

# CONNECTIONS



LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Ms Sarah Brown (left) and Professor Sugata Mitra (right) address the audience on day three.

## The future of education lies in innovation

Ms Sarah Brown, founder of children's charity Theirworld and Executive Chair of the Global Business Coalition for Education, opened day three of the ninth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF9) with an insightful address on the pursuit of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). Ms Brown noted that education is a barrier that holds young people back, but also a solution to addressing many of the key issues of the planet. "If we don't change the trend now, by 2030 we will have 400 million children leaving school without basic primary education and half of the world's boys and girls will not have the basic skills needed for the workforce," said Ms Brown. She also spoke about the financing gaps that stand in the way of reaching SDG4 and the role the private sector and corporate citizenship can play in meeting these challenges. In reference to expanding education opportunities for refugees and children, Ms Brown said, "Innovations that we need to strive for when we think about young people who are waiting for their future to start [need to be based] on low-cost, simple solutions."

Professor Sugata Mitra, Professor Emeritus, Newcastle University, in his keynote entitled, "The Future of Learning," advocated the merits of spontaneous learning over conventional structured classroom environments. His remarks were rooted in his seminal experiment in 1999 known as the "hole in the wall," where a networked computer terminal embedded in a wall in a Delhi slum yielded spontaneous learning among young children. What followed was Professor Mitra's conceptualisation of self-organised learning environments (SOLE), which he articulated as, "a mildly chaotic environment of children, clustered around the Internet in search of answers to big questions." Professor Mitra then explained 'The School in the Cloud' initiative – seven schools in India built on the principles of SOLE. Greater achievement in reading and comprehension resulted, along with how to use an electronic device, Internet searching skills, sense of well-being and collaboration. Professor Mitra concluded by noting that, "We need a curriculum of what we don't know yet; a pedagogy that is immersed in the Internet; and an assessment that looks for heuristics over process and method."

“Innovations that we are talking about do not just come in the classroom, they also have to come into the financing of education.” Ms Sarah Brown



## AI in Education

Dr Rose Luckin, Professor of Learner Centred Design, UCL Knowledge Lab, delivered a special address on ‘AI and Education: An intelligence infrastructure to empower self-efficacy,’ on day three of PCF9. Professor Luckin recalled a recent headline in the *New Scientist* that read, “AI achieves its best ever mark on a set of English exam questions.” She pointed to this headline as demonstration of how we can build AI to learn and teach what we currently value in our education systems.

AI can support teaching and learning, Dr Luckin said. She then led the audience through how AI and analytics can help create the intelligence infrastructure to empower teaching and learning and keep humans smarter than our AI peers. In her overview of how AI can enhance learning and teaching, Dr Luckin emphasised three areas: tackling educational challenges using AI, prioritising human intelligence, and the importance of educating people about AI and the ethical considerations for education. She noted that humans should complement AI automation and not repeat it. “AI is intelligent in a particular sort of way, humans are intelligent in many more ways,” said Luckin.

“As educators, we need to think about intelligence infrastructure.”



## Who is talking about PCF9?

Be sure to check out **#PCF9 on Twitter** so you don’t miss any of the photos and comments being shared throughout each day. It’s a great way to experience the different facets of the forum through the eyes of delegates.



**Ibrar Bhatt, PhD** @ibrar\_bhatt · 3h  
A pleasure to present at #PCF9. The most diverse and global conference I have ever attended. Thank you @COL4D



**Beck Pitt** @BeckPitt · 7h  
Thanks to everyone who came to our #PCF9 session on #DigitalStrategy #TIDEMyanmar this morning! Paper available here: [oro.open.ac.uk/66351/](http://oro.open.ac.uk/66351/) @Tim10101



**Nathalie Smuha** @NathalieSmuha · 2h  
At the #PCF9 in Edinburgh, speaking on law & ethics of AI in Education. Before starting to mainstream AI in our schools, let’s pls not shy away from asking difficult questions & ensure that we know -to the extent we can- what we get ourselves into & what we hope to get out of it.



**Annabel Boud** @annabel\_boud · 2h  
Very engaging paper from @sindilengubane on support for students with disabilities at @unisa. Interesting discussions about the intersection of race and disability in SA. @KateMarburg - I’ll send you the paper 😊 #PCF9



**Faye Taylor** @fayectaylor · 7h  
Celebrating 60 years of educational cooperation in the #Commonwealth at #PCF9. Enjoying meeting so many colleagues from across the globe!



**Gabriel Konayuma** @GabrielKonayuma · 6h  
Listening to Thabisa Mayisela present on ‘Implementing a practice-based approach to digital literacy of a South African university’ #pcf9

## The OU’s strong presence in Scotland

Supported by 140 staff in our offices in Edinburgh, the OU has over 16,500 students across Scotland. From Shetland to Selkirk, Portree to Peterhead, there’s an OU student in just about every community. We’re proud to call ourselves Scotland’s national widening access university and believe we are as radical and relevant today as we were in 1969.



The Open University

50 YEARS



## AROUND THE FORUM



Parallel sessions continued on day 3 of PCF9 with presenters speaking on a range of topics, from achieving women's and girls' education in the face of challenges like low literacy levels and domestic labour, to the link between academic ambition and employability, to the transformative work to expand access and improve the quality of open and distance education, and the potential of MOOCs and OER to improve access to educational programmes in many developing countries.



## Workshop on skills development in the Pacific

With the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand, COL and the University of the South Pacific (USP) organised a workshop on skills development in the Pacific on 11 September. Ministers from Kiribati and Samoa, along with their officials, joined the event with Dr Linda Sissons, COL Board Chair, and Professor Asha Kanwar, President and CEO of COL. A number of senior officials, academics and experts from several countries gave inputs on a plan of activities developed by COL and the USP.





## Excellence in Distance Education Awards

COL recognises and honours excellence in open, distance and technology-enabled learning at every Pan-Commonwealth Forum with the Excellence in Distance Education Awards (EDEA). These awards acknowledge achievement by institutions/organisations and individuals around the Commonwealth.

- **Award of Excellence for Institutional Achievement**

 **Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University**

- **Award of Excellence for Distance Education Materials**

*Category A: Innovations in print, electronically delivered materials, or other low-cost media materials*

 **Open University of Malaysia**

*Category B: Design and development of study materials through the innovative use and re-use of open educational resources (OER)*

 **Athabasca University**

 **Open Education Resource Foundation of New Zealand**

- **Award of Excellence in a Distance or Online Learning Experience**

*eLearning in difficult circumstances*

 **Ms Sakshi Kumari**

 **Mr Jima Ngei**

## COL names new Honorary Fellows

A total of eight Honorary Fellows of the Commonwealth of Learning were named at PCF9 on the evening of 11 September. The designation of COL Honorary Fellow recognises outstanding individual contributions to open and distance learning in areas such as: leadership and service, published work, mentorship, innovation, improving access to quality education and promoting learning for sustainable development.



The 2017-2019 COL Honorary Fellows are:

- Professor Abdalla Uba Adamu
- Ms Anne Gaskell
- Professor Datuk Dr Asma Ismail
- Mr Kamaraj Keppanan
- Professor Mandla Makhanya
- Professor Nageshwar Rao
- Professor Clement Sankat
- Dr Linda Sissons

Consideration for Honorary Fellows is typically limited to citizens of Commonwealth countries and the title is conferred for life.

## Learning for Sustainable Development

COL's vision of 'learning for sustainable development' means that learning must lead to social inclusion, economic growth and environmental conservation.



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 Hashtag: #pcf9  [instagram.com/commonwealthoflearning/](https://www.instagram.com/commonwealthoflearning/)

This aligns COL's work to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." COL harnesses the potential of open, distance, and technology-enabled learning to help Member States accelerate progress towards achieving development outcomes.

*\*Numbers reflect period of July 2015 to August 2019*

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Chair: Dr. Linda Sissons, CNZM

President & CEO: Professor Asha S. Kanwar

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