

Remarks at the Opening Ceremony of PCF9



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Open University UK

Dr Linda Sissons
COL Board Chair

As the Chair of COL's Board of Governors, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the 9th Pan-Commonwealth Forum. I am especially happy to be here, as Edinburgh has a special place in my heart. My own career journey started here in the '70s after I received a diploma in Adult Education from the University of Edinburgh, and I was fortunate to work as the Open University Senior Counsellor for students in Scotland's remote areas during OU's exciting first years.

I have also been part of the COL family for close to 10 years, first as a member of its Governing Board, and currently as its Chair. It never ceases to amaze me how far COL has come. From a vision some 30 years ago, it has become a reality – a true catalyst for positive change for a third of the world's population. This small organization with a modest budget has become a thought leader in education and development. Most importantly, it has empowered people in the Commonwealth and beyond to take greater responsibility for their own lives, their societies and their environment.

COL's emphasis on lifelong learning for employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment, its global leadership in Open Educational Resources (OER) and innovations in educational technologies have been praised by the Commonwealth Education Ministers. And a report drafted by UNESCO in April to assess its work in ICT in Education in 2014-2018 lists COL alongside OECD and the European Union as a critical quality benchmark.

What are the key success factors for COL? COL aligns its work with the global priorities. Its vision of 'learning for sustainable development' means that learning must lead to social inclusion, which closely aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4. And COL is also making sure that it stays relevant to our Member States' needs, regularly consulting with them on their priorities. Most importantly, COL's strength lies in its people, partners and networks – and I would like to thank you all for your continuing support.

Every Pan-Commonwealth Forum informs the subsequent work of COL and sets the pace for developments in open education. We are confident that the inputs of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers who are joining us at PCF9 will continue this trend. We are especially honoured to have one head of state and several ministers at the Forum, which underscores its importance.

It has been three years since participants of PCF8 in Kuala Lumpur challenged us to ensure that education not only keeps pace with change but actually leads it. In Edinburgh, we will carry the torch further, looking at the various facets of "Innovations for Quality Education and Lifelong Learning."

Now is the time to deepen our partnerships to ensure that we can provide employability skills to young people, a quality education to all regardless of circumstances, and to find practical ways for technology to speed up our progress. We look forward to working together to address this challenge.