



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

President's Quarterly Progress Report: January - March 2021

1. Board Matters

The Board engaged closely with the strategic planning process and held two meetings during this quarter. The first was to meet with the Evaluators on 21st January to review the recommendations of the final Meta-Evaluation Report for the previous Strategic Plan 2015-2021. The Board also met on 2nd March to review the revised draft of the Strategic Plan 2021-2027. While the majority of members approved the Plan as presented, further revisions were requested where the Board delegated the responsibility of final approval to the Executive Committee. A meeting of the Executive Committee was scheduled for 7th April 2021.

The Audit Committee met on 22nd February to review the revenue and results of the second quarter.

I am delighted to welcome Senator the Honourable Kay McConney, Minister of Innovation, Science and Smart Technology, Barbados, as the Caribbean representative to the Board.

I also extend a warm welcome to Professor Daniel Kgwadi, Vice Chancellor, North-West University as the representative of South Africa.

The annual meeting of the Board of Governors will be held on 14th and 15th July 2021, and as per current trends is likely to be virtual.

2. General

Canada's representative on the Board, Mr Arif Lalani played a key role in the organisation of a virtual event by Global Affairs Canada to celebrate Commonwealth Day on 8th March, which coincided with International Women's Day. The programme featured a special presentation by COL with a focus on gender equality. Girls from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania participated and sent video messages on how COL's interventions had changed their lives. This was attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Marc Garneau and Commonwealth High Commissioners posted in Canada. Since CHOGM is scheduled to be held in June this year and COL presents to Ministers of Foreign Affairs, such a briefing was both timely and opportune. The celebration closed with

the launch of a COL song contributed by two UK composers. This uplifting composition captures the spirit of COL and inspires us to work together for our common future. As the Prime Minister the Rt Honourable Justin Trudeau stated in his Commonwealth Day message 'The Commonwealth also helps our countries work together to overcome the challenges of today, and create a better future for all of our people and people of other countries. An example of this work, in line with this year's theme – *Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating and Transforming* – is the Commonwealth of Learning... which... helps further girls' education around the world.'

Another significant milestone during this quarter was the completion of the COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery programme under which over 150,000 Commonwealth citizens were skilled and reskilled for livelihoods. The partnership has been transformational—a game-changer that has raised COL's visibility well beyond Commonwealth borders and provided just-in-time online training to thousands who would otherwise not have the opportunity. The impact has been the greatest in the Caribbean. The Ministry of Education, Guyana signed an MOU with the Private Sector Commission and the Public Service Commission to ensure that the certificates earned are recognised for employment. The National Transformation Initiative, Barbados has signed an agreement directly with Coursera to continue offering this programme as part of its national skills transformation agenda. A Virtual Convocation for the Pacific graduates, the third in the series, was held at which both the Coursera CEO Jeff Maggioncalda and I spoke. Coursera has further facilitated a collaboration with Google, under which 10,000 licenses for highly specialised IT courses have now been made available to COL.

The 'Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning in the Pacific' project supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), New Zealand is being implemented in nine small island states with support from education ministers. Activities such as capacity building in Open Educational Resources (OER) and identifying the needs for skills development have been completed as per schedule.

In spite of the anxieties caused by the interminable pandemic, we are very fortunate to have colleagues who walked the extra mile to maintain the momentum of their activities while also contributing to the strategic planning process.

2.1 President's Activities

Online meetings have become a regular feature of our lives and even without travel it is possible to keep stakeholders engaged and present COL's work at international forums.

It was a pleasure to moderate a CommonwealthWiseWomen webinar where the Secretary-General, the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland spoke on women's leadership. This was well attended by participants from around the Commonwealth who benefited from her insights and personal experience as a global leader and role model. I too had occasion to speak on the same topic at an event organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat on International Women's Day. Such reciprocity between sister organisations further strengthens Team Commonwealth.

A range of presentations were made during this quarter. These include an inaugural address at the graduation ceremony for learners who successfully completed a COL-supported course on Disability and Assistive Technologies organised by Mr Armoogum Parsuramen's Global Rainbow Foundation, Mauritius. I participated in the launch of a Benchmarking Framework where COL contributed as a member of an International Consortium. This was organised by Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University, Dubai. I was also invited to speak at the European Distance and E-Learning Network's Open Education Week 2021. Congratulatory video messages were sent to Athabasca University, Canada and University of the Philippines Open University.

Several meetings were held with stakeholders: the Minister of Education, Seychelles the Honourable Justin Valentin to discuss his ministry's strategic plan which led to the establishment of a joint COL-Ministry Task Force to support implementation; the New Zealand High Commissioner HE Bede Corry and Deputy High Commissioner Shannon Austin posted in the United Kingdom to brief them on COL's work; and the Brunei High Commissioner HE Colonel (R) Pengiran Haji Kamal Bashah bin Pengiran Haji Ahmad posted in Canada.

The pandemic has accelerated the acceptance of distance and online learning, bringing greater visibility and recognition to COL. Not only is COL more widely recognised and respected but is also sought-out internationally. However, this cannot be taken for granted. COL will have to enhance its thought leadership role and the new Strategic Plan provides the road map for maximum reach and optimal impact.

3. Programme

The following activities demonstrate that COL is a resilient organisation and, despite the ongoing disruptions, continues to deliver.

3.1 Education Sector

3.1.1 Open/Innovative Schooling

Five secondary schools in Kenya are using OER videos developed by COL partner ElimuTV and 961 learners registered on a COL-supported online platform to prepare for national exams. In Malawi, 5,000 OER were reconfigured for offline use. More than 1,700 OER were developed for secondary school subjects in Eswatini and Namibia. A training programme for community-outreach facilitators in Tanzania was designed, outreach guides drafted and facilitators recruited.

In Guyana, 13 teachers were trained in 'Developing and Teaching Online Courses' and are now preparing courses in seven subjects for out-of-school youth and adults.

COL is supporting the Flexible and Distance Education division in the Ministry of Education, Papua New Guinea with course design and development where four staff members completed the 'Moodle Implementation' course.

3.1.2 Teacher Education

More than 2,400 learners from 72 countries enrolled in the MOOC 'Advanced Cyber Security Training for Teachers' with 696 completions. COL and The Open University, UK jointly offered a MOOC on 'Inclusive Teaching and Learning' where 367 learners enrolled.

A webinar on establishing a school professional development plan attracted 64 participants from The Gambia. A project to train 2,000 teachers/teacher educators in OER was launched at the National Teachers' Institute, Nigeria.

'Mobile Learning with Multimedia', an online course, was contextualised for Freetown Teachers College (FTC), Sierra Leone and Kiribati Teachers College (KTC). Ninety teachers/teacher educators from FTC and 70 from KTC enrolled in the course.

3.1.3 Higher Education

Online workshops on 'Assessment Practices for Online Learning' and 'Micro Credentials' attracted 458 participants and 45 digital badges were issued. Under a joint project with the Association of Commonwealth Universities, five quality assurance review reports were received from partner universities.

In Kenya, a feasibility study was completed with Kenyatta University, and the pilot 'Virtual Labs for Science Subjects' was launched with 120 students. At Moi University, an employability strategy was developed. ODL programme accreditation standards for the Council of Higher Education, Lesotho were finalised and an institutional ODL policy drafted for Mzuzu University, Malawi. The Open University, Mauritius revised the course on 'Introduction to Sustainable Development in Business' to include COVID-19 recovery materials and 3,060 learners have registered for the next offering. At Copperbelt University, Zambia a blended workshop on digital assessment was held for 35 participants.

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

In partnership with the University of Seychelles, 'The Blue Economy: Blue Resources' MOOC was offered, attracting 1,772 participants from 83 countries, with 381 completions.

The Caribbean Tourism Organisation began piloting two courses based on VUSSC materials, 'Multi-hazard Risk Management' and 'Caribbean Sustainable Tourism', with 47 learners. In Guyana, 55 learners enrolled in the first of three short online courses in educational leadership offered by the National Centre for Educational Resource Development. Thirty-six lecturers from Cyril Potter College of Education were trained in

online course development and facilitation as a result of which 355 students began taking courses through a Moodle instance implemented by COL.

An agreement was signed with the Ministry of Education and Training, Tonga to contextualise and offer COL's 'Introduction to Needs Assessment and Assistive Technologies' course to 30 staff, teachers and disability practitioners.

3.1.5 GIRLS Inspire

In Bangladesh, COL partner Centre for Mass Education in Science trained 1,455 women and girls in skills, 24 of whom started online businesses. Approximately 32,500 community members were sensitised and 15 child marriages were prevented. Two videos on the GIRLS Inspire model were released and a social media campaign carried out for International Women's Day.

3.2 Skills Sector

3.2.1 Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

COL supported Kenya's Ministry of Education to implement the national plan on 'Establishment of Distance and Flexible Learning in TVET'. This includes the design of a resource repository, support for 28 institutions to implement online learning and capacity building for more than 2,000 TVET teachers. Nigeria's National Board of Technical Education enrolled 160 TVET teachers from 115 polytechnics in an online course on 'Flexible Skills Development', with 90 completions.

In Nauru, an app to develop skills in kitchen gardening was finalised and site/content administrators were trained to begin populating the app with local content. Tuvalu launched the Building, Construction and Allied Trade Skills (BCATS) programme, the country's first TVET pathway from school to the Tuvalu Atoll Science, Technology and Training Institute (TASTTI). The Minister for Public Utilities and Environment was the guest of honour at the launch. Eight trainers from TASTTI were certified as workplace assessors by New Zealand's Building and Construction Industry Training Organisation and 40 learners enrolled in a higher level programme.

3.2.2 Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)

COL partner Matumaini Mapya and the Ministry of Agriculture, Tanzania organised a workshop on 'Integration of Table Banking in National Policies' for representatives from the ministry and various cooperatives. One outcome of this event was the recommendation that the Tanzania Producers Financial Public Limited Company be licensed to manage micro-finance. In Uganda, Makerere University piloted a MobiMOOC on financial literacy for 300 farmers.

More than 2,400 farmers in India enrolled in MobiMOOCs and COL partner Vidiyal linked 1,431 farmers to credit.

In Jamaica, 5,456 farmers were reached by text messages on climate smart agriculture, farming as a business and good agricultural practices. Sixty-three extension officers were trained through online learning and a new ODL course was developed to train farmers.

3.2.3 Technology Enabled Learning

Two MOOCs on 'Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning' and 'Blended Learning Practice' were offered jointly by COL and Athabasca University with 3,216 participants. A MOOC on 'Social Media Marketing' was offered and 2,860 learners enrolled.

Following an online capacity building workshop attended by 31 staff, Kaimosi Friends University College, Kenya is developing 26 courses.

The Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture, Belize, with the support of COL, implemented C-DELTA in 44 schools, with 1,878 participants. With COL support the Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development, St Lucia organised a blended workshop on OER and online course development for 30 teachers to develop three secondary school courses.

3.2.4 Skills Online

The COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery Program, which ended in its current phase, surpassed one million course enrolments with over 151,000 unique learners. In Barbados, the Program has been integrated into the country's 'National Transformation Initiative' aimed at reskilling citizens. A convocation was organised for 130 graduates from seven Pacific Commonwealth countries.

Through Self Employed Women's Association, India, 250 learners enrolled in an online course on leadership.

3.3 Cross-cutting Theme

3.3.1 Gender

A new cohort of 23 mentors and 39 mentees joined the CommonwealthWiseWomen programme and a significant development was the launch of a new chapter in India.

COL partner Concerned Youth Organization, Malawi registered 1,240 new learners and conducted skills training and sensitisation for gender equality. Close to 80 girls and boys have returned to school as a result of advocacy efforts. With COL support, Youth Aid Education and Possible Changes Organization, Tanzania trained 520 girls in ICT and social marketing, and more than 50,000 community members were sensitised to gender quality.

Women's Development Centre, Sri Lanka trained 527 women and girls in skills for livelihoods.

In Papua New Guinea, 45 women and girls were trained in domestic trades.

3.4 eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO)

Three cohorts completed UNFPA's 'Virtual Orientation Programme'. Two blended learning programmes for UNHCR 'Programme Management' and 'Operational Data Management' were completed. One cohort of 'Report Writing' for the World Bank and two cohorts of 'Writing Effectively' in English and French were initiated for the Council of Europe.

UNHCR, in collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council, invited COL to facilitate two training sessions for an inter-agency pilot programme 'Leadership for Unpredictable Futures'.

3.5 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

CEMCA organised a virtual workshop on OER for 18 teachers of Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

Several activities were completed in India. An online workshop on Moodle implementation was held for 98 staff of Uttarakhand Open University. Training on national assessment and accreditation and OER was provided to the staff of Karnataka State Open University. In partnership with the National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development, 75 vocational trainers were trained in employability, entrepreneurship and life skills. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and CEMCA built the capacity of 54 workers for livelihoods in the apparel industry. In collaboration with UNESCO, CEMCA developed a handbook on 'Best Practices of Community Radio and Sustainable Development Goals' which was launched on World Radio Day. CEMCA and the Ministry of AYUSH, launched a project to engage Community Radio Stations for International Yoga Day. The project orientation has been conducted with 60 stations and audio materials produced.

In partnership with the National Institute of Education, Maldives, CEMCA trained 194 teachers and teacher educators in the use of virtual labs.

Online training on the 'Implementation of Open Book and Take-Home Examinations' was conducted for 180 faculty of the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

3.6 Regional Centres

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

Eighteen learners from the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre completed the first semester of the 'Certificate for Distance Education Practitioners'.

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

An online workshop series on TEL for higher education was delivered to 39 participants from Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana and Sierra Leone with seven TEL action plans submitted.

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

Two MOOCs 'Youth and Climate Crisis' and 'Youth Rights, Civil Engagement and Political Participation' were offered with 627 and 423 enrolments, respectively.

3.6.4 Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (CCCL)

A workshop was held to contextualise the MOOC 'Digital Literacy Lab for Educators' for Africa and Asia.

3.6.5 COL Chairs

Dr George Veletsianos is conducting a research project on flexible learning in the Pacific and the survey is ongoing.

Professor Mpine Makoe contributed to a COL virtual workshop on Digital Assessment.

3.6.6. COL Internship Programme

An intern from India was selected through an open application process and commenced work with CEMCA.

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

As part of a rapid response to COVID-19, an OER repository was built and content related to teacher education and school subjects was added and shared with ministries of education. Guides were developed to help ministries contextualise the OER and for teachers to make use of the repository. A MOOC on 'OER for Online Learning: An Introduction' for teachers attracted more than 580 learners.

Consultation meetings with TVET stakeholder groups from eight Pacific countries were held and research on the regional TVET ecosystem was completed. Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu were identified to implement a project on youth employment over the next four years.

3.8 Vice President's Activities

The Vice President led the process of developing the RBM framework and the draft implementation plans for the first year of the next Strategic Plan. Dr Balaji facilitated the development of an agreement between COL, the International Labour Organisation and the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning for collaboration on the digitalisation of skills training. He also provided oversight for the MFAT, New Zealand project and L3F where he liaised with banking sector officials in India to secure their agreement on the recognition of informal online learning.

4. Stakeholder Relations

At the end of the third quarter, contributions totalling \$10.6 million were received from 39 countries. See 5.1 for a listing by country for this quarter.

4.1 Member Governments Support

4.2 Focal Points

Seychelles: Ms Vicky Michel, Chief Liaison Officer, Ministry of Education.

Tonga: Dr Raelyn Esau, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Tonga Institute of Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Training.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenue

COL has received over \$11.4 million in revenue between July 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021 comprising member government contributions, additional contributions and miscellaneous income (the same level in revenue was received between July 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020). The figure for this year represents 90% of the revenue forecast.

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

Bangladesh – \$37,500; Fiji – \$62,850; Jamaica – \$56,700; Mozambique – \$51,930; Trinidad & Tobago – \$94,275; United Kingdom – \$1,760,500; and Vanuatu – \$6,285.

In addition, Uganda made a further instalment of \$4,500.

5.2 Cash Flow

At March 31, 2021, COL held approximately \$6.5 million in cash to meet operational costs for the balance of the current financial year and maintain a positive cash

flow into the next financial year. A contingency fund of \$687,000 is available for possible programme expansion.

An internally restricted cash reserve representing 12 months of operating costs and a capital fund earmarked for a permanent site are in place at the same levels as the previous quarter.

5.3 Expenditures

At the end of the third quarter, over \$9.5 million was spent or committed to meet programme and organisational management activities, staff and office costs. This amount represents 78% of the annual budget of \$12.1 million for 2020-2021, as compared to 84% of the budget at the same time last year.

6. Technology & Innovation

Ten Moodle or WordPress instances were added to COL's 'Platform as a Service' offering and the websites managed by COL, including CommonwealthWiseWomen and OpenDoor, were upgraded to the latest versions. The Aptus device was successfully migrated to the Raspberry Pi computer and the performance has been significantly improved. A learner testimonial video was produced for the COL-Coursera Pacific Convocation and the event was successfully conducted in virtual mode.

The audio-visual infrastructure was reconfigured to enable more flexibility. Technical support for team sites and user training for online events were provided. The Wi-Fi system was upgraded and security updates for the COL website were implemented.

7. Communications

A video to celebrate Commonwealth Day was prepared featuring different artists from across the Commonwealth. These included singers, dancers, poets and artists who represent our rich and diverse culture. This video and the COL song were both released on the same day. In all, COL released 73 new videos on the corporate YouTube channel, with a total of 32,800+ views.

COL published 28 press releases and received 25 mentions in external media. The social media presence has grown to 248,900+ followers on Facebook and 8,000+ on Twitter. A single post on Facebook reached over 420,000 people.

8. Publications/Resources

The following are recent publications and resources of note:

- [A Guide for Implementing a Quality Assurance Institutional Review Tool for Blended Learning](#)
- [Connections \(Vol. 26, no. 1\)](#)
- [Journal of Learning for Development \(Vol. 8 no. 1\)](#)
- [Out-of-School Children: A Contemporary View from the Pacific Island Countries of the Commonwealth](#)

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
April 15, 2021*