



COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING

President's Quarterly Report

October – December 2023

Board Matters

At the 57th meeting of the Audit Committee held online in December, the audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2023 were approved. You will be pleased to note that as in previous years, an unmodified auditor's report was received. This is the gold standard of financial audits and a testament to the excellent performance of COL staff and the robust systems in place. The statements are available at [COL Website](#).

Following the announcement by His Excellency Danny Faure, all of us at COL welcome Professor Peter Scott — a global leader in open and distance learning — as the fifth President and Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth of Learning, commencing his term on January 8, 2024. I wish him the very best as he takes up the role in the New Year. It has been a privilege and honour to serve the Commonwealth in this role for over 11 years.

The next meeting of the Audit Committee will be held in the third quarter along with a meeting of the Executive Committee with dates to be finalised.

The annual meetings of the Board will be held in Vancouver on June 26–27, 2024.

General

COL's footprint in the Pacific is growing, as a result of the Open Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) project supported by New Zealand. At a recent Steering Committee, the representative from New Zealand expressed satisfaction at some of the key achievements including skills training for youth in Fiji,

Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu; training teachers in Open Educational Resources (OER) and ODFL, and identifying technology solutions to address national data sovereignty requirements. At the Pacific Education Ministers' meeting held in March this year, I had initiated discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to support a new project for transforming education for climate action in the Pacific. With its expertise in ODFL and the strong networks established in the region, COL is eminently well-placed to take this forward and members agreed to explore this further.

Under the Empowering Women and Girls project funded by Canada, more than 6,000 women and girls in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were trained in various livelihood skills, including computer literacy, tailoring and sustainable agriculture. A range of resources including courses on gender and climate change were completed and a Social Protection Literacy toolkit developed to provide information on country-specific programmes.

The [ODL Observatory](#) has been launched internally. It will continue to be a work-in-progress guided by a 12-member Advisory Committee of global experts as COL offers this one-window entry point into a range of resources and valuable information in the field of open and distance learning.

The [COLCommons](#) platform continues to provide micro-courses for just-in-time training opportunities to thousands of learners, not just in the Commonwealth but around the world. This received two silver Brandon Hall Awards 2023 for Excellence in Technology during this quarter, making it seven awards received in different categories over the last three years.

The mid-term evaluation is under way with an external evaluator appointed after a thorough international search. The meta-evaluation will provide an assessment of what is working well and what needs to be done differently in the programme.

As a learning organisation, COL provides a range of continuous professional development opportunities.

President's Activities

Given the vast spread of the Commonwealth, the approach that worked well was to combine in-person and virtual participation to respond to the many invitations that COL receives.

The first in-person meeting during this quarter was hosted by the Open University of Mauritius to finalise the course revisions of the Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme offered by institutions in 11 countries. The Academic Board finalised the courses which were approved by the Executive Governing Board, comprising vice chancellors (VCs) from partner institutions. Expressions of interest to offer this programme have since been received from two universities in Kenya and Papua New Guinea.

Taking advantage of these meetings, a High-Level Round Table of VCs was organised immediately thereafter. These Round Tables have become a regular feature at COL and promote leadership development for enhancing the quality of higher education. With 27 VCs and senior officials from 15 Commonwealth countries present, discussions focused on how to build resilient systems that are well prepared to deal with unexpected disasters and disruptions.

In addition, the Higher Education Commission, Mauritius held an awards ceremony for students who had completed the COL-Coursera courses in special education and invited me to deliver a keynote address on innovation in higher education. The Vice Prime Minister, Hon Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun presided over the event. While there, I also addressed the Task Force responsible for the implementation of the national OER policy, developed with COL support.

As Chair of the UNESCO IITE Governing Board, I presented the report of the Institute to the Education Commission held during the UNESCO General Conference. Education for peace and for promoting the digital and the green learning agendas dominated the discussions. It was also an occasion to meet Ministers

of Education: Hon Justin Valentin, Seychelles; Hon Haja Ramatulai Wurie, Sierra Leone and Hon Susil Premajayantha, Sri Lanka. I met HE Ambassador Hajo Sani who arranged a brief conversation with Hon Tahir Mamman, Minister of Education, to discuss the status of Nigeria's contribution.

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The annual Advisory Council of CEMCA was held with members from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Maldives and Sri Lanka present. The common areas of support requested were: capacity building of teachers in blended learning, skills development for employment and entrepreneurship and credit transfer frameworks for learner mobility. Members highlighted the need to focus on public rather than private institutions and to align projects with the priorities of the funding ministries.

I delivered a keynote on 'Elderly Learning in the Digital Age' at the Zheijiang Open University in China. In addition, I contributed three video presentations to: a UNESCO Conference on Higher Education in Mongolia; a graduation ceremony for teachers in Guyana and the Africa TVET Regulators Conference in Kenya. All speeches are available at [COL website](#).

Two awards were conferred on me in absentia on 'Excellence in Inclusive and Sustainable Education' at a ceremony held in Mauritius and an Honorary Member award at the ICDE World Conference, Costa Rica. These are a recognition of COL and its growing visibility.

With increased competition and shrinking resources, COL must continue to be responsive, relevant and results-oriented. While goodwill and social capital are fundamental to ensuring that COL continues to receive voluntary contributions from Member States, it is equally important to demonstrate impact, show evidence of what is achieved and communicate regularly with stakeholders.

Programme: Progress against Outputs

Rapid progress in training and sensitising government officials, institutional staff and community members was witnessed during this quarter. Support for the development of national policies and strategies has improved, but calls for a more proactive approach in aligning COL's work with government priorities.

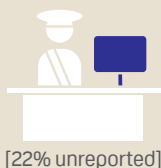
There is still need to develop a strategy to increase COL's activities in the Caribbean.

This quarterly report presents data up to December 15, 2023. Of the ten targets, three have been exceeded, five are on course while two need a more focused approach to reach expected outcomes.

Building National Resilience

Government staff/officials trained/sensitised

29%
female



49%
male

72%

■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

812 government staff/officials trained or sensitised in ODL, OER, TEL, GE or COL models

target: **1,135**

COL supported the training of government officials on open and distance learning (ODL) for teacher training in Ghana and Sierra Leone. In Namibia, policymakers and education officers were trained on gender mainstreaming and using online resources. In Zambia, COL hosted a workshop on ODFL standards to improve the quality of TVET. COL also supported the Zambia Higher Education Authority and Teaching Council of Zambia to strengthen capacity building on ODL and OER.

In partnership with the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, COL trained 112 master trainers in ICTs for teachers.

Building the capacity of policymakers is a key strategy to integrate ODL in national teaching and learning systems. Evidence-based advocacy is required and needs to continue on an ongoing basis.

Ministry officials from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga participated in a webinar on OER. Course developers and facilitators in Papua New Guinea received training on Moodle and online course facilitation. In Fiji, COL organised a regional workshop to train government officials in developing strategies for the professional development of TVET practitioners.

Support for national policies/ strategy development



6 policy/strategy developed

target: **30**

20%

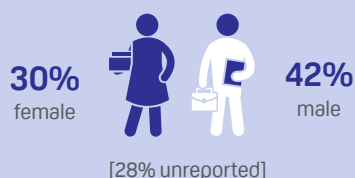
■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

Any shift in policies depends on a combination of factors. Demonstration of successful models and well-documented steps for upscaling, play a major role in influencing policy decisions.

With support from COL, an ODL policy framework has been developed for the establishment of The Gambian School of Open Learning. A national framework on quality assurance of ODL in TVET was developed in Kenya. Organisations in Rwanda and Zambia received support to develop ODL strategies for in-service teacher training. In Sierra Leone, the Tertiary Education Commission developed a national OER policy for tertiary education institutions.

Strengthening Institutions

Institutional staff trained



3,377

staff/faculty/trainers trained in ODL, OER, TEL, GE, or COL models

target:
5,775

Institutional staff play a major role in ensuring the quality of learning through the adoption of ODL approaches and resources. Training of institutional staff equips them with a variety of skills in curriculum development, instructional design and the integration of technologies to improve the quality of learning.

58%



■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

Botswana Open University academic staff were trained on gender keys and gender-sensitive indicators for policy and curriculum review. Institutional staff in Eswatini, The Gambia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Maldives, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Togo and Uganda were trained in ODL, TEL, OER, authentic assessment, learner support services, quality assurance and employability skills. In Ghana, the Presbyterian Agriculture Station (GPAS) trained field staff and district officials on the use of ICT tools to collect data and disseminate voice messages. Staff from the Kenya School of TVET were trained in micro-credentials and the use of COL's Gender Responsive Checklist. COL supported the Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique to adapt and localise the Gender Green Teacher course. Staff from the Technical and Vocational Teacher's College, Zambia, received training on developing a curriculum for blended TVET. In partnership with the African Union Development Agency, COL hosted a TVET Regulators Conference in Kenya to strengthen TVET systems in Africa where representatives from 17 countries participated.

Several training activities, both in-person and online, were organised to promote gender mainstreaming and empowering women and girls in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Training on open textbooks was conducted for teachers from 11 institutions in Malaysia.

Institutional policies/strategies developed



35 institutional policies/strategies developed

target:
48

Institutional policies and frameworks provide structure and guidance for implementing new activities in OER/ODL/TEL for improving learning outcomes, including for those with disabilities and marginalised communities.

73%



■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

With support from COL, Emlalatini Development Centre, Eswatini and the National University of Lesotho developed a TEL policy. An Authentic Assessment framework was developed at the University of Eswatini. Four institutions in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Uganda developed institutional ODL policies. In Sierra Leone, COL supported two tertiary institutions to develop quality assurance guidelines and an employability strategy. Two institutions in Kenya and nine in Nigeria developed ODL strategies for TVET. A university in Namibia developed policies on ODL, OER and employability. Quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation of ODFL frameworks were developed with the Technical Vocational Teacher's College in Zambia.

With support from CEMCA, the University of North Bengal in India, developed an OER policy.

The University Council of Jamaica now has a capacity-building strategy with COL support.

Learning opportunities (courses) developed/improved



209 courses developed or improved with COL support

target: **244**

Development of OER with a focus on employability and enterprise addresses the need for quality content that is accessible to all.



■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, The Gambia developed eight OER-based Moodle courses with COL support. Universities in Rwanda and Sierra Leone developed nine courses on a range of subjects. Six universities in Kenya and Mauritius developed 48 blended/online courses, while the Namibian College of Open Learning developed six vocational courses aligned with the revised national curriculum.

In India, two MobiMOOC courses were developed with COL partner VIDYAL on self-help groups and the benefits of millet. CEMCA collaborated with IIT Kharagpur to develop five contextual lessons on Teachable Machines based on the MIT 'Day of AI' curriculum. CEMCA also developed a course for community radio broadcasters on climate change literacy. In Sri Lanka, CEMCA and the Tertiary Vocational Education Commission developed a course for caregivers of the elderly.

The Cyril Potter College of Education, Guyana developed 12 online courses. The University of Trinidad and Tobago offered a MOOC on dispute resolution and conflict management. The St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College was supported to convert six courses for online delivery and developed an online orientation course for learners.

Learning opportunities (resources) developed/improved



756 learning resources developed with COL support

target: **62**

Accessible learning resources in multiple formats help to reach a range of learners seeking lifelong learning opportunities.

EXCEEDED

The Gambia College developed a learning management system user guide with support from COL. VIDYAL was assisted to develop voice messages on topics including goat-rearing, agriculture and health. Additionally, two mobile learning networks were used to deliver voice messages on enhancing the farmers' loan repayment scheme and reducing the non-performing asset rate.

A curriculum covering women's human rights, gender-based violence protection, justice-seeking mechanisms and service mapping was developed and the courses will be deployed in five countries to promote the empowerment of women and girls.

Improving Lives and Livelihoods

Gender-responsive learning opportunities developed and offered through ODL

8%
female



7%
male

[85% unreported]

121,836 learners enrolled in COL-run courses

target: **266,750**

Online courses increase the reach of COL by offering quality courses that can help enhance employability and livelihoods opportunities.



■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

Over 6,400 learners joined online courses offered directly by COL on a range of topics including quality assurance, authentic assessment, artificial intelligence, blended delivery for TVET and leadership. The C-DELTA programme enrolled 6,913 participants while 2,411 learners participated in the COLCommons courses.

Coursera, Grow with Google and Udemy courses continued to be popular attracting over 30,294 enrolments from Commonwealth countries during this quarter.

Learners mentored and linked to services and financial resources

78%
female



[13% unreported]

9%
male

2,338 learners
mentored/linked to
resources

target:
1,950

EXCEEDED

In Namibia, the Khomas Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture, supported by COL, trained learners on how to start and run a business and linked them with banks and other savings schemes.

In India, COL's partner VIDYAL reached 300 shareholder partners of the Theni Consortium of Farmers Producer Company through voice messages, mentoring them on farmer producer organisation management and marketing.

COL facilitates grassroots communities to access finance and markets through innovative interventions and mentoring support.

Partnerships with labour market, finance and service industry established



30 partnerships
established with labour
market, finance and
service sectors

target:
82

37%



■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

In the Pacific, COL partnered with the Tonga Women in ICT organisation to train youths in skills development.

Partnerships with diverse organisations that facilitate access to finance and the labour market are critical for successful entrepreneurship and employment opportunities.

Community members sensitised

25%
female



[55% unreported]

20%
male

14,807
community members
sensitised in ODL,
OER, TEL, GE or COL
models (m/f/PWD)

target:
13,400

EXCEEDED

With COL support, Botswana Open University organised a meeting to disseminate its employability strategy to external stakeholders. In Ghana, farmers were sensitised on sorghum production through COL's partner GPAS. A dissemination meeting was held on a COL-supported research project on learner support services at the National Open University of Nigeria which also held a two-day workshop where stakeholders discussed the application of ODL/ ICT for achieving fish self-sufficiency. Obafemi Awolowo University conducted a workshop on the application of digital technology to various aspects of vegetable production, marketing and financial management.

COL's partners in Malawi, Namibia, Pakistan and Tanzania conducted awareness raising/public advocacy campaigns to sensitise community members and traditional leaders on human rights, public health and gender equality.

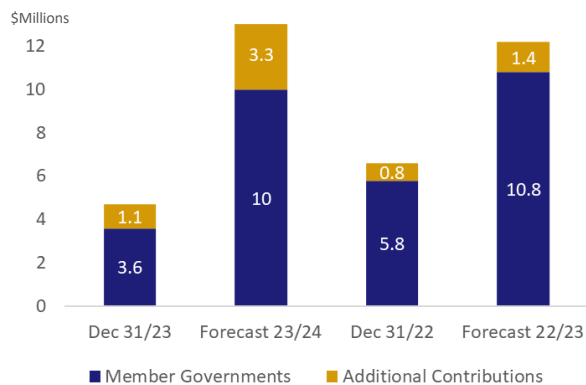
RETRIDOL monthly webinars attracted over 550 participants.

Collaborating with civil society partners allows COL to target and engage with marginalised communities and enhance its reach while also advocating for social change.

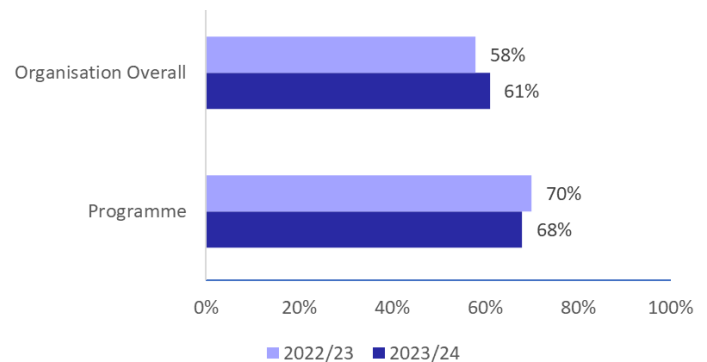
Revenue and Expenditure

Member government contributions were received from 23 countries totalling \$3.6 million (\$5.8 million from 23 countries for the same period in the previous year). The difference in amount can be attributed to the contributions received from just two major donors, as compared to four in the previous year. The revenue forecast from member governments was estimated at \$10 million for 2023-2024. However, notification was received from India that the annual funding will be reduced and Nigeria's contribution is still outstanding, representing a significant shortfall. This could result in a corresponding reduction in the operating budget if additional revenues are not received or a decision to draw on cash reserves.

COL has forecast that additional contributions of \$3.3 million from grants and services will be received, of which \$1.1 million has been recognised to date. An estimated \$2.5 million in deferred revenue from grants and services was on hand at the end of the second quarter and will be recognised as activities related to these funds are completed.



In addition to these sources of revenue, interest revenue of approximately \$260,000 has been earned on cash investments.



COL has estimated that close to 68% of the programme budget has been spent/committed at December 31, 2023, as compared to 70% at the same time in the previous year. Overall, 61% of the organisational budget of \$13.4 million has been spent/committed (as compared to 58% for the six-month period ended December 31, 2022, with a budget of \$12.7 million).

All currencies expressed in CAD.

Outreach, engagement and communications

COL received 45 press mentions in 15 countries and continued to maintain a robust online presence. Website traffic held steady while OAsis users increased by seven percent to 426,000. Daily impressions on X rose from 767 to over 1,100 through optimised posting times and tags. Facebook reach grew by 75% to 575,000 via more images and targeted content, especially in the Pacific region, Bangladesh and Nigeria. In order to increase the Instagram reach, more diverse images are needed for enhanced engagement. YouTube use remained steady. As AI developments continue to affect search functions, reduced institutional website traffic could be a risk that will require close monitoring.

Recent publications and resources (available on [OAsis](#)):

- *Journal of Learning for Development (JLAD)* Vol 10, No 3
- *Connections* (Vol. 28, No. 3)
- Blended Learning Course Experience at Kaimosi Friends University (Kenya)
- Teacher Training through Open, Distance and Technology-Enabled Learning in Rwanda
- Supporting Learners Studying through ODFL: A Guide for Parents in the Pacific



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