



COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

# President's Quarterly Report

July – September 2022

## Tribute

The passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II marks the end of an era. When COL was formally inaugurated, Her Majesty offered 'a hearty welcome to this new and significant element in the fabric of the Commonwealth', established to foster 'Commonwealth cooperation in distance education as an important practical step in cementing relationships between members'. We share a deep sense of loss while at the same time celebrate her commitment to a thriving and respected Commonwealth. COL will continue to do its part to take this legacy forward.

## Board Matters

The Board meetings were held on July 6–7, 2022 in Marlborough House, London soon after CHOGM took place in Kigali. Most members attended—some in person with a few participating online. The Audit and the Performance Committees met on the first day, when an induction for new Board members was held.

This was followed by a reception hosted by the Canadian High Commissioner HE Ralph Goodale at Canada House attended by about a hundred guests from the academic and diplomatic communities in London.

The Board meeting took place on the second day to review governance matters and progress over the first year of the Strategic Plan 2021–2027.

With the sudden passing of the Chair, Prof Narend Bajjnath, the process of selecting his successor was a matter of priority. HE Hajo Sani was appointed Deputy Chair for a period of two years. Dr Caroline Seelig will serve as the Chair of the Audit Committee for three years.

The next meeting of the Board will take place in Vancouver, Canada on June 28–29, 2023.

## General

The major highlight of this quarter was the tenth **Pan-Commonwealth Forum** (PCF) held in Calgary during 14–16 September. These forums are held every three years in partnership with an institution in a Commonwealth country. This is the first time that a PCF was held in Canada with Athabasca University (AU) as the co-host. Over 400 policy makers, experts and practitioners from 43 countries, including 37 Commonwealth Member States, participated in hybrid mode to discuss the theme: 'Innovations for Educational Resilience'.

The Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt Hon Justin Trudeau sent a **welcome video** reinforcing Canada's commitment to COL and to open and distance learning. The Hon Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa, a former COL Board member, delivered the inaugural address. Eleven ministers of education from Botswana, Cameroon, Guyana, Mauritius, Maldives, Namibia, Nigeria, Samoa, South Africa and Zambia attended.

A Ministerial Round Table, chaired by the Prime Minister of Samoa, generated a lively discussion on how governments had addressed the educational disruptions during the pandemic. COL has been tasked with several actions—capacity building of teachers, developing

## President's Activities

skills for livelihoods, enhancing the quality of open and distance learning (ODL), promoting the well-being of students and empowering parents to strengthen the educational ecosystem.

**The Asa Briggs Lecture**, honoring COL's first Chair, is always a highlight of PCF— Professor Tim Blackman, Vice Chancellor of The Open University, UK stressed the importance of reaching underprivileged students through open learning and providing opportunities for jobs in the modern economy. Four **keynotes** addressed the sub-themes of the Forum.

A special session for the Pacific region was organised to take stock of the Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) project supported by New Zealand. This project has strengthened the professional development of teachers and the creation and sharing of open educational resources (OER) and ODL courses in the region. The deputy high commissioner of New Zealand in Canada who was present, stated that the only way to combat the digital divide was to promote ODFL.

Eight outstanding individuals were recognised as **Honorary COL Fellows** for their innovative contributions to education and training across the Commonwealth. Two '**Excellence in Distance Education Awards**' were presented.

The forum culminated in the adoption of the **Calgary Communique**, a roadmap for transforming education in a post-Covid world. It is a call to action for promoting girls' education and fostering lifelong learning for all through close collaborations. As we know, technology is an invention and innovations only happen when it is 'domesticated' and stakeholders are empowered.

By all accounts, PCF10 was a great success as it had the right balance of serious discussion and debate, networking and social opportunities combined with the warmth and hospitality of our partner AU. In addition to ensuring that programme targets are on track, Team COL walked many extra miles to deliver the best PCF so far!

In addition to raising the visibility of COL and building social capital, PCFs are also becoming an important platform for convening ministers of education, our primary stakeholders. COL has traditionally been strong in its partnerships with organisations, institutions and individuals. A consistent effort has been made to strengthen the engagement with ministers and much more needs to be done going forward.

Another opportunity to engage ministers of education presented itself at the UN Transforming Education Summit held in New York. I met the education ministers of Bangladesh, Nigeria, Palestine and Sierra Leone at this historic Summit, which coincided with the UN General Assembly. The objective was to draw the attention of world leaders to the education crisis and stress the need for urgent action, which included an appeal for allocating additional funds. Former prime minister of UK, the Rt. Hon Gordon Brown announced the launch of the International Financial Facility for Education, another source of funding for developing countries. COL must contribute to and be seen as part of global efforts to accelerate progress towards achieving SDG 4. While the global community is stressing the need for more resources, COL's role is to demonstrate how alternative approaches, such as ODL, can be a viable means for providing enhanced access to quality education at lower costs.

PCFs are an opportunity to showcase COL's thought leadership in education and sustainable development. My contributions included introducing the **theme** of the forum, providing the **concluding summary** and moderating two panel discussions. The first was on educational resilience where one of the experts included our Board member, Dr Joanna Newman. The second focused on climate change and called on the education community to change individual and collective behaviours for conserving our environment.

In addition to PCF10, I participated in several international events. A **video** recording on 'All things research in open, distance and elearning' was presented as a keynote at a conference hosted by the University of South Africa. Anadolu University, Turkey invited me to present a **keynote** on 'Disruptive Innovation in an Age of Disruption' at its 5<sup>th</sup> International Open and Distance Learning Conference.

In collaboration with Asia eUniversity, COL organised a Vice Chancellors' Round Table with representatives from 17 Commonwealth countries, where our Board member, Professor Datuk Dr Asma Ismail moderated a panel discussion. A Women's Leadership training programme for mid-career academics from 16 countries was organised in partnership with Wawasan Open University. Both events were held in Malaysia where I made several **presentations**. These activities contributed to the higher education and gender initiatives. Close contacts were established with institutional leaders and

these will help facilitate effective implementation of programme activities in the participating universities. The women’s leadership training will be followed by an online course and short virtual workshops to build the next cadre of women leaders.

The Dr BR Ambedkar Open University, India invited me to deliver a convocation address, where an honorary doctorate was conferred on me—this being the ninth from around the Commonwealth—and a recognition of the esteem in which COL is held. As I presented gold medals to prison inmates, it was gratifying to hear that they would continue their studies as lifelong learners. This is the value of distance education where Nelson Mandela earned two degrees during his incarceration.

As a member, I participated in the Board meetings of Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICAN) and Globethics, Geneva—both very diverse and cohesive boards. The CICAN Board aspires to make a transition from ‘good’ to ‘great’ governance by following international best practice, reflecting regularly on its performance and constituting a special committee to provide a forum for the identification, review and advice to the Board on matters of emerging priorities. This could be a model for other boards to emulate.

Together these activities amplify COL’s relevance, reputation and reach. They are also an opportunity to learn at first-hand from our stakeholders on how best COL can respond to their needs and make a difference.

## Programme: Progress against Outputs

Programme activities are beginning to gain momentum where online events are being supplemented with more in person training. In order to optimise the presence of stakeholders from around the Commonwealth during PCF10, six pre-conference workshops were held to advance the work on climate change education, skills for the blue economy and TVET, teacher development, digital resources along with lifelong learning for farmers.

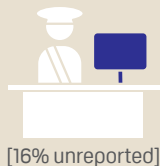
The Vice President Dr V. Balaji and I attended each workshop to interact with the participants.

Of the 10 targets being tracked, three have already been exceeded during this quarter. COL needs to work more on policy development at the national and institutional levels. All regions of the Commonwealth have been covered but more needs to be done in the Caribbean.

## Building National Resilience

### Government staff/officials trained/sensitised

37%  
female



47%  
male

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

target:  
**1,060**

34%

A consultative workshop to develop an ICT in education policy was held with the Ministry of Education, Malawi. CEMCA, in partnership with the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, India, organised a discussion with policymakers and academics for developing blended learning policy. COL’s civil society partners in Bangladesh, Namibia, Pakistan, Tanzania and Uganda trained and sensitised 164 policymakers and government officials in gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. In Malawi and Pakistan, workshops were organised to build the capacity of policymakers, parliamentarians and law enforcement officials for changing discriminatory social norms. With COL support, the Ministry of Education, Vanuatu has re-started the Open Schooling model in 15 schools. Under the Pacific Partnership project, three online workshops on ODFL policy and planning were conducted for ministry officials from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu.

*It is important for policymakers to understand the benefits of ODL/OER/GE if COL models are to be scaled and sustained.*

## Support for national policies/ strategy development



**1** policy/strategy developed

target: **38**

**3%**

In Mozambique, COL supported the development of an ODL policy framework for the National Institute for Distance Education.

*Policy development at the national level is a key strategy for mainstreaming ODL. COL needs to take a holistic approach where policy is followed by capacity development and effective implementation.*

## Strengthening Institutions

### Institutional staff trained

**54%**  
female



**36%**  
male

[10% unreported]

**1,383**

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

target: **7,428**

**19%**

COL supported the Kenya Institute of Special Education to train teachers in online course facilitation for students with special needs. In order to improve the quality of 12 higher education institutions in Nigeria and Ghana, training was held as part of the COL-ACU Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning. Teachers at the Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST), Bangladesh, and Seychelles Institute of Distance and Open Learning received training on developing blended courses. Teachers and teacher educators in India were trained on a Virtual Reality platform developed by CEMCA. Similarly, 29 teachers from Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, were trained in the use of virtual labs in collaboration with the Kenya Technical Trainers College. A leadership training programme for 26 mid-career academics from 16 Commonwealth countries was held in Malaysia. In addition, 162 trainers and staff from The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, St Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago and Zambia, participated in a workshop on 'Skills for Work'.

*Teachers will play a greater role in mitigating the 'learning loss' experienced during the pandemic and need continuous professional development.*

### Institutional policies/strategies developed



**7** institutional policies/strategies developed

target: **43**

**16%**

COL supported AUST, Bangladesh to develop a strategic plan and apply the Technology Enabled Learning (TEL) Benchmarking toolkit. Six institutions – Technical and Vocational Teachers' College, Zambia, Ramogi Institute of Advanced Technology, and Sigalagala National Polytechnic, Kenya, Yaba College of Technology, Nigeria, Sir Arthur Lewis Community College and the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme, St Lucia – developed strategies to integrate TEL in technical and vocational education and training.

*The need for skilling and re-skilling youth for employment at scale requires alternative and flexible approaches through the use of technology.*

## Learning opportunities (courses) developed/improved



**39** courses developed or improved with COL support

target: **275**

**14%**

The Ladoké Akintola University of Technology, Nigeria revised 11 courses to integrate authentic assessments. Nine courses of the CEMBA/CEMPA programme were revised. In collaboration with the Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, Malaysia 13 OER courses were developed in manufacturing, building and civil engineering. CEMCA supported the Indian Plumbing Skills Council to develop video content for training at scale. A course, 'Empowered Digital Teacher for Online Learning' was developed for teachers in the Pacific. The Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development, Fiji developed three courses for livelihoods. Courses on 'Quality Assurance of Blended and Online Learning' and 'Motivating and Supporting Online Learners' were added to the COLcommons platform.

*COL continues to support the development of quality courses which are offered as OER for adoption and adaptation by other institutions and users.*

## Learning opportunities (resources) developed/improved



**540** learning resources developed with COL support

target: **73**

### Exceeded

COL partner, the Centre for Research and Development Initiative, Malawi has developed and disseminated 30 radio programmes and 60 short messages for mobile devices to develop vocational skills among girls. Vidiyal, India prepared and disseminated 445 voice messages based on the learners' needs for goat rearing, agriculture and health. CEMCA supported the International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation to develop two audio-visual modules on furniture-making for artisans and entrepreneurs in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

*Skills development resources are often more effective in audio and video mode rather than text and often need to be delivered in local languages.*

## Improving Lives and Livelihoods

### Gender-responsive learning opportunities developed and offered through ODL

**7%**  
female



**3%**  
male

[90% unreported]

**31,539** learners enrolled in COL-run courses

target: **209,958**

**15%**

During this quarter, an additional 1,400 nurses enrolled in professional learning modules in Botswana and Eswatini. A MobiMOOC on 'Promotion of Livestock Farmers Activities as Profitable Self-employment' attracted 1,507 farmers in India. A course on 'Capacity Building for NGOs in the Disability Sector,' was delivered through MOOC4DEV to 234 participants from 25 countries. Over 1,500 participants enrolled in courses on the C-DELTA and COLcommons platforms. In collaboration with Coursera, Udemy and Grow with Google, 26,648 learners took up various ICT and business courses.

*Previously COL used to offer online training courses only through partner institutions. However, during the pandemic COL also started enrolling learners directly. This approach has yielded good results and will be continued.*



## Learners mentored and linked to services and financial resources

99%

female



[1% unreported]

0%

male

**7,439** learners mentored/  
linked to resources

target:  
**3,060**

### Exceeded

Youth Aid Education Possible Changes Organization, Tanzania established linkages with the private sector enabling 550 women and girls to get internships and 270 girls were re-integrated into school. In Bangladesh, 783 women and girls were linked to learning resources by COL's partner, the Centre for Mass Education and Science (CMES), Bangladesh. As a result, 640 received internships, 60 were re-integrated into formal schooling and 83 engaged with local industries to enhance their employment and income opportunities. The Mann Deshi Foundation, India is using the Digital Borrowing System to provide access to financial support to aspiring women entrepreneurs. During this quarter, 5,363 women have been supported through a revolving grant initiative. Similarly, 339 women farmers working with another COL partner, Vidiyal, India received credit support from banks for mobile-based learning.

*By working with civil society organisations, COL is able to see the outcomes of its activities in shorter time spans.*

## Partnerships with labour market, finance and service industry established



**66** partnerships established  
with labour market, finance and  
service actors

target:  
**465**

14%



Youth Challenge, Guyana engaged 15 organisations/institutions to support employment opportunities for boys. In Bangladesh, CMES signed MoUs with 40 local enterprises to enhance the employment and income opportunities of COL trainees, mostly women and girls.

*COL's holistic approach not only provides training but also facilitates linkages with financial institutions and the labour market.*

## Community members sensitised

10%

female



[83% unreported]

7%

male

**57,416** community  
members sensitised in ODL,  
OER, TEL, GE or COL models  
(m/f/PWD)

target:  
**22,492**

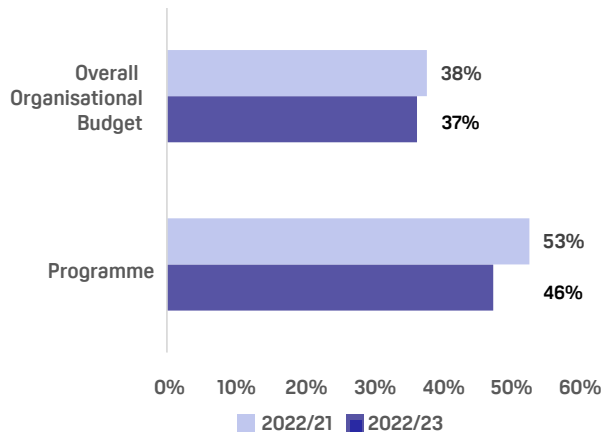
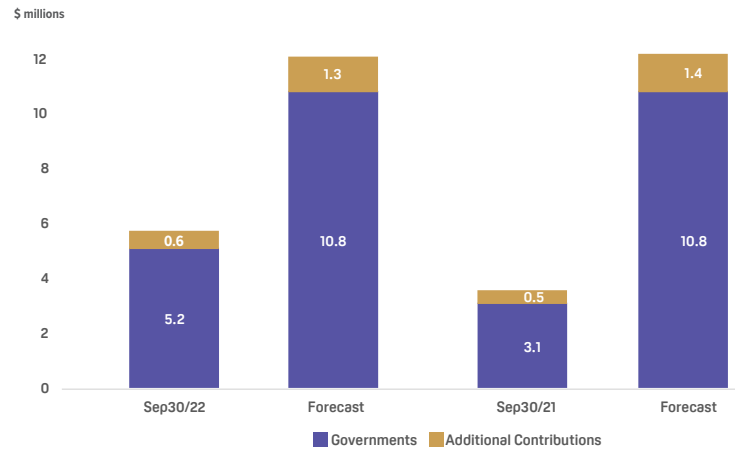
### Exceeded

Point of View, India organised six workshops on digital gender justice, where 275 marginalised young women (including transgender people and women with disabilities) were sensitised. COL partner the Jamaica Teaching Council (JTC), distributed 26,147 Boys' Journal in 76 schools in seven regions—this life planning guide, helps to set life goals and follow them through. COL conducted awareness-raising events and sensitised 10,905 community members on the importance of girls' education and the negative impacts of gender-based violence in Bangladesh, Malawi, Namibia, Pakistan, Tanzania and Uganda. A workshop on gender inclusion in blended/online course design and delivery was attended by 50 participants.

*Empowering communities is the first step in bringing more boys and girls to education and training.*

## Revenues and Expenditures

During this quarter, contributions were received from 17 countries totalling \$5.2 million (as compared to 18 countries totalling \$3.1 million for the same period in the previous year). The difference in amount can be attributed to the receipt of contributions from the two largest major donors. COL is forecasting additional contributions of \$1.3 million from grants and service fees. Deferred revenue of \$1 million was on hand at the beginning of the financial year which will be recognised, as activities related to these funds are completed. Approximately \$600,000 in additional contributions have been recognised to date.



COL has estimated that 46% of the programme budget has been spent and/or committed at September 30, 2022 as compared to 53% at September 30, 2021. Overall, 37% of the organisational budget of \$12.7 million has been spent/committed (as compared to 38% for the period ended September 30, 2021).

## Outreach, engagement and communications

Progress is being monitored along the three dimensions of COL's Communications Strategy – informing, engaging and transforming.

During the quarter, 38 news items and four blogs were published by COL, with 62 news items relating to COL issued in 15 countries. There was a 500% increase in the use of COL's repository, OAsis, as compared to the previous quarter. This was due to new publications, and the availability of over 300 papers from PCF10. The number of visitors to the COL website dropped by about 12% which could be attributed to gaps in service availability. Social media engagements have increased by 75% on Twitter and 7% on Facebook. The Facebook page for the Pacific region saw an increase of 200% over the quarter. An analysis of the hashtag #PCF10 showed that the total reach in social media was approximately 3.8 million.

Professor Asha S. Kanwar,  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
October 14, 2022

Recent publications and resources (available on OAsis), include:

- *Connections* (vol. 27, no. 2)
- 'Improving the Efficacy of Mentorship with an Open Education Ecosystem'
- *Journal of Learning for Development* (Vol. 9 No. 2)
- *Participant Experience in an Inquiry-Based Massive Open Online Course*
- 'Reports on the benchmarking of TEL in universities in Bangladesh and Malaysia'
- *Smart Education Strategies for Teaching and Learning: Critical Analytical Framework and Case Studies*
- *Technology Application in Teaching and Learning: Second-Order Review of Meta-analyses*
- *Transforming Education for Climate Action: Report to Commonwealth Ministers of Education*