Commonwealth of Learning: Delivering a Common Future
Canada
Province of British Columbia
Commonwealth of Learning

ELIZABETH THE SECOND, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom,
Canada and Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the
Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith

To all to whom these presents shall come – Greeting

WHEREAS The Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting
in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, on October 1987, did agree to
create a Commonwealth institution to promote cooperation in distance
education; and
WHEREAS, by the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding between
Governments of the Commonwealth on Cooperation in Distance
Education, agreed on the 1st day of September, 1988, there was estab-
lished an institution to be called the ‘Commonwealth of Learning’, an
Agency which will be an international organization with member countries
of the Commonwealth, through their Governments, as participants, and
having its headquarters in the City of Vancouver; and
WHEREAS The Memorandum of Understanding affirms that the
Agency’s activities will aim to strengthen member countries’ capacities to
develop the human resources required for their economic and social
development, and will give priority to those developmental needs to
which Commonwealth cooperation can be applied; and
WHEREAS The Government of British Columbia endorses this
affirmation and the principles laid out in the Memorandum of
Understanding and has joined with the Government of Canada and other
Governments in the Commonwealth to assist the Commonwealth of
Learning; and
WHEREAS Institutions in all Provinces of Canada and in all
Member Countries of the Commonwealth are encouraged to participate in
the activities and to pursue the purposes of the Commonwealth of
Learning;
BE IT KNOWN That Representatives of the Government of Canada and of
The Government of the Province of British Columbia, The Commonwealth
Secretary-General, and Representatives and Distinguished
Citizens of Member Countries of The Commonwealth, on the 14th of
November, 1988, did gather in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada,
to Commemorate the Inauguration of the Headquarters of
the Commonwealth of Learning,

AT ROBSON SQUARE in the City of Vancouver, Province of British Columbia, Canada, THIS 14th Day of NOVEMBER, A.D. 1988

[Signatures]

[Stamp: Government of British Columbia]

[Stamp: Government of Canada]

[Stamp: Commonwealth of Learning]

Buckingham Palace

I am delighted to hear that the formal
inauguration of the Commonwealth of Learning, which was
decided upon at the last meeting of Commonwealth Heads
of Government in Vancouver is to take place in that
same city only twelve months later. The institution of
these arrangements for Commonwealth co-operation in
distance education is a most important practical step
in cementing relationships between the members. I look
forward confidently to the healthy growth and
development of this new institution under the
Chairmanship of Lord Briggs, and offer a most hearty
welcome to this new and significant element in the
fabric of the Commonwealth.

[Signature]

Elizabeth R

Message from Her Majesty The Queen

WINDSOR CASTLE

Professor Asha Kanwar,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Commonwealth of Learning.

On the occasion of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2021, I send my warm greetings to all those associated with the Commonwealth of Learning.

I was pleased to be reminded of the organisation’s dedication to promoting education and training across the Commonwealth and was interested to learn that you will be marking CHOUM 2021 with the release of a pictorial publication detailing your history.

I much appreciate your thoughtful message and, in return, send my best wishes to all concerned for the future success of your important work.

ELIZABETH R.
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Introduction

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was established in 1987 by Commonwealth Heads of Government “to create and widen access to opportunities for learning, making use of the potential offered by distance education and by the application of communication technologies to education. COL’s activities will strengthen member countries’ capacities to develop the human resources required for their economic and social development” (MOU, CHOGM 1988, amended 1995). Giving people the opportunity to learn helps accelerate progress towards achieving sustainable development and contributes to the Commonwealth values of peace, equality, democracy and good governance.

In its first decade, COL’s primary focus was on expanding and improving access to higher education using open and distance learning (ODL). COL aligned its aims with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in its second decade, when the objective was to achieve universal primary education and reduce poverty. COL did this by expanding its activities to include teacher training and informal learning opportunities for improved livelihoods. In its third decade, marked by the global commitment to sustainable development, COL advocated the use of distance learning and technologies to achieve improved outcomes, not only in education but also in skills development and lifelong learning. By evolving and expanding its work, COL has been proactive in its response to global trends and the evolving needs of its stakeholders.

In its fourth decade, marked by pandemics, natural disasters and economic uncertainties, COL continues to promote “learning for sustainable development.” Learning must lead to economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation. COL achieves this by harnessing the potential of existing and new technologies.

The theme of CHOGM 2022 is “Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating and Transforming.” As COL is the only Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation dedicated entirely to education and training, examples of how it is delivering a common future by connecting, innovating and transforming are presented in this document.

“One thing we got right was to see the Commonwealth of Learning established in Vancouver — the result of good fortune and sound Canadian government sense may have been our most successful legacy.”

Late Dr Hilary Perraton
ODL expert and member of the Briggs Committee, which developed the report to establish COL.
How COL works

“Heads of Government created COL with three ambitions: to exploit the potential of technology for improving education; to reflect trends in student enrolment; and to respond to country needs. COL remains tightly focused on these aims and will be an indispensable asset to Member States in the uncertain times ahead.”

Sir John Daniel, OC
COL President & CEO, 2004–2012

“COL is accepted and seen as a leader in ODL. It has the mandate, over 30 years of experience, a large repository of OER materials, tools and highly skilled international experts on staff and at the governance level. It has a senior management team that continually reads the contextual reality within the Commonwealth countries and regions where it works. COL has put in place processes to validate its understanding of context and priorities through regular partner meetings that bring together focal persons from across the Commonwealth along with key institutional stakeholders to share best practices and forge a vision of change. In addition, it has developed clear, results-based models for its ten core initiatives, which it tests, evaluates and improves on a regular basis. . . . By learning, adapting and striving for high-quality performance, COL remains relevant. It has demonstrated its ability to build capacity in using technology to support formal and informal educational institutions and skills development programming as well as support policy development and institutional change. These are key enablers of success in its programming and results.”

COL Meta-evaluation Report, 2021
Connecting

COL promotes co-operation and leverages its modest resources by nurturing and catalysing a network of partners in the Commonwealth and beyond.

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is a unique network where small states collaborate, share resources and build capacity for strengthening their tertiary education systems. All 32 small states are Member States and collaborated to develop skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, disaster management and fisheries. The National University of Samoa offered the VUSSC-developed diploma in Sustainable Agriculture, and the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) offered a bachelor’s degree in Business and Entrepreneurship. VUSSC has developed courses in the blue economy in partnership with the University of Seychelles.

The VUSSC course materials are non-proprietary and adaptable to specific contexts leading to credit-bearing qualifications. The VUSSC Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) helps institutions to align their courses
for recognition of credentials and mobility of students across countries or regions. These courses are available not only for formal, accredited study but also for employment and entrepreneurship programmes.

The impact has been substantial — 30 institutions in 17 countries are active partners, 84 courses have been developed and 29,434 learners and teachers reached.

Management and Public Administration Education

The Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) programme is the outcome of an initial collaboration between COL and four open universities in South Asia: Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan), Bangladesh Open University, Indira Gandhi National Open University (India) and the Open University of Sri Lanka. Established in 2002, the programme has expanded through partnerships with institutions in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. CEMBA/CEMPA was designed to help open universities in the Commonwealth meet the social and professional requirements for management and public administration education at the postgraduate level. Key features are affordable access, a flexible and distributed learning mode, flexible credit transfers across the partner institutions, and learning materials developed by highly qualified and experienced subject-matter specialists from across the Commonwealth.

Impact studies carried out during 2019–2021 have shown that the programme noticeably improves graduates’ livelihoods. In Bangladesh, graduates were able to increase their monthly income by 31 per cent. In Pakistan, CEMBA/CEMPA graduates had a 28.5 per cent better chance of making it to a managerial position and had an average increase in annual income of 32 per cent.

In the last two decades, over 35,000 students have graduated, and the CEMBA/CEMPA programme has promoted co-operation among 11 universities around the Commonwealth.
Collaboration for Youth Work

While 60 per cent of the Commonwealth’s population is aged 29 or under, many states suffer disproportionately from a lack of trained youth work practitioners to meet their distinct challenges. The Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work — a partnership of COL, the Commonwealth Secretariat and The University of the West Indies — was established to address this gap by making the learning materials of a Youth Work degree available to partner institutions as open educational resources (OER) and building their capacity to offer it in online and blended modes. Currently, 17 universities from 15 Commonwealth countries are implementation partners.

One such institution is the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), which sought COL support to increase their pool of online course developers and facilitators. As a result, 23 modules comprising the bachelor of arts in Youth and Community Development is being made available on their e-learning platform, leading to expanded access to online programmes for practising and aspiring youth workers in Namibia and surrounding countries. NAMCOL course developer Imogene Hilukiluah considers the programme’s shift to online delivery and the use of OER key because they both reduce the financial barrier that many small states face and increase accessibility for learners. She sees the advantages first-hand, noting that students do not have to travel long distances or purchase expensive textbooks to study. Student Oliver Mhuriro echoed this sentiment, acknowledging that about 80 per cent of those in his class worked full-time, so they benefited immensely from the distance education model. As a seasoned youth worker, Oliver knows the potential for youths to drive change and is emphatic about the need for the youth work sector to be professionalised. He believes doing so will “help the government alleviate or manage the social issues that youths are facing” and, by extension, foster significant economic benefits.
Connected during Closures

As countries closed borders to contain the Covid-19 virus, open collaboration became essential to support current needs and build resilience for the future. COL’s OpenDoor partnership attracted more than 60 organisations, institutions and associations across the world, becoming a vibrant platform where partners have shared over 260 courses.

In an effort to help young women and girls stay connected and motivated during the pandemic, COL launched CommonwealthWiseWomen. This mentoring programme offers unique networking opportunities to women and girls in underserved communities across the Commonwealth. By pairing mentees with successful and influential women in leadership roles for a period of six months, COL helps these women and girls map their future path. The first cohort of mentees included 82 women and girls from ten Commonwealth countries. Over 25 prominent women — from the Caribbean to Africa, Asia, Europe and the Pacific — have joined this initiative as mentors.

“COL initiated the connecting of professionals, nations and regions in a way and for purposes which excited the imagination of academics, onlookers and leaders of Commonwealth countries.”

Burchell Whiteman, OJ
Chair, COL Board of Governors, 2008–2014

“As COL grew in stature so has its vision become sharpened to accommodate the development of partnership with countries and people outside the Commonwealth family but who shared the vision and mission of the Commonwealth, expressed through COL. This was how the special relationship with UNESCO, ILO and other bodies and groups emerged to further contribute to the work of COL.”

Professor Michael Omolewa, OON
Member, COL Board of Governors, 2001–2010
Innovating

For COL, innovations are not just about technologies but also about models, methods and processes that can be scaled.

"COL’s innovative approaches to teacher development, blended learning, and institutional capacity building in ODL, OER and TEL are at the cutting edge."

COL Meta-evaluation Report, 2021

Not everyone in the Commonwealth has computers and connectivity. COL has consistently pursued a multi-track approach to technology use, helping institutions deploy appropriate technology for their context. COL developed Aptus, a low-cost offline virtual classroom that provides learners in remote locations with access to digital resources. Dubbed a Classroom without Walls, the device requires only battery power; the battery can be recharged via grid electricity or a solar charger. Aptus can be accessed by any learner with a laptop, tablet or mobile device. Initially the main emphasis was on the Pacific region, with education ministries in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu deploying it. The design and functionality of Aptus has continued to evolve based on research, field trials and deployment in many Commonwealth countries.

COL has helped government agencies and institutions in 12 countries deploy Aptus. Its deployment in Pakistan, Samoa and Tonga resulted in better motivation of teachers and improved learning outcomes for students.

In response to requests from ministries of education in the Pacific and Caribbean for support in training teachers to move online as a result of school closures, COL, in partnership with the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development, developed and offered a short online course called Using Open Educational Resources for Online Learning: An Introduction, which has
contributed to learning continuity with its contemporary learning design and emphasis on peer engagement. Ministries in Fiji and Trinidad and Tobago, who partnered with COL to offer the course, requested all teachers nationwide to enrol in the training, and 11,568 teachers participated. A video-on-demand service aligned with the curricula of Fiji, Nauru and Samoa was developed. During the pandemic, COL helped develop virtual labs so that university students could still conduct science experiments in institutions in Kenya and India.

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) have been tailored to suit the needs of developing countries, and thousands of learners have been reached through MobiMOOCs using basic mobile phones. One group in particular that has benefited from this use of mobile phones is farmers in the most remote areas of the world.

"COL worked closely with a range of humanitarian and development agencies in a variety of capacities, promoting the usefulness and validity of distance and technology-based education to reach far and wide, always keeping in focus the needs of that ‘last person in the queue.’"

**Tan Sri Raj Dhanarajan**
COL President & CEO, 1995–2004

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**Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA)**

Digital skills are a vital component in teachers’ toolkits, as the Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us. COL developed C-DELTA to support effective digital education by assessing competencies, developing learning materials around digital education skills and providing training opportunities for teachers.

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) began implementing the C-DELTA programme in Sri Lankan schools in 2018. The objective was to improve teachers’ digital education skills and prepare them to become champions in their schools. These teachers then helped
other teachers and students to learn digital education skills on the C-DELTA platform. To date, 1,918 teachers and students, from 86 schools and colleges, are registered in C-DELTA. In addition, several departments at OUSL have also adopted C-DELTA as a non-credit course. About 38 per cent of the participants have successfully completed the course.

In South Africa, C-DELTA has been implemented through COL’s partner SchoolNet South Africa since 2019. By 2021, 4,798 students and teachers had registered on the platform, with a completion rate of 43 per cent. The South African Council for Educators accredited C-DELTA as equivalent to 35 Continuous Personal and Professional Teacher Development points.

Open Schooling Model in Six Countries

COL frequently works with schools as part of its national-level engagement. It has provided support for ministries to pilot its Open and Innovative Schooling (OIS) model in six countries: Belize, Malawi, Mozambique, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu and Zambia, where the model is being piloted in 95 schools or adult education centres. The National Institute of Education, Mozambique, recently reported that “between 2018 and 2020, 15,675 learners were supported through the OIS model, with 6,895 learners passing one or more subjects.”
Flexible and Blended Approach to Technical and Vocational Skills Development

COL’s Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD) initiative has had wide reach and impact, especially in Africa, where over 100 technical and vocational skills and training (TVET) institutions have been supported to build their capability in flexible and blended learning. COL’s approach to promoting the inclusion of learners in the informal sector has been holistic. Its impact has been felt in institutional policy, technology infrastructures and learning and teaching practices.

People working in the informal economy face many barriers to skills training. Thanks to its collaboration with COL, Yaba College of Technology has created a new Centre for Flexible Skills Development to support the integration of flexible approaches to programme delivery for both formal on-campus courses for students and non-formal courses for the local community. Twenty-six new non-formal courses aimed at increasing sustainable livelihoods are being made available as OER for sharing with other institutions. Tapping into informal apprenticeships, the centre creates new employment pathways for young Nigerians. In one project, the focus is on upskilling technicians for computer and mobile phone repair and maintenance, with a view to helping them get formal recognition for their skills. The centre contributes to building learners’ hard and soft skills to make them more relevant to local labour markets.

Another organisation to undergo substantial change with COL’s support is Koforidua Polytechnic in Ghana. The polytechnic established an Institute of Open and Distance Learning to support flexible skills development in campus-based programmes. This includes new radio lessons and the installation of the Moodle learning management system to provide e-learning opportunities. Over 4,100 students have benefited from distance and blended learning. The institute also provides new courses for the informal sector.

Knowledge sharing among colleagues, including cascade training, has been a key element of COL’s strategy. The Africa Community Learning Network, formed with COL’s help, has more than 2,000 members. COL partner institutions in five countries went a step further in 2019, creating the African Foundation for Quality e-Learning for TVET. This professional association aims to “build a community of practitioners striving to increase access to quality TVET programmes at low cost to all through open, distance and e-learning.”

“Most significantly, in my personal view, COL has developed a set of measures to estimate the value of vocational and work-based education interventions, including its impact on social, personal, economic and community wellbeing.”

Dr Linda Sissons, CNZM
COL Board of Governors Member: 2011–2012; Chair: 2014–2020
Transforming

Today, it is not enough to provide access to education and training — we must also create opportunities for livelihoods that can transform individuals and societies.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers

A substantial portion of the population in developing Commonwealth countries depends on agriculture for food and livelihood security. However, the agricultural sectors in most of these countries have continued to record a steady decline. One of the major reasons is inadequate human resource development.

COL believes that capacity building can only help improve farmers’ livelihoods when it is linked to social capital in the form of mobilised farmer groups and financial capital in the form of credit. The Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programme has applied this approach in a wide variety of contexts since 2006. L3F is a holistic model that emphasises continuous learning among farmers using information and communication technologies (ICT), horizontal and vertical learning, and networking with stakeholders. COL’s ability to broker partnerships is a key strength: the L3F model links stakeholders with microfinance, agricultural extension workers and agricultural supply chains. Stakeholders invest their incomes in children’s education, better food and improved housing, as well as increasing their assets and diversifying their income-generating activities, which multiplies development impact.

More than 600,000 L3F participants, mainly women, are learning through mobile phones. Courses over mobile phones have strengthened their savings, credit management and enterprise activities. One of the key success points has been that the mobile technology and educational messaging uses local languages and reaches large numbers of people, many of whom are illiterate or semi-literate.

A study by India’s National Institute of Bank Management showed that L3F yielded a return of INR 9.00 to the community for every INR 1.00 spent on facilitating and implementing the initiative.
Kenyan youth becomes community mobiliser

With just a primary-level education, Pius Oduor Ongaro had struggled to support his family of five. A welcome break for this 32-year-old came through an initiative facilitated by COL in his native Siaya County, Kenya. By joining a seed savings and credit co-operative organisation (SACCO), Pius received training in financial literacy and was able not only to improve his livelihood but also to set up a self-help group in his village to promote poultry and other agricultural enterprises. The group now has 40 members, the majority of them women, and some are living with disabilities. Group members are working together to breed chickens and grow vegetables to sell to hotels and restaurants and were able to keep the business running during Covid-19. “With COL’s support, Pius has become a community mobiliser and role model to other youth,” said Evans Martine Owiye, a business officer who facilitates financial literacy. “We greatly admire his commitment to involving all generations in learning and enterprise development.”

L3F women in India launch the Theni Producers Company

A community of women goat herders in Theni District in the state of Tamil Nadu, India, launched their own company in 2015 after receiving training in goat farming and business management through L3F. Using mobile phones, community members received voicemail messages with information to help them achieve higher productivity in goat rearing through better breed selection, health management and animal care. With the support of Vidiyal, a non-governmental organisation, and India’s National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, the Theni District Farmers Goat Producer Company Limited was registered. The company operates with funds raised from members’ shares and is run by a board comprising ten directors (nine women and one man). In the year 2020–21, the annual turnover of the company was INR 4,021,432 (about USD 60,000). The company also created its own assets, such as a seed processing unit (worth about USD 130,000), with a grant provided by the State Farmers Agri-Business Consortium. For the last five years, the company has paid dividends to its shareholders totalling about USD 8,000.
Transforming the Lives of Underprivileged Girls

GIRLS Inspire is a COL project, initially funded by the governments of Canada and Australia, to provide schooling and skills development through ODL to some of the world’s most vulnerable and hard-to-reach girls. The project aims to end the cycle of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and to address the barriers that prevent women’s and girls’ economic participation, such as early marriage, cultural norms, distance from schools, or environmental factors such as monsoons. Community organisations in Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan and Tanzania are mobilised to leverage the power of ODL to end CEFM and address other barriers that prevent women’s and girls’ economic participation. GIRLS Inspire adopts a holistic approach to empower women and girls by creating awareness about their human rights while also providing skills training. This project is also being implemented in Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Sri Lanka and has reached over 106,000 women and girls.

Empowered woman becomes community role model

Until Rumeisha became involved with COL, she rarely left the house. This young woman from a village in Sri Lanka was raised in a traditional culture and would manage her day-to-day life with the minimal income brought in by her husband. A crucial break came after she met with a representative from the Women’s Development Centre, COL’s partner in Sri Lanka. Rumeisha was invited to participate in a training programme aimed at developing women’s livelihood and business skills. She became a sewing instructor for the Industrial Development Board in her village. Rumeisha is proud that she was able to “find herself.” Despite pandemic-induced disruptions and being pregnant with her second child, she started a sewing class for women from her community. Rumeisha’s students are selling quality garments locally.
Pakistani woman breaks down disability barriers

Madhia is a 25-year-old from Pakistan who comes from an underprivileged family and has a physical disability caused by polio. She has always wanted to gain an education, but her father, a daily wage labourer, could not support her dreams. Through a friend, Madhia learned about life-changing opportunities offered by COL’s GIRLS Inspire. Madhia successfully completed courses in dressmaking and basic life skills. She has opened a dressmaking centre in her home, and the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child has facilitated her gaining a loan to support her business venture.

Skilling and Re-Skilling for Workforce Recovery

The COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative was offered in collaboration with ministries across the Commonwealth. Through the programme, over 150,000 Commonwealth citizens gained free access to 5,000 courses taught by reputable professors and mentors from top universities and companies around the world. Many of them had lost their jobs because of the pandemic and subsequently found new jobs thanks to the courses. In Guyana, online course enrolments involved 10 per cent of the country’s population in the 15–35 age group, and the credentials earned are recognised for employment purposes.

Johnstone Muruka (Kenya) is an environmentalist and entrepreneur who has taken 18 online courses since joining the COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative. The skills and knowledge he has gained have helped him develop his own environmental business to make cleaner living spaces by converting everyday waste into sustainable fuel, as recommended in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. Johnstone was nominated for an award for youth-led business initiatives that mitigate the consequences of Covid-19.
Transformation from BOCODOL to BOU

The trajectory followed by Botswana Open University (BOU) and its predecessor, the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL), over the last two decades demonstrates the value of long-term, multifaceted relationships — the type of relationship, in fact, that has been a defining characteristic of COL’s work.

Once BOCODOL formally embarked on the journey to becoming an open university, COL stepped in to help. Between 2015 and 2017, COL provided BOCODOL with consistent support to plan the transformation, with technical advice ranging from structures and systems to culture. BOU currently has 7,000 active students and saw its first graduation of nearly 2,400 in November 2021. It has five campuses — in Gaborone, Francistown, Palapye, Maun and Kang — each providing learner support.

Following BOU’s inauguration, several of its degree programmes had their genesis in work carried out in partnership with COL. The certificate in Disaster Management and the bachelor’s in Business and Entrepreneurship, both developed with COL’s support, continue to be popular programmes. An evaluation study confirmed that the introduction of OER had reduced the cost of study materials by more than 50 per cent. The Special and Inclusive degree programme, offered for the first time by distance, was also developed with COL’s help. This support made special education OER content available and strengthened capacity among teacher education staff to design, develop and facilitate special education courses online.

With COL’s support, BOU developed a Strategy for Technology-Enhanced Learning. Dr Tau, Vice Chancellor, said that “through the implementation of that policy, we were able to very easily introduce online education blended learning.” This was timely, because it enabled BOU to keep its programmes alive throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. “COL is a very responsive partner,” said Dr Tau. “They are interested in advancing the frontiers of ODL, not just in the Commonwealth but globally too.”

“More than material contributions, associational pride, prestige, and learning are significant contributions to all institutions engaged with COL.”

Professor V.S. Prasad, COL Fellow, India.
Delivering a Common Future

When COL was formally inaugurated in 1988, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II offered “a most 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.” Thirty-five years later, COL has fulfilled that expectation by making a difference in the lives and livelihoods of millions of men and women around Her Majesty The Queen’s beloved and diverse Commonwealth. As a leader in open, distance and online learning, COL is recognised for its focus on relevance, responsiveness and results.

“COL was indeed an act of foresight and a visionary concept. ... To be a year ahead of one’s time is one thing; to be 35 years ahead is something else.”

Professor Ian Macdonald, OC
Chair, COL Board of Governors, 1994–2003

The pandemic forced the global community to embrace distance learning and online delivery. Historically, ODL was adopted to address issues of access, using a range of technologies, including print, radio and TV. Countries that already had ODL systems in place were better able to respond to institutional closures by providing existing distance learning materials and systematic learning support. COL’s experience shows that ODL and other technologies can be leveraged to increase access to quality education, skills development and

“COL has a strong portfolio and reputation for delivering high-quality technical support and leadership in ODL, OER and TEL across the Commonwealth. Its innovative approaches to teacher development, blended learning, and institutional capacity building in ODL, OER and TEL are at the cutting edge of educational innovation across the globe. COL’s repository of OER, education and gender manuals and tools, along with innovative technologies for helping institutions transform their practice and pedagogy and expand the opportunity that the digital educational age provides, is impressive.”

COL Meta-evaluation Report, 2021
lifelong learning at lower costs. Even post-pandemic, where resources may be limited, the demand for distance and technology-enabled learning will continue. COL will provide support for developing enabling ODL policies, stronger systems and enhanced human resource capacity for formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Distance learning has always been a “disruptive innovation” that can be harnessed to provide lifelong learning for all. The role of COL as an intergovernmental organisation established to promote distance education and technologies has become more important than ever before, and it will continue to invest in innovations to leave no one behind.

“‘Learning for Sustainable Development’ is one of the higher purposes toward which the Commonwealth can reach. As the world itself strives toward what the UN Secretary General in his Mandela Lecture describes as ‘a new social contract,’ ‘a new global deal,’ COL’s mandate and vision are ever more important. I have elsewhere described the Commonwealth of Learning as ‘a jewel in the crown of the Commonwealth.’ We need to keep it ever exceptional.”

Sir Shridath Ramphal, GCMG, AC, ONZ, OE, OCC, QC
Secretary General Commonwealth, 1975–1990