations. UNESCO–UNEVOC partnered with COL to support the capacity building of TVET practitioners in The Gambia and Zambia to utilise appropriate open and distance learning (ODL) approaches and technology for an inclusive TVET delivery — preparing strategies and action plans to integrate ODL institutionally and utilising assistive technology in disability needs assessments for a more targeted support for the training of learners. Implementation of the two projects are in line with COL’s strategy for building national resilience.

Virtual labs, East Africa

Due to the impact on education created by the Covid–19 pandemic, flexibility and cost effectiveness have made virtual labs a viable option in experiment-oriented training and education. COL organised a regional workshop on the use of virtual labs in TVET for practitioners from Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, with the aim of providing trainers the necessary skills to incorporate Internet-based experimentation in their practice. Learners in science and engineering will now have remote access to a real-life simulation-based workshop environment providing a deep sense of involvement. Speaking at the event, Dr Margaret Mwakima, Principal Secretary, Department of Vocational and Technical Training (VTT), Ministry of Education, Kenya stressed the immense potential of virtual labs which are also cost effective in comparison to physical ones. COL’s regional office (CEMCA, Delhi) initiated collaboration with Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeeth University, India — the national lead for a project of India’s Ministry of Education — on setting up a large number of virtual labs to facilitate a number of capacity building workshops in Asia to support teachers.

The three-day workshop was hosted in late July 2022 by Kenya Technical Trainers College (KTTC), Nairobi.

Roundtable for diplomats of small states

COL President & CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, gave a presentation on “Building Resilience in Small States” at a roundtable meeting with diplomats from the Permanent Delegation of the Commonwealth to the UN Office, Small States Office, in Geneva Switzerland in October 2022. The diplomats were informed of the ongoing programmes and initiatives COL is undertaking with small states designed to help Commonwealth governments and institutions use technologies to overcome some of the challenges faced by small states, while contributing to the goal of learning for sustainable development by empowering people through learning that leads to economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation. Diplomats also discussed how climate change has emerged as the single greatest environmental concern globally, especially for small island developing countries. Professor Kanwar explained the significance of COL’s most recent efforts in supporting training for the blue and green economies with a perspective of climate justice towards building resilience in small states.
The Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning welcomed attendees to the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre from 53 countries (42 Commonwealth) from 14 to 16 September 2022. Together with COL and host partner, Athabasca University (AU), everyone participated in three days of insightful keynotes, engaging plenary panels, discussions and more, on the theme of “Innovations for Educational Resilience.”

The Opening Ceremony recognised the Indigenous Peoples who have called Canada home for millennia. This included the traditional Blackfoot hoop dance performed by the Labelle Sisters — accomplished Pow Wow dancers and Métis jiggers.

Dr Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions spoke about building education resilience and how “our education systems across the globe do not currently teach the kinds of basic resiliency skills learners might need.”

Mr Mohammed Rezwan, Executive Director, Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha, Bangladesh virtually addressed the importance of inspiring innovations and outlined the work he and his organisation have done to support education in the impoverished, flood-prone regions of his country — the practice of developing and building floating schools.

The Honourable Buti Kgwaridi Manamela, Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training, South Africa spoke about his country’s successes in increasing access to education in an address promoting equity and inclusion.

Delivering the Fostering Lifelong Learning address, Professor Olaf Zawacki-Richter, Professor at the University of Oldenburg, Germany said that “widening access comes with duties and the responsibility of taking care of and providing support, especially for non-traditional learners.”
Performers dazzled the audience with exciting performances at both the dinner reception and farewell gala.

The Closing Ceremony featured the reading of the Calgary Communique statement that was drafted at the event and an acknowledgement of all the efforts that went into making PCF10 possible.

Almost 350 papers and posters were presented, including workshops and panel discussions during the Parallel Sessions, covering the four sub-themes of building resilience, fostering lifelong learning, inspiring innovations and promoting equity and inclusion.

In a video address, Professor Tim Blackman, Vice-Chancellor, The Open University UK delivered the Asa Briggs Lecture with a focus on how open learning is the most modern, efficient and cost-effective pathway for underprivileged students seeking higher education opportunities. He also expressed the strongly-held view that the experience of distance learning has opened countless new avenues to education, especially in the wake of the Covid–19 pandemic.

COL organised a well-attended reception, presenting over 20 publications at COL’s Publications Launch, where both print and digital versions on USB drives were made available to guests.

The Country Showcase, highlighting transformative technology, was presented by Ms Claudette McGowan, Global Executive Officer, TD Bank, Canada.

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The University of the South Pacific (USP) — the only regional tertiary institution in the Southern Hemisphere — was established in 1968 at Laucala Bay in Fiji, which was a former New Zealand Air Base. It began providing distance education for all of its 12 member countries in the early 1970s. Later, other campuses were established in Vanuatu, and Samoa followed by smaller campuses and sub-campuses set up in all of the 12 member countries that is now regional students’ learning hub for their Open, Distance and Flexible (ODFL), face-to-face (F2F), online and blended studies. Soon after Distance Learning was established, and later when online courses were offered through Moodle, the Learning Management System (LMS) in 2006, the ODFL policies were designed to ensure that the quality of learning and teaching at USP met the international standards.

The Centre of Flexible Learning (CFL) at USP plays an important role in ensuring that the flexibility of learning and teaching is not compromised by ensuring the USP’s Flexible Learning Policy and Open Educational Resources (OER) policies are met for all the courses at USP. Courses designed at CFL cover the whole spectrum — traditional print mode courses, use of satellite tutorials, F2F with regional campus-based tutorial support, complete online courses, blended and flexi school mode with academics travelling to remote regional campuses to offer F2F experiences to learners at USP.

The Southern Hemisphere is prone to natural disasters such as cyclones and hurricanes and every time a disaster affects the university study, USP has been able to switch the mode of study to provide flexibility as needed by regional countries.

The Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD) is the Commonwealth of Learning’s regional centre which is hosted by the CFL based at USP.

During the Covid–19 lockdown, PACFOLD, approached COL to assist USP in hosting a LMS platform to provide an online orientation and skill development program for its potential new learners. The lockdowns’ impact on learning, with a possibility of no F2F orientation program needed urgent planning to provide USP’s potential learners some awareness, confidence and much more. Many universities’ orientation and study programmes have been impacted by the current Covid–19 outbreak.

While some struggled with the difficulty of fewer students enrolling due to travel constraints, others were still debating whether to open their doors for F2F education. USP experienced a distinct difficulty. Orientation sessions are often held on all campuses, however the majority of new students arrived early at USP’s main campus in Fiji for the session. Students’ travels were limited because of Covid–19, and this year (2022), the orientation programme was held in a relatively confined space. Additionally, USP began Semester One later due to issues with Year 13 external exams for one of its member countries (Fiji). This implied that rather than starting the semester in mid-February as usual, the university now commenced in late March, which affected more than 3,000 provisional students.

USP launched an online orientation programme called ‘Semester Zero’ in order to keep these prospective students interested for nearly two months. The program’s goal was to introduce these prospective new students to USP utilising a Moodle platform rather than a conventional face-to-face orientation session while still combining the fundamental literacy, numeracy and digital skills required for new students.

While we cannot prevent disasters from occurring, we can choose and adjust how exposed our universities are to them.”

by Dr Rajni Kaushal Chand
Director, Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD)
Director, Centre for Flexible Learning,
The University of the South Pacific (USP), Fiji
Keynote at IODL 2022

Professor Asha Kanwar delivered a timely and topical keynote address at the Fifth International Open and Distance Learning Conference (IODL) 2022, organised by Anadolu University, Turkey. The address entitled “Disruptive Change in an Age of Disruption” emphasised how current global crises have significantly impacted open and distance learning, as well as higher education.

Professor Kanwar remarked, “Dealing with disruptive change will require an innovation mindset. One element of this would be to regard every challenge as an opportunity. Another would be to take risks and learn from failures. Finally, we need to adopt collaboration and sharing as a strategy.”

IODL 2022’s aim is to provide a platform for researchers and practitioners to present and discuss a broad range of topics related to open and distance learning within the context of “disruptive change” in education.

Agricultural training takes root in Jamaica

400 rural Jamaican farmers are benefitting from an eight-week training programme sponsored by COL on how to treat farming as a business and to maximise their earning potential.

Using a combination of face-to-face and open and distance learning, the programme involves the use of mobile devices to train and mentor participants into higher levels of professionalism in agriculture.

Through exposure to topics such as effective marketing techniques, business proposal writing, record keeping and other business skills for future growth, these Jamaican farmers are now being taught the fundamentals of how to turn their underdeveloped farmland into a thriving agribusiness.

Current efforts are also being made by organisations like the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) to create, support and provide opportunities to Jamaican youth with support from COL’s Gender initiative, and to encourage economic and social transformation on a community and countrywide basis.

Open schooling in Malawi and Mozambique

Recently, COL began organising and supporting new open schooling content development in two sub-Saharan African countries — Malawi and Mozambique.

Both countries are long-term partners of COL’s Open Schooling initiative having been involved in the development of lesson-level content piloted through COL’s Aptus device, as reported in a recently published Social Return on Investment study and available online from the OER & Digital Public Goods (DPG) Library. However, the content as currently constituted, assumes mediation by a teacher, whether face-to-face or online. Moreover, countries are realising the need to offer more occupational or vocational subjects to out-of-school youths. There was a need therefore to revisit both what should be offered and how it should be offered.

In response, COL provided a course design and development consultant to facilitate the discussion and practical application related to curriculum mapping, activity-based course design, as well as discovering and using open educational resources while promoting gender equality in content development. Participants from each country were also provided with an introduction to Moodle — an open-source LMS — and will continue to be provided with online assistance as they work towards completion of their courses.

In summary, the content developed for students involved in open schooling provision can also be used to support the education system more widely; for example, learners in day schools who need additional support.
At the UN Transforming Education Summit

The Summit was convened in response to the existential global crisis in education — one of equity and inclusion, quality and relevance.

COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, in attendance at the Summit, reaffirmed the UN’s commitment to prioritise education said, “The Commonwealth of Learning supports the UN’s call to action to address the learning crisis that is impacting millions of students around the world. COL will complement global efforts by harnessing the potential of distance learning and technologies to provide equitable quality education at lower costs and with a lower carbon footprint.” COL’s main objective was to draw the attention of world leaders to the education crisis and stress the need for urgent action, which included an appeal for allocating additional funds. Professor Kanwar also expressed that while the global community is stressing the need for more resources, COL’s role is to demonstrate how alternative approaches, such as ODL, can be a viable means for providing enhanced access to quality education at lower costs.

From listeners to learners

In August 2022, at the India International Centre (IIC), the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) organised a brainstorming consultation entitled “A Journey from Listeners to Learners” – a discussion of strategies and the formulation of plans for engaging listeners of audio programmes as lifelong learners. The day-long consultation was attended by stakeholders representing different groups, including academia, technology, civil society organisations and community radio practitioners. The outcome of the consultation was designed to develop a long-term approach, or framework, on how traditional and new technologies can be harnessed towards engaging listeners of audio content into active learners, leading to livelihood opportunities, income generation and skill development.

Towards open schooling in The Gambia

COL is working with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, The Gambia, to promote and accelerate the establishment of open schooling to reach out-of-school youth. Support was provided for an expert to prepare a detailed concept plan followed by a national stakeholders consultative meeting in Banjul in early November to finalise the project plan. This project demonstrated to officials that continuity of learning could be supported by sharing appropriate digital content which can be accomplished more quickly and cheaply than creating and distributing printed materials. Projects such as these provide a good foundation to build on for the introduction of open schooling. Dr Tony Mays, COL’s Education Specialist for Open Schooling, represented COL at the meeting and guided the deliberations towards finalising plans.

AgMOOCs for veterinary professionals

From May to July 2022, COL, in partnership with Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (TANUVAS), India offered a MOOC on Management of Metabolic and Production Disorders in Cattle. The course attracted about 2,700 veterinary professionals from across the Commonwealth. A total of 751 professionals received their certificates of competency for participation in the course. COL has offered two MOOCs on this topic in the last six months attracting over 5,000 veterinary professionals from over 30 Commonwealth countries. TANUVAS has partnered with COL in offering both courses. It is among the oldest veterinary education institutions in the Commonwealth and has been a partner for almost two decades. As well, the National Skills Qualifications Framework equipped the learners to find placements immediately.

JL4D seeks contributions

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.
Women’s leadership training

The fourth offering of the Pan-Commonwealth Training Programme on Women and Leadership was launched in partnership with COL and Wawasan Open University (WOU) Malaysia, in July. It focused on fostering conversations around transformational leadership. The three themes centred on women and leadership, educational technology and climate change. Mid-career women professionals from 15 countries, covering all four regions of the Commonwealth, participated in the programme. Six globally-renowned leaders in ODL served as panellists, including Professor Asha Kanwar and Professor Lily Chan, Vice Chancellor of WOU. Delivering a keynote address, Ms Nurul Izzah Anwar, Member of Parliament from Penang State, Malaysia termed ODL as “a boon to women who may want to upskill and increase their employability but cannot leave their young children.” She praised COL for advocating for ODL and WOU for practising inclusion.

Regional workshop in Fiji

15 NGO representatives from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu participated in a regional workshop on Skills and Leadership training for youth, women and persons with disabilities – the first in-person meeting of the Pacific Partners since the Covid–19 pandemic. Held in August in Suva, Fiji and jointly organised with COL and the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD), the purpose of the workshop was to introduce the Pacific project to and gather insights from local NGOs regarding the opportunities and challenges for youth, women and persons with disabilities, as well as to explore the use of online training solutions. Over the next three years, selected partners will work with COL/PACFOLD to develop short online courses to train approximately 5,000 youth in leadership and technical skills.

Special needs educators trained

COL, in partnership with the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), conducted a two-day training workshop on the topic of online facilitation. The training was designed as an orientation for prospective online facilitators for the forthcoming MOOC on Inclusive Teaching and Learning (ITL), jointly offered by COL and KISE. There were about 30 participants from various special needs teaching specialisations at KISE. At the end of the workshop, the participants were able to navigate the course in readiness for their online facilitation role. Specifically, those with visual impairment were able to use assistive technologies, like smartphones and laptops with screen readers, as well as braille tablets, to access the course.

Fourth roundtable for Vice-Chancellors and Heads

The roundtable of Vice-Chancellors and Heads of ODL institutions was held in Penang, Malaysia in late July. This is the fourth edition of the roundtable organised by COL for senior leaders of ODL institutions. The Asia e University (AeU) partnered with COL in organising the event. About 30 leaders from 15 countries attended the event where the focus of the discussions centred on quality of higher education in the context of SDGs.

Professor Asha Kanwar, in her inaugural presentation, gave an overview of the issues and developments that have impacted education during Covid–19 while highlighting the benefits of the ODL paradigm. In a post-Covid era, there is a need for campus-based institutions to learn from the experience of ODL institutions alongside an increasing recognition of the role of universities in achieving SDG4.
The urgency of the global climate crisis requires a whole-of-government approach to education systems transformation. Such an approach also needs a firm commitment from the top to create an enabling environment for all necessary downstream and cross-stream activities and facilitate resource allocation. Wherever possible, incentives could also be provided to help nudge behavioural change in the short term.

There are three pathways by which we can ensure resilience through mainstreaming climate change action across Commonwealth governments. First, there has to be greater policy coherence and coordination around a system of education solutions for climate action. We should seek a clear mandate that includes comprehensive actions such as; greening the education system’s physical infrastructure, operating procedures, organisational structures, delivery approaches and human resources that can strengthen the overall climate resilience of the education system. The mandate must also focus on implementing the New Green Learning Agenda, published recently by the Commonwealth of Learning with the endorsement from policymakers.

The second pathway is creating more climate change education champions within the government so that the continuity of climate actions will remain regardless of changes to the government.

The third pathway is mobilising climate financing and developing partnerships to strengthen education systems. “Strengthening financial inputs to Commonwealth education systems, especially for small island developing states and climate-vulnerable countries, is mission critical for their existence.” Policymakers should send clear signals to international and multilateral donors, climate financing facilities, and the private sector that countries are ready to address the climate crisis through education and training of present and future generations.

For The Maldives, addressing climate change is crucial and essential to its very existence as a nation. Our lives and livelihoods in The Maldives crucially depend on the health of our ocean. Simply put, the impacts of climate change could make small islands like The Maldives uninhabitable.

As one of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the Maldives faces multiple challenges arising from smallness, remoteness, ecological fragility, vulnerability to external shock and susceptibility to natural hazards. The education sector has a critical role to play in protecting children and preparing present and future generations to face the full consequences of the climate crisis and in helping them to proactively take part in finding solutions.

Our government is implementing a number of actions to enhance climate resilience and reduce vulnerabilities, including building capacity of communities, strengthening the legal framework, and implementing sustainability measures for our fisheries, agriculture, accessibility to safe water, coral reefs, biodiversity, livelihood, coastal management and tourism sectors.

In The Maldives there has been significant investment in improvement of school infrastructure and facilities in recent years. After the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, schools were rebuilt and relocated to address safety concerns. However, a majority of schools are still located very close to the shoreline and therefore are at high risk of inundation.

Through our ‘Fehi Madharusa’ Project, we are promoting the integration of climate change education across all levels, while ensuring climate change education is grounded in science, is gender-responsive, and fosters civic engagement, climate action and an awareness of climate justice.

To build green skills for jobs in the green and blue economy, we have planned to place a greater focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. In addition, teachers are being trained to use project-based learning so students can learn skills that are required for jobs in the green and blue economy, while also meeting their development goals through innovation and design.
New Resources

Transforming Education for Climate Action: Report to Commonwealth Ministers of Education

This report provides a road map for how ministers of education can climate-proof education systems, implement a green learning agenda that builds skills for blue and green economies and promote education for climate action through policy development, resource allocation and effective implementation. The recommendations also focus on the important issues of quality, equity and justice.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.56059/11599/4068

Participant Experience in an Inquiry-Based Massive Open Online Course

This book presents a critical perspective into the design and delivery of the TELMOOC. Of particular interest to administrators, educators and instructional designers is the descriptions and outcomes of the course from the view of the participants. How and why the course interactions were incorporated to descriptions of new educator roles are included in this research-based book that intends to provide a roadmap for others to follow.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.56059/11599/4132

Technology Application in Teaching and Learning: Second-Order Review of Meta-analyses

This second-order meta-analysis (i.e., systematic quantitative synthesis of individual meta-analyses) summarises how the use of technology affects learning (achievement outcomes) in three different educational settings: in-class, online learning and blended learning. Comprehensive literature searches identified 915 potentially relevant publications. Final review covers 131 primary meta-analyses (featuring 134 independent effect sizes) across settings, technology types, grade levels and subject matters. Aggregated effect sizes were organised in three independent collections around the setting/delivery mode (in-class, online and blended).

DOI: https://doi.org/10.56059/11599/4069

Smart Education Strategies for Teaching and Learning: Critical Analytical Framework and Case Studies

A publication of COL with the UNESCO-Institute for IT in Education (UNESCO-IITE) and Beijing Normal University (BNU), this report proposes a theoretical framework for the universal agenda of ICT in education (ICTE). Included are textual analyses of ICTE policies in ten countries, covering developing and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Also included are fifteen case studies of policy-informed implementation projects.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4464

DOI (Digital Object Identifier) is a unique and reliable permanent link assigned to online articles, books and other works, making it easier to retrieve and cite works. Since September 2022, COL has assigned DOIs to the Journal of Learning for Development (JL4D) and other major publications, increasing the reach, impact and visibility of COL’s publications in the academic world.
Search is possibly the most widely used function on the Internet. For a typical user, a search engine and the web are often indistinguishable. In our own context, use and adaptation of open educational resources (OER) presuppose the ability to search for or locate OER for which the search engine is a must.

Google is the most widely used search engine with a share of about 91 per cent of global searches as of early 2022. Bing, owned by Microsoft, has a much smaller share. There are many engines based with geographic specificity or serving particular languages. Baidu is a well known example in Chinese, with a near total command over the market. Russia-based Yandex is also used extensively. Qwant, a service operating from France, is estimated to have about 50 million users. Japan and Korea also have search engines in national languages that are extensively used. There are also meta search engines such as Metacrawler or Dogpile that trigger searches in other search engines when users query them.

The essential business model of popular search engines is to gather user’s personal data to generate a revenue stream for the company, while the user is presented with results free of cost. Advertising is the main source of revenue. The results are ‘personalised’ for the user with advertisements inserted in search results. When a browser and a search engine are tightly integrated, the company obtains access to a wider range of personal data, therefore even higher revenue.

Until the advent of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union (EU) in 2018, users were not given many options to stop involuntary collection of personal data on the web by free services. With GDPR, search service providers and browser designers have been obliged to restrict data collection only to contexts where the user provides informed consent. This can produce the unintended consequence of reducing potential revenues for search engine providers. (Of note, Google’s year-on-year revenue declined by 36 per cent as of October 2022, while the cost of acquiring traffic from users increased by about 10 per cent).

Herein lies the context where alternative search engines are emerging. One example is DuckDuckGo (DDG) — a USA-based search engine that, by default, disavows collection and use of personal data from the user. Thus, explicit consent by the user is necessary for DDG to collect personal data. It is increasing in popularity because its results are presented well with reasonable relevance.

Presearch, a Canada-based search engine, offers another business model. It does not, in turn, collect personal data but encourages users to create accounts for browsing. Personal data, so collected, is used to deliver personalised results. Reviewers have offered good ratings for this service. As a departure from the traditional business model, this service offers cryptocurrencies to users offering them, in effect, a share of the revenue generated from the deployment of personal data.

While new models may emerge, there is an increase in the probability of some search functions becoming paid services. A number of site-specific search services already require a subscription. Algolia, an efficient engine for site searches, is an example. It is deployed on COL’s website to facilitate ease-of-search without collecting personal data.

Given the changes in regulatory approaches and the reductions in revenues of major search engine providers, advanced personalised services may become paid services in the near term. And, as a result, this may have an impact on the ability of individuals and institutions in developing countries to search for and locate OER.

What are the emerging trends in online search?

While new models may emerge, there is an increase in the probability of some search functions becoming paid services.