



BOARD OF GOVERNORS President's Quarterly Progress Report: October - December 2019

1. Board Matters

At the 45th meeting of the Audit Committee held on November 12, 2019, the audited financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2019 were approved. You will be pleased to note that as in previous years, an unmodified auditor's report was received. The audited statements are available [here](#) on the COL website.

The next meeting of the Audit Committee is scheduled for February 25, 2020 to be followed by an Executive Committee meeting on February 27, 2020. Both meetings will be held by teleconference.

The upcoming annual meeting of the Board will take place in Vancouver on July 15 and 16, 2020 and include a strategic planning retreat.

I place on record our gratitude to the board members whose terms have recently concluded: Honourable Nurul Islam Nahid, MP from Bangladesh who represented Asia; Letuimanu'asina Dr Emma Kruse Va'ai representative for the Pacific from Samoa; Mr R. Subrahmanyam, India's representative from the Ministry of Human Resource Development; and Lord David Puttnam, the Commonwealth Secretary General's appointee. Each one of them has made outstanding contributions to the development and growth of COL and will be remembered for their unwavering support.

I am delighted to welcome the following regional representatives: for Africa, Mr Armoogum Parsuramen GOSK, Founder-President of the Global Rainbow Foundation, Mauritius; for Asia, Professor Datuk Dr Asma Ismail, President, Academy of Sciences Malaysia; and for the Pacific, Honourable Siaso Sovaleni, Minister of Education and Training, Tonga. The process of filling the remaining vacancies on the Board is under way.

2. General

The process for COL's next Strategic Plan 2021-2027 was initiated with a one-day retreat for programme staff facilitated by Maxim Jean-Louis, President-CEO of Contact North. The objective was to explore what has changed in the last five years and how these changes are impacting education and learning in Member States. While SDG 4 remains the overarching framework for most of our stakeholders, we need to consult our Focal Points around the four regions of the Commonwealth on national and regional priorities. The Evaluation of the current Strategic Plan 2015-2021 will also provide useful

recommendations for COL to deliver effectively on its mission and mandate. In developing the new Plan, we will i) focus on the needs of specific target groups such as people with disabilities; ii) support 'green' models of educational delivery that will mitigate the detrimental impact of climate change; iii) harness the potential of emerging technologies; iv) demonstrate viable methods of promoting lifelong learning and v) be a trusted innovator and thought leader that delivers results. The trends and insights from the Focal Points' consultations and the evaluation report will be shared with the Board at the planning retreat in July 2020.

The annual one-on-one meetings with the staff provided a valuable opportunity to get feedback on how we can further improve our processes and work culture. Morale continues to remain high and we are fortunate to have a team of dedicated professionals from around the Commonwealth. The year ended on a high note with the annual Christmas lunch for staff.

2.1 President's Activities

With COL's growing global visibility, the number of invitations to various events are increasing from different regions. Thanks to technology, it is possible to be virtually 'present' when time does not otherwise permit. Two keynote addresses by video were sent to Namibia and Pakistan for the Namibian Open Learning Network Trust and the Asian Association of Open Universities conferences.

I participated in a plenary panel on women's leadership organised by Professor Belinda Tynan at the ICDE World Conference in Dublin, where a new COL publication on micro-credentials was launched. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Zheijiang Open University, I was invited to deliver a keynote at the international symposium organised in Hangzhou. The integration of technology innovations into their daily operations—robots, virtual reality, online credit transfer systems—are truly impressive. With the introduction of 5G technology, China is poised to leapfrog into the future. In London, the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council invited me to give the second Zena Daysh lecture, the first having been delivered by renowned journalist Sir Mark Tully. My topic 'Our changing climate: do we need a shift in the way we learn?' was very well received by a diverse audience comprising policy makers, academics, students and Commonwealth enthusiasts.

The lecture was followed by the annual Diplomats' Induction programme led by the Commonwealth Secretariat in partnership with the Commonwealth Foundation and COL, where newly posted diplomats from 16 countries participated. This programme provides a useful opportunity to raise COL's profile and meet key stakeholders. On this occasion, I met the High Commissioners of The Bahamas, Barbados, Botswana, Cyprus, Malta, Namibia, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. My presentations on COL's six paradigm shifts and contributions to mitigating the climate crisis, generated a lively discussion.

This was an opportunity to call on the Secretary General the Rt Honourable Patricia Scotland to apprise her of COL's progress and pending appointments to the Board. While in

the UK, I met colleagues from the High Commissions of Australia, Canada and New Zealand as well as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

I have been nominated to the Governing Board of the Geneva-based Globethics.net Foundation, which promotes ethics in higher education and has a global network of partners. As this association will help to extend COL's existing networks, I attended my first Board meeting in Buenos Aires. Later in New Delhi, I chaired the 19th Advisory Council of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), our regional office, with representatives from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka.

COL had been invited to conduct a trial institutional audit at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and the international panel that I chaired, visited the campuses and regional centres to complete the final set of activities. This has resulted in two reports on 'Research' and 'Institutional Quality' which will help UNISA to prepare for the formal audit to be conducted later this year. While in Pretoria, I met the Honourable Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training who acknowledged COL as a major player in education. I also met Professor Narend Bajjnath, CEO, Council for Higher Education and briefed him on various COL activities.

While we rely on technology to reach our dispersed Commonwealth, we cannot underestimate the power of face-to-face interactions. All these events and activities have contributed significantly to raising COL's profile and as COL's reputation grows, so will the expectations of stakeholders. COL is well prepared.

All speeches and presentations are available at: <http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/2409>

3. Programme

The pace of activities has gained momentum as can be seen in both the increased results and expenditure.

3.1 Education Sector

3.1.1 Open/Innovative Schooling

COL organised a study visit for practitioners from the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Nigeria, Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) and Ministry of Education, Malawi to the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), a mature open school. The objective was to learn from their experience as these two countries seek to expand open schooling. MCDE is currently undertaking a quality assurance review of the 4741 learning resources that have been developed with COL support. UBEC have identified six states and 109 schools that will adopt the open schooling model. COL is also working with NAMCOL to update the content for the national senior secondary school curriculum. Content will be created/updated for 11 subjects by 55 educators and used in 200

schools by over 100000 learners. In Mozambique, COL supported 15 schools to finalise the content, pedagogic model and learner support systems for open schooling.

COL is supporting the development of an Inclusive Education policy for the Open School at Bangladesh Open University to give greater access to children with disabilities. In partnership with the National Institute of Open Schooling, India, a workshop was held in Sri Lanka to develop Gender Guidelines for the National Institute of Education.

A workshop was held in Guyana to build capacity in the different aspects of open schooling including the use of Open Educational Resources (OER). In Trinidad & Tobago over 1000 resources have been developed for piloting the open schooling model.

Two training programmes were organised in Vanuatu – a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy and a review of the content developed for piloting in the next quarter.

3.1.2 Teacher Education

COL supported a learning design workshop in The Gambia on the use of OER for eLearning. Two workshops were organised in Ghana for project inception and problem-based learning attended by staff of Tamale College of Education, school teachers and representatives of the regional and municipal education directorates. In collaboration with The Open University, UK, COL supported the Ministry of Education and the Kenya Institute of Special Education to host a learning design workshop where participants contributed to developing resources in inclusive education. A project initiation workshop was held for participants from Gulu and Muni Universities in northern Uganda. National Teachers' Institute, Nigeria organised a training programme in M&E focused on data collection practices for evaluating the Green Teacher project.

An agreement was signed with the Joint Board of Teacher Education, Jamaica to implement a project on teaching Mathematics and English in 35 secondary schools that will include children with disabilities. This is expected to benefit over 37000 students and 2000 teachers.

3.1.3 Higher Education

Staff members from 18 universities in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda participated in a four-week online course on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa. Under the Association of Commonwealth Universities-COL partnership project, quality assurance reports were received from 12 institutions where three universities have completed their on-site review and submitted improvement plans. COL participated in a workshop held in Nairobi.

The University of Namibia organised a workshop on employability for staff members who attended a series of training sessions on competency-based curriculum development and mapping learning outcomes to the competencies. A similar workshop on employability was also held at UNISA. The national ODL policy for Eswatini was

completed and sent to the Ministry of Education and Training for approval. Participants from Copperbelt University, Zambia developed institutional ODL policy and Quality Assurance guidelines.

More than 4000 learners from 70 countries registered in the second edition of a MOOC on 'Introduction to Business for Sustainable Development', which was offered jointly with the Open University of Mauritius resulting in a completion rate of 50.4 %.

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

In partnership with the Global Rainbow Foundation, a report on *Technology-Enabled Learning for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) and Practitioners who Support Them* was completed and a training session held which included the University of Mauritius. Outlines for two revised courses were completed for the Special and Inclusive Education Degree programme for in-service teachers at Botswana Open University.

The Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work conducted a technical workshop on developing and delivering an online/blended Bachelor in Youth Work. Hosted by the Bangladesh Open University (BOU), the workshop brought together representatives from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and the UK. An agreement has been signed with the University of Guyana to strengthen staff capacity to deliver this programme.

With assistance from COL, Dominica's Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development has produced a series of audio and video messages as part of a public education series on climate change and resilience. As a result, the Climate Resilience Execution Agency Dominica submitted a proposal to COL to support their initiatives in making Dominica the world's first climate resilient nation. COL is providing support to The Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute to develop five online courses and learning resources related to Mathematics, Reading, IT Skills and Entrepreneurship to be released as OER. Thirty-eight students at the University of Belize are beginning the second year of the VUSSC Master's in Educational Leadership.

COL is working with The University of the West Indies to update the VUSSC courses in Sustainable Agriculture, to be offered by the Open Campus.

3.1.5 *GIRLS Inspire*

This project continues to achieve encouraging outcomes in Bangladesh, India Pakistan and Sri Lanka through the efforts of our partners. Over 7943 women and girls were trained in life and vocational skills, including reproductive health, goat rearing, computer literacy and other income generating activities. Seventy two girls were re-integrated into formal schooling; 1518 women and girls were gainfully employed; 132 girls obtained micro-loans; 80 girls opened their own bank accounts and 36 girls established an online business. Over 14000 men and women attended community awareness raising events.

3.2 Skills Sector

3.2.1 Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

COL is working with the College of Technology Education, Koforidua Technical University and Ghana National Association of Garages on a joint project to formalise informal apprenticeships in the automotive industry. COL facilitated a project design workshop with Kenya Technical Trainers College and Jua Kali Association, a mega-alliance of artisans in Kenya. The National Vocational Training Institute conducted a workshop in Ghana on e-learning for TVET trainers and assessors from over 20 institutions. Yaba College of Technology and the Computer and Telecommunication Engineers Association of Nigeria held a project design workshop for computer and mobile phone technicians.

In Zambia, COL is assisting the Ministry of Higher Education, Technical Education Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority, Kabwe Institute of Technology and Luanshya Technical and Business College to build ICT and furniture-making skills using a blended approach. COL is coordinating a project with funding from the Human Resource Development Council of Botswana. Stakeholder workshops were held to share the results of the situational analysis and develop a student internship and apprenticeship policy.

COL has partnered with institutions in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda, for promoting employability skills by registering over 900 learners with Udemy for Business courses. As part of institutional capacity-building, 115 people enrolled in the Flexible Skills Development online course.

3.2.2 Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)

The m-Learning platform in Kenya was formally launched with 445 farmers registered. The m-Learning platform in Tanzania enrolled 502 learners. In addition, 109 leaders were trained in financial management and 308 farmers in loan negotiation where 555 farmers accessed loans. A workshop in Tanzania for senior officials in banking and the Ministry of Agriculture was organised to discuss acceptance of learning as collateral for accessing credit.

COL and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), India held a workshop in Chennai for their managers on innovative financing mechanisms and the use of the Results-Based Management approach to monitor and evaluate impact. In India, an audio-only MOOC on corporate literacy for shareholders, with a basic mobile phone interface, was offered to build organisational capacity where 2493 farmers (50% female) enrolled, 10% of whom were eligible for certificates. Three MOOCs for agriculture were delivered, reaching over 12000 learners with a completion rate of 20%.

3.2.3 Technology Enabled Learning (TEL)

COL supported Zambia to organise a national consultation to finalise an OER policy. In partnership with Kaimosi Friends University College, Kenya, COL held a

workshop to develop a TEL policy for the institution. COL supported Uganda Management Institute to strengthen its TEL implementation by organising a training programme on Blended Learning and Online Facilitation.

In Bangladesh, a workshop on Blended Course Development was held at Ahunsallah University of Science and Technology, where participants finalised 20 courses.

A workshop for school teachers was held in St Lucia to implement the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) programme.

COL supported Fiji National University to strengthen its TEL implementation by facilitating a workshop on e-Moderation. A COL-facilitated workshop on Blended Course Development using Moodle at the University of Papua New Guinea resulted in the development of 20 blended courses.

The fourth TEL MOOC on 'Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning', offered jointly with Athabasca University, Canada, attracted 2426 participants from 42 Commonwealth countries. Certificates of completion or participation were awarded to 28% of the participants.

3.3 Cross-cutting Theme

3.3.1 Gender

As a result of a COL-supported gender audit, Koforidua Technical University, Ghana began implementing a Gender Mainstreaming Roadmap. A Gender Centre has been created along with a new gender website. In Malawi, COL worked with Concerned Youth Organization to conduct six inception meetings/stakeholder briefings with 168 participants to empower women and girls.

COL engaged Youth Challenge Guyana to train and mentor 110 boys/young men in market driven technical skills and life skills, as well as placed them in internships.

The Solomon Islands National Council of Women conducted consultations for the ongoing Social Safety Nets project to gain community insights about the need for social services. Students from the University of Wollongong, Australia developed an app which provides an easy-to-navigate tool for Solomon Island citizens to access information on social protection.

3.4 eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO)

eLIO delivered courses in programme management, operational data management, and communications to staff of Council of Europe, UNHCR, UNICEF and World Bank, with high completion rates of 86% or more. Administration services for UNFPA benefitted 126 learners, including a team of 36 new staff in the Mozambique country office.

3.5 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

CEMCA organised several training events in collaboration with different partners in India. A meeting on building capacity in Assessment and Accreditation was held at Netaji Subash Open University. A training workshop on OER policy development and implementation was held at Tamil Nadu Open University (TNOU). At another event, 42 faculty members of TNOU were trained in designing and developing online courses. CEMCA is supporting Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University to develop a policy on OER and a capacity development workshop was facilitated by COL. Two workshops on Community Radio as a Tool for Community Development were organised for representatives of 77 radio stations. The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting supported a Community Radio Awareness workshop for civil society, facilitated by CEMCA. Fifty two skills development videos in four Indian languages were completed for the Bamboo for Sustainable Development project.

CEMCA brought out its quarterly [Newsletter](#) and published its Annual Report and Achievement Report for the 19th Advisory Council meeting.

3.6 Regional Centres

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

Lesotho College has developed an action plan, with SADC-CDE support to implement non-formal education programmes.

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

Seven institutions in Nigeria and three in Ghana have drafted policies for dual-mode provision. In Nigeria, 12 action plans for gender mainstreaming (one from each participating university) were developed. Gashua University and National Open University of Nigeria have already commenced implementation, which include the constitution of gender committees and development of gender policy.

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

The Functional Numeracy MOOC and Youth Development courses have been finalised.

3.6.4 Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (CCCL)

A MOOC on digital literacy skills for educators is being designed.

3.6.5 COL Chairs

The COL Chair at IIT-Kanpur, India led the development of five MOOCs offered by COL that reached 17400 learners around the world. The COL Chair at Royal Roads University, Canada is preparing a research project on Flexible Learning in the Pacific.

3.7 Vice President's Activities

Reports of evaluation from all programme initiatives have been received. A team of two experts Ms. Pamela Branch (Canada) and Dr Leslie Casely-Hayford (Ghana) has been commissioned to carry out the meta-evaluation with the draft report to be available for the Board meeting in July.

The Vice President visited CEMCA to review the summative evaluation process, meet with staff and participate in the Advisory Council meeting. While in India, Dr Balaji met the regional head of NABARD to strengthen the collaboration with COL. The Vice President and colleagues worked with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand and PACFOLD to finalise a business case for skills development in the Pacific after conducting the final set of consultations in Kiribati and PNG.

4. Stakeholder Relations

4.1 Member Governments Support

At the end of December, contributions were received from 31 countries (29 countries contributed during the same period last year). A complete listing of countries for this quarter is provided at 5.1.

4.2 Focal Points

COL welcomed a new Focal Point from Nigeria, Ms Maria Ada Amedu, Assistant Director, Federal Ministry of Education.

4.3 Congratulatory Letters

Seven congratulatory letters were sent to newly-appointed Commonwealth ministers.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenue

COL has received \$8.8 million in voluntary contributions from Member States towards the budget for 2019-2020 (compared to \$9.5 million at the end of the second quarter

in 2018-2019). Contributions from five major donors have now been received as compared to six a year ago during the same period.

The 18 countries that contributed during this quarter are:

The Bahamas – \$79,032; Bangladesh – \$39,570; Barbados – \$59,355; Belize – \$39,570; Botswana – \$132,390; Cyprus – \$17,530; Guyana – \$19,825; Lesotho – \$92,330; Malaysia – \$50,000; Mauritius – \$100,000; Namibia – \$132,390; Saint Lucia – \$24,254; Saint Vincent & The Grenadines – \$6,595; Samoa – \$79,434; Seychelles – \$19,859; South Africa – \$250,000; Sri Lanka – \$39,717; and United Kingdom – \$2,245,100.

Additional contributions of \$1 million from grants and services have been recognised during the period July 1 to December 31, 2019 towards meeting the annual target of \$2.3 million. Deferred revenues in excess of \$1.1 million are also available for recognition over the fiscal year as activities are completed.

5.2 Cash Flow

At December 31, COL held \$7.5 million in cash and cash equivalents and temporary investments. These funds will be used to maintain a positive cash flow and meet operational costs which include current liabilities of \$3.5 million.

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. A contingency fund was set up to provide for expenditure over 100% to 105% of the annual budget. In addition, a Capital fund is available for a permanent site.

5.3 Expenditures

At the end of the second quarter, approximately \$7.9 million was spent or committed to meet programme and organisational management activities, staff costs and office expenses. This amount comprises 62% of the annual budget of \$12.5 million approved for 2019-2020 (as compared to expenditures and commitments of 43% of the annual budget for 2018-2019 during the same period).

6. Human Resources

6.1 New Staff

Ms Jayavadee Sooben from Canada was appointed Adviser: Higher Education effective January 6, 2020.

7. Information Technology & Innovation

During this quarter, 300 tablets and 30 Aptus devices were sourced for assisting schools in The Bahamas following the recent hurricane. The tablets have been shipped to Nassau while the Aptus devices have been received at COL for content loading and customisation. These items have been purchased through an additional contribution.

The number of Amazon virtual servers was reduced from 13 to seven by porting websites to a shared hosting environment, resulting in a reduction of the monthly hosting fee by more than 15%.

'A Guide to Blended Learning', the first COL publication using Pressbook an open book publishing platform, may be accessed at: <https://openbooks.col.org/blendedlearning/>

COL implemented several advanced security features, such as multi-factor authentication, labelling external email, implementing advanced threats detection to protect COL information systems and network from cybersecurity attacks. Staff training on cybersecurity was conducted to heighten awareness.

8. Permanent Site

The Permanent Site Committee, which had been constituted in the previous quarter to take forward the decision of the Board, initiated the identification of a permanent site for COL by working with the selected real estate services company, Colliers International to 1) review the listing of available properties received in response to a call for information to property owners and realtors; 2) invite three qualified full-service construction managers to submit proposals and make presentations on how they could support COL with its site acquisition (one firm was recommended by the Committee based on its experience with similar sized projects, range of services, pricing model and other factors); 3) initiate a property tax review for possible exemption as an international organisation; and 4) hold various discussions on costings for budgetary purposes.

The space planning exercise will be completed soon with site visits to follow and a full report with timelines submitted to the Audit and Executive Committees at the February 2020 meetings.

9. Communications

COL has been mentioned in 15 external media stories with 27 news items, two press releases and two blogs published on the website

COL's social-media presence has kept steady with 172,300+ followers on Facebook and 6,800+ on Twitter. On Facebook, 32 posts were published, with one reaching 60,100+

individuals globally. On Twitter, Independence Day messages were sent to Member States and COL published 46 Tweets and re-Tweets, which generated 37100 impressions.

The November issue of *Connections* focussed on key highlights of PCF9 and was widely distributed in both paper and electronic formats.

10. Publications/Resources

Recent publications and resources of note are listed below and available at <http://oasis.col.org>

1. [*Connections* November 2019, Vol 24 No 3](#)
2. [*Journal of Learning for Development* November 2019, Vol 6 No 3](#)
3. [*Guidelines on the Development of Open Educational Resources Policies*](#)
4. [*Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action: An Evaluation*](#)
5. [*Learners' Access to Educational Materials in Select Institutions within the Commonwealth*](#)
6. [*Speeches and Presentations*](#)

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

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