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.

COL provides support to numerous community groups and educational institutions in the Caribbean, notably the University of the West Indies, which provides distance education 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 Caribbean.

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.

COL is strongly advocating the adoption of open schooling systems. It has helped to establish the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA). Three Caribbean countries are members: The Bahamas, Belize and Trinidad & Tobago.

COL assisted with the establishment of the National Open School of Trinidad & Tobago (NOSTT) and the Gwen Lizarraga Open School in Belize.

Open schools in the Caribbean have access to quality learning materials through COL’s OER for Open Schools initiative. Master Teachers in six developing Commonwealth countries, including Trinidad & Tobago, developed 20 new secondary-level courses that can be freely downloaded, adapted and re-used as open educational resources (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.
In Jamaica, COL is working with the Joint Board of Teacher Education (JBTE) to develop teacher educators’ capacity in online course development and in the conversion of existing face-to-face upgrading programmes for online delivery. The expected result of this initiative is that all of Jamaica’s 9,000 under-qualified teachers will have the opportunity to upgrade their qualifications to a bachelor’s degree through a mixed mode of online and face-to-face course delivery.

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.

The collaborative Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programmes have attracted a cumulative enrolment of over 24,000 students studying through one or more of the participating institutions in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. The University College of the Caribbean (Jamaica), the University College of the Cayman Islands and the University of Guyana are members. Designed for senior and middle managers working in developing Commonwealth countries, the newly revised courses help developing nations meet the need for professionals who can contribute to economic growth and good governance. The programmes have over 10,000 graduates.

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
VUSSC was initiated by COL and is now led by an independent Management Committee, with support from COL. Hundreds of educators from the Caribbean have taken part in VUSSC boot camps and online courses. Eight of these countries are offering VUSSC developed certificate and degree programmes.

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.

The 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 the Caribbean region.

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.

Caribbean technical/vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in The Bahamas, Jamaica and St. Vincent & the Grenadines have been expanding their skills and practice in flexible approaches to programme delivery.

COL is working with the College of The Bahamas to develop institutional policies and plans for flexible skills training.
In Jamaica, a new partnership has been formed between COL and HEART/NTA to support a strategic commitment to create a flexible TVET system that will make TVET more accessible for existing and new target learners. COL is providing capacity building in instructional design and eLearning as well as manager development for flexible TVET systems and quality assurance.

The Faculty of Education and Liberal studies (FELS) at the University of Technology, Jamaica, and COL are running training workshops for staff to strengthen their capacity to plan for, develop and engage in teaching and learning online.

COL has also been working with the staff of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College to build capacity in eLearning and strengthen the College’s ICT infrastructure, including managing flexible learning, offering blended online learning, running Moodle systems and training a cadre of eLearning Master Teachers.

www.col.org/TVSD

LEARNING FOR FARMING: 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 the Pacific. In Jamaica, COL is working with the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) on implementing an L3F programme and has developed frameworks for other Caribbean countries.

www.col.org/L3Farmers

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: Communities across the Caribbean 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 drought to domestic violence, parenting to non-communicable diseases, and anger management to maternal and child 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 seven countries in the Caribbean (Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago). The initiative works with national and regional partner agencies 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.

New community learning programmes (CLP) in the Caribbean, including operational programmes in Jamaica (maternal healthcare, drought, domestic violence and parenting) and Trinidad & Tobago (anger management among incarcerated youth), have been designed through a blended training and mentoring process jointly developed and offered by the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication at the University of the West Indies, Transformative Communication Partners – Caribbean and the Commonwealth of Learning. 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.

In 2014, COL and Jamaica’s Joint Board of Teacher Education (JBTE) worked with teacher training colleges from Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago in building gender awareness of staff while pilot testing COL’s prototype gender mainstreaming toolkit for teachers and teacher educators. Further implementation of the toolkit is planned for the Caribbean and other regions.

Also in 2014, COL worked with its Jamaican L3F partner, the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), to identify strategies for gender mainstreaming at the institutional level. COL also provided gender awareness training to local farmers’ organisations, and collaborated with them to develop workplans that integrate gender equality considerations into activities, outputs and outcomes.

www.col.org/Gender
www.col.org/GenderMS

eLEARNING: 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.

Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Ministers of education have endorsed a draft regional ODL policy framework “to make education at all levels accessible and available to their citizens”, prepared with guidance from COL. Further consultation with stakeholders is now taking place.

Antigua & Barbuda have adopted a new OER policy which is part of their ICT in Education policy, developed with assistance from COL and UNESCO.

Ministers of education of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) have endorsed the COL/UNESCO regional Open Textbooks initiative. The pilot implementation of an Open
Textbooks prototype for secondary mathematics was successfully completed earlier this year in Antigua & Barbuda. The prototype includes over 500 mathematics open educational resources (OER) from 72 different service providers. These OER were assessed for quality by a specialist mathematics educator, then collected, tagged, and stored within a repository and aligned to learning objectives of the Caribbean Secondary Education Curriculum (CSEC) Mathematics syllabus.

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. CCTI course materials are being actively used in the Caribbean. A first CCTI graduation ceremony was held in Antigua & Barbuda in March this year.

www.col.org/eLearning

REGIONAL PRESENCE

COL maintains strong relationships with many stakeholders in the Caribbean, including member governments, partner institutions, donors and individuals. The Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the West Indies Open Campus is one of COL’s Honorary Advisors. In addition to membership on COL’s Board of Governors, the Caribbean 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.

COL is collaborating with Panos Caribbean to establish a regional centre to support non-formal learning and communication using ODL and technology. A regional framework with a focus on livelihoods, health and skills development is being developed.

**E-Learning 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)

**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”.

[Image of a group of people]
COL’s Excellence in Distance Education Awards are also presented at the Forum. Several people and institutions from the Caribbean were among the past award winners. In 2013, in Abuja, COL awarded eight distinguished individuals with the designation, Honorary Fellow of COL, including one from Trinidad & Tobago.

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.

www.col.org
www.col.org/board
www.col.org/blog
www.col.org/connections
www.col.org/resources
www.jl4d.org

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COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.