

# Virtual Graduation Address



**23 February 2021**

Virtual Graduation Ceremony for Introduction to Disability  
Needs Assessments and Assistive Technologies  
Global Rainbow Foundation, Mauritius

Professor Asha Kanwar  
President & CEO, Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

Mr Parsuramen, Mr Choudhry, Colleagues and Graduands

It is a pleasure to be part of this virtual graduation which marks an important milestone in our efforts to provide quality learning opportunities for all regardless of abilities and location. Recent data from 14 countries found that children with disabilities constitute 15% of the out-of-school population (UNESCO, 2020). This is expected to be further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, 25% teachers in 48 education systems reported a high need for professional development on teaching students with special needs. We introduce barriers within systems when we don't take into account the needs of our learners. Assessing the needs of learners is the basic starting point for any course but especially when we want to sensitively address the diverse needs of PWD. In inclusive systems, every learner must feel valued and respected.

This course on 'Introduction to Disabilities Needs Assessment and Assistive Technologies' is a step in the right direction. It starts with identifying needs and providing solutions on the kind of assistive technologies that can be used to support learning. I understand that this elearning course has equipped you for offering tailored support to PWD in your environment. Because of its inclusive design, this course was also suitable for those of you with disabilities. I am glad to note that this course has also provided guidance on how to choose appropriate technologies that are accessible and affordable so that we do not widen existing inequalities.

The development and delivery of this course has been made possible because of a very productive partnership that the Commonwealth of Learning shares with the Global Rainbow Foundation and Diversity and Ability, UK. Partnerships flourish when they share common objectives and values. Let me thank Mr Parsuramen, Mr Choudhry and their teams for their dedication and support. I must also appreciate Dr Mairette Newman my colleague, without whose hard work and personal commitment, this course would not have been possible. This is an important course and we would like it to benefit as many people as possible.

You will be pleased to note that the course is generating much interest around the Commonwealth-- the Ministry of Education, Trinidad and Tobago have requested that this be customised for 5,000 Special Education teachers. The Ministry of Education in Tonga has also asked that we support them to contextualise and offer this course locally. There is a huge demand for training in Africa and Asia.

Let me congratulate you who graduate today and you who participated in this course. Special felicitations are in order for the three of you receiving the outstanding achievement awards. I hope you will continue to learn and acquire additional skills to excel in this field and share your knowledge and expertise widely. I look forward to listening to the experiences of the participants—we need to learn from each other and be more proactive in creating a more inclusive world.