

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

President's Quarterly Progress Report: April - June 2021

1. Board Matters

The Executive Committee met on 7th April 2021 to approve the Strategic Plan 2021-2027 on behalf of the Board. The Plan has since been finalised after incorporating the requested changes, printed and despatched to Commonwealth education ministers.

A selection process was undertaken by members of the Audit Committee to appoint a new auditor and the firm of MNP LLP was selected. The Audit Committee is scheduled to meet on 13th July to approve the Audit Plan for the year ended June 30, 2021.

This will be followed by the Board of Governors meeting on 15th July where both will be held virtually.

2. General

The Strategic Plan 2015-2021 has come to a successful conclusion and served to consolidate COL's image as a key international player in education and training. All targets were exceeded and the results endorsed by external evaluations.

COL had been established to promote access to higher education through the use of distance learning and technologies. It is interesting to note that in the past six years, COL has had maximum impact in promoting access to livelihoods—first with Lifelong Learning for Farmers, then with the GirlsInspire project and more recently the COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery programme. Livelihoods emerged as the greatest need in the Commonwealth Member States, most being middle- and low-income countries. Through these interventions, COL responded by providing learning opportunities to the most marginalised farming communities, empowering girls in remote regions with appropriate training for livelihoods and skilling and reskilling thousands of youth for employment and entrepreneurship. In light of this, what are the implications for education? Over the next six years, integrating employability into higher education and strengthening the vocational stream in secondary schools would be COL's approach to building relevant and resilient systems of quality education and lifelong learning. Teacher training at all levels will be critical to the success of this strategic goal.

The needs of the 32 small states in the Commonwealth include skilling and reskilling for livelihoods, bringing out-of-school youth into education and training, building the capacity of institutions and addressing the adverse impact of climate change. While the numbers reached will be

modest, the impact will be significant. COL will strengthen VUSSC to become a powerful platform for fostering collaboration and catalysing change.

As the world embraced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, COL was well placed to respond effectively by sharing its resources and expertise. While this has been an opportunity to showcase its many strengths, we need to be aware that every organisation related to education and training is now positioning itself as an expert in distance and online learning. In order to stay ahead in this field, COL must strengthen its niche with 'quality' and 'equity' as its defining features—as an organisation that provides sound technical advice, addresses the needs of the last person in the queue and invests in innovations for impact.

In the past, COL worked mainly with institutions and individuals. As institutions went into lockdown, it was ministries that called upon COL to provide targeted support for keeping the doors of learning open. COL will need to deepen these engagements and align its work with national priorities for scale and sustainability.

By organising webinars and online training programmes, COL was able to reach larger numbers with more in-depth training and longer-term engagement. This was possible because COL has been demystifying MOOCs over the past six years, making them more accessible to people in low-bandwidth contexts through its own versions of MOOC4D. In the future, these will become an integral feature of how training is delivered.

Education has suffered a major setback at this time and every effort will be needed to ensure a quick recovery. The success of the current Plan gives us the confidence and encouragement to embark on the new Strategic Plan with renewed commitment. Member States have supported us financially and intellectually over the years. COL will do everything to justify their continued confidence.

2.1 President's Activities

Even though webinars and online events have reached out to many diverse and dispersed audiences, a certain fatigue seems to have set in as can be seen from the decreasing numbers of participants. The world is ready to resume in-person activities and COL staff is eager to return to the field and engage with its networks.

Even so, the numbers of invitations to virtual events has not decreased. Some of the keynotes that I delivered were for conferences organised by the Flexible Learning Association of New Zealand, Global Energy Parliament, India, Asian Association of Open Universities, the Caribbean Association of National Training Authorities and the Philippines Higher Education Forum. Speeches were also given for events organized by partners in Fiji, Guyana and Nigeria. Some of these were pre-recorded videos. Another highlight was the Asian Virtual Convocation held to celebrate the graduates of the COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery programme at which both the CEO of Coursera Jeff Maggioncalda and I spoke along with ministers the Hon Tipu Munshi, Bangladesh and the Hon Dr Ibrahim Hassan, Maldives.

COL participated in meetings convened by Commonwealth sister organisations. COL's annual report was presented to the Commonwealth Secretariat Board meeting, where 11 countries spoke up in appreciation of COL's work. I also moderated a panel on 'EdTech for the new normal' organised by the Commonwealth Women Entrepreneurs' Summit.

As a member of several boards, I attended meetings of Open Educa Berlin; Colleges and Institutes Canada; Globethics, Geneva and UNESCO Institute of Information Technology in Education, Moscow. Several meetings of the Rifkind Committee, of which I am a member, were held to finalise a report on the future of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London.

Despite the difficult circumstances, both our partners and staff redoubled efforts to achieve the 100% spend but as new waves of the pandemic paralysed nations, this was simply not possible. Internal discussions have been held and strategies identified to mitigate such challenges in the future. As economies contract due to the pandemic, another challenge will be to retain the funding from Member States at present levels to help us deliver on the commitments of the new Strategic Plan.

3. Programme

3.1 Education Sector

3.1.1 Open/Innovative Schooling

A range of lessons for secondary schools were developed in Botswana and Nigeria. The Flexible, Distance and Open Education division, Papua New Guinea drafted 19 lessons in a COL-hosted Moodle instance.

At the request of the Ghana Education Service, COL initiated a new project for out-of-school children. In Tanzania, eight manuals to strengthen outreach to out-of-school youth were developed and a training programme for facilitators launched.

Twelve learners from Namibia were sponsored by COL in the Post Graduate Diploma in Open School Management. COL is supporting the Ministry of Education, Zambia and the National Institute of Distance Education, Mozambique to design and conduct tracer studies of open schooling learners.

3.1.2 Teacher Education

The Gambia College concluded a webinar series on School-Based Teacher Development with 193 participants. With COL support, the National Teaching Council of Ghana trained 50 master trainers who are training 1000 teachers in 10 districts. Over 1300 teachers and teacher educators from the National Teachers' Institute, Nigeria enrolled in the 'Mobile Learning with Multimedia' online course. Over 200 female teachers in Northern Nigeria were trained in accessing e-learning resources and OER using mobile technologies. A workshop on 'OER and Digitisation' was held at Freetown Teachers College, Sierra Leone, with 80 participants.

A MOOC on 'Creating an Inclusive Education', jointly offered by COL and The Open University, UK had 659 enrolments, while 'Planning a Family and Intergenerational Literacy and Learning programme', offered with UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, attracted 178 learners, with 86 certificates issued.

3.1.3 Higher Education

COL is supporting the Faculty of Business, Bangladesh Open University, to develop competency-based assessment. A workshop on course design was held for staff of the University of Buea, Cameroon, and a Moodle instance was installed. Kenyatta University, Kenya completed content localisation for a staff capacity-building programme, and the first cohort of 40 staff enrolled. A MOOC on 'Introduction to Sustainable Development in Business' was completed with 1045 certificates issued. An online course design and development workshop was held for the University of Rwanda where 20 participants drafted quality assurance standards for ODeL.

Under the Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL) project with the ACU, new Quality Assurance (QA) review reports were received from two universities and COL's contribution was commended in the final evaluation.

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

In Antigua and Barbuda, IT administrators were trained on using and maintaining Aptus devices. The course 'Designing and Developing Online Assessments' was launched at the University of Belize and 25 faculty enrolled. In partnership with the Climate Resilience Execution Agency, Dominica, public education messages on disaster preparedness are being regularly broadcast. Through the National Centre for Educational Resource Development, Guyana, 40 learners completed online courses on educational leadership, based on VUSSC materials and hosted on a COL Moodle Platform.

The University of Trinidad and Tobago is offering COL's 'Quality Assurance in Blended Learning' course to QA practitioners across the Caribbean.

The first training course 'Introduction to Assistive Technologies' with the Ministry of Education, Tonga began and 32 people enrolled.

'The Blue Economy: Blue Space' MOOC had 1547 enrolments and 440 certificates were issued.

3.1.5 GIRLS Inspire

In Bangladesh, 1200 women and girls were trained or linked to internships, and 470 gained employment or self-employment. About 22900 community members were sensitised and four mentorship clubs established. Public meetings on girls' rights were attended by 562 people and nine child, early and forced marriages were prevented. COL partner Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha, Bangladesh provided interest-free loans to 36 women and girls who completed skills training. Evening boat shows were held on reaching 1582 community members (65% men and boys).

3.2 Skills Sector

3.2.1 Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

COL is supporting Kenya Technical Trainers College to compile a catalogue of TVET OER and more than 1200 TVET teachers have enrolled in COL courses. Staff from 42 institutions in Kenya and Zambia enrolled in a 'Moodle Implementation' course, and eight facilitators are being trained.

In Nigeria, COL partners Computer Telecommunication Engineering Association of Nigeria and Yaba College of Technology have been approved by the National Board of Technical Education for offering blended learning and workplace apprenticeships.

3.2.2 Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)

Eight extension staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, Antigua and Barbuda, were trained in climate smart agriculture. 'Farmer Field School' training was conducted with 25 learners in marketing, pest management, and climate smart agriculture.

Through the Andhra Pradesh State Cooperative Bank, India, 918 learners participated in a mobiMOOC on business development and the Bank has decided to launch a virtual learning centre to train staff and farmers.

In Kenya, 1010 new learners were trained in sustainable agriculture and two new organisations adopted L3F. Over 120 farmers obtained loans while 778 gained employment or started businesses. In Tanzania, 97 people and two savings groups, with over 3100 members, became shareholders of the Tanzania Producers Financial Company, developed with COL support. Over 552 members received loans and 1505 learners were reached through mobile learning. The M-FLAIS mobile learning platform in Zambia was officially launched by the Minister of Livestock and Fisheries.

3.2.3 Technology Enabled Learning (TEL)

'Training of trainers' workshops for the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) programme were held with MIER College of Education, India; Kibabii University, Kenya; and the Ministry of Education, Seychelles, reaching 123 teachers. A workshop on developing blended courses using Moodle was held at Kibabii University, Kenya with 51 participants.

A MOOC on 'Social Media Marketing' reached 2860 learners and 306 certificates were issued. Two MOOCs on 'Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning' and 'Blended Learning Practice' were offered with Athabasca University, Canada, reaching 2107 participants.

3.2.4 Skills Online

A Virtual Convocation was held for nearly 10,000 COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery graduates from Asia.

10000 learners have enrolled in a COL-Google programme and 2800 certificates have been issued. In its second phase, the COL-Coursera project has 3000 enrolments with more than 2500 certificates awarded. A study of the COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery programme, which has concluded, found that 75% of respondents reported benefits as a result of their participation.

3.3 Cross-cutting Theme

3.3.1 Gender

Over 1084 people in Malawi were trained in sustainable agriculture, skills for livelihoods, women's rights, and prevention of gender-based violence leading to the reintegration of 412 students into schools. In Tanzania, 520 girls and young women were trained in ICT skills.

In Pakistan, 295 girls/women enrolled in e-Commerce training. A training manual was developed and translated into the local language. In Sri Lanka 133 girls/women were trained in skills for livelihoods where 40 of them received micro-loans to start their own business.

To address boys' underachievement, COL has partnered with the Jamaica Teaching Council to train 500 mentors to mentor 10000 boys.

The Commonwealth Wise Women Mentorship project hosted a webinar on 'Online Learning: Designing for Gender Inclusion' with 64 participants.

3.4 eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO)

Three cohorts of UNFPA's 'Virtual Orientation Programme' were completed and the agreement was extended for a fourth year.

One cohort of 'Report Writing' for the World Bank was completed. COL facilitated a component of a pilot programme 'Leadership for Unpredictable Futures' for UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council with 48 participants.

3.5 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

In India, a workshop on 'Smart and Future Agro-farming' was held for 41 faculty from eight agricultural universities. A MOOC on 'Life Skills for Engineers' attracted 2654 learners and 264 certificates were awarded. Another MOOC on 'Introduction to Statistical Analysis' had 4660 enrolments with 807 certificates issued, while the MOOC on 'Academic Counselling for ODL' attracted 1340 learners resulting in 427 certificates being issued. More than 751 faculty from various universities participated in an online workshop series on 'Effective Online Teaching, Assessment and Communication Skills.' A workshop on 'Blockchain Introduction for Developers' attracted 294

participants. CEMCA provided capacity-building for 347 faculty from universities in India in areas such as course development, accreditation, neurodiversity, and Virtual Reality. In partnership with the Furniture and Fittings Skill Council a 'Recognition of Prior Learning' workshop was conducted where 23 carpenters were certified. CEMCA and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry conducted online training on bamboo handicrafts for 45 participants, while 500 restaurant cleaning staff are being upskilled in partnership with the Domestic Workers Sector Skill Council. Training in 'Employability, Entrepreneurship, and Life Skills' was conducted for 127 vocational trainers. CEMCA and the Community Radio Association, India held online training on 'Documentation and Report Writing' for 149 officials from Community Radio Stations.

At HELP University, Malaysia an online workshop on virtual labs was conducted and 40 faculty members were trained in designing self-learning materials.

3.6 Regional Centres

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

COL is supporting Botswana Open University to conduct an environmental scan for developing a 'Blended TEL' strategy. Three workshops on Moodle and course design were conducted with the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre. The Namibia College of Open Learning developed and piloted the course 'Facilitating Online Learning' with 29 participants.

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

A workshop on dual mode adoption in Ghana was held with 22 participants from 7 institutions. A workshop to upskill National Open University of Nigeria staff in blended learning was held with 450 participants. In addition, 17 certificates were issued to participants in the 'TEL for Higher Education online workshop series.

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

More than 1600 learners enrolled in the 'Professionalising Youth Work' programme, with 677 certificates awarded. The first consultation for a new project on Youth Work with The Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute took place with 31 participants.

3.6.4 Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (CCCL)

The second offering of the MOOC on 'Digital Literacy Lab for Educators' attracted 1313 participants. Workshops were held to support the integration of blockchain in education, and implementation plans were received from institutions in Botswana, India, Mauritius and Nigeria.

3.6.5 COL Chairs

Dr George Veletsianos and Professor Mpine Makoe developed units for an online course on 'Digital Assessment'.

3.7 Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) in the Pacific

Nine national level OER repositories (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) were developed and shared with the Ministries of Education. A prototype online searchable directory of ODFL courses was developed and shared with key stakeholders for feedback. The MOOC 'OER for Online Learning: An Introduction' was re-designed based on inputs from teachers in the region and has been offered.

3.8 Vice President's Activities

The Vice President led the process of finalising the Implementation Plan based on COL's Strategic Plan 2021-2027 and supported the development of logic models for all initiatives which include risk management. He represented COL at workshops in Africa and the Pacific relating to L3F and TVSD. His research on AI, Blockchain and 5G was published as a chapter in a book released by Routledge.

4. Stakeholder Relations

4.1 Member Governments Support

At the end of the fourth quarter, contributions totalling \$10.8 million were received from 44 countries as compared to the same amount from 45 countries as at the same time in the previous year. See 5.1 for a listing by country for this quarter.

4.2 Focal Points

Cameroon: Ms Anne Oben, Director of Commonwealth Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs.
Malawi: Dr Joshua Valeta, Director of Open and Distance Education, Ministry of Education.

4.3 Congratulatory Letters

A congratulatory letter was sent to the Honourable Janet Museveni, Minister of Education & Sports, Uganda.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenue

COL has received about \$12.5 million in revenue between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, comprising member governments contributions, additional contributions and miscellaneous income (compared to \$13.1 million in 2019-2020). The figure for this year represents 100% of the revenue forecast.

During this quarter, contributions were received from the following countries:

Ghana – \$70,501; Kenya – \$54,567; Lesotho – \$87,472; Maldives – \$6,200; and St. Lucia – \$22,298.

Additional contributions in the amount of \$1.2 million from grants and service fees were recognised during the financial year.

5.2 Cash Flow

At June 30, 2021, COL held approximately \$5 million in cash to meet operational costs and maintain a positive cash flow into the next financial year.

COL continued to maintain a restricted reserve of \$10.2 million as per its policy to meet unexpected expenditures or to cover any shortfalls in revenue.

5.3 Expenditures

At the end of the financial year, close to \$11 million was spent or committed to meet programme and organisational management activities, staff and office costs. This amount represents 90 % of the annual budget of \$12.1 million for 2020-2021, as compared to 96% at the same time last year, based on preliminary figures.

6. Human Resources

6.1 Staff Departures

The following staff left COL on June 30, 2021:

Dr Kirk Perris who held the post of Adviser: Education.

Dr David Porter who held the temporary post of Senior Adviser: Higher Education.

Dr Basheerhamad Shadrach who held the post of Adviser: Skills.

7. Technology & Innovation

The COL supported course ‘Artificial Intelligence for IT and non-IT Professionals’, developed by the Virtual University of Pakistan, was added to COL’s repository and the Pacific Regional Channel platform. Three showcases/playlists were added to the platform for Nauru.

A generic image for the newly developed Aptus-Pi was developed and tested. Seventeen Aptus devices were delivered to Malawi for the Open Schooling initiative, while six were delivered

to Antigua and Barbuda for VUSSC. In addition, 200 additional devices have been despatched to the Maldives.

A new website for the 'Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific' project was created. The project for COL's new website was launched and the project management, redesign and redevelopment activities of the site are ongoing.

There were 106 new uploads to COL's Open Access repository and 22 courses were added or updated on COLVEE.

8. Communications

COL published 24 news releases and received 35 mentions in external media. 104 new videos were released on the corporate YouTube channel, with 30,100+ views.

The social media presence has grown to 272400+ followers on Facebook and 9962 on Twitter. COL's Facebook page reached over 752240 users and its tweets earned close to 658000 impressions.

9. Publications/Resources

The following are recent publications and resources of note:

- [Commonwealth of Learning Strategic Plan 2021-2027](#)
- [COL in the Commonwealth: 2015-2021](#)
- [Out-of-School Children: A Contemporary View from the Pacific Island Countries of the Commonwealth](#)
- [Quality and Equity in Digital Learning: Policy Brief](#)

They are available on [OAsis](#), COL's open access repository. Speeches and presentations are found [here](#).

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

*Professor Asha S. Kanwar
President & Chief Executive Officer*

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