Hon Minister, Distinguished Guests, Graduands. It is a pleasure to join you on this important day, even if virtually. Developments in AI over the last few months have generated expectations that this might be the breakthrough the education sector is looking for.

But first a word about my organisation the Commonwealth of Learning or COL which has been a close partner with the ministry of education and institutions in Guyana. Our mandate is to help governments and institutions to use technologies to improve access to education and training.

Over a decade ago, COL supported the professional development of teachers using the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework to build capacity in integrating technologies in teaching and learning. COL also worked with the Ministry to develop OER for secondary schools and the quality content was deployed in remote regions of the country.

Under the dynamic leadership of the Hon Priya Manikchand over 30,000 COL-Coursera licenses were provided for skilling and reskilling thousands of youth in Guyana during the pandemic.

The Hon Minister knows that for technology to be effective, it must be placed in an appropriate social political and economic context. It is for this reason that lessons are provided through a range of technologies including radio, CDs and MP3 players.

Guyana’s ICT in Education policy provides an enabling framework for implementing the Master Plan for educational recovery and transformation by providing the technologies required in schools. The capacity of teachers in harnessing the potential of these technologies will be a critical success factor for the project.

Let us look at the implications of AI for education, and the actions that we as educators must consider going forward.

We need to look at AI in Education from the perspective of the key stakeholders—the institution, the teacher and the learner.

AI is promising—can help institutions raise productivity, reduce costs, develop assessments and support credit transfers.
Teachers can reduce their workload by getting AI to generate lesson plans, text summaries and even develop microlearning courses.

For learners, the biggest benefits are personalisation, adaptive learning and instant feedback.

A recent report on the Impact of AI in Education found that AI generated videos were as engaging as human videos, AI helped personalise content, supported automated grading and lowered the costs of learning materials. The promise of AI in education is already being realised. However, certain issues still need to be addressed.

The use of chatbots can help us achieve the aspiration of providing one assistant per student. There are hundreds of tools available to generate content in seconds — create videos and support video dubbing and translation.

COL recently piloted a project on AI/GPT powered learner support for Moodle in Samoa. This involved training teachers as well as IT professionals.

Both teachers and students found the responses very specific and accurate in relation to their courses. Correct responses were provided 85% of the time. Technology is opening up new horizons for educational transformation.

But in order to ensure that we technology effectively and safely, we need to take certain actions. Let me highlight three.

First, let us not forget that the digital divide is alive and well. The global average for internet connectivity is 60% while in Guyana it is only 40%. Women are 12% less likely to own a mobile phone than men.

One way to close the existing divides is to invest in the three Cs — connectivity, content, and capacity — any investment in ICT infrastructure must first make provision for reaching the last mile so that existing inequalities are not further exacerbated.

Second, the pace of development of AI requires that regulations and policies are framed at all levels. For example, a UN Multistakeholder Advisory Body on AI has been established to recommend safeguards at the international level. Enabling policies and regulatory frameworks are available at the national level — for instance, in China there are the Regulations on Governing the Service of Generative AI. Institutional policies have been developed to safeguard both the staff and the students — such as Monash University’s, Policy and Practice Guidance around acceptable and responsible use of AI Technologies.

Third, while AI is generating alarm regarding the future of jobs, humans will still be in high demand: for blue collar jobs, jobs that need empathy and jobs where creativity and innovation are the key requirement.

Let us ensure that our teachers acquire three literacies. First, human literacy, prepares them to perform jobs that only human beings can do and help them to make ethical choices. Second, data literacy is essential where we must be able to find meaning and separate the true from the fake.
Third, technological literacy is essential to deploy software and hardware for creativity and excellence.

Finally, we need to remember that AI by itself will not transform education—a whole paradigm shift is required. When we look at our common future, we know that the teacher is central to it and AI can only be an instrument of support and not a replacement. Technology also provides various channels for connecting and collaborating—our communities of practice will both motivate and inspire.

On that note, let me once again congratulate the graduands and thank you for your kind attention.