



BOARD OF GOVERNORS President's Quarterly Progress Report: October - December 2017

1. Board Matters

At the 39th meeting of the Audit Committee, held on November 22, 2017, the audited financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2017 were approved. Like previous years, an unmodified auditor's report was received and the statements are available [here](#) on the COL website. The next meeting of the Audit Committee, to be held by teleconference, is planned for February 28, 2018.

The 42nd meeting of the Executive Committee was held via teleconference on November 23, 2017 where the fundraising strategy was finalised, a communications roadmap discussed and the risk management matrix reviewed.

I extend a warm welcome to Mr Steve Hillier, representing UK on the COL Board and place on record our gratitude to Mr. Rob Whitby, his predecessor, for his valuable contributions. I had occasion to meet two Board members—Mr Hillier, UK and Mr K.K. Sharma, India.

2. General

The end of 2017 marks thirty years of COL's service to the Commonwealth. It is a time for reflection and renewal. The mid-term evaluation of the Strategic Plan currently under way will provide insights into what needs to change and what needs to continue as we strive to exceed the targets set for 2021.

COL has much to celebrate for the past three decades. It has strengthened its reputation as a reliable and trusted partner which delivers results. It has remained relevant by reinventing itself to respond to the needs of Member States. Even though the number of contributing countries has doubled and revenues increased substantially, the organisation has remained lean and nimble to ensure that its resources are used to achieve developmental impact. COL has been very fortunate to have outstanding staff, dedicated partners and committed stakeholders in the Commonwealth and beyond.

The previous year has witnessed declining budgets for education in various organisations and this presents an opportunity for COL to assume a larger role in serving the educational needs of the Commonwealth. As an acknowledged thought-leader in

learning for sustainable development with strong networks around the globe, COL is well-positioned to expand its remit as it enters its fourth decade.

2.1 President's Activities

The Induction Programme for London-based diplomats organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec) and the Commonwealth Foundation in London in early October attracted representatives from fifteen countries. Diplomats appreciated my presentations on 'Promoting Learning for Development' and 'Assistance to Member States' which focused on concrete results in their countries. While in London I had meetings with the High Commissioners of Antigua & Barbuda, Fiji and New Zealand and the Acting High Commissioners of Nigeria and Tonga. I also met senior officials from Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom to discuss COL's work and its potential role in the Commonwealth Summit (CHOGM) to be held in London in April 2018.

The Ghanaian High Commissioner to Canada visited COL and has requested support in agriculture and skills development. A delegation from Chongqing Radio and TV University, China visited COL and has expressed an interest in translating COL publications into Chinese. The Open University of China has also sought our permission to translate several COL publications. COL resources are crossing borders and boundaries to reach newer constituencies.

Our partners from a US-based NGO 'Women Deliver' invited us to the launch of a major conference that they will organise in June 2019 with support from the Government of Canada. The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau and his spouse Sophie Grégoire-Trudeau presided over the event that was attended by various dignitaries including the Premier of British Columbia. I had a brief informal conversation with Ms Grégoire-Trudeau, a passionate advocate for women's equality, and have invited her to visit our field sites where the projects for skilling girls are being implemented.

During this quarter, I met Ministers of Education from India and Sri Lanka, the Honourable Prakash Javadekar and the Honourable Akila Viraj Kariyawasam, to brief them about COL's work in the respective countries. While in Sri Lanka, I chaired the annual Advisory Council meeting of CEMCA which was hosted by the Ministry of Education and the Open University of Sri Lanka.

At the ICDE World Conference held in Toronto, which attracted over 1300 participants from 95 countries, I presented an opening plenary address on 'Expanding Access, Openness, Flexibility'. I was also invited to deliver a keynote at an international conference organised by Guwahati University, India. I accepted an invitation from our partner the Arab League Educational Cultural Scientific Organization (ALESCO) to give a keynote at the 6th International Conference of ICT and Accessibility held in Muscat, Oman. During that conference, I participated in a UNESCO panel on 'Open Solutions for All Learners' (all presentations are available [here](#) on the COL website).

You will be pleased to note that a new institution has joined the thirty open universities in the Commonwealth. The Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning made a smooth transition to become the Open University of Botswana on 1st December 2017. COL supported the process by providing expert advice on strategic planning and systems development.

All these events and activities have contributed significantly to raising COL's profile. The 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Fiji and the Commonwealth Summit in the UK will provide further opportunities in the new year.

3. Programme

This quarter was a period of introspection and analysis within COL and with our partners. Reflections on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are being synthesised and will be presented in the mid-term evaluation. New partnerships in countries such as Kiribati, Namibia and Zambia resulted in the replication and scaling-up of activities.

3.1 Education Sector

3.1.1 Open/Innovative Schooling (OIS)

The OIS Model is now fully operational in Belize and the process to develop learning resources has commenced. Officials from Mozambique and Zambia will study the open schooling models in Namibia and Botswana, a good example of Commonwealth cooperation. Mozambique is also developing eLearning resources for seven secondary school subjects.

The Commonwealth Open Schools Association website, which provides a platform for a Community of Practice in open schooling, has been updated and has registered an increase in both membership and activity.

COL has facilitated partnerships in the Pacific region. The Ministry of Education, Vanuatu has identified two officials for a study visit to the Australasian Association of Distance Education Schools in Australia and New Zealand. COL is supporting the Ministry to finalise its policy on Open and Distance Education and to build the capacity of curriculum developers.

3.1.2 Teacher Education

In collaboration with the Kiribati Teachers College and Ministry of Education, COL is training senior secondary teachers in innovative school-based teacher development.

National Teachers' Institute, Nigeria has completed four modules of the Green Teacher course. Freetown Teachers' College conducted a baseline survey in 13 schools in Sierra Leone which revealed, that despite lack of infrastructure, most teachers showed

readiness for eLearning. A workshop to prepare stakeholders for implementing school-based teacher development was held.

In the Caribbean, the piloting and standardisation of the diagnostic tools for Special Needs Education was completed and an interim analysis affirmed that the tools were effective.

3.1.3 Higher Education

Representatives from the Council of Higher Education and more than 15 institutions in Lesotho are working on strengthening institutional Quality Assurance (QA) systems with COL support. An internal QA audit of the Open University of Mauritius was conducted and an institutional QA policy and implementation plan developed. A review of the Tertiary Education Act in Seychelles was completed and is being placed before the government for approval. Project design workshops were conducted in Namibia and Zambia to increase access to higher education through the introduction of open and distance learning (ODL).

Fifteen COL-sponsored students from six Pacific countries completed our Legislative Drafting programme offered by the University of the South Pacific.

Our Education Specialist: Higher Education made a presentation on the role of blended learning at a conference organised by the Association of Commonwealth Universities in South Africa.

3.1.4 Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

The National University of Lesotho is now offering distance education programmes through COL support. These include diplomas in Communications Studies and Business Management and a Bachelor of Arts in Business and Entrepreneurship.

The Bachelor's degree course on Youth in Development Work has been uploaded to an eLearning platform. This course was developed by the University of the West Indies, in collaboration with ComSec and COL.

3.1.5 GIRLS Inspire

The training of women and girls continues to deliver satisfying results. In Bangladesh, the Centre for Mass Education in Science trained 1200 women and girls in vocational skills and organised awareness-raising sessions on social rights, health and the adverse consequences of child, early and forced marriage. Aptus was used to deliver the training.

Bedari, our partner in Pakistan, hosted a dialogue between parliamentarians and civil society organisations to advocate against the proposed amendment to the Child Marriage Restraint Act which lowers the age of marriage from 16 to 13 years old. Bedari also undertook intensive community advocacy to garner support for women and girls' education

and to call for an end to child marriage. Another partner in Pakistan, the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, trained 525 women and girls in life skills and vocational skills. Of these, 74 women and girls have been placed in internships, including with the Government of Punjab. The baseline-endline study for *Reaching the Unreached* project in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan has been completed and contains valuable data and human interest stories.

In Mozambique, our partner Ajuda de Desenvolvimento de Povo para Povo hosted the visit of the Canadian Deputy Minister for International Development who interacted directly with the women and girls in Nacala Porto. The Institute of Adult Education, Tanzania has registered over 1000 women and girls for training under this project.

Kavya, an illustrated storybook inspired by real stories of child marriage collected by COL's partner, Mann Deshi in India, has now been translated into Portuguese and Swahili. Two University of British Columbia interns researched legal and social rights in Bangladesh and India and their work will form the basis of a game aimed to support women and girls' life skills training.

3.2 Skills Sector

3.2.1 Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

Workshops on Open Educational Resources (OER) and Monitoring and Evaluation were conducted with Dhaka Ahsania Mission in Bangladesh and the State Resource Centre, Kerala (SRCK) in India. Learners have completed the SRCK Certificate in Community Development offered with COL support.

Over 140 participants from Africa and the Pacific completed the Flexible Skills Development online course. In the Caribbean, another 35 participants from five countries completed the Facilitating Online course.

A specialised Moodle Administration training for the Caribbean Vocational Qualification Assessor Training programme was held in which ten people from three countries participated. A Life Skills online course was developed and delivered with the Youth Training and Employment Partnership programme in Trinidad & Tobago.

TVET partners' meetings were held in Nigeria and Zambia to develop Open Distance and Flexible Learning Guidelines and a national eLearning strategy.

3.2.2 Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)

L3F now has a presence in 12 countries, with Zambia as the most recent partner where the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries has initiated preliminary activities. In Ghana, Garu Presbyterian Agriculture Station launched the L3F programme targeting 4000 participants from five districts. The Kenya National Farmers Federation, a national farmers'

apex organisation with a membership base of 2.1 million farm families, has sought COL's support in adopting L3F. Matumaini Mapya in Tanzania operationalised the use of a mobile learning platform to reach at least 5000 farmers. The Kagera regional government will use the platform to enable many more people to access learning, in addition to the L3F participants. Uganda Christian University and World Vision Uganda have institutionalised the L3F model and are using this mobile learning platform now popularly known as *m-omulimisa*.

In Antigua & Barbuda, capacity building in the use of ICTs and ODL in farmer extension was held for staff from the ministries of Agriculture and Social Transformation.

The Tonga Business Enterprise Centre's financial literacy course, developed with COL support, is reaching 202 learners in its print-based format, while the mobile-based course is being delivered to another 100 participants via text messages, through the active support of mobile service providers.

In India, our partner VIDIYAL collaborated with the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research to strengthen the capacity of the farmers' producer organisations in developing viable agri-business models and market linkages.

3.2.3 Technology-Enabled Learning (TeL)

COL's online course on OER attracted more than 15,000 participants from 144 countries, 68% being female.

A three-day workshop on integrating OER into courses was held at the University of the South Pacific. As a result, 30 teachers are receiving funding from the university to develop OER courses. As a follow-up to the Technology-Enabled Learning policy developed by the National University of Samoa, a capacity building workshop on blended learning was organised.

In India, course writers of Odisha State Open University were trained in multimedia and animation

3.2.4 OER for Skills Development

Based on a request from Cameroon, a project for Nursing and Paramedical Professionals was initiated.

In India, three partner organisations—a women's federation, a farmers' association and a tertiary institution—developed a web platform for sharing content developed in Tamil as OER. So far 150 OER-based learning objects using multimedia have been uploaded. The platform has also been linked to social media where the farmers can search and view content easily through mobile phones.

Twenty teachers from the Tonga Institute of Education and Tonga Institute of Higher Education were trained in developing and delivering OER-based online courses on life skills and employability.

3.3 Cross-cutting Theme

3.3.1 Gender

In Guyana, COL has initiated discussions with institutions and youth groups to develop a programme to support skills development, safe communities and sustainable livelihoods.

Two partners each in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands were identified to support programmes on skills development and sustainable livelihoods for young women and communities.

Discussions took place with the representative of the University Grants Commission in Sri Lanka to mainstream gender in all the public universities.

3.4 eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO)

eLIO is currently developing an online learning programme for Young Leaders for Women Deliver. Four online courses were completed by 383 learners from ILO, Norwegian Refugee Council and UNHCR with a high completion rate of over 85%. Three new courses started this quarter with 124 learners from the Council of Europe, UNHCR and the World Bank.

3.5 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

The annual meeting of the CEMCA Advisory Council was hosted by the Open University of Sri Lanka in Colombo. Both the Vice President and I participated in this meeting which had high-level representation from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka.

CEMCA helped Bangladesh Open University to develop an OER policy and is now assisting with its implementation.

In India, CEMCA launched three higher education projects in the University of Hyderabad, Netaji Subhas Open University and Uttarakhand Open University under which 90 faculty members were trained in e-content development. Five hundred learners are being supported through this intervention.

CEMCA initiated the creation of a MOOC on *Life Skills for Engineers*, in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and COL. In addition, 19 faculty members were trained in the effective management of the mooKIT platform.

A strong emphasis was placed on strengthening traditional skills—60 women in Kashmir were trained in tailoring and 150 fishermen on better fish farming techniques. Learning materials were also developed to skill construction workers.

A toolkit for Career Guidance based on job roles identified by the National Skill Development Corporation, India was developed and field tested with 230 girls in secondary schools. This programme, supported by IKEA Foundation and UNDP, aims to equip girls for financial independence through employment and entrepreneurship.

CEMCA was granted a four-year EU-SWITCH Asia project on *Bamboo for Sustainable Production* as a co-applicant along with the Foundation of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises clusters.

At the request of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, CEMCA commissioned four videos to promote flagship programmes of the Ministry, such as SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, National Digital Library and National Academic Depository.

3.6 Regional Centres

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

COL Senior Adviser: OIS visited SADC-CDE to widen the scope of interaction between SADC-CDE and COL initiatives. The Centre played an important role in organising the Distance Education in Southern Africa conference in Zambia.

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

Following the approval of the RETRIDOL Strategic Plan, a list of activities has been prepared, which includes capacity building in ODL in Nigeria and West Africa.

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

The Pacific Open, Distance and Flexible Learning Framework was formulated in response to the endorsement by the Pacific Heads of Education Systems to help achieve inclusive and equitable access to quality education in the region. PACFOLD continued its online course on Flexible Skills Development in which 50 participants from the Pacific completed the course.

3.6.4 Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (CCCL)

CCCL, in collaboration with COL, facilitated the development of an Open Access policy for the University of Malta, which was approved by the university authorities. A technical report on *Blockchain in Education* was authored by the director of CCCL and published by the Joint Research Centre of the European Union.

3.7 Vice President's Activities

The Vice President met the Additional Secretary and senior officials of the Ministry of Education in Bangladesh and briefed them about the activities of COL. The Additional Secretary reiterated his government's commitment to implementing the national OER policy, developed with COL support. The Vice President had discussions with various partners in Bangladesh and has developed a roadmap for streamlining COL/CEMCA initiatives for a better impact on learners, communities, institutions and governments.

In India, the Vice President and I met the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Mr Madhu Ranjan Kumar, who is also the COL Focal Point, to discuss the priorities that COL/CEMCA could address.

In Sri Lanka, Dr Bala held meetings with various stakeholders including the Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Infrastructure and MOBITEL to identify strategies for training women and girls.

The Vice President has commissioned Dr Robert Sauder of Carleton University, a very experienced development specialist who had formerly worked for Global Affairs Canada, to conduct the mid-term evaluation for COL.

4. Stakeholder Relations

4.1 Member Governments Support

COL is forecasting contributions of over \$10.7 million from member countries in 2017-2018. In 2016-2017, \$10.6 million was received from 46 countries, the highest level of member government funding to date.

At December 31, contributions have been received from 31 countries (the same number of countries that contributed during the first half of the previous year). A complete listing of countries is provided at Revenue 5.1 for this quarter.

4.2 Focal Points

We welcomed the following Focal Point:

Tuvalu – Mr. Neaki Letia, Director of Education, Education Department, Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports

Vanuatu – Mr Reginal Garoleo, PEO, Teacher Education and Development Office, Teacher Education Directorate, Ministry of Education and Training

4.3 Congratulatory Letters

Ten congratulatory letters were sent to newly appointed heads of government, ministers of education, ministers of foreign affairs and finance and heads of institutions.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenue

COL has received \$9.3 million in voluntary contributions from member governments towards the budget for 2017-2018 (compared to \$5.9 million at the second quarter ended December 31, 2016).

The 16 countries that contributed during this quarter are:

Bahamas – \$75,630; Bangladesh – \$37,815; Barbados – \$57,461; Belize – \$38,307; India – \$769,417 (second instalment); Kenya – \$53,784; Malta – \$19,120; Namibia – \$126,050; New Zealand – \$702,790; Pakistan – \$35,000; Seychelles – \$19,157; Solomon Islands – \$6,302; South Africa – \$250,000; Tonga – \$25,538; Tuvalu – \$12,771; and United Kingdom – \$2,162,940.

In addition to contributions from member governments, COL is forecasting additional contributions of \$2 million from grants and fee-for-service activities.

Towards meeting these additional contribution targets, COL recognised over \$1 million in revenues from grants and fee-for-services during the period July 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017. Deferred revenues in excess of \$1.3 million are also available for recognition over the fiscal year as activities are completed.

5.2 Cash Flow

At December 31, 2017, COL held \$15 million in cash and cash equivalents and temporary investments. These funds will be used to maintain a positive cash flow until outstanding contributions are received throughout the year, meet operational costs which include current liabilities of \$3.1 million and the unspent portion of the budget of \$6 million, and have on hand funds to meet up to three months of operations in the next financial year in accordance with the Reserves policy.

In addition, COL also held an internally restricted reserve in line with the Reserves policy to provide a source of funds for unexpected expenses and shortfalls in funding, if needed. This reserve provision requires 12 months of operating costs to be on hand.

5.3 Expenditures

At the end of the second quarter, approximately \$5.8 million was spent or committed to meet programme and organisational management activities, staff costs and office expenses. This amount comprises 49% of the annual budget of \$11.9 million approved for 2017-2018 (as compared to expenditures and commitments of 53% of the annual budget for 2016-2017 during the same period).

6. Human Resources

6.1 Staff Changes

6.1.1 Departures

Ms Sparrow McGowan who held the post of Communications Manager departed from COL on November 15, 2017.

6.1.2 Recruitment

Dr Obinna Okwelume of Nigeria joined COL on November 16, 2017 as Communications Manager.

Dr Kirk Perris of Canada joined COL on January 8, 2018 as Adviser: Education.

7. Information Technology & Knowledge Management

A new online document storage and sharing service (part of MS Office 365) has been deployed as the corporate standard, allowing safe and secure sharing with staff as well as partners.

The AgMOOCs project received national recognition in India with the Skoch Gold Award after a process of multiple reviews and voting by experts and delegates.

Several innovations to create an “offline” version of a MOOC were successfully deployed. Messaging Apps for mobile devices, that enable a user to participate in a MOOC even when the bandwidth is low, were developed and used, in collaboration with Athabasca University.

8. Communications

COL was mentioned in 23 external media stories since October 2017. Additionally, 20 news releases were published on the COL website during this quarter. A database of

journalists is currently being developed to increase COL's visibility in media. COL will constantly share news releases with these journalists and reach out to as many media outlets in the Commonwealth to engage and empower stakeholders.

COL's following on social media is growing steadily and, as a result, engagements continue to surge. Facebook experienced an increase in followers by 180%. The overall following on Twitter was up by 5%. However, for the GIRLS Inspire project it was more substantial with over 39,400 Twitter impressions and 2,450 Facebook likes. COL now has an Instagram channel with a fair number of followers since the handle was created in December 2017.

The COL website has been regularly updated with news and content largely focused on engaging the stakeholder.

9. Visitors to COL

Recent visitors to COL include:

- Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, Director, International Centre for Open Education, Open Polytechnic/OER Foundation, New Zealand
- Mr. Sumit Kalra, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India
- Professor Guo Quing, President and delegation, Chongqing Radio & TV University, Peoples Republic of China
- His Excellency Joseph Ayikoi Otoo, Ghanaian High Commissioner to Canada; Mr. George Addei-Piprah, Honorary Consul-General and delegation, Republic of Ghana

10. Publications/Resources

The following are recent publications and resources of note:

- Publications oasis.col.org
- [*Boys' Underperformance in Education: Revisiting the Issue in the Commonwealth*](#)
- [*Connections, November 2017, Vol. 22, No. 3.*](#)
- [*Journal of Learning for Development, Vol. 4, No. 3.*](#)
- Speeches and presentations at [speeches and presentations](#).

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

*Professor Asha S. Kanwar
President & Chief Executive Officer
January 15, 2018*