LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT is the theme of the Commonwealth of Learning’s Three-Year Plan for 2012-2015. Through this plan, COL is committed to realising its vision – namely, that of seeing the achievement of human development goals through universal access to learning.

COL helps governments expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate technologies, particularly those that support open and distance learning. It assists governmental, non-governmental and community partners in developing policy, building capacity, refining models, creating materials and nurturing collaborative networks.
As a small and specialised intergovernmental agency, COL emphasises partnerships in all its activities, collaborating with other Commonwealth bodies and multilateral organisations and NGOs, as well as Commonwealth Governments, fostering communities of practice and nurturing regional bodies.

COL’s two programme sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health, embrace seven initiatives that will help governments pursue the twin goals of expanding access to learning and using public funds cost-effectively. eLearning and Gender are COL’s two cross-cutting themes that underpin and complement all seven initiatives. COL’s programme is also supported by knowledge management and communications services.

A region comprised largely of small island states, the Commonwealth South Pacific faces distinct challenges. Most countries have limited resources to sustain a large education and training infrastructure. While the University of the South Pacific reaches a wide range of learners through open and distance learning (ODL), there remains a pressing need to increase economic productivity and literacy levels throughout the region. Through partnerships with institutions in the region, COL is applying its expertise in open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communication technology (ICT) to help address needs in the Pacific.

www.col.org/3yp
EDUCATION

OPEN SCHOOLING: Secondary school places are grossly insufficient to absorb the surge of pupils now completing primary schooling, thanks to progress made in achieving universal primary education. Open schooling is increasingly recognised as a viable solution to the growing demand for equitable access to secondary education, especially for girls and marginalised groups, particularly in remote locations. Governments are seeking to redefine the way that secondary education addresses societal needs, by diversifying the curriculum. This means making available technical and vocational programmes alongside academic offerings – something that open schools are well placed to do.

Throughout the Commonwealth, COL is working with 26 countries to expand open schooling and thereby increase learning opportunities for secondary education, particularly for girls, out-of-school youth and people in remote regions. The initiative has also provided training and produced several studies, action plans and resources, including a Quality Assurance Toolkit for Open Schools and case studies, entitled Open Schooling with Open Educational Resources: Opening doors, creating opportunities, for administrators and policy makers.

With COL’s assistance, open schools have been established in several Commonwealth countries including, in the Pacific, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tonga and, most recently, Vanuatu.

Institutions in four Pacific countries (Australia, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) are members of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA), a consortium of open schools working to expand access to quality education through open schools. COL led the establishment of COMOSA and provides ongoing support.

As part of a World Bank contract, COL’s Education Specialist for Open Schooling provided technical support on ODL and open schooling to Papua New Guinea’s Department of Education’s Flexible Open and Distance Learning programme (FODE) in support of the World Bank initiative to develop curriculum content and enhance their policies and services.
Open schools in the Pacific have access to quality learning materials through COL’s Open Educational Resources (OER) for Open Schools initiative. Master Teachers in six developing Commonwealth countries developed 20 new secondary-level courses that can be freely downloaded, adapted and re-used as OER.

www.col.org/OpenSchooling

TEACHER EDUCATION: Achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015 requires well-trained teachers of good quality. Governments want to increase teacher supply and improve teacher quality; and COL has a good record of helping them do this. COL's Teacher Education initiative is focusing on school-based, in-service training models during this three-year period.

COL's Quality Assurance Toolkit for Teacher Education is freely available on COL's website – and COL continues to support institutions wishing to adapt this toolkit for use in their institutions.

Online and print-based materials have been developed for the professional development of multi-grade teachers in Samoa and Solomon Islands. COL is also helping Solomon Islands National University (SINU) plan for integration of ODL and train staff in instructional design.

www.col.org/TeacherEducation

HIGHER EDUCATION: COL continues to support policy makers, institutions and leaders in higher education to harness the potential of ODL and technology and so enable them to cope with the combination of increasing demand for higher education, rising costs, diminishing public funding and the need to maintain high quality levels.

COL is working to improve access to quality higher education in the Pacific by working closely with the University of the South Pacific (USP), the primary provider of off-campus tertiary education in the region. USP offers COL's Graduate Diploma in Legislative Drafting, which builds capacity in planning and writing laws and policies.

The COL Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM) for effective institutional quality audits is freely available to all institutions and provides a cost-effective approach to quality assurance.

www.col.org/HigherEducation
VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH: Nine Pacific countries (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) are members of a collaborative network of over 30 small states that are part of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). VUSSC was initiated by COL and is now led by an independent Management Committee, with support from COL. Hundreds of educators from the Pacific have taken part in VUSSC boot camps and online courses.

Fourteen courses and programmes are now being delivered by nine institutions in eight Commonwealth small states. In 2013, the first group of VUSSC students graduated with a Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture from the National University of Samoa.

Primarily through online collaboration, VUSSC countries have chosen to focus on creating postsecondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, professional development, disaster management, the fisheries industry, port management, construction safety and agriculture. These non-proprietary, digital course materials (OER), which can readily be adapted to the specific context of each country, are used in offering credit-bearing qualifications in post-secondary institutions, strengthening their capacity and outreach. The programmes developed under VUSSC include a Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture for Small States, a Bachelor’s Degree in Business and Entrepreneurship and a Master’s in Educational Leadership.

VUSSC has also developed a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) to show how qualifications from one region translate to those in another and it has now been mapped against national and regional frameworks including those in use in the Pacific.

www.vussc.info

LIVELIHOODS AND HEALTH

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: COL has demonstrated that using ODL and learning technologies can increase access to quality technical and vocational skills development equitably. The role of TVSD in creating a skilled
workforce of lifelong learners for the informal and formal economies is constantly challenged by urban-rural and gender divides that exclude large numbers of learners from skills training systems. COL is working with institutional partners and governments to create contextualised, high-quality models for using educational media and technology in TVSD.

COL facilitated the establishment of the Pacific Association for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PATVET) and continues to work with PATVET members to increase access to skills training in the Pacific through distance and flexible approaches.

COL's technical and vocational skills development (TVSD) partners in the Pacific have been busy since the Pacific technical/vocational education and training (TVET) Forum held in Tonga in 2013 and the second planning workshop held in Fiji in May 2014. New flexible approaches to skills training are being explored and planned in all nine Commonwealth Pacific island countries.

With support from COL, a development plan and two pilot courses are being planned to test the use of technology to reach more young people in Kiribati's Outer Islands.

The newly created Flexible and Open Learning Branch of the TVET wing of the Department of Education in Papua New Guinea brought together participants from six TVET institutions to work with facilitators from Australia's Central Gippsland Institute of Technical and Further Education (GippsTAFE). They are building capacity to establish flexible programme offerings to increase access to skills training in the Port Moresby area. Three institutions are now developing pilot courses.

In Samoa, training for community development life-skills coaches is high on the agenda. Matuaileoo Environment Trust Inc. (METI), a charitable trust, has partnered with COL to help build their capacity in training life-skills coaches, especially through preparing self-instructional training materials.

In Vanuatu, COL is supporting the development of a flexible programme in skills training and income generation for girls living in rural areas.

www.col.org/TVSD
**LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS:** The L3F approach strengthens livelihoods and empowers the poorer sections of rural societies by linking social capital and financial capital with human capital. So far, COL has promoted networking and capacity development in livestock, horticulture and agriculture, leading to higher incomes. It continues to facilitate self-replication and scaling-up so that L3F can reach marginalised communities in many more countries. Under the L3F model, COL is a catalyst in bringing together governments, institutions, civil society, financial institutions and the private sector to build the capacity of the communities through gender-sensitive ODL.

Launched in India in 2003, L3F is now established in other countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and in the Pacific, beginning in Papua New Guinea. COL is working with Kairak Vudal Resource Training Centre and Ginigoada Foundation in PNG to build capacities for strengthening L3F activities in the region.

Recent studies conducted in Asia and Africa have confirmed the effectiveness of COL's L3F initiative and the impressive social and financial rates of return for both participants and partners such as financial institutions.

www.col.org/L3Farmers

**HEALTHY COMMUNITIES:** Communities across the Pacific have urgent needs in community health and development, which conventional top-down approaches to education generally fail to meet. COL's Healthy Communities initiative addresses the gap. By emphasising collaboration, participation and blended and multichannel approaches, the community learning programme model enables better individual and collective responses to local issues – from girls’ and
women’s sexual and reproductive health to diabetes to suicide and mental health. Healthy Communities pays special attention to issues faced by women and youth in resource-poor areas.

COL’s Healthy Communities initiative is working with individuals and groups in the Pacific to build capacities among local communication and development groups using both face-to-face and distance training and mentoring methods. COL builds local capabilities to plan, design and deliver community-based learning and social behaviour change programmes using a participatory and collaborative approach. Community partners assist with research and facilitate active participation by target audiences in design and delivery. Local experts provide subject information and lend credibility. Community leaders and policymakers link local programmes to national priorities, in terms of both inputs and feedback. Media technologies help enable scale, creative approaches and dialogue, e.g. through the use of radio, mobiles, and social media.

Established community learning programmes (CLP) in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands have been joined by representatives of government, civil society and the private sector in blended training and mentoring processes jointly developed and offered by COL in association with Healthy Communities partners around the Commonwealth.

Communication for Development (C4D): Why, How, Now. and Research for Planning, the first two courses in the CLP Developer’s Certificate, inaugurated the certificate in 2013-2014.

COL also provides technical advice to Commonwealth governments, institutions and organisation concerning the use of information and communication media to support learning for development.

www.col.org/HealthyCommunities
CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

**GENDER:** COL recognises that the advancement of the goals of gender equality and women’s empowerment is central to its agenda of learning for development. As a cross-cutting corporate goal, gender equality requires that both women’s and men’s views, interests and needs shape its programmes. ODL can be especially helpful in enabling women and girls to access educational opportunities while also fulfilling other responsibilities. COL has a Gender Policy and a Gender Action Plan – and a Gender Microsite provides links to resources and research on gender and ODL and ICT.

COL gender mainstreaming training as a part of a VUSSC workshop held in Samoa this year.

[www.col.org/Gender](http://www.col.org/Gender)
[www.col.org/GenderMS](http://www.col.org/GenderMS)

**LEARNING:** COL continues to raise levels of digital literacy and expertise in partner organisations, as well as the ICT competencies of teachers, and facilitates the creation of high-quality learning materials made available as open educational resources (OER). COL is also continuing its partnership with UNESCO for the global advocacy of OER and the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds.

COL's Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration (CCTI) uses ODL to train teachers in how to integrate ICT into school management, teaching and learning. An Instructional Design tool developed by COL is being used in developing countries to create quality courses and learning materials that use best practices in eLearning.

[www.col.org/eLearning](http://www.col.org/eLearning)

REGIONAL PRESENCE

COL maintains strong relationships with many stakeholders in the Pacific, including member governments, partner institutions, donors and individuals. Three of COL's Honorary Advisors and Honorary Chairs are from the Pacific.

In 2014, in partnership with the University of the South Pacific, COL established the Pacific Centre for Flexible & Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD), a “network of networks” to facilitate flexible and open learning for sustainable development in the Pacific through advocacy, communication, innovation and research.

Also in 2014, COL's President was invited to deliver a keynote presentation at the annual meeting of Pacific Island Ministers of Education, hosted by the Government of the Cook Islands, under the aegis of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. In their reflections on the President’s keynote address Ministers agreed on the importance of ICT for supporting actions towards improved access, quality and inclusion in education across the region. Ministers shared their country experiences and visions, and objectives in terms of ICT in education not as an outcome, but as a tool to support education development. Ministers also called on regional and international organisations to explore opportunities related to ICT in education such as virtual universities and OER.
In addition to membership on COL’s Board of Governors, the Pacific region is also represented by a network of individuals, selected by member Governments, who liaise directly with COL as Focal Points. In-depth meetings of Focal Points take place once every three years in all four regions of the Commonwealth. These meetings provide an opportunity for Focal Points to share information about the status of ODL in their countries, receive a report on what COL has done in their country and identify education and training priorities COL can support in COL’s next Three-Year Plan. COL creates specific country action plans and country reports to ensure the region’s needs are addressed.

**eLEARNING FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

UN and international agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, ILO, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth Secretariat, The World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank are using COL’s eLearning for International Organisations programme to provide customised communications, programme and data management skills training for their headquarters staff and field-based workers located throughout the world.

[www.col.org/COLeLIO](http://www.col.org/COLeLIO)

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**PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING:**

COL’s Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning is co-hosted with partners in different regions of the Commonwealth every three years. The programme is designed to explore applications of open and distance learning in widening educational access, bridging the digital and information divide and advancing the social and economic development of communities and nations at large. The Forum’s focus is on topics relating to developing countries and participation of practitioners from these countries.

Officials from nearly all of the Commonwealth countries and others, including many subsidised delegates, explore how open and distance learning can help achieve international development goals and education for all. COL’s Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF7) was held in Abuja, Nigeria in December 2013, co-hosted by the Federal Ministry of Education. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was the lead partner institution. The Forum addressed “Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation” through five themes: “Girls’ and Women’s Education”, “Skills Development”, “Promoting Open Educational Resources”, “Innovation and Technology” and “Institutional Development”.

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COL’s Excellence in Distance Education Awards are also presented at the Forum. Several people and institutions from the Pacific are among the past award winners. In 2013, in Abuja, COL awarded eight distinguished individuals with the designation, Honorary Fellow of COL. Four of the eight are from Pacific countries. A Pacific institution, The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (TOPNZ), also won an award for distance education materials.

www.col.org/pcf
www.col.org/edea

TECHNOLOGY, KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA:

As a leader in the fast-evolving field of knowledge management, COL continues to develop its internal systems to organise information from its own work and to support partners. COL also maintains an Information Resource Centre and collects ODL news, policies, resources and statistics from large variety of sources. It is also developing directories of open educational resources (DOER), researching the use of OER and mobile devices in education and conducting MOOCs (massive open online courses). In 2013, COL partnered with the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT Kanpur) offering a six-week MOOC on Mobiles for Development. The course attracted 2,255 registrants from 115 countries.

www.col.org/KnowledgeServices

Aptus is COL’s prototype “Classroom Without Walls” system that it is currently testing with a number of partners. Combining low-cost technology and OER, the system facilitates content sharing and learning interaction through WiFi, without requiring internet connections.

www.col.org/Aptus
COL is a firm advocate of creative commons (CC) content licenses through OER and OpenAccess. OER repositories and directory services that COL offers to partners and the public are being enhanced to take advantage of the latest technologies and tagging methods.

www.col.org/oer
http://doer.col.org

COL employs a variety of media to communicate with and provide resources for stakeholders and the wider public. COL’s website, newsletters (Connections/EdTech News and EduComm Asia), journal (Journal of Learning for Development), blog and electronic resources are among the world’s foremost sources of knowledge on ODL. Most of COL’s recent publications are available on CD-ROM; all are available on the COL website.

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