

# Reception at Canada House



6 July 2022

Reception for the Commonwealth of Learning and the Commonwealth Study Conference hosted by the High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom  
Canada House, London, United Kingdom

Professor Asha Kanwar  
President & CEO, Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

HC of Canada, Acting Chair and Members, COL Board of Governors, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests

What a pleasure to be here in Canada House and to meet everyone in person. We are very grateful to the High Commissioner for hosting us this evening and to the Government of Canada for hosting us for nearly 35 years, making us the only Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation, not in London. COL also has a regional office for Asia in Delhi. Having our two offices outside London, the traditional home of the Commonwealth, clearly reflects our diversity and provides an illustration of the expertise and resources available in the various regions.

Thank you for joining us, and I hope that you are enjoying this evening by reconnecting with old and new acquaintances. I am especially grateful to the members of our Board for travelling thousands of miles to be here today. We are fortunate to have a very eminent board that inspires us to keep raising the bar. COL may not be so well known here, but our stakeholders in the Member States that we serve, know us well. This is all because of the hard work of our diverse and dedicated staff that represents different regions and cultures.

The Commonwealth of Learning was established when Canada hosted the 1987 CHOGM in Vancouver. Heads mandated COL to support Commonwealth member states and institutions to use distance learning and technologies for human resource development. This visionary idea has grown and flowered especially during the pandemic when distance learning was embraced globally and almost overnight.

COL is a unique organization which has the ability to respond to the needs of a wide range of stakeholders: from the Batwa community in the forests of Uganda, who learn beekeeping using mobiles, to the rural women in Malawi who participate in development programmes through community radio. Our stakeholders include goat herders in India, construction workers in Nauru, rural girls in Pakistan and out of school youth in Jamaica. In addition, COL supports policy development and provides technical advice to ministries and institutions across the Commonwealth. Being relevant to such a diverse constituency and delivering results is an ongoing challenge that COL has consistently addressed. Today COL has emerged as a thought leader, effecting a paradigm shift in the field of human resource development.

COL works in two sectors education and skills development. As an organization with modest means, COL is able to punch well above its weight by investing in innovations. But innovation can become a cliché if we do not raise the questions ‘innovation for what’ and ‘innovation for whom’? For COL, innovations are not just about technologies but also about models, methods and processes. At the recent Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, HE President Uhuru Kenyatta referred to COL as an ‘engine of innovation’.

Three years ago, Canada House hosted us to launch our triennial conference the Pan-Commonwealth Forum which was held in Edinburgh in collaboration with the Open University UK. This year we’ll be hosting the tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum in Calgary with Athabasca University as our partner. The Commonwealth family will come to Canada this September and enjoy their stay amidst the magnificent Rockies. As the naturalist John Muir said, ‘the mountains are calling and I must go’. I hope you’ll respond to the call of the Rockies and join us at PCF 10.