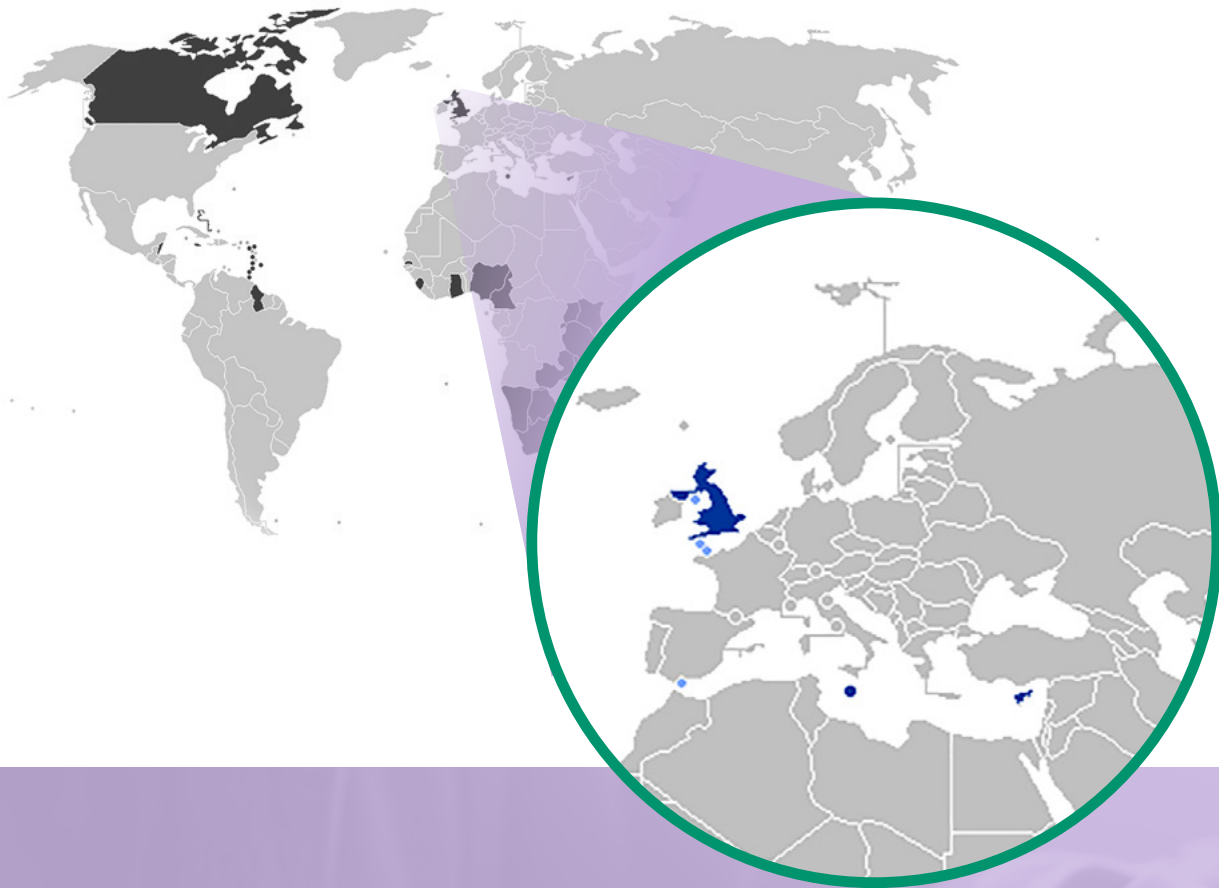




COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



COL in the Commonwealth

• **CYPRUS** | 2015–2021

COL in the Commonwealth

CYPRUS
2015–2021



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Foreword

COL in the Commonwealth: 2015–2021 Country Reports summarise COL's activities over the last six years, detailing what we have achieved in each Member State and across the Commonwealth. The reports describe not only how COL has addressed country needs in education and training but also how its work supports the priorities of its development partners: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the global community to embrace distance and online delivery to keep the doors of learning open. The current crisis has highlighted, yet again, the uneven development of technology across the Commonwealth. COL has been promoting the use of a range of technologies, from print, radio and TV to the Internet, to reach learners in different contexts. As an intergovernmental organisation established by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote distance learning and technologies for human resource development, COL's role has never been more important.

COL's Strategic Plan 2015–2021 was based on the conviction that learning leads to sustainable development. COL has continued to use its expertise in distance education and technology-based approaches to promote lifelong learning that leads to sustainable development, which means economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation. This aligns COL's work with SDG4, which aspires to provide equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning for all.

To accelerate progress towards this goal and enhance impact, COL has been fostering partnerships, building capacity, supporting the development of materials and replicable models, and enabling policy. Focusing on these core strategies, this compendium begins with a Pan-Commonwealth section, which describes COL's initiatives under Education and Skills, with Gender as a cross-cutting theme. This is followed by a section containing brief regional overviews for Africa, Asia, the

Caribbean and Americas, Europe and the Pacific. The regional summaries are followed by individual country reports, which highlight some of the results achieved.

You will be pleased to note that COL has exceeded the targets identified for the six-year plan. External evaluators, who conducted a meta-evaluation to assess the impact of the Strategic Plan 2015–2021, concluded that "COL programming over the period assessed... was relevant, effective, and efficient. COL is having an impact in many dimensions and across several initiatives; and in many cases, where government has taken interest and is assuming more leadership, there are good reasons to believe some of the changes at the institutional and government levels are sustainable."

This success has been possible through the support that COL has received from ministries of education as well as partner organisations and experts. *COL in the Commonwealth* is also the result of collective effort and collaboration. Partners on the ground have diligently provided COL with updates, while COL staff have tracked and assessed results obtained through meticulous monitoring and evaluation. I am very grateful to everyone involved for their valuable inputs.

Pandemics, natural disasters and widening inequalities will continue to challenge our systems. The lessons learned in the past will help shape a better future. COL will support Member States in their efforts to rebuild robust and resilient systems of education and training by providing bold and imaginative solutions to address future risks and uncertainties. Your continued support will be key to achieving these goals.



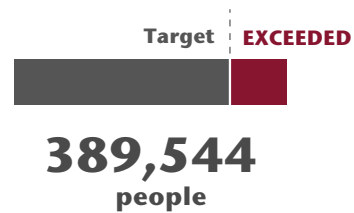
Professor Asha S. Kanwar
President and Chief Executive Officer
Commonwealth of Learning

TARGETS 2021

ACHIEVED by April 2021



Improved sustainable livelihoods
300,000 PEOPLE

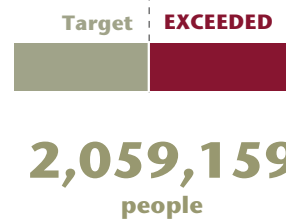


470
ORGANISATIONS
Improved organisational
capacity to leverage ODL



1.4 million
PEOPLE

Increased and equitable
access to and use of quality
learning opportunities



Pan-Commonwealth Activity

Located in British Columbia, Canada, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation that serves the education and training needs of the 54 independent states that comprise the Commonwealth and their combined population of 2.4 billion, of whom more than 60% are under the age of 30. COL was established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government specifically to help ministries, institutions and organisations expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open, distance and technology-based approaches.

COL participates in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) and presents its progress report to foreign ministers. During the 25th CHOGM, in London in April 2018, COL highlighted at various forums the paradigm shifts required to

secure “our common future.” As well, at the triennial Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) and the meetings of the Commonwealth Education Ministers’ Action Group, COL reports on its progress in promoting learning for sustainable development.

At the 20th CCEM, in Fiji in 2018, the Commonwealth Education Ministers commended COL “for its emphasis on Lifelong Learning for employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment which supported the ongoing efforts of Member States to achiev[e] SDG4... [and] its global leadership in Open Educational Resources (OER) and innovations in educational technologies.”

2nd World OER Congress

COL partnered with UNESCO, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the government of Slovenia to organise the 2nd World OER Congress, in Ljubljana, Slovenia from 18 to 20 September 2017. The ensuing 2017 Ljubljana OER Action Plan provided recommendations to stakeholders in five strategic areas: building the capacity of users to find, reuse, create and share OER; language and cultural issues; ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality OER; developing sustainability models; and developing supportive policy environments.



COL leverages its impact through a wide range of partnerships that include institutions, national organisations, international development agencies and non-governmental organisations. Inter-governmental partners include the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UN Women, UNESCO and UNESCO’s Institute for Information Technologies (IITE) and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). COL also works with donor agencies such as the World Bank, regional organisations such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, national and regional distance education associations, industry, and private-sector foundations such as The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

COL assists governmental, non-governmental and community partners in developing policy, building capacity, refining models, creating materials and nurturing collaborative networks.

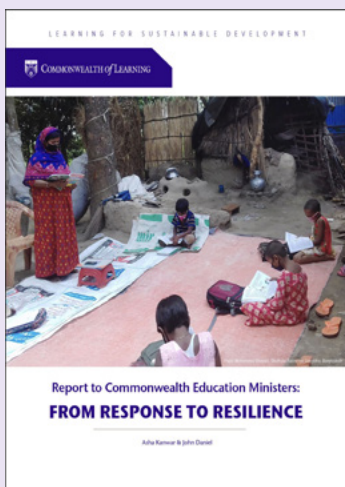
COL's response to COVID-19

COL has been quick to respond to the urgency of the situation and the evolving needs across the Commonwealth by initiating relevant projects and targeted country interventions and joining global coalitions.

COL has joined the UNESCO Global Education Coalition and “Combat COVID-19: Keep Learning”, spearheaded by IITE. COL also initiated the International Partnership of Distance and Online Learning for COVID-19, commonly known as [OpenDoor](#), bringing together over 60 organisations and institutions around the world. COL's online repository of curated content and tools became a

go-to resource for educators across the world. The COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative has provided access to free online courses to almost 150,000 Commonwealth citizens, many of whom have lost their livelihoods due to COVID-19.

In an effort to help young women and girls become successful in their fields of interest and build future generations of leaders, COL has launched [CommonwealthWiseWomen](#). This new mentoring programme offers unique networking opportunities to women and girls from underserved communities across the Commonwealth by pairing them with successful and influential women in leadership roles.



Report to Commonwealth Education Ministers: From Response to Resilience

“What lessons can be drawn from the COVID-19 experience to make education systems more resilient in future? This policy brief provides examples of how governments and institutions made it possible for people to continue their education during the pandemic and identifies factors that contributed to success. The responses required are reviewed from social, pedagogical, technological and psychological perspectives.”



COL's Programmes



Education and Skills are COL's two programme sectors, with gender as a cross-cutting theme.

OPEN/INNOVATIVE SCHOOLING (OIS)

Open/innovative schooling is increasingly recognised as a viable solution to the growing demand for equitable access to secondary education, especially for girls and marginalised groups, and particularly in remote locations. Governments are seeking to redefine the way secondary education addresses societal needs by diversifying the curriculum. This means making technical and vocational programmes available alongside academic offerings — something that open schools are well positioned to do.

Activities

OIS currently works in Bangladesh, Belize, Botswana, Eswatini, Guyana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu and Zambia. COL also supports the information-sharing activities of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association.

COL has supported the development of policies and strategies in Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Tanzania; developed and enhanced open schooling models in Belize, Malawi, Mozambique, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu and Zambia; and promoted quality OER, including for persons with disabilities, in Bangladesh, Botswana, Eswatini and Namibia. It also



COL's activities and projects are relevant to achieving SDG4, to the priorities of the Commonwealth countries COL works in, and both relevant and appropriate to achieving the aims of the current Six-Year Plan.

- COL is accepted and seen as a leader in ODL. It has the mandate, over 30 years of experience, a large repository of OER materials, tools and highly skilled international experts on staff and at the governance level.
- COL's innovative approaches to teacher development, blended learning, and institutional capacity building in ODL, OER and TEL are at the cutting edge.
- COL is committed to learning from doing and adapts its work based on the evidence coming from M&E and internal studies.

Key Evaluation Findings. *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*

has been building capacity in course development, delivery and assessment in Guyana and Papua New Guinea.

Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, the current model for OIS is relatively new and involves developing, piloting, scaling and mainstreaming OER, ODL, eLearning methods and open educational practices in order to have a large-scale systemic impact. Since the implementation of this model started in 2017, educators in six countries have developed curriculum-based OER and have piloted or are close to piloting their use. The pilots in Mozambique and Zambia are currently reaching about 800 formerly out-of-school youths per year, and both countries are now looking towards scaling. In addition, as part of their response

to the pandemic lockdowns, participating countries shared some of the OER they had in development, and these were downloaded more than 26,000 times in 2020. In a similar vein, curriculum-based resources created for use by learners in Kenya were viewed on YouTube more than 20,000 times in the first eight weeks and, it is estimated, were viewed by more than 150,000 learners in Kenya and Tanzania when first broadcast.

TEACHER EDUCATION



Teaching quality is considered to be the most important factor affecting learning in schools in most Commonwealth countries. COL's focus is on improving teacher quality through school- and technology-based training models, which can cut costs and achieve scale. Working in partnership with government agencies and teacher education institutions, COL supports capacity development in the integration of technology and OER into pre- and in-service teacher training.

Activities

COL is working with ministries of education as well as non-governmental organisations and teacher education institutions in The Gambia, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Uganda to develop capacity and resources for school-based teacher development.

In response to partner needs and emerging pedagogies, the initiative has also developed online courses, including MOOCs and webinars for educators and education leaders.

COL's Educational Podcasting for Innovative Classrooms is a response to the increased need for practices, processes and systems for effective last-mile teaching and teacher professional development in partner countries.

Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, the model has been replicated in ten countries. The findings from the evaluations and interviews with key actors at institutional and government levels suggest that the model is succeeding in West Africa, particularly The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, and it shows potential for scale, with the strategic selection of institutions by governments.

HIGHER EDUCATION

COL continues to support policy makers, institutions and leaders in higher education to harness the potential of ODL and technology and enable them to cope with the increasing demand for quality higher education in the face of rising costs and diminishing public funding. COL has developed action plans aligned to the priorities of specific countries to increase access to quality higher education, while also forging partnerships with international and regional organisations to leverage its impact.

Activities

Institutions in Bangladesh, Botswana, Cameroon, Eswatini, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Sri Lanka,



Uganda and Zambia have partnered with COL in various projects.

COL is collaborating with 12 higher education institutions across the Commonwealth to offer the Commonwealth Executive Master in Business Administration and Commonwealth Executive Master in Public Administration programmes.

Through the Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning project, led by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, COL is supporting the development of quality assurance mechanisms for blended learning courses at 23 higher education institutions located in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

Outcomes

The evaluation of Higher Education initiatives in the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021* found that student performance had improved and student satisfaction had increased. There is evidence that systemic investments in technology, staff training, materials development and quality assurance policies have all had a positive impact.

THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH (VUSSC)

Strengthening and improving the quality and scope of existing tertiary institutions is a key priority for small states. The VUSSC partnership represents 32 small states of the Commonwealth dedicated to sharing educational resources and expanding access to tertiary education. VUSSC works with ministries of education and their agencies, post-secondary institutions and non-governmental organisations to build capacity in online course development, pedagogy and assessment. It promotes technology-enabled learning through the provision of a learning platform and enables the transfer of credits across small states through the use of the Transnational Qualifications Framework.

Activities

VUSSC has been active in small states across three regions – Africa (Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles), the Caribbean (The Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana) and the Pacific (Fiji,



Solomon Islands) – promoting eLearning, supporting the development of OER and providing learning opportunities at certificate, diploma and degree levels.

VUSSC has supported the development of a series of blue economy MOOCs in which close to 6,000 learners from across the world have participated.

In response to the increasing need to transition to online delivery, VUSSC has supported institutions in Africa and the Caribbean to manage and use learning management systems to create and offer courses.

As part of a tripartite Commonwealth initiative with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of the West Indies Open Campus, VUSSC has repurposed and made available an online undergraduate degree programme in Youth Work Development to universities that are members of the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work.

Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, there is strong support from ministers of education in the small states of the Commonwealth, and COL offers a variety of courses responding to the unique needs of small states in areas such as the blue economy, sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, disaster management and port management. VUSSC has played a major role in the development of OER that have led to educators' pedagogical development and students' improved educational performance. The Transnational Qualifications Framework, which allows for the recognition of qualifications earned in one nation by 31 other nations, is a major strength.



The Skills sector addresses the needs of both formal and non-formal learning. The initiatives in this sector are: Technology-Enabled Learning, Lifelong Learning for Farmers, GIRLS Inspire, and Technical and Vocational Skills Development, including Skills Online.



TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED LEARNING (TEL)

This initiative aims to encourage more governments and institutions to integrate TEL and OER policies and practices to improve teaching and learning for skills development. COL believes that for technology to have a transformative effect in teaching and learning, a focus on policy–technology–capacity is needed, and practice must be based on research evidence.

Activities

This initiative is being implemented in Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Belize, Fiji, Grenada, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Saint Lucia, Samoa, South Africa, Sri Lanka, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Since its launch in 2018, COL's Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training

in Action (C-DELTA) platform has had over 13,500 registered users. Over 24,000 learners have benefited from MOOCs organised in partnership with Athabasca University, Canada. Since 2018, COL's online course *Understanding OER* has been used by over 13,000 people worldwide; in 2020, it won a prestigious Brandon Hall Group Silver Award.

Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, TEL demonstrates the systematic use of technology to offer quality education at scale. The C-DELTA (seven modules) and Online Course on Open Education Resources (LearnOER) platforms are examples. TEL provides peer-reviewed and quality-assured tools and resources to help any educational institution integrate technology in teaching and learning so as to improve the quality of



PCF8

PCF8 was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 27 to 30 November 2016. More than 500 participants from 59 countries joined COL and host partner Open University Malaysia for four days of speeches, presentations and discussions on the theme Open, Online and Flexible Learning: The Key to Sustainable Development. In the framework of the forum, education ministers from five countries held a Ministerial Roundtable, where they discussed learning and sustainable development, including issues of access and capacity. Forum delegates adopted the Kuala Lumpur Declaration with a set of ten recommendations for governments, institutions, the private sector and civil society, on topics that included lifelong learning, ODL, access and equity, teacher education, OER, education of women and girls, research and innovation.

student learning and success. The Advanced ICT Skills Development Project has developed 26 OER courses to make the teaching and learning of advanced ICT skills affordable. These courses are developed as OER textbooks that can be adapted by institutions to offer courses. In addition, this initiative works to improve TEL policies.

LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS (L3F)

This programme empowers vulnerable rural women and their families to gain knowledge, create their own self-directed learning processes, and organise themselves to solve the challenges of lack of access



to credit and finance to improve their livelihoods. In this model, COL is a catalyst in bringing together institutions, civil society and the private sector to build the capacity of communities through gender-sensitive learning.

Activities

Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tonga, Uganda and Zambia are currently implementing the L3F model. Nearly 800,000 farmers, more than half of them women, have participated in L3F learning activities. COL has also trained over 100,000 learners across several countries of the Commonwealth using MOOCs - to scale up L3F through building capacity in agricultural extension. During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, about 42,000 learners were trained using innovative mobiMOOCs. Banks in various countries collaborate with L3F, including NABARD, a large agricultural bank in India, and Andhra Pradesh State Cooperative Bank. COL has been building the capacity

of staff at the Bank of Tanzania through a visit to India and subsequent follow-up training workshops.

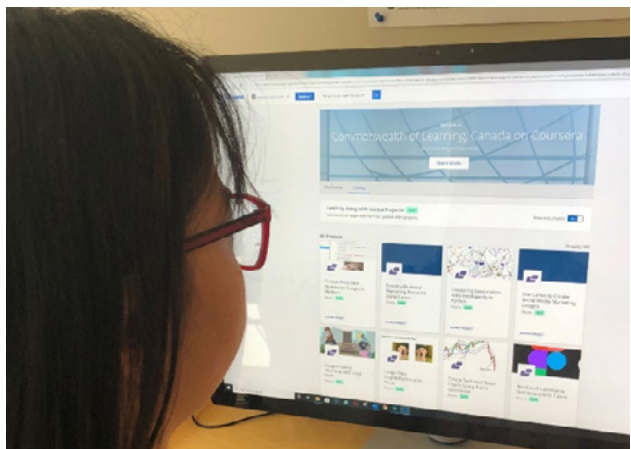
Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, since being piloted in 2006, the L3F programme has been demonstrated to enhance crop productivity, household incomes and empowerment, not simply through learning but also by linking small-holder farmers to sources of financing and to other actors in the supply chain. Participants invest their incomes in children's education, better food and improved housing, as well as increasing their assets and diversifying their income-generating activities, which multiplies the development impact. COL's ability to broker partnerships is a key strength: the L3F model links participants with microfinance, agricultural extension workers and agricultural supply chains using a social-capital approach.

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (TVSD)

COL is building the capacity of TVET government agencies and institutions to increase access to quality TVSD through using ODL and learning technologies. COL is supporting selected partners to implement Skills in Demand projects, which blend online learning with learning in the workplace or community. Tapping into the physical and human resources in these contexts helps overcome TVET-specific challenges of how to develop practical skills while still reaching marginalised learners in informal sectors and remote locations.





Activities

Since 2015, COL has trained more than 3,000 TVET educators across the Commonwealth in flexible and blended learning. COL is supporting government agency partners in The Gambia, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea and Zambia to implement national change strategies for flexible and blended TVET. COL has seven Skills in Demand projects underway in Kenya, Nauru, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu and Zambia, and across the Caribbean in partnership with the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies. Skills being developed are project management, gardening, construction, computer and mobile phone repair, furniture making, and teaching and assessment for TVET teachers and workplace trainers.

Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, more than 100 partners are implementing flexible and blended (FaB) learning approaches to varying degrees, and there is evidence that organisations are moving toward more flexible TVSD. COL has online OER to build capacity in flexible skills development, allowing countries to cost-effectively scale up institutional capability through training trainers to use COL's OER. COL's new Skills in Demand model was found to meet the needs of national TVET agencies and bring government support that allowed work to scale rapidly across institutions and workplaces. TVSD also promoted learning networks: the INVEST Africa Community Learning Network has more than 2,000 members, and the African Foundation for Quality e-Learning for TVET (AFQueT) was founded in 2019 by nine individuals

from five African countries who have had their capability in eLearning built through COL.

As well, Skills Online aims to support the efforts of Member States to disseminate skills required for employment and entrepreneurship. Through hybrid models that apply ODL techniques, it helps women, girls, youths, persons with disabilities, entrepreneurs and the unemployed to acquire relevant 21st-century skills and access in-country mentorship support. It enhances the ODL capabilities of both TVET institutions and other non-governmental organisations involved in skills development.

The COL–Coursera partnership has been offered in 50 Commonwealth countries, resulting in over one million course enrolments and over 182,000 certificates. In addition, COL has collaborated with Udeemy Inc., facilitating access for vulnerable youths in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda to 4,000 highly curated online courses that have benefited over 8,100 learners. In India, COL has helped reskill 2,100 auto-technicians, tailors and beauticians to become sanitation hygiene entrepreneurs and train 5,000 women digital entrepreneurs to meet new demands created by COVID-19.

GENDER

Gender is a cross-cutting theme that underpins and complements all COL initiatives. COL recognises that the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment is central to its agenda of learning for sustainable development. COL supports partners in mainstreaming gender and in implementing holistic projects to address specific gender issues. Targeted programmes tackle the distinct challenges faced by



girls/women and boys/men in regions where they are most disadvantaged, while also shifting the social norms that create and perpetuate gender inequalities.

Activities

Projects are being implemented in Botswana, Ghana, Guyana, India, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad and Tobago. Through a variety of skills-building activities in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, COL has been empowering women to achieve sustainable livelihoods. In Sri Lanka and Tanzania, COL has trained girls and young women in ICT, and in the Caribbean, it has helped address issues of boys' underachievement. In 2020, COL launched a gender-equality capacity-building project with the participation of 11 partners in nine countries of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.



As well, a special project, GIRLS Inspire, has aimed to provide schooling and skills development to some of the hardest-to-reach girls in the Commonwealth. COL has worked in Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tanzania to provide education and training to almost 100,000 girls to equip them for employment and entrepreneurship. This project has been supported by Global Affairs Canada and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, COL has the ability to influence as well as support partners, and its long

history and relationships give it credibility. Three of the gender projects — the Social Safety Net project, Lifelong Learning for Mothers, and the Gender Mainstreaming project — have developed strategies and mechanisms for implementation that can be scaled up. The Gender Mainstreaming model has clear guidelines, and the three phases of the gender mainstreaming strategy are logically connected and relevant. In addition, COL has developed tools, including a Gender Audit Tool and a Gender Road Map template. A social protection mobile application has also been developed for Solomon Islands.

COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA (CEMCA)

COL's regional office in Asia is based in New Delhi, India. CEMCA promotes the meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of media and technology to serve the education and training needs of the Commonwealth Member States of Asia. CEMCA works in education and skills development, with a focus on community media, particularly community radio.

Activities

Through activities with partners in Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Singapore and Sri Lanka, CEMCA has helped institutions improve their capacity to leverage ODL for increased access to education. During the COVID-19 lockdown in the region in 2020, CEMCA offered training to faculty and leaders in ODL institutions to help with the transition to online learning. Recently, virtual labs have been introduced.



Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, CEMCA operates with a small academic staff and well-developed networks. Its advocacy efforts and technical support have led to the successful adoption of institutional OER policies. Similarly, capacity building with institutions has created improvements in knowledge, changes in attitude, and changes in systems and practices, leading to the increased use of OER to create learning materials. In a few cases, partner institutions have shared their experience with other universities, creating a multiplier effect. CEMCA has also been able to obtain additional contributions from other donors or development agencies.



PCF9

Close to 550 policy makers, practitioners and thought leaders from across the Commonwealth and beyond gathered at the historic Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh, Scotland for PCF9, themed Innovations for Quality Education and Lifelong Learning. It was organised from 9 to 12 September 2019 in partnership with The Open University, UK. The four days of insightful keynote addresses, engaging plenary panels, informative parallel sessions, and other programme highlights provided a unique opportunity to bridge traditional divides between borders and sectors. Discussions centred around four key sub-themes — Opening Up Education, Equity and Inclusion, Technology, and Employability — and delegates appreciated the focus on new forum features: artificial intelligence, youth and girls' education, and learners with special abilities. Under the auspices of PCF9, COL hosted a ministerial roundtable with participation from six education ministers.

REGIONAL CENTRES



COL supports regional centres in Western and Southern Africa, Europe and the Pacific. These are hosted by ODL institutions (in Botswana, Fiji and Nigeria) or ministries (in Malta). They carry out activities that are aligned to COL's mandate and programmes.

Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, the regional centres are centres of excellence focused on advocacy and research in ODL. They have generated activities that can be replicated by new partners. In addition, they have well-developed networks of consultants to help them expand activities. The evaluation found that the regional centres are becoming increasingly relevant in their respective regions. The more established ones have developed networks and partnerships, significantly increasing ODL capacity in their regions.

SERVICES

COL's eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO) is a service initiative that works with international organisations on a fee-for-service basis to develop and deliver professional development courses and projects. Over the past 20 years, eLIO has progressively diversified its services to provide innovative solutions to meet the needs of globally dispersed staff and enable learning for sustainable development.



COL IN EUROPE

The Europe region of the Commonwealth comprises three Member States: Cyprus, Malta and the United Kingdom.

In a world marked by pandemics, natural disasters and economic uncertainties, COL continues to promote 'learning for sustainable development'.

COL is an enabler: COL was established specifically to help ministries, institutions and organisations to expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open, distance and technology-based approaches. As an acknowledged leader and innovator in ODL, OER and TEL, COL supports Member States to create enabling environments for building robust and resilient systems of education and training.

COL is a capacity-builder: COL harnesses the potential of ODL and technologies to build the capacity and capability of institutions and individuals in formal, non-formal and informal environments for reaching the unreached with lifelong learning opportunities.

COL is a catalyst: By developing innovative models, COL catalyses the transformation of education and training systems. As a catalyst for collaboration within the Commonwealth and beyond, COL promotes partnerships for enhanced impact.

Through its regional centres, COL promotes the development of leadership and expertise in the fields of ODL and TEL.

In Europe, the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (3CL) operates as a knowledge hub for a global network of groups, agencies, institutions and educators interested in the rapid deployment of programmes for connected learning in the Commonwealth and the European Union. 3CL is an international foundation set up by the Ministry of Education and Employment in Malta in collaboration with COL, presently hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. COL's President and CEO chairs 3CL's International Advisory Board.

Cyprus and Malta are members of COL's Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015-2021 concluded that COL's activities improve education access and quality and are focused on capacity building, policy development and institutional technology support for education, TVET, agriculture, and women's and girls' empowerment. The focus is relevant to both COL objectives and national priorities.



COL's major regional initiatives in the European countries between 2015 and 2021 are outlined below.

- The European OER Regional Consultation was organised in preparation for the 2nd World OER Congress, which was held in Slovenia in September 2017. The Regional Consultations were organised in partnership with UNESCO and the Government of Slovenia with the generous support of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. They followed a central theme of “OER for Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education: From Commitment to Action,” reflecting a strong focus on the role of OER in achieving SDG4. They explored strategies and solutions to the challenges of mainstreaming OER. The Europe Regional Consultation was held in Valletta, Malta in February 2017. Ministers, officials and experts from 24 countries participated in this important consultation, which was co-hosted by the Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta.
- COL and 3CL organised a two-day conference titled “Blockchain, Credentials and Connected Learning” in May 2018 in Valletta. The purpose was to generate an overview of emerging practices and associated technology providers as well as the concerns and interests of leaders in the education and skill-development sectors. The conference brought together 115 experts in blockchain technology from 17 countries.



- In June and July 2020, COL and 3CL organised an online webinar series entitled *Blockchain and Gaming in Education*. A total of 291 registrants were tabulated, and four partners were identified to pursue an institutional blockchain activity with COL and 3CL. Since then, COL and 3CL have been in touch with three institutional partners in Botswana, Namibia and Mauritius to pilot interventions using blockchain technology.
- From September to October 2020, COL and 3CL delivered a MOOC entitled *Digital Literacy Lab for Educators*. It attracted 1,685 learners, and 361 certificates were awarded.
- In consultation with the Ministry of Education and Employment, Government of Malta, COL developed a draft national OER policy for Malta. COL also facilitated the development of the University of Malta's open access policy through the provision of technical advice from a senior expert based in Canada.



- Working in collaboration with various institutions and experts from the region, COL has offered tailored training through a series of MOOCs to improve teacher capacity in responding to new demands for distance and online learning during COVID-19. The courses include *Cybersecurity Training for Teachers*, *Mobile Learning with Multimedia* (focusing on educational podcasting), *OER for Online Learning* and *Teaching Mathematics with Technology*, among others. These have attracted participants from six countries in Europe, including two Commonwealth nations.
- In partnership with The Open University, UK, COL launched a project aimed to build capacity in inclusive education. As part of the project, two MOOCs on inclusive education have been offered: *Inclusive Teaching and Learning* and *Creating an Inclusive School*.
- The Africa and Mediterranean regional meeting of COL's Focal Points took place on 24–25 September 2018 in Gaborone, Botswana to



strengthen the effectiveness of COL's work in addressing key priorities for education and training in the region, and to share information related to learning for sustainable development. On 28–29 April 2020, COL held online consultations with Focal Points from the region as part of the development of its new strategic plan (2021–2027).

- COL partnered with The Open University, UK to organise the Ninth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, held in Edinburgh in September 2019. Close to 550 policy makers,

practitioners and thought leaders from across the Commonwealth and beyond came together to discuss the role of open and distance learning in meeting the challenges of the changing world.

- Experts from UK-based Diversity and Ability (DnA) built the capacity of staff at the Global Rainbow Foundation in Mauritius to deliver a three-month



online course on *Conducting Disability Needs Assessments and Assistive Technologies*.

- Professor Brenda Gourley (UK) and the Right Honourable Patricia Scotland QC (UK) are mentors in COL's [CommonwealthWiseWomen](#) programme, aimed at developing the leadership potential of women and girls in the Commonwealth.
- Close to 130 learners from Europe joined the COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative, gaining free and unlimited access to 4,000 online courses taught by highly reputed professors and mentors from top universities and companies around the world.



Cyprus



97.5%
Primary school
enrolment



95.3%
Secondary school
completion rate



Cyprus



Introduction

Cyprus (population: 1,198,575 in 2019) has a primary net enrolment rate of 97.5% (2017) and a secondary school completion rate of 95.3% (2017).

The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute is the main provider of in-service training for secondary education teachers. The [Open University of Cyprus](#) is the first and only higher education institution in Cyprus that provides open and distance education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Internet connectivity is available to 86% (2019) of the population, and mobile-cellular subscriptions are at 144 per 100 people (2019). Infrastructure is available for distance and technology-enabled learning and for expanding access to education and training in Cyprus. In the 2012 [Digital Strategy for Cyprus](#), the government committed to ensuring all public schools have computer networks, including datacentres with high-speed physical connections, and to installing computers and multimedia labs in every school.

BUILDING EDUCATION RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has had an unprecedented impact on education. Shortly after the pandemic struck, the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus decided to [promote the use of eLearning via subsidised training providers](#), a move also aimed at achieving faster adoption of ICT in vocational training.

COL FOCAL POINT

Professor George Papadopoulos, Dean, Department of Computer Science, University of Cyprus, is COL's Focal Point in Cyprus.



COL's Work in Cyprus: Six-Year Review 2015–2021

COL's work in Cyprus is primarily in the areas of higher education through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth and in technology-enabled learning. Participants from

Cyprus have attended regional and international events hosted by COL, and learners have benefited from COL's open online courses and other resources.



Education Sector Overview

VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH (VUSSC)

Cyprus is a member of VUSSC, with Professor George Papadopoulos, University of Cyprus, as the VUSSC Interlocutor.

Initiated by ministers of education of developing small states of the Commonwealth, VUSSC is currently supporting institutions so they can offer VUSSC courses and programmes, and promoting the use of the Transnational Qualifications Framework. Over 40 courses are available to partners at www.colvee.org.

In September 2019, Professor Papadopoulos participated in the Interlocutors Meeting organised by COL ahead of the Ninth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF9) in Edinburgh, UK. The meeting focused on identifying individual country priorities and the ways in which VUSSC could add value.

As well, COL has held discussions with CyprusInno, the largest bi-communal digital platform connecting all Cypriot entrepreneurs, about offering VUSSC entrepreneurship courses.



Skills Sector Overview

TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED LEARNING (TEL)

In partnership with Athabasca University, Canada, COL has been offering two MOOCs — *Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL)* since 2017 and *Blended Learning Practice* since March 2020 — for teachers in secondary, post-secondary and vocational education across the Commonwealth and beyond. Learners from Cyprus are among the nearly 24,000 who have participated in these courses.

One learner from Cyprus participated in the *Digital Literacy Lab for Educators* MOOC, co-hosted with the

Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning, in Malta.

GENDER

COL's Gender Profile 2017: Cyprus report is a compilation of current sex-disaggregated data for socio-economic indicators, namely in the areas of health, education, economic participation, and decision making.



Special Events and Activities

VISIT OF CYPRUS HIGH COMMISSIONER TO CANADA

COL welcomed the Cyprus High Commissioner to Canada, His Excellency Pavlos Anastasiades, at their headquarters in Metro Vancouver, Canada in May 2016.

PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING (PCF)

COL supported the attendance of Professor George Papadopoulos, Dean, Department of Computer Science, University of Cyprus, at both PCF8, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in November 2016, and PCF9, held in Edinburgh, UK in September 2019. As well, Professor Papadopoulos was invited to participate at the Interlocutors Meeting hosted by VUSSC ahead of each forum.

2ND WORLD OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES CONGRESS

COL organised six Regional Consultations on OER leading up to the 2nd World Open Educational Resources Congress, hosted by the Government of Slovenia in Ljubljana in partnership with UNESCO and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The Europe Regional Consultation was held in Valletta, Malta in February 2017. Mr Thanasis Hadzilacos, Professor of Educational Technology and Director of the Educational Technology Lab, Open University of Cyprus, attended.

BLOCKCHAIN, CREDENTIALS AND CONNECTED LEARNING

COL and the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning organised a two-day conference titled “Blockchain, Credentials and Connected Learning” in May 2018 in Valletta, Malta. The purpose was

to generate an overview of emerging practices and associated technology providers, and an awareness of the concerns and interests of leaders in the education and skill-development sectors. The conference brought together 115 experts in blockchain technology from 17 countries, including Professor Soulla Louca, University of Nicosia.

REGIONAL MEETINGS OF COL FOCAL POINTS

Between 2018 and 2020, COL’s Focal Points from Africa and Europe met twice for regional consultations. The first meeting took place on 24–25 September 2018 in Gaborone, Botswana, where Dr Georgia Kapitsaki, Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science, University of Cyprus, represented Cyprus. Professor George Papadopoulos, Dean, Department of Computer Science, University of Cyprus, joined the second meeting virtually in May 2020 to share national priorities.



Partnerships

Partnerships are fundamental to COL’s work. Strategic partnerships allow COL to broaden its reach and engage at global, regional and national levels, while implementation partners support COL’s work in communities and institutions across Commonwealth Member States. Partners include multilateral organisations, regional bodies, national governments, government agencies, foundations, civil society

organisations, public and private (not-for-profit) institutions and the private sector. COL partnerships assist in improving and extending teaching and learning services to people in the developing Commonwealth.

COL’s partners in Cyprus include:

- Ministry of Education and Culture
- University of Cyprus



Looking Ahead: 2027

Most Member States will accelerate efforts to address the learning deficit that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused. They will also need innovative solutions to achieve the targets of SDG4 by 2030. COL’s experience shows that ODL, OER and TEL can be leveraged to increase access to quality education, skills development and lifelong learning at lower costs. COL will provide support to ministries and institutions to develop enabling policies, build resilient systems and enhance human resource capacity for formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Going forward, COL will:

- i) build on its expertise in ODL, OER and TEL to play a more influential role in national policy development and implementation;
- ii) invest in innovations and research;
- iii) support the digital transformation of institutions and organisations;
- iv) develop skills for employment and entrepreneurship; and
- v) promote gender equality.



LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

VISION: To be the foremost global agency that promotes learning for sustainable development

MISSION: To help governments and institutions to expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open, distance and technology-based approaches



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