



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

President's Quarterly Progress Report: July - September 2020

1. Board Matters

We welcome Professor Narend Bajjnath as the new COL Chair who took up his appointment on July 1st. Professor Bajjnath is no stranger to COL, having served as South Africa's representative on the Board since 2012. I would like to place on record COL's sincere appreciation of Dr Linda Sissons for the valuable contributions during her term as Board Chair.

Sir Lockwood Smith, New Zealand's representative to the Board, completed his term in June. We are very grateful to Sir Lockwood for his close engagement and strong support to COL.

Dr Abdurrahman Umar, who had recently been appointed as Nigeria's representative following his appointment as Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, passed away on July 21. As a former colleague, Abdurrahman will be dearly missed by all of us who had the privilege of working with him.

It is a pleasure to welcome Dr Joanna Newman as the Commonwealth Secretary-General's nominated member to the Board. Prior to this, Dr Newman was an Advisor to the Board since 2017.

The next meeting of the Audit Committee will be held on November 19 to approve the audited financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2020. Mr Armoogum Parsuramen has taken up the role of Audit Committee Chair. At the request of the Board, a special meeting will be held on November 25, 2020 to review the draft of the Strategic Plan 2021-2027. After public consultations, the revised Plan will be presented to the Executive Committee in February 2021, for approval.

The next annual meeting of the Board will take place in July 2021 when we sincerely hope to welcome you here in Vancouver.

2. General

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause major disruptions in education across the Commonwealth. Some countries are cautiously opening up but it is clear that 'business

as usual' is no longer likely to work. Technology will become an integral part of teaching and learning, where blended approaches—online and in-person—will be the new norm. Over the past five decades, open and distance learning (ODL) institutions in the Commonwealth have perfected the use of a range of technologies, from print to online mode, to serve the social justice agenda for which they were established. As an intergovernmental organisation with the mandate to promote distance learning, COL is best placed to serve Member States as the demand for distance education grows. Namibia has recently requested COL to support the transition of the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), an open school, into an open university, to provide quality tertiary education to thousands who would otherwise not have the opportunity.

The pandemic has also highlighted the wide inequalities that exist in our societies. Less than half the population of the Commonwealth has access to the internet—how do we reach those on the other side of the digital divide? More girls are expected to drop out of school in the wake of the pandemic and persons with disabilities (PWD) could face further marginalisation. COL is addressing each of these issues. For example, COL is training teachers at scale through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). At the same time, the training of farmers is taking place through MobiMOOCs, a basic mobile phone interface, enabling farmers to receive audio messages and interact with experts in local languages. As more partners have embraced technologies, the MOOCs offered by COL are now attracting larger numbers than ever before. Community Radio has had a second coming and our Delhi office has received additional contributions from the Department of Science and Technology, and the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, to use this technology for reaching the last mile. COL is working with its partners and networks to mount a massive campaign involving communities and families on the benefits of education for girls to ensure that they are not left behind. COL is also supporting PWD by developing resources, training teachers and partnering with specialist organisations.

Job losses have been another unfortunate outcome of the pandemic and re-skilling is now a pressing priority. The COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery partnership could not be more timely. What started initially with 10000 Coursera licenses, has now expanded to well over 100000 participants, with 54% being women. Under each licence, a learner can access 3800 professional online courses from 200 top universities in the world and earn multiple certificates, without the need to pay anything. Access to computers and connectivity was limited in many countries, but participants used their mobile devices and local library facilities.

One of the reasons for the success of this programme was the Help Desks established by COL to offer administrative, academic and counselling support, which was especially valuable for first-time online learners and those located in remote regions. Even though 49 countries signed up, the maximum uptake has been in the Caribbean. Guyana has been the leader with 24910 unemployed citizens enrolled. The Ministry of Education, Guyana and the Private Sector Commission have signed an MOU for recognising the credentials earned under this programme for employment purposes. Since COL colleagues found the courses beneficial, we also shared the Coursera licences with staff at the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC) and the Commonwealth Foundation.

Partnerships and collaboration are essential in tiding over this crisis. COL accepted the invitation of UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL), Hamburg to be an Associate Member of their Global Alliance of Lifelong Learning. COL has much to offer and one outcome of this partnership has been the development of an online course on intergenerational literacy and learning.

Because of the global acceptance of distance learning, COL has moved from margin to mainstream. This involves supporting Member States to develop resilient systems of education prepared for current and future disasters. COL is tailoring its response according to evolving needs. For instance, institutions are no longer satisfied with access to repositories of Open Educational Resources (OER)—they require curated content mapped to their curricula. COL has initiated a video-on-demand project for Fiji, Nauru and Samoa that is aligned to their needs. As Zoom is not the permanent answer to online learning, COL has fast tracked the process of building capacity in effective pedagogies and alternative assessment methods towards this end.

2.1 President's Activities

Even without travel, it has been possible to keep ministers, senior officials and stakeholders engaged. The Virtual Convocations organised for graduating learners of the COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery Programme served to recognise their achievements and at the same time engage ministers. The first Convocation was held for 2300 graduates from 17 African countries where Honourable Dr Douglas Letsholathebe, Botswana, Honourable Ms Gifty Twum Ampofo, Ghana and Honourable Ester Anna Nghipondoka, Namibia participated. Four ministers joined the Caribbean Convocation at which 3000 students graduated: Honourable Colin Jordan, Barbados; Honourable Emmalin Pierre, Grenada; Honourable Priya Manickchand, Guyana and Honourable Dr Gale T. C. Rigobert, St Lucia. The CEO of Coursera Jeff Maggioncalda delivered the opening remarks, the ministers shared their reflections and I gave the convocation address at both events, which have served to raise COL's profile significantly in the regions.

Thanks to COMSEC, I had the opportunity to make a short presentation on 'Building Back Better: digital learning and skills' at the virtual meeting of Commonwealth Ministers for Gender and Women's Affairs. The Honourable Margaret Kobia, Kenya, who chaired the meeting, commended COL on its work.

Guidelines on re-opening schools and using blended approaches for skills development have been despatched to Commonwealth Education Ministers including a new book entitled *Technology Enabled Learning: Policy, Pedagogy and Practice*. These publications help to keep stakeholders updated about current developments and signals the ways in which COL can assist.

The Globe and Mail invited me to speak at a webcast on navigating the impact of the pandemic on international postsecondary education organised in partnership with Athabasca University. Even though international students account for only 2% of all higher education students, their financial and intellectual contributions to host universities and societies are

considerable. The pandemic is disrupting the existing hierarchies of receiving countries and institutions will have to revisit their business models and strategies to address the changing reality. This event raised COL's visibility across Canada and has resulted in several invitations. Highlights are available [here](#).

Two videos of keynote addresses were recorded for conferences in Islamabad and New Delhi. Both topics related to the challenges of education during the pandemic. I also sent congratulatory video messages for events in The Bahamas, China and Indonesia which can be found [here](#). This spread demonstrates the close links that COL enjoys with a range of institutions globally.

In addition, I moderated two webinars for [CommonwealthWiseWomen](#), which continues to be a dynamic forum for women and girls. The two topics discussed by the speakers were the role of mentorship and leadership skills for youth. The speakers were also our high-profile mentors who brought valuable perspectives from different countries: Botswana, Malaysia, Mauritius, Namibia and Samoa. A series on the 'Future of Learning' is being organised under [OpenDoor](#), where global thought leaders Mr Marc Prensky and Professor Sugata Mitra were the first two speakers. In my opening remarks, I emphasised the need to shift from teaching to learning and find technology solutions to address the needs of the marginalised. COL is aware of the webinar fatigue which is setting in and is careful not to over-burden stakeholders unnecessarily.

During this quarter, a number of consultations were held to shape the next six-year Strategic Plan. SDG 4, which aims to provide equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning for all, will continue to be the broad framework within which countries will define their priorities. Given the setbacks in learning caused by the pandemic, the real test for COL will be to develop innovations and targeted solutions that are both meaningful and scalable.

3. Programme

Most partners are still in various stages of lockdown but colleagues are working hard to ensure that the momentum is not lost. The results are encouraging and all corporate targets set for June 2021 have already been exceeded.

3.1 Education Sector

3.1.1 Open/Innovative Schooling

COL commissioned the South African Institute for Distance Education to support the open school at Botswana Open University with online training in Moodle to develop new content for business studies.

In Eswatini, COL is supporting the online development of 1500 curriculum-based OER. The content and the open schooling model will be piloted in 15 schools, with plans to scale to 290 schools.

NAMCOL has developed more than 1050 resources to update existing courses, with COL support.

Online meetings were held with the Universal Basic Education Commission task team, content developers, and centre managers in Nigeria to discuss and develop a document for an open schooling model.

COL supported the National Institute of Education to develop and implement gender guidelines for open schooling in Sri Lanka.

Curriculum-based OER content development in Trinidad & Tobago was completed. The 'OER for Online Learning' course reached more than 9900 teachers in the Caribbean using the mooKIT platform. The Ministry of Education is using the course as the foundation for more in-depth training.

3.1.2 Teacher Education

COL supported the Teaching Service Commission in Sierra Leone to hold a multi-stakeholder strategic planning workshop for in-service teacher training. Recommendations from the workshop will inform the national Continuing Professional Development strategy.

COL entered into an agreement with ScooNews | EdBank to train 100000 teachers in India over the next one year. Already, 7500 learners have registered and 650 certificates of completion issued.

The Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka held a workshop to introduce school principals to the COL-supported 'School-Based Professional Teacher Development' programme. Principals from 15 national and provincial pilot schools as well as ministry officials participated and will lead the professional development activities in their respective institutions.

Two courses—'Cybersecurity Training for Teachers' and 'Mobile Learning with Multimedia'—have been developed and are currently on offer as MOOCs with 3700 participants enrolled.

3.1.3 Higher Education

In Cameroon, 20 participants attended a workshop on quality assurance at which guidelines and rubrics were developed.

The University of Rwanda, with inputs from COL, developed an 'Online Protection Policy' and 'Student Code of Conduct for Online Learning and Safety', which were approved and sent to the Senate.

In Copperbelt University, Zambia, an employability policy and a skills development workshop were held with 16 participants.

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

The online course 'Introduction to Disability Needs Assessments and Assistive Technologies' has attracted 42 teachers and disability practitioners from Mauritius.

Prompted by the demand for online training, NAMCOL is offering the VUSSC 'Developing and Teaching Online' course with 746 registrants.

In partnership with the University of Seychelles, the second MOOC on 'The Blue Economy: Creating an Enabling Environment' was launched where 1405 learners enrolled. The numbers of nurses and midwives in Seychelles enrolled in the continuing professional education courses offered through The World Continuing Education Alliance, with COL support, continues to grow; 484 learners have completed courses so far.

COL supported the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Antigua & Barbuda to organise a virtual workshop on 'Teaching and Learning with OER', attended by 135 primary and secondary teachers.

Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute developed five online courses available as OER in maths, reading, IT skills and entrepreneurship.

Thirty five participants from 14 Commonwealth countries have enrolled in the online course 'Designing and Developing Online Assessments'.

3.1.5 GIRLS Inspire

COL partner, the Centre for Mass Education in Science, Bangladesh, trained 1152 women and girls who became self-employed while 288 got jobs in the garment and computer industries. In addition, 1080 men and boys registered for gender equality training. Through Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha, another partner, 1050 women and girls completed training in duck rearing, fish farming, sewing and computer skills.

COL commissioned SPARC in Pakistan to train 3590 women and girls through the new centres that were opened during the pandemic. As a result, 184 girls reported earning an income and 12 opened bank accounts for the first time. Eleven girls, who completed the training, trained other girls in designing and dressmaking in their villages.

Due to the pandemic, women and girls in Sri Lanka were trained in establishing their businesses online as regular sales had declined. COL partner, the Women Development Centre, conducted 18 training workshops for livelihoods skills at which 354 women and girls and 6 boys participated.

3.2 Skills Sector

3.2.1 Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

COL shared OER for TVET teacher training in distance and flexible learning with Kenya Technical Teachers College (KTTC). COL, KTTC, National Industrial Training Authority and National Federation of Jua Kali Associations have developed a national qualification to train master craftsmen and women.

COL supported Nigeria's National Board of Technical Education to train TVET teachers to teach online by developing a Moodle Implementation Plan and Moodle instance.

The Human Employment and Resource Training Trust, Jamaica, built the capacity of its 28 member institutions with COL support. Eight master trainers have further trained 185 TVET teachers using COL's 'Blended Learning in the Classroom' course. COL partner the Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica, an agency of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, built the online capacity of its 11 member colleges.

3.2.2 Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)

In Ghana, 2500 new farmers registered for L3F. Courses on financial literacy and sustainable farming were developed by the District Department of Agriculture and translated into local languages with COL support.

In Kenya, 4030 farmers were trained in sustainable agriculture, poultry farming and financial management and 724 new farmers registered on the mobile learning platform during the pandemic.

The L3F model has been adopted in all ten provinces of Zambia with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture.

In India, two MobiMOOCs were completed with 4599 farmers. Staff of civil society organisations were trained to send credit-related messages to farmers.

A MOOC on 'Good Agricultural Practices' led by The Bahamas Agricultural Health and Food Safety Authority and the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources was completed with 375 learners.

In Jamaica, 6431 farmers were reached by text messages on COVID-19 safety, cassava and hot pepper production, and farming as a business.

3.2.3 Technology Enabled Learning

Kibabii University, Kenya developed a draft policy for implementing technology-enabled learning at an online workshop where 41 staff and faculty participated.

Indira Gandhi National Open University launched a 'Certificate in Mobile Application Development' using the advanced ICT skill courses developed with COL support. The Digital Empowerment Foundation, India completed a training programme which enhanced the digital skills of 2000 weavers and artisans (1490 male and 510 female) with 974 (633 male and 341 female) enhancing their livelihoods.

With COL support, Universiti Malaysia Sabah organised a MOOC on 'Introduction to Bio Risk Management' which attracted 950 learners.

Antigua State College developed a draft policy for technology-enabled learning at an online workshop where 19 staff and faculty participated. A baseline study on technology-enabled learning was also completed at the college.

As part of its technology-enabled learning implementation, Fiji National University has developed 18 online/blended courses at which 1554 students registered to date. The University of Papua New Guinea has also developed 18 online/blended courses where 1548 students have registered.

A self-learning online course 'Teaching in A Digital Age' is on offer with an initial registration of 93 learners, 50 of whom have completed so far. The revised and updated course on 'Understanding Open Educational Resources (OER)' has 12451 registered users. The C-DELTA online platform, an important resource for digital skills, has 10109 registered users. Two MOOCs on 'Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning' and 'Blended Learning Practice' offered jointly by COL and Athabasca University registered 4720 participants of which 973 completed the courses.

Two webinars were organised for OpenDoor. This has become a vibrant partnership of over 60 institutions/organisations, where 200 courses have been shared for use by anyone, anywhere. They can be found [here](#).

3.2.4 Skills Online

The COL-Udemy online project, which builds employability skills among youth has 44623 enrolments from Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda, and 11226 certificates have been issued.

COL supported digital marketing skills and cyber security training for 5000 learners through READ-India. In partnership with LabourNet, India, COL has implemented a blended training programme for 2100 workers who lost their livelihoods during the pandemic. Beauticians, auto service technicians and tailors were re-trained in sanitisation skills and workplace hygiene practices.

The over 100000 learners in the COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery programme have completed multiple courses and 49545 certificates have been issued.

3.3 Cross-cutting Theme

3.3.1 Gender

The Minister of Youth and Development, Malawi visited the Concerned Youth Organisation-COL project, which has trained over 450 women and girls in entrepreneurship, financial and business management skills.

In order to help women and girls respond to the challenges experienced during COVID-19, COL partnered with Youth Aid Education Possible Changes Organization in Tanzania to build the capacity of 1000 women and girls in vocational and life skills.

Servants of St. Joseph in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands National Council of Women and Guadalcanal Province Council of Women participated in the first meeting of the Community of Practice for the 'Learning for resilience and local sustainability' project for women which aims to help them develop local produce.

A gender equality capacity building project was launched with ten partners in 12 countries. Online meetings were held and a capacity needs assessment was conducted.

Two policy briefs, 'Addressing Gendered Consequences of COVID-19' and 'Enhancing Girls' and Women's Success in Technical and Vocational Education' were completed.

CommonwealthWiseWomen mentorship project hosted two webinars. The mentees completed a survey which indicated that this programme has had a positive impact on their confidence and self-image.

3.4 eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO)

Course administration for three cohorts for UNFPA's 'Virtual Orientation Programme' was completed. Two cohorts in the 'Oral Communication' and two pilot cohorts in the 'Facilitation and Team Building' courses were completed for Council of Europe.

A new five-year frame agreement with the Council of Europe has been received to adapt and deliver the 'Writing Effectively' course in English and French. Two proposals for service provision were submitted to international organisations.

3.5 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

A three-day capacity building programme on 'Online Learning Facilitation' was organised by CEMCA for 560 teachers and teacher educators in Maldives in collaboration with the National Institute of Education.

Capacity building workshops on topics related to online course/video development were organised in the virtual mode for teachers of Bangladesh Open University (70 participants) and Rajiv Gandhi University in India (104 participants). Faculty training on OER was also organised with Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Open University, India (150 participants) and HELP University, Malaysia (33 participants).

CEMCA worked with 25 community radio stations in Northeastern India to deliver messages on science, technology and innovation through a grant received from the Department of Science and Technology.

3.6 Regional Centres

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

An online induction was held for 33 learners of the 'Certificate for Distance Education Practitioners' course.

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

RETRIDOL experts visited the Centre for Open and Distance Learning established by the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, to provide technical advice on seeking formal accreditation.

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

Content for all six courses of the micro-credentialled 'Youth Work' programme has been completed for review.

3.6.4 Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (CCCL)

Four webinars on 'Blockchain in Education' were conducted with 91 participants from several Commonwealth countries where certificates were issued using blockchain. A MOOC on digital literacy was launched with 1300 participants.

3.6.5 COL Chairs

COL Chair Professor Mpine Makoe, facilitated the offering of two courses on 'Upskilling Teachers to Teach Online' which were taken up by 463 participants.

3.7 Vice President's Activities

Dr Balaji extended advice to L3F partners in deploying a set of MobiMOOCs on digital literacy. He also worked with staff to develop funding proposals. Work plans with programme staff were finalised.

4. Stakeholder Relations

4.1 Member Governments Support

In 2019-2020, \$10.7 million was received from 46 Member States. COL is forecasting contributions at a similar level in 2020-2021. Invoices for the current year's funding have been sent.

During this quarter, contributions were received from 19 countries (as compared to 13 countries during the first quarter of the previous year). A complete listing is provided at Section 5.1.

4.2 Focal Points

COL welcomed Mr Gerard N Vries, Deputy Director for Lifelong Learning, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture as the Focal Point for Namibia.

4.3 Congratulatory Letters

Letter of congratulation were sent to Ministers of Education in Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Malawi, Sri Lanka and Trinidad & Tobago.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenue

COL has received \$5.8 million in voluntary contributions from Member States towards the budget for 2020-2021 (as compared to \$5.3 million for the same period the previous year).

The 19 countries are:

Australia – \$950,067; Bahamas – \$79,332; Botswana – \$130,000; Cameroon – \$38,927; Canada – \$2,600,000; Cyprus – \$18,891; Dominica – \$6,750; India – \$1,445,497; Malta – \$19,500; Mauritius – \$100,000; Namibia – 132,000; Nauru – \$6,830; Saint Kitts & Nevis – \$39,666; Seychelles – \$9,916; Solomon Islands – \$6,611; South Africa – \$250,000; Tonga – \$26,444; Tuvalu – \$13,244; and Uganda – \$2,704.

COL is forecasting additional contributions of \$1.3 million from grants and fee-for-service activities. Deferred revenue of \$440,000 was on hand at the beginning of the financial year and will be recognised as activities related to three projects are completed.

During this quarter, COL recognised close to \$460,000 (similar to the \$465,000 received at the same time in the previous year) in revenues from grants and fee-for-services. This included \$67,000 from deferred revenue and a new general operating support grant from Hewlett Foundation.

5.2 Cash Flow

At September 30, 2020, COL held close to \$7 million (as compared to \$7.6 million at September 30, 2019) in cash and cash equivalents which will be utilised to meet operational commitments throughout the year while maintaining a positive cash flow until outstanding contributions are received.

COL holds an internally restricted cash reserve of \$11 million to provide a source of funds for unexpected expenses and shortfalls in funding, if needed. The cash reserve provision represents 12 months of operating costs.

A capital fund of \$10.2 million is held for the acquisition of a permanent site along with a contingency fund of \$500,000 for possible programme expansion.

5.3 Expenditures

In the first quarter, an estimated \$3.6 million was spent or committed to meet programme and organisational management activities, staff costs and office expenses. This amount comprises 30% of the annual budget of \$12.1 million approved for 2020-2021 (as compared to expenditures of 37% of the annual budget for 2019-2020 during the same period).

6. Technology & Innovation

Three Moodle/OER Portal Installations were provided for partner institutions in Barbados, Guyana and Kenya and a fourth for UIL. Eight Moodle sites were created to provide dedicated environments for programme initiatives. These systems will provide high-quality cloud services at much lower costs as compared to commercially available solutions.

Pacific Focal Points had requested that a Regional TV Channel be developed to serve their needs. A platform was established for a video-on-demand hosting service and is being populated with OER mapped to the needs of three countries in the first phase. Outlines of two courses on cybersecurity were reviewed and feedback provided.

OpenDoor and the CommonwealthWiseWomen websites were updated with course catalogue and webinar features. Over forty new resources were added to COL's open access repository, OAsis.

7. Communications

COL's work continues to generate media visibility with 31 external news items around the Commonwealth. In addition, 24 news releases were published on the COL website.

Increased social media activity has continued to boost audience engagement. The social media following has grown with 220000+ followers on Facebook and 7100+ on Twitter. A total of 97 posts were released on Facebook and 101 in Twitter, with the top engagement of 18055 for a single post. A social campaign marking one year of PCF9 featured key highlights and videos as a lead up to PCF10 to be held in Canada in 2022.

COL released a record 79 videos on our YouTube channel, with a total of 22640 views.

8. Publications/Resources

The following are recent publications and resources of note:

- [Assistive Technologies: Inclusive Teaching Guidelines for Educators](#)
- [Connections \(Vol. 25, no. 2\)](#)
- [Journal of Learning for Development \(Vol. 7, no 2\)](#)
- [Quality Assurance Rubric for Blended Learning](#)
- [Report on the Baseline Study of Technology-Enabled Learning at Antigua State College](#)
- [Strategies for Blended TVET In Response to COVID-19](#)
- [Technology-Enabled Learning: Policy, Pedagogy and Practice](#)
- [Virtual Conference on Skills for a Resilient Youth: Virtual Conference Report](#)

They are available on [OAsis](#), COL's open access repository.

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

*Professor Asha S. Kanwar
President & Chief Executive Officer
October 15, 2020*