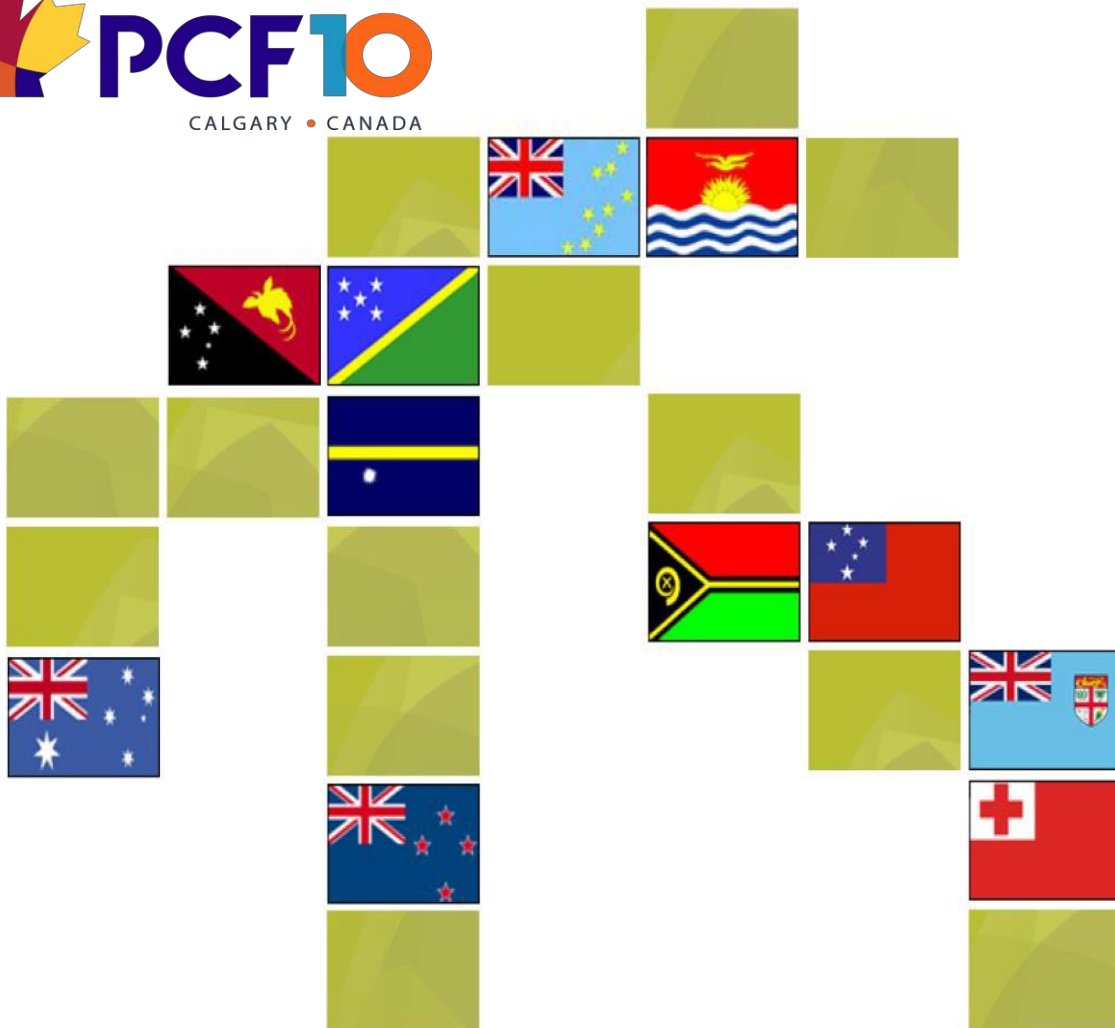


# REPORT OF THE SPECIAL PARALLEL SESSION:

## Strategies and Solutions for ODFL in the Pacific Region

September 15, 2022 | Calgary, Canada



Australia | Fiji | Kiribati | Nauru | New Zealand | Papua New Guinea | Samoa | Solomon Islands | Tonga | Tuvalu | Vanuatu



**Please note**

*This is a summary of presentations and discussions at a special session on 'Strategies and Solutions for Open Distance and Flexible Learning in the Pacific' organised by COL during the Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF10) in Calgary, Canada. The summary is based on notes provided by interested participants and edited at COL. It does not purport to be a true record of the proceedings. For further information please contact [PacificPartnership@col.org](mailto:PacificPartnership@col.org)*

## Contents

---

Overview .....	4
Summary of Proceedings .....	5
Welcome remarks, Professor Asha Kanwar .....	5
Remarks by the Prime Minister of Samoa, Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa .....	5
Overview of advances in the Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific Project .....	6
<i>Dr Rajni Chand, Director, PACFOLD and CFL, USP</i> .....	6
<i>Dr Tony Mays, Education Specialist: Open Schooling, COL</i> .....	6
<i>Mr Robert Okinda, Adviser: Skills, COL</i> .....	7
<i>Ms Frances Ferreira, Acting Director: Skills, COL</i> .....	8
Invited Statements.....	10
<i>Ms Peseta Noumea Simi, CEO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Samoa on behalf of the     Minister of Education, Sports and Culture, Samoa</i> .....	10
<i>Dr Anjeela Jokhan, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Heritage and Arts, Fiji</i> .....	11
<i>Ms Kirsty Pelenur, Deputy High Commissioner of New Zealand in Canada</i> .....	11
Comments from the audience .....	12
Annex 1: Programme .....	13
Annex 2: List of Participants from the Pacific (in-person and virtual based on registration data) .....	14

## Overview

---

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted education around the world with school closure and lockdown. In response to the pandemic, the Pacific region has experienced a dynamic transition to open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL), despite its challenges, given dispersed populations and limited access to learning opportunities in rural and outer island locations.

The special parallel session on September 15, 2022, was convened by COL during the [Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning](#) (PCF10) in Calgary, Canada. This was similar to the session on the Pacific region in PCF9 in Edinburgh, Scotland, in September 2019 to develop the outlines of a large project on ODL in the region. This session brought together over 40 key policymakers and experts from the Pacific who had been playing a leading role in the transition to ODFL, share lessons learned and discuss a way forward. This was also an opportunity to share information on the 'Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific' Project, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand and implemented by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in partnership with the Pacific Centre for Flexible & Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD), the University of the South Pacific (USP), and learn from the stakeholders about areas for advancement aligning to the countries and regional priorities. This session was co-chaired by the Prime Minister of Samoa and the President of COL and was broadcast to all registered participants in the virtual mode. There were 41 participants from the Pacific region.

While Covid-19 reinforced the need for the Pacific to be well-prepared in open, distance, and flexible learning (ODFL), Pacific leaders identified the challenges they had been experiencing including:

- *Insufficient online curriculum material*
- *Limited access to devices*
- *Lack of teachers' digital fluency*
- *Lack of parental support*
- *Lack of engagement with teachers and students in ODFL*
- *Internet connectivity and affordability*
- *Reaching the last person in the queue.*

After discussion, a few common strategies emerged on how to address the challenges going forward as the following:

- *Adopting a multi-modal delivery across the region*
- *Planning for wider access to devices and the Internet for students and teachers, especially in remote areas*
- *Monitoring staff and student engagement and developing a community of practice for support*
- *Providing appropriate learning resources and technology compatible with the context to build resilience in education*
- *Providing teacher training in digital fluency and offering technical support*
- *Improving coordination among development agencies in the region.*

## Summary of Proceedings

---

### Welcome remarks, Professor Asha Kanwar

Professor Asha Kanwar welcomed the attendees with an outline of COL's work in the Pacific. She said the Pacific used to be the region with a relatively lower investment. To strengthen Open Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) in the Pacific, COL and the University of the South Pacific (USP) established PACFOLD in 2013. Since then, PACFOLD has become the main regional network to facilitate and advocate ODFL in the Pacific.

She said that [the Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific Project](#), with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand (MFAT NZ), had further strengthened COL's work in the Pacific in partnership with the PACFOLD. While Covid-19 created huge challenges during the initial stage of the Project, good progress has been made. Professor Kanwar pointed out the four reasons for its success:

- ***COL's Focal Points were involved in the design phase of the Project;***
- ***COL has a social capital which has been nurtured over years of work;***
- ***Ownership of the Project through a wider consultation with all stakeholders; and***
- ***COL has made available relevant resources and expertise, which could be deployed immediately.***



### Remarks by the Prime Minister of Samoa, Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa

The Prime Minister observed that ODFL is an important channel for increasing educational opportunities and outcomes, and is especially relevant for the Pacific region, given the small and dispersed remote populations plus limited access to secondary and post-secondary opportunities. Despite the importance of ODFL in the region, she said there had been a limited investment; there is a need for more investment in multiple ways.

Covid-19 further reinforced the need for the Pacific to be well-prepared outside of the traditional teaching mode.

Samoa also experienced a challenge and several gaps were identified as the following:

- ***Internet access – (as an immediate response, a satellite was set up, especially to support learning in remote areas);***
- ***Insufficient online curriculum material;***
- ***Limited access to devices; and***
- ***The capacity of teachers and students to utilise technology.***



She was hopeful that the session would be an opportunity for the Pacific leaders in ODFL to share their recent experiences during Covid-19 and discuss how challenges could be addressed.

## Overview of advances in the Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific Project

*Dr Rajni Chand, Director, PACFOLD and CFL, USP*

Dr Chand provided background information on the PACFOLD. The USP has been a main regional institution which works with the 12 Pacific Island countries to provide educational opportunities to people using the satellite. PACFOLD was established in 2013 when COL and USP agreed to establish a regional centre to strengthen the use of ODFL. PACFOLD was initially hosted by USP's Pacific Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and thereafter by the Centre for Flexible Learning (CFL) at USP in 2019. PACFOLD's mission is to be a network of networks to facilitate flexible and open learning for sustainable development in the Pacific through advocacy, communication, innovation and research.



She further spoke about the Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific Project that started at the end of 2020 in partnership with COL, with support from the MFAT NZ. She said PACFOLD had been instrumental in providing support to facilitate ongoing stakeholder engagement with various communication channels to achieve the objectives of the Project – to contribute to enhanced capacity and efficiency of Pacific education sectors through greater use of innovative delivery mechanisms and technology. She said PACFOLD had been using USP's main and the network of regional campuses to increase the visibility of the Project and promote greater uptake of online courses offered for teachers.

*Dr Tony Mays, Education Specialist: Open Schooling, COL*

Dr Mays spoke about teacher training during the Covid-19. He said when the pandemic hit, switching the teaching mode from classroom to online overnight was a huge challenge for many teachers.

With the request received from the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, Fiji, COL developed and offered a course on Open Educational Resources for Online Learning (OER4OL) in May 2020, which introduced a tool and knowledge on how to use OER for teaching and learning for teachers. Over the four weeks, about 700 teachers from Fiji and another 100 from other countries received training.

Dr Mays continued by saying that since the Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific Project started, much work had been done to support the professional development of teachers in online learning. COL revised the OER4OL course to make it more relevant to the Pacific and this was offered two times more. Also, [an open course platform](#) was developed and a series of open courses was offered – Digital Skills for OER Sharing, Communication Skills for ODFL, Assessment Skills for ODFL, and Empowered Digital Teacher for Online Learning. To date, over 4,000 teachers from the Pacific have received training in ODFL.



Complementing this, a [Pacific regional](#) and nine national OER-collection sites were developed for teachers where they could either use or adapt resources as needed. It was designed in a way that when the OERs were added to the regional site, this would automatically be affiliated to the national site. It could then be further contextualised according to the national curriculum by working with the Ministry. So far work has been done with Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Dr Mays said that COL could provide support to other Pacific countries interested in contextualising the national OER collection site.

Alongside, Dr Mays introduced [the Open and Distance Learning \(ODL\) Course Catalogue for the Pacific](#), which would be soon launched after uploading more courses in collaboration with the Ministries and educational institutions in the region. He said this Catalogue would be a one-stop place for teachers in the Pacific for accessing information on a wide range of ODL courses.

### *Mr Robert Okinda, Adviser: Skills, COL*

Mr Okinda spoke about the [Online TVET Toolkit](#) which had been developed as part of the Project. He said its design was based on participatory processes aiming to design the 'right toolkit' and design the 'toolkit right.' COL used a variety of methods, including desk research, virtual workshops and online surveys with various Pacific stakeholder groups in the TVET sector. Through these processes, COL developed guiding principles, defined target audiences, prioritised problem statements and refined the site to ensure that Pacific TVET practitioners would feel that the Toolkit was their space. He said the Online Toolkit has three main benefits over other similar sites:



- **Focusing on issues identified as most relevant by Pacific stakeholders;**
- **Curating existing content and developing concise summaries of existing content for TVET practitioners; and**
- **Sourcing Pacific-specific content.**

Mr Okinda explained that the priority audiences for the Online Toolkit are TVET teachers and trainers, TVET institution managers and those employing TVET trainees.

He also shared some challenges after the Toolkit had been designed. Many TVET institutions thought the Toolkit was a course while it had the guiding resources for TVET stakeholders on how to develop their own resources and how this could be used for their own practice. It was therefore essential for COL to train them on how to utilise the Toolkit. Another challenge was a connectivity issue faced by several TVET institutions.

To date, a lot of progress and achievements have been made with the following six institutions:

1. **Pacific Polytech, Fiji**
2. **Kiribati Teachers College, Kiribati**
3. **National Department of Education, Papua New Guinea**
4. **The National University of Samoa**
5. **Montfort Technical Institute, Tonga**
6. **Ituani Centre, Vanuatu**

As an example of recent work, Mr Okinda mentioned that the National Department of Education, Papua New Guinea had been developing a Trainee Workbook and Learner Guide for the Certificate in Hospitality Commercial Cookery (Level 1). Soon the resources would be available for use by the TVET practitioners in Papua New Guinea., COL aims to reach 5,000 Pacific users by 2025.

### *Ms Frances Ferreira, Acting Director: Skills, COL*

Ms Ferreira spoke about her work in skills and leadership online training for youth, young women, and youth with disabilities in the Pacific, which has three phases:

1. **Engage and Partner with NGOs: work with local NGOs to support and empower young people to access and complete the courses and link them to employment opportunities.**
2. **Develop short online courses in technical skills, entrepreneurship, self-employment and leadership: In collaboration with partners, a set of 14 short online courses, in technical skills, as well as entrepreneurship, self-employment, skills and leadership, to be developed. The courses and materials will be translated in local languages where relevant.**





**3. Support NGOs to empower young people to access and complete the courses: In collaboration with the Ministries of Education, the courses will be marketed, targeting youth with disabilities and young women. It is envisaged that 5,000 youth will be trained in 5 countries in technical skills, skills for self-employment, and leadership.**

Ms Ferreira said the following five Pacific countries had been selected to implement the Project activities: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu. Early this year, COL issued a 'Request for Proposal' and disseminated among the NGOs in the Pacific, followed by a series of online meetings and consultations with the prospective partners to introduce the Project activities. Through a selective process, a partnership was established with the Fiji-based NGO called 'Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development Fiji (FRIEND Fiji).' A gender workshop was organised in Suva in August 2022 to develop a gender-responsive learning resource. She said several online trainings were planned to be offered in September 2022 for youth training in skills such as soap making, oil infusion making and in entrepreneurship skills.

She also spoke about a regional workshop in August 2022 jointly organised with PACFOLD in Suva, Fiji, where 15 NGOs representatives from four countries (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu) joined to share the challenges and opportunities for youth, women and persons with disabilities in the Pacific. She also described briefly COL's other projects in the region that are complimentary to the Project's activities. It included a gender project in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands as well as a skills training project in both the countries. An App called "Social Safety Net and Gender-Based Violence" was also mentioned.



## Invited Statements

*Ms Peseta Noumea Simi, CEO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Samoa on behalf of the Minister of Education, Sports and Culture, Samoa*

On behalf of the Minister of Education, Sports and Culture, Samoa, Ms Noumea Simi spoke about recent experience in Samoa. She said ODFL is in alignment with the Samoa national development strategy, and there is a need for a technology solution to ensure uninterrupted access to high-quality education for all. She said Samoa had been appreciative of the support received from the development partners, especially COL which had provided the Moodle platform for the National University of Samoa as well as open educational resources, which were broadcast on TV and radio.

She said that ODFL had benefited many schools in Samoa. The pandemic provided an impetus for the educational sector in Samoa which responded by putting emergency and contingency plans in place to ensure all students have access to educational opportunities. The response was also aimed at ensuring that the education system is more resilient to future disruption. Samoa had placed a number of ODFL platforms to help in recovery and to make up the learning loss. Most schools in Samoa now use the ODFL in a multi-modal approach, which includes print, online, TV, and radio.

While much progress had been achieved, she pointed out several remaining challenges in ODFL as the following:

- ***Building capacity of teachers;***
- ***Access to devices and the Internet;***
- ***Support for parents; and***
- ***Engagement with teachers and students.***

She recommended some strategies for going forward :

- ***Adopting a multi-modal delivery of education across the region;***
- ***Planning for wider access to devices and the Internet for students and teachers;***
- ***Providing technical support and training for teachers; and***
- ***Monitoring staff and student engagement and developing a community of practice.***



*Dr Anjeela Jokhan, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Heritage and Arts, Fiji*

Dr Jokhan spoke about challenges experienced in Fiji and how these had been addressed during Covid-19. While connectivity and affordability were a major challenge, the Ministry of Education and Heritage and Arts, Fiji, established a partnership with Telecom Fiji and launched the cloud platform called 'LearningHub,' which allowed students, parents, and teachers to access the learning materials. All the resources were accessible without any internet charges from the telecom services providers.

She also spoke about the national OER collection site developed by COL. She said while the site had increased access to open educational resources (OER) for teachers, a challenge still had been remaining as many teachers were not comfortable with using the OERs, and therefore teacher training should be continued.

She also mentioned a recent Fiji national consultation for transforming education with various stakeholders. She said the main feedback received in recovery from Covid-19 were:

- **Providing appropriate learning resources to build resilience in education;**
- **Providing schools with digital tools and improving connectivity in remote schools; and**
- **Teacher training in digital fluency**

*Ms Kirsty Pelenur, Deputy High Commissioner of New Zealand in Canada*

Ms Pelenur spoke about the value MFAT NZ places in working with the national and regional priorities within the context of ODFL.

She said the overall approach of engagement in the Pacific focused on building long-term resilience across multiple domains (social, culture, economy, climate disaster, governance, intergenerational). MFAT New Zealand's partnership with COL since 2020 aims to strengthen the resilience of the education system and equip youth, including girls and youth with disabilities, with work-ready skills.



She pointed out education as the main priority of MFAT’s development program. And its approach to supporting the delivery of efficient educational services is around localised solutions. She said MFAT sought a partnership that uses research based on an indigenous framework to inform program delivery.

While rapid change had been widening inequality across all sectors of society, it had also been a new opportunity. Technology in ODFL plays a critical role in providing an opportunity for prosperity. A technology-enabled platform is also a valuable tool in increasing equitable access to education. With limited access to secondary and post-secondary opportunities in the Pacific, ODFL plays a key role during an emergency in supporting learning continuity.

She emphasised that achieving educational outcomes is not just about supporting ODFL. It requires a consideration of context and ability for a programme to adapt and be responsive to progress and outcomes, which is complex. She said development partners need to collaborate and adapt to ensure that technology and learning programmes are compatible with the context.

## Comments from the audience

*Dr Raelyn Esau, Director, Tonga Institute of Higher Education*

Dr Esau shared a recent experience in Tonga. She said when volcanic erupted early this year, at that time only option to continue learning was using the Moodle, which was hosted locally. Later on, Elon Musk sent 50 satellites to the outer islands. Then Internet service was restored.

She also mentioned that people in Tonga had been actively using the online TVET Toolkit developed by COL. She said Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditation Board was impressed by the usefulness of the Toolkit; while most available resources had been focused on primary and secondary education, the Toolkit’s more comprehensive resources, including the tertiary level, were very useful for Tonga.

She pointed out several challenges remaining in Tonga’s education sector as the following:

- ***Internet connectivity and affordability;***
- ***Reaching the last person in the queue. In the rural and outer islands, there is a high rate of school dropout for youth, including youth with disabilities; and***
- ***A need for better coordination among development agencies in the region for better resource utilisation and value for money***



## Annex 1: Programme

---

### ***PCF10: A special parallel session on ODFL in the Pacific***

***Date/time: September 15, 2022, 2:30 pm – 3:30 pm***

***Venue: Glen 201/202 @ Telus Convention Centre, Calgary, Alberta, Canada***

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted education around the world with school closures and lockdowns. In response to the pandemic, the Pacific region has experienced a dynamic transition to open, distance, and flexible learning (ODFL) despite its challenges, given dispersed populations with limited access to learning opportunities in rural and outer island locations.

This special parallel session convened key policymakers/experts who have been playing a leading role in the transition to ODFL to review the progress of ODFL in the Pacific, shared lessons learned and discussed a way forward. It was also an opportunity to share information on the 'Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific' Project, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand and implemented by COL and PACFOLD, USP, and learned from the stakeholders about areas for advancement aligning to the countries and regional priorities.

### Programme

- **Welcome remarks**
  - Prof Asha Kanwar, President and CEO, COL
- **Co-Chair's remarks**
  - Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister, Samoa
- **Overview of advances in the Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific Project**
  - Dr Rajni Chand, Director, PACFOLD and CFL, USP
  - Dr Tony Mays, Education Specialist: Open Schooling, COL
  - Mr Robert Okinda, Adviser: Skills, COL
  - Ms Frances Ferreira, Acting Director: Skills, COL
- **Invited statements**
  - Ms Peseta Noumea Simi, CEO of Samoa Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (on behalf of the Minister of Education, Sports and Culture, Samoa)
  - Dr Anjeela Jokhan, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, Fiji
  - Ms Kirsty Pelenur, Deputy High Commissioner of New Zealand in Canada

## Annex 2: List of Participants from the Pacific (in-person and virtual, latter based on registration data)

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Title	Country
Afshana	Anzeg	The University of the South Pacific	Learning Specialist	Fiji
Dhiraj	Bhartu	Fijian Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts	Manager E-Learning/COL Focal Point	Fiji
Alan	Cadwallader	The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand	Executive Director Learning Delivery	New Zealand
Dianne	Chambers	University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle	Associate Professor	Australia
Rajni	Chand	University of the South Pacific	Director: Centre for Flexible Learning and PACFOLD	Fiji
Ioana Tuugalei	Chan Mow	National University of Samoa	Professor, Computing Education / COL Focal Point, Samoa	Samoa
Kaylash	Chaudhary	The University of the South Pacific	Lecturer in Computer Science and Information Systems	Fiji
Raelyn	Esau	Tonga Institute of Higher Education	Director / COL Focal Point, Tonga	Tonga
Raveena	Goundar	The University of the South Pacific	Student Learning Specialist	Fiji
Mohammed	Hussein	The University of the South Pacific (USP)	Learning Experience Designer	Fiji
Anjeela	Jokhan	Fijian Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts	Permanent Secretary	Fiji
Peter	Kants	Department of Education	Deputy Secretary TVET	Papua New Guinea
Bijeta	Kumar	The University of the South Pacific	Coordinator	Fiji
Darrina	Kun	Department of Education	Secretary for Education/ COL Focal Point, Nauru	Nauru
Lucy	Kum-On	Kiribati Teachers College	Principal/ COL Focal Point, Kiribati	Kiribati

Neaki	Letia	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	Director, Education Department/ COL Focal Point, Tuvalu	Tuvalu
Vena	Liz-Upton	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NZ	Senior Adviser, Education	New Zealand
Jim	Madavana	Montfort Technical Institute, Suva	Principle	Fiji
Stuart	Martin	Skills Consulting Group	Specialist Consultant, Credentialing	New Zealand
Fiame Naomi	Mata'afa		Prime Minister	Samoa
Ralph	Mosiri	Flexible, Open and Distance Education, Department of Education	Deputy Principal Services	Papua New Guinea
Som	Naidu	Technology, Education and Design Associates	Principal Associate	Australia
Sharishna	Narayan	The University of the South Pacific	PACFOLD Project Officer	Fiji
Mark	Nichols	The Open Polytechnic of NZ	Executive Director, Learning Design and Development	New Zealand
Martin	Otto	Solomon Islands National University	Manager, Distance and Flexible Learning Centre	Solomon Islands
Kirsty	Pelenur	High Commission of New Zealand in Canada	Deputy High Commissioner	New Zealand
Melissa	Porter	National University of Samoa	Director for academic quality unit	Samoa
Anthony	Rayappan	Flexible, Open and Distance Education, Department of Education	Deputy Principal Services / COL Focal Point, Papua New Guinea	Papua New Guinea
Pritika	Reddy	Fiji National University	Lecturer	Fiji
Renata	Sguario	Maxme	CEO and Founder	Australia
Bibhya	Sharma	University of the South Pacific	Associate Professor in Applied Mathematics	Fiji
Peseta Noumea	Simi	Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture	CEO	Samoa
Mahendra	Singh	Crystal Delta	Director	Australia

Malia	Sio	Ministry of Education & Training, Tonga	IT Coordinator	Tonga
Clint	Smith	LearnWorks Performance Design	Director	Australia
Tangikina	Steen	Ministry of Education & Training, Tonga	CEO	Tonga
Janet	Subagan-Mondez	Flexible Open and Distance Education	Acting Deputy Principal Curriculum	Papua New Guinea
Aberaam	Tebitaki	Kiribati Teachers College, Ministry	Senior Lecturer	Kiribati
Seuula Ioane	Tuaau	Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture	Minister	Samoa
Philip	Uys		Senior International Education Consultant	Australia
Jito	Vanualailai	University of the South Pacific	DVC	Fiji

## List of Participants from COL

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Title
Asha	Kanwar	Commonwealth of Learning	President and CEO
Sir John	Daniel	Independent Expert	Former President and CEO, COL
Venkataraman	Balaji	Commonwealth of Learning	Vice President
Frances	Ferreira	Commonwealth of Learning	Acting Director: Skills
Dave	Jackson	Commonwealth of Learning	Communications Manager
Soyeon	Kim	Commonwealth of Learning	Project Coordinator
Tony	Mays	Commonwealth of Learning	Education Specialist: Open Schooling
Robert	Okinda	Commonwealth of Learning	Adviser: Skills
Basheerhamad	Shadrach	Commonwealth of Learning	Director: CEMCA