



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

COUNTRY REPORT
2021-2023 | **PACIFIC**



Fiji

Helping Commonwealth Member States and institutions use distance learning and technologies for expanding access to education and training.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is focused on adding value to member states' efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG4. It's supporting the governments and institutions of the Pacific in the use of appropriate, affordable technologies to improve and expand learning for sustainable development.

During its current plan (2021-2027), 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) promote gender equality; and
- v) implement a rigorous monitoring and evaluation plan.

COL's work is organised into two sectors — Education and Skills — with Gender Equality and Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL) as cross-cutting initiatives.

The Education sector supports formal education from secondary to tertiary levels across the Commonwealth, particularly in the small states in the Pacific (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu) and has four initiatives: Open Schooling; Teacher Education; Higher Education and the Virtual University for Small States of The Commonwealth (VUSSC).

The Skills sector supports formal, non-formal and informal education and training to equip learners for livelihoods and has three initiatives: Skills for Work; Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) and GIRLS Inspire.

The work in these sectors complement the three pathways of change COL is focusing on in achieving impact for each Pacific member state. These are:

1. Building National Resilience
2. Strengthening Institutions
3. Improving Lives and Livelihoods.

INTRODUCTION

Fiji is an archipelago of about 300 islands (100 inhabited) and 540 islets, spread over three million sq km. It has a population of over 925,000 ([World Bank](#), 2022).

COL's current work in Fiji is primarily in the areas of skills for work, technology-enabled learning and is part of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) network. Fiji is also home to COL's regional centre, the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD). Learners from Fiji are also participating in COL's free, open online courses and benefitting from other available resources.

PARTNERS

COL's partners in Fiji include:

- Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts
- Fiji National University (FNU)
- Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND Fiji)
- Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD)
- Pacific Polytech
- University of the South Pacific (USP)

KEY CONTACTS

FOCAL POINT

Mr Dhiraj Bhartu
Manager E-Learning
Ministry of Education,
Heritage and Arts

COL ACTIVITIES BETWEEN JULY 2021 - JULY 2023

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Over 4,150 teachers from Fiji trained to provide effective learner support in ODFL contexts.**
- **Over 1,200 youths from Fiji trained in leadership and practical skills leading to employability.**
- **Active TVET Project with Pacific Polytech to build the capacity of TVET practitioners.**
- **Development of online learning resources for teachers: [ODL Course Catalogue](#), [National OER Collection Site](#), and [Online TVET Toolkit](#)**

In addition to COL's core activities, the **Partnership for Open Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) in the Pacific** is a 5-year project (2020–2025) funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade (MFAT) to support enhancing capacity and efficiency of education sectors in the Pacific through greater use of innovative delivery mechanisms and technology. COL, together with the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD), is implementing the project in the nine Commonwealth countries in the Pacific (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu). <https://pacificpartnership.col.org>.

BUILDING NATIONAL RESILIENCE

COL is working with governments to use gender responsive ODL policies and strategies for increasing equitable access to quality learning.

COL initiated several high-level panels on Climate Change and Education to support Member countries in advancing climate action (through policy, capacity, resources and research). This resulted in the [Transforming Education for Climate Action: Report to Commonwealth Ministers of Education](#), published in August 2022. The Honourable Ms Premila Kumar, Minister of Education, National Heritage and Arts, Fiji was a member of this high-level panel who provided guidance and contributed to the discussions.

A survey on data resilience in education systems was conducted with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts in May 2022 to understand the data infrastructure and management system in response to a natural disaster.

Between July and October 2022, two nominated Ministry officials from Fiji participated in two workshops on policy and planning for ODFL, including COL's Focal Point who shared Fiji's policy experience in ODFL.

STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS

COL is supporting partner institutions to strengthen its ODL systems and capacities for providing quality education and training.

Fiji contributes curated OER videos to the Pacific Regional Video on Demand (VOD) Channel which was established by COL in response to partners in the Pacific Island States. It's designed to ensure that all resources are downloadable even in low-bandwidth environments and can be hosted on local servers. <https://pacificregionalchannel.org/>

USP launched the Semester Zero programme in January 2022 to ensure a smooth transition of future students to university life. This programme was implemented using a COL-hosted Moodle platform.

A survey on ICT access and use in the Pacific was conducted in April 2022 with people in the Pacific, in which 267 people from Fiji participated. The purpose of the study was to better understand the local needs to ensure an effective and appropriate delivery of a learning program in the Pacific.

The Digital Gender Gap study was conducted to assess the extent of differences in access to ICTs across genders and in access to training and learning opportunities in the region, with Fiji as a case study in consideration of its diverse community.

Seven courses developed and offered in collaboration with PACFOLD with over 4,150 teachers from Fiji trained to provide effective learner support in ODFL contexts:

- Open Educational Resources for Online Learning, July 2021 (100 teachers); November 2021 (144 teachers)
- Digital Skills for OER Sharing, September 2021 (1,270 teachers); November 2022 (97 teachers)
- Communication Skills for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning, January 2022 (1,024 teachers); June 2022 (277 teachers)
- Assessment Skills for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning, April 2022 (335 teachers)
- Empowered Digital Teacher for Online Learning, June 2022 (11 teachers)
- Learner Support for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning, November 2022 (185 teachers)
- Quality Assurance for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning, February 2023 (407 teachers)

Launched in September 2022, the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Course Catalogue offers training courses for teachers in the Pacific on various aspects of ODL. This catalogue was designed in a way that Ministries and educational institutions can have admin access and share any relevant courses for their own country. <https://www.odlcatalogue4pacific.org/>

The Fiji OER Collection Site provides resources for teachers that can be used or adapted for their teaching. This site was contextualised in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Training, Fiji, to reflect the national curriculum. <https://fji.oer4pacific.org/>

COL supporting the Fiji National University (FNU) in the implementation of technology-enabled learning:

- drafted a policy for Open Educational Resources (OER). [Aug2021]
- offered 22 blended courses to students with 1,663 currently enrolled. [Aug2021]
- [*The Impact of Blended Learning at the Fiji National University*](#) report published in November 2022.

COL supporting FNU to build and launch the Wisdom Community of Pasifika Teachers (WCPT) by offering language skills training courses for teachers and to grow a community of practice to more than 1,300 Pasifika teachers.

Offered by PACFOLD, the Professionalising Youth Work in the Pacific course series concluded with 112 certificates of achievement and 82 certificates of participation issued to participants from Fiji.

COL provides tuition scholarships to learners in the Pacific for USP's Legislative Drafting Programme which was developed with COL support. A total of 18 learners from Fiji have been awarded the Postgraduate Diploma in Legislative Drafting. Graduates from this programme contribute to good governance in the region.

IMPROVING LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

COL continues to provide learners, especially from disadvantaged groups, access to learning and resources for improved livelihoods.

COL partnered with Pacific Polytech and the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts to enhance the capacity of Technical and vocational education training (TVET) practitioners using the online Pacific TVET Professional Development Toolkit, which was developed by COL. Pacific Polytech trainers are

using the Toolkit as they develop descriptors for 13 micro-courses related to construction.
<https://pacifictoolkit.col.org>

COL has partnered with the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND Fiji), to develop courses for youth to build practical skills that can link to employment opportunities.

- Workshop on Gender inclusion in blended/online course design and delivery with more than 50 FRIEND Fiji staff members and invited youth participating in August 2022.
- 585 youth have been trained on various topics including soap making, business management, organic farm management and food processing training.

A longitudinal survey was conducted for youth who received the skills training during September-November 2022. 22 youths (100% of respondents) indicated that the training was useful in getting a job or establishing own business.

The MOOC on 'Assessment Skills for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning' re-offered by the University of South Pacific (USP) in March 2023 had 352 enrolments, including 255 from Fiji. [Apr2023]

SPECIAL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

In March 2022, a **webinar on the TVET Toolkit** was held with 110 practitioners and institutional leaders from Fiji registered, with additional TVET institutions showing interest to become partners.

Professor Pal Ahluwalia, University of the South Pacific participated at COL's fourth edition of the **Vice-Chancellor's Roundtable** which focused on "Quality Higher Education for Sustainable Development" in July 2022. This two-day event held in Malaysia provided an opportunity to share and learn from peers and develop collaborative action plans.

Dr Rajni Chand, Director of the Center for Flexible Learning, USP was invited to participate in the **4th Pan-Commonwealth Training Programme on Women and Leadership in ODL** in August 2022, in Penang, Malaysia, including an online workshop earlier in the year. The workshop theme was 'Women Leaders: Shaping the future for a sustainable world' with three sub-themes-Leadership, ICTs and Climate Change.

In August 2022, the Acting Director: Skills visited Fiji and organized, together with PACFOLD, a **regional workshop with NGOs** where 9 representatives from Fiji joined. NGO representatives learned about the project on Skills and Leadership training for youth, women and persons with disabilities and were invited to submit an action plan and proposal to COL.

COL's Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning is held triennially and is co-hosted with different partners in different regions of the Commonwealth. Fourteen delegates from Fiji registered for the **Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF10)**, the first-ever hybrid Forum held in Calgary, Canada from 14-16 September 2022. Nine were sponsored by COL. Participants included: Afshana Anzeg, USP; Dhiraj Bhartu, Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts; Rajni Chand, USP; Kaylash Chaudhary, USP; Raveena Goundar, USP; Mohammed J. Hussein, USP; Anjeela Jokhan, Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts; Bijeta Kumar, USP; Jim Madavana, Montfort Technical

Institute; Sharishna Narayan, USP; Pritika Reddy, Fiji National University; Bibhya Sharma, USP; Vilitati Togavou, , Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts; Jito Vanualailai, USP.

A **parallel session on ODFL in the Pacific** was also held during PCF10 with Dr Anjeela Jokhan, Permanent Secretary, Fiji Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts in attendance. She spoke about the importance of teacher training in using the Open Educational Resources (OERs) and building resilience in the educational sector.

The **COL Focal Points Meeting for the Pacific** was held in Fiji, from 23-24 March 2023. Fiji's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, the Honourable Professor Biman Chand Prasad welcomed participants to Fiji during a reception. A summary based on key priorities identified in the reports from each country was submitted to COL in advance, which informed the discussions. Teacher capacity building in online education was a priority for all.

Jointly organised by COL and PACFOLD, a **coordination meeting** was held in Fiji, March 2023, **as part of the Pacific Partnership for an open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) project**. Meeting participants received detailed presentations on activities and progress toward outcomes under the ODFL project, funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu were represented at the meeting. Country representatives prioritised teacher capacity development to deliver ODFL, while it was determined that education ministry officials would also require capacity-strengthening support. While appreciating some of the current topics available through COL course offerings, life skills and climate change and adaptation along with digital technology leadership were also requested.

PUBLICATIONS OF RELEVANCE

Institutional Surveys on Open Educational Resources at Fiji National University

<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4934>

The Impact of Blended Learning at the Fiji National University <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4749>

Developing Partnerships to Acquire Impact: The Role of Three Regional Centres' Capacity Building Efforts for ODL Adoption in the Emerging World (United Kingdom, South Africa, Nigeria, Botswana, Fiji, Malta) <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3901>

Report of the Special Parallel Session: Strategies and Solutions for ODFL in the Pacific Region

<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4534>

ICT use and access in the Pacific: Emerging Perspectives <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/5252>

Improving the Efficacy of Mentorship with an Open Education Ecosystem

<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4065>

Integrating OER in Teaching: A Guide for Teachers in the Pacific

<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4014>

Reversioning OER: A Guide for Teachers in the Pacific <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4015>

Guide to QA of ODFL Provision in the Pacific <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/5443>



4710 Kingsway, Suite 2500
Burnaby, BC V5H 4M2
Canada

Tel: +1.604.775.8200
Fax: +1.604.775.8210
E-mail: info@col.org
Web: www.col.org