

COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

Three-Year Plan 2012–2015

Learning for Development



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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.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Three-Year Plan provides the strategic direction and overall framework that will guide the work of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) from 2012 to 2015. The plan, like its two predecessors, is titled *Learning for Development*. It remains the overarching theme that best captures both the focus and the scope of COL's work during 2102–2015.

Learning for Development

In the same spirit of maintaining its theme, COL has committed to holding the course during 2012–2015 with an approach of thinking globally and acting locally. COL's vision and goals are embedded in the principles of development. COL believes that ODL can enhance access to education and training and thereby enable Commonwealth citizens — particularly women, youth and marginalised poor communities — to lead productive and healthy lives.

This commitment is manifest in the plan's emphasis on programme continuity overall.

COL's mission is to help governments expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate technologies, particularly those that support “open and distance learning” (ODL). For 2012–2015, this mission is again translated into a comprehensive Logic Model that specifies the strategic goals, outcomes and impacts COL aims to achieve over the medium and long terms, through activities in key initiatives within two programme sectors — *Education* and *Livelihoods & Health*. Success will also again be measured against a set of clearly identified performance indicators.

COL will work within the framework of the Logic Model while remaining flexible and responsive to new needs as they arise.

Wide Consultations

While continuity in programme direction and activities is clear in the new plan, the Three-Year Plan 2012–2015 also reflects how COL has made adjustments in response to consultations with stakeholders and to the findings of its own monitoring and evaluation efforts.

For example:

- While nearly all of the past initiatives continue to be pursued under this plan for the next three years, COL will now focus more closely as well on the outcomes and impact of those initiatives.
- During the next three years, COL will direct attention to:
 1. skills development in both of the two programme sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health;
 2. the education and training of girls and women; and
 3. the promotion of the use of open educational resources.
- Under the two sectors, COL will pursue seven programme initiatives instead of eight as in the Three-Year Plan 2009–2012. *Integration of eLearning* (previously, the eighth programme area) and *Gender* are the two cross-cutting themes in this plan that underpin and complement all seven of the core initiatives.

The Education sector will continue to help countries improve the scope, scale and quality of formal instruction at all levels through the use of learning technologies. The four initiatives being pursued within this sector are: Open Schooling, Teacher Education, Higher Education and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

The Livelihoods & Health sector works in both formal and non-formal learning environments. Under the new plan, this programme sector will continue to help communities, civil society and institutions improve the livelihoods and health of their members by using various technologies to enhance skills, share knowledge and develop new economic opportunities. The three initiatives being pursued within this sector are: Technical and Vocational Skills Development, Lifelong Learning for Farmers and Healthy Communities.

Over the course of this new Three-Year Plan, COL will carry out monitoring and evaluation at two levels by:

1. undertaking an impact evaluation of its work from 2006–2015 to determine the extent to which its interventions in “learning” have led to “development”; and
2. monitoring and evaluating the outcomes achieved during 2012–2015.

The results of these evaluations will help COL better understand which initiatives are working and which aren't, and this information will be shared with policy makers and development practitioners at appropriate forums.

Looking Ahead

Although achieving sustainable and self-replicating development goals takes time, most of the initiatives COL has pursued through its last two triennial plans are now showing demonstrably positive results — from expanding and improving education and training opportunities to building healthier communities, contributing to skills development, and generally helping rural people achieve greater prosperity.

For instance, after a decade of commitment to open schooling, COL is now the world's leading source of practical expertise on this ODL approach. This continues to be a vital contribution to formal education, because coping with the “secondary surge” — a result of the steady progress in achieving universal primary education — is now a major preoccupation of many Commonwealth governments.

So, too, is developing the skills of their people. For this reason, skills development, which already permeates COL's programme, will be given even greater emphasis in the next phase of implementation.

Similarly, after a decade of work on the Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative in several countries, COL has shown the model to be a practical and effective means of helping poor people earn livelihoods and become empowered. Other stakeholders, having observed this success, are now replicating the model in a number of countries.

During its second decade, COL also became increasingly adept at incorporating the principles of results-based management into its work. That process continues, which means that assertions about COL's impact can increasingly be backed by an expanding body of evaluation data.



The Hon.
Burchell Whiteman, O.J.
Chair, Board of
Governors



Professor
Asha Kanwar
President & CEO



FOREWORD

This Three-Year Plan takes the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to 2015, the target date set for the achievement of a number of the Millennium Development Goals. Those goals were agreed at the United Nations in 2000 and since then COL has devoted much of its work to their achievement. This plan, like its immediate predecessors, is entitled *Learning for Development*.

To support its presentation to the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth, COL provided two documents to each Member State. One was a brochure describing COL's contribution to the attainment of each of the Millennium Development Goals. The other was a report detailing how COL had assisted that particular country in the previous two years.

During 2012–2015, COL will continue this tradition of thinking globally and acting locally. Achieving development goals takes time. Most of the initiatives that COL has pursued through its last two triennial plans are now showing demonstrable results in expanding and improving education and training, building healthier communities, helping rural people achieve greater prosperity, and contributing to skills development. Those initiatives continue in this new plan with an even clearer focus on outcomes and impact.

Continuity and consistency are reassuring, but change is constant, not least because COL's mission involves using technology to expand and improve education. Evolving technologies are making COL's models for enhancing learning ever more powerful. Mobile phones are remarkable tools for rural development. Open educational resources enable world-class materials to be versioned for local use. eLearning delivers these resources to ever larger numbers of people. Knowledge management is increasingly sophisticated.

But development is about people. The purpose of development is to increase the freedoms that people enjoy. In turn, new freedoms make people more effective agents of development. This is the virtuous upward spiral that COL seeks to encourage by working with its many governmental, institutional and individual partners. We are grateful for their past support and we look forward to working with them to turn this plan into reality.



1



1 COL'S IMPACT: PAST AND FUTURE

“Any learner anywhere in the Commonwealth shall be able to study any distance teaching programme available from any bona fide college or university in the Commonwealth.”

This aspiration expressed in the founding document of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), *Towards a Commonwealth of Learning*, was well ahead of its time in 1987. Twenty-five years later the creation, sharing and re-purposing of open educational resources (OER) are making it a reality. As the first inter-governmental body to commit itself to OER in a corporate policy, COL is now working with UNESCO to show governments how OER can slash the cost of achieving quality education for all.

When establishing COL in 1987, Heads of Government also discussed creating a University of the Commonwealth for Cooperation in Distance Education. In 2000, Education Ministers from the Commonwealth's 32 smallest countries launched the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). Today, the VUSSC helps hundreds of teachers acquire sophisticated skills in information and communication technology (ICT), and organises the co-operative development of eLearning courses. Its Transnational Qualifications Framework advances the broader ideal of sharing courses right across the world.

Since 1987, COL's impact has evolved in two phases. In the 1990s, its main focus was expanding and improving higher education. COL was the catalyst for initiatives such as the establishment of:

- the University of the West Indies Distance Education Centre (UWIDEC);
- a medical education network in Malaysia;



- the Open University of Tanzania;
- a tele-conferencing network at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU);
- restructured extension studies at the University of the South Pacific;
- the Centre for Distance Learning at the University of Mauritius; and
- the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) in New Delhi.

In 2000, the Millennium Declaration and the World Forum on Education for All set new goals for the expansion of education and training at all levels. In its second decade, COL progressively aligned its programme with this agenda by focusing on the key challenges in formal education while also expanding informal learning opportunities to promote higher incomes and better health. The programme was renamed *Learning for Development*.

For development to become sustainable and self-replicating takes time, so COL emphasises continuity of focus with regular adjustments to reflect feedback. This is a successful approach. A decade of refining its know-how has made COL the world's leading source of expertise on **open schooling**. This is a vital development because multi-national initiatives such as the Global Partnership for Education will never achieve their goal of getting all children into school without expanding open schooling. **Skills development**, an increasing preoccupation of governments, already permeates COL's programme and will receive even greater emphasis in the future. Similarly, a decade of action research on **Lifelong Learning for Farmers** in several countries has yielded a model that empowers poor people to improve their livelihoods by tapping into their spirit of entrepreneurship.

Since 2000, COL has also become increasingly adept at results-based management. Assertions about COL's impact can now be backed by an expanding corpus of evaluation data.

In its third decade, COL must achieve even greater impact in a new environment. Persistent economic difficulties in richer countries and the rapid emergence of China and other developing countries have rendered the traditional paradigm of development aid obsolete. This plan takes COL to 2015, the target date for the achievement of most of the Millennium Development Goals. COL will not only support developing countries in their efforts to achieve the MDGs but will also position itself for the post-2015 world. Developing countries will likely be largely on their own in addressing the considerable challenges of expanding schooling and learning that they will still face.

COL will be a preferred partner in helping these countries maximise the impact of their efforts for three reasons:

- The key imperative for education systems will be to achieve scale with quality and equity at low cost. Open, distance and technology-based approaches, which are the only way of achieving this, will come into their own. COL is a world-class source of expertise for these approaches.
- COL has always worked from the grassroots upwards by refining models of development that tap into the entrepreneurial spirit of local people and the dynamism of community and institutional leaders.
- Where external bodies, private or public, are ready to invest in education and skills development in particular countries, COL can help them achieve impact for their investment by adapting to local contexts its proven models for expanding both formal and informal learning.

2 THE PROGRAMME

“One of COL’s hallmark characteristics — one that sets it apart, particularly from donors and larger international organisations — is its disposition to listen and build interventions around partner needs.”

Patrick Spaven, stakeholder survey, 2010

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This Three-Year Plan sets the strategic direction and provides the overall framework for guiding COL’s work from 2012 to 2015.

Learning for Development continues to be the theme of COL’s work. Following the ideas of development economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, COL understands development as freedom. Increasing the freedoms that men and women enjoy is a definition of development, and greater freedom empowers people to be more effective agents of development. In concrete terms, COL uses the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals, the Education for All goals and the Commonwealth priorities of peace, democracy, equality and the rule of law as its framework for action.

COL’s mission is to help governments expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate technologies, particularly those subsumed in the general descriptor “open and distance learning” (ODL). This mission is translated into a Logic Model that sets out the results that COL will achieve over the medium and long terms through its impact and outcome statements. Success will be measured against the performance indicators identified. COL will work within the framework of the Logic Model while remaining flexible and responsive to new and specific needs as they occur.

2.1 Inputs to the Development of the Three-Year Plan

The programme is the product of broad and intensive consultations with stakeholders and the recommendations of a stakeholder survey and external evaluation. It reflects feedback from COL Focal Points, Board members and staff, as well as from partners and other stakeholders, together with the results of continuous monitoring and evaluation, the results of a mid-term stakeholder survey, and lessons from an external evaluation.

Focal Points Meetings

Four regional meetings were held in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific regions to consult country Focal Points on the content of this Three-Year Plan. The consensus of the Focal Points was that COL should continue to focus on the two sectors (Education and Livelihoods & Health) in its present programme. Stakeholders in all four regions indicated clearly that COL should continue to work in: ODL policy and policy advocacy; capacity building; quality assurance; and mobile learning (mLearning) and eLearning.

In the **Caribbean** region meeting, there was an emphasis on developing regional rather than national ODL policies, developing a Caribbean Qualifications Framework and sharing success stories in the region. Other priority areas are capacity development in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), leadership training and open schools. Addressing the issue of boys’ underachievement was a key gender-related priority.

The priorities expressed in the **Africa and Mediterranean** meeting were quality assurance, the development of national ODL policies, and promotion of indigenous knowledge. Most countries wanted COL to continue capacity development in all aspects of ODL, integrating ICTs for



eLearning and open educational resources (OER) development and re-use. The region stressed the need to empower women for leadership roles.

The **Asian** Focal Points urged COL to support capacity development in lifelong learning, skills development, teacher training in eLearning, open schooling, dual-mode operations in universities, mutual recognition of qualifications/credit transfers, and community health/hygiene. Other priority areas included entrepreneurship for youth, digital literacy and strengthening of the farming of community in new agricultural areas. The gender concern in the region was increasing female foeticide, lack of access to secondary schools for girls, and boys' underperformance, especially in Southeast Asia.

The **Pacific** region emphasised integrating ICT into teaching and learning by building human resource capacity in Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD) and teacher training in ODL through intensive in-country programmes. There was concern at the increasing number of out-of-school youth and the need to provide open schooling opportunities to them. The gender issue highlighted across the different countries of the region was violence against women.

Reports for each region are available at www.col.org/FocalPoints.

Mid-term Stakeholder Survey

Another important input into this Three-Year Plan was a mid-term stakeholder survey. This was a rapid assessment of views and experiences of COL's behaviour as an organisation, among a range of stakeholders, partners and staff. The overall view, as stated in the summary of survey results, was that "COL is seen as a more effective organisation than three years ago. Its current staff members are praised for their experience and energy. COL is also seen to be more focused and results-oriented."

However, certain areas were also identified in which COL could perform better. Stakeholders called for:

- greater advocacy of ODL with governments
- enhanced work in farming and TVSD
- more work in small states
- improved presence in the Pacific
- more proactive approach to gender

The full report is available at www.col.org/reporting.

External Evaluation

The external evaluation was commissioned in August 2011 to cover the period from July 2009 to September 2011. Ten "longitudinal" studies tracing results of specific programme activities were conducted by external evaluators and formed the basis of the overall evaluation.

The evaluation report has measured COL's progress against the outcome statements and the performance indicators listed in the Logic Model for the 2009–2012 Three-Year Plan. It concludes that "COL looks and feels like a different organisation from the one first encountered in 2005. In all teams there is a palpable striving to be relevant and to create long-term effects.... In particular COL understands the need to build sustainability into its interventions.... COL has not lost its disposition and ability to be needs-driven and to listen to what this means for particular clients.... [There is a] transition to a more outcomes-oriented approach...."

The report recommends that COL needs to:

- review its work in higher education;
- develop models more systematically;

- take its results-based management approach to the next level;
- invest more in skills development; and
- bring down the number of initiatives further to between four and six, or structure the programme around “root solutions” such as quality assurance, policy and OER instead of around open schooling, higher education and similar initiatives.

The recommendations have implications at three levels:

1. Certain ones have been incorporated into the current Three-Year Plan 2012–2015, such as those related to gender.
2. Others will be considered for improving COL’s efficiency further as it implements this plan over the next three years (e.g., development of models).
3. Others will need to be discussed internally and with stakeholders, particularly governments, over the next triennium and will impact how the Three-Year Plan 2015–2018 is structured (e.g., root solutions).

The full report and the ten longitudinal studies are available at www.col.org/reporting.

2.2 Programme Framework

COL’s programme will be guided by three strategic goals:

- quality education for all Commonwealth citizens
- human resource development in the Commonwealth
- harnessing ODL and technologies to achieve development goals

In the light of wide consultations, COL will continue to work in two sectors — Education and Livelihoods & Health — but will focus on seven programme initiatives instead of the eight in the previous Three-Year Plan. The emphasis will be on (i) skills development in both sectors, (ii) the education and training of girls and women, and (iii) the promotion of the use of OER.

The *Education* sector helps countries improve the scope, scale and quality of formal instruction at all levels through the use of learning technologies. This sector has four initiatives: Open Schooling, Teacher Education, Higher Education and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

The *Livelihoods & Health* sector works in both formal and non-formal learning environments. It helps communities, civil society and institutions to improve the livelihoods and health of their members by using various technologies to enhance skills, share knowledge and develop new economic opportunities. It has three initiatives: TVSD, Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) and Healthy Communities.

eLearning (previously the eighth programme area) and *Gender* are cross-cutting themes that underpin and complement all seven initiatives.





2.3 Education Sector

Open Schooling

“It is time for us to pursue open schooling in order to expand access to education and lifelong learning. This form of education delivery is very cost effective as well as helpful in increasing school completion and literacy rates.”

Minister of Secondary Education H.E. Bapes Bapes, Cameroon, 2010

Compared with the global average of 67% participation in secondary schools, the gross enrolment ratio in Sub-Saharan Africa is only 34%. Secondary school places are grossly insufficient to absorb the surge of pupils now completing primary schooling, thanks to progress made in achieving universal primary education. Open schooling is increasingly recognised as a viable solution to the growing demand for equitable access to secondary education, especially for girls and marginalised groups, particularly in remote locations. Governments are seeking to redefine the way that secondary education addresses societal needs, by diversifying the curriculum. This means making available technical and vocational programmes alongside academic offerings — something that open schools are well placed to do.

In this Three-Year Plan, the main focus will be on girls' education.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will continue to work with ministries and institutions to:

- introduce and expand open schooling to increase learning opportunities, particularly for girls, out-of-school youth, and people in remote regions;
- increase enrolment and performance by adopting new policies and systems;
- introduce technical and vocational subjects to promote skills development and attract learners who would otherwise have stayed away; and
- support policies that promote the development, adoption and use of OER.



Teacher Education

“COL’s support to the National Teachers’ Institute (NTI) Kaduna, has ... energised programme development capability of professional staff ... and deepened many teacher educators’ knowledge of ODL across the country.”

Prince Ademola Olude, Deputy Director, NTI, Kaduna, Nigeria

Achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015 requires well-trained teachers of good quality. Globally about 10 million teachers will be required; Sub-Saharan Africa alone will need over three million teachers. All governments of Commonwealth developing countries want to increase teacher supply and improve teacher quality. COL has a good record of helping them do this.

COL’s Teacher Education Initiative will focus on school-based, in-service training models and during this Three-Year Plan will continue to:

- advocate the use of ODL in teacher education and develop the capacity of teachers and teacher educators in different aspects of ODL;
- support ministries and institutions to harness the potential of ODL and ICT and thereby strengthen and expand teacher education institutions;
- support institutions to design and implement quality programmes;
- work with institutions and quality assurance agencies to develop and implement quality assurance frameworks; and
- collaborate with international partners and training institutions to promote the development, adoption and use of OER.

Higher Education

“COL RIM is much more useful than the regular Quality Assurance process because it probes a lot more and is a better way of teaching what quality means.”

Uma Coomaraswamy, former Vice Chancellor, Open University of Sri Lanka

Many developing countries consider that increasing age participation rates in higher education to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 40–50% is vital to sustainable economic development. Many countries in South Asia have age participation rates of less than 15%, while the average rates in Sub-Saharan Africa are less than 10%. COL has worked with governments and institutions to promote greater access to higher education and improve the quality of the delivery and management of their programmes through the use of ODL. It will continue to support policy makers, institutions and leaders in higher education to harness the potential of ODL and so enable them to cope with the combination of increasing demand for higher education, rising costs, diminishing public funding and the need to maintain high quality levels. Where appropriate, COL will link to major initiatives in technology-mediated learning at both graduate and undergraduate levels in Member States.

COL will develop action plans aligned to the priorities of specific countries to increase access to quality higher education and forge partnerships with international and regional organisations to leverage its impact. During this Three-Year Plan, COL will:

- support the development and implementation of ODL policy, both at the national and the institutional levels;
- provide technical assistance to new open universities and support the transition of conventional institutions to dual mode;
- strengthen leadership and entrepreneurial skills development for both women and men in higher education;
- ensure the development of robust systems in higher education institutions through the implementation of low-cost quality assurance models; and
- support the adoption and use of OER.



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

“Now I see that I can move from providing training for a few persons in my country to becoming a teacher of many, across nations. I have gained new skills, a new perspective, a vision of what is possible and how limitations of size, money and distance can be overcome if people are willing to work together and share resources.”

Singapore workshop participant, 2007

Many small states do not have adequate provision for tertiary level education. As a result, the average migration rate from small states is 44% compared with the Commonwealth average of 18%. Strengthening and improving the quality and scope of existing tertiary institutions is therefore a key priority. The VUSSC partnership represents 32 small states of the Commonwealth dedicated to expanding access to tertiary education. In the past few years, VUSSC has connected institutions through online technologies to promote eLearning and the sharing of educational resources using collaborative and multi-institutional frameworks.

COL's emphasis will now be on the adoption and delivery of VUSSC programmes. During this Three-Year Plan, COL will continue to:

- provide support to strengthen the capacity of faculty members to facilitate the delivery of VUSSC courses through their institutions;
- promote the use of quality skills development courses;
- develop cost-effective models for the creation of content through collaboration and the use of technology;
- support the development of systems to provide support to learners for ensuring successful implementation of ODL in small states;
- work with international partners and stakeholders to promote and institutionalise OER; and
- collaborate with qualifications authorities and quality assurance bodies to ensure successful implementation of the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) and encourage the recognition of courses and learner credentials.





2.4 Livelihoods & Health Sector

Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

“We have learned that it is possible to teach skills training courses through distance and flexible learning and this excites us! We will be able to reach many more students — especially those in the informal sector who never had the opportunity to take technical courses.”

Abdi Ali Aden, Principal, Masai Technical Training Institute, Kenya

Youth unemployment is a global challenge. About 45% of the world’s young people, many of them girls and young women, are without work. Africa alone needs to find productive employment for 7 million to 10 million new entrants to the labour market annually. COL has demonstrated that using ODL and learning technologies can increase access to quality technical and vocational skills development equitably. The role of TVSD in creating a skilled workforce of lifelong learners for the informal and formal economies is constantly challenged by urban-rural and gender divides that exclude large numbers of learners from skills training systems.

In order to address this challenge, COL will, during this Three-Year Plan:

- work with institutional partners to create contextualised, high-quality models for using educational media and technology in TVSD;
- provide training for policy makers, managers, teaching and administrative staff;
- assist in national and institutional policy development and strategic planning;
- support the development of new curriculum components and new courses as OER;
- develop capacity in quality assurance for TVSD; and
- develop innovative strategies for scaling up.



Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)

“Through ... the Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative, we started learning from mobile phones in our languages and dialects. Through such a learning process ... we were able to repay 80% of the loan amount to the bank within two years in a five-year repayment schedule.”

Memorandum signed by 25,000 women and men from Self-Help Groups, Tamil Nadu, to Reserve Bank of India

More than 500 million members of the rural workforce in agriculture have limited access to training opportunities. The L3F approach strengthens livelihoods and empowers the poorer sections of rural societies. So far, COL has promoted networking and capacity development in livestock, horticulture and agriculture, leading to higher incomes. It will continue to facilitate self-replication and scaling-up so that L3F can reach marginalised communities in many more countries. Under the L3F model, COL is a catalyst in bringing together governments, institutions, civil society and the private sector to build the capacity of the communities through gender-sensitive ODL.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will:

- scale up and facilitate the self-replication of the model from small communities to larger geographical regions such as districts and provinces;
- strengthen policy advocacy strategies with governments, industries and financial institutions;
- promote dialogue with international development and national agencies for replicating the L3F approach; and
- pay specific attention to smaller nations in the Caribbean and Pacific.

Healthy Communities

“The women feel the [community learning] programme belongs to them; it is their own initiative. That is why they are eager to participate and bring more ideas.... In their communities they came up with this idea: Can we have a media programme to share with more communities, to share outside of our specific communities? They made it happen. They make it work.”

Florida Malamba Banda, Senior Facilitation and Training Officer,
MaiMwana Project, Malawi

Health is a major challenge in the developing Commonwealth, which accounts for 60% of maternal and 40% of infant deaths in the world. Globally, non-communicable diseases, principally cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases, account for 60% of deaths, rising to 80% in low- and middle-income countries. The rate of HIV infection in Commonwealth countries is more than twice the world average rate. Communities have urgent needs for health education, but conventional top-down approaches cannot cope with the sheer scale of learning needs.

COL's Healthy Communities initiative addresses this issue. By emphasising collaboration, participation and blended and multichannel approaches, the initiative's community learning model has enabled better individual and collective responses to maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, non-communicable diseases, and other health and development challenges, particularly those faced by women and youth in resource-poor areas.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will engage strategic partners at all levels to:

- ensure co-ordination among development stakeholders as well as relevance, sustainability and appropriate scale of proposed learning programmes;
- focus on women and youth as learners, highlighting their particular health concerns;
- validate, refine and diversify the community learning model through applied research, analysis and advocacy;
- develop capacities among key national and regional partners to apply the community learning model; and
- build capacities at the local level to design and deliver non-formal ODL programmes using media, particularly community radio and mobile devices, for large numbers of citizens.



2.5 Cross-Cutting Themes

The two most significant common themes underpinning all seven initiatives are *eLearning* and *Gender*.

eLearning

“... an innovative approach for delivering a well-designed, learner-centred, interactive, and facilitated learning environment to anyone, anyplace, anytime by utilising the attributes and resources of various digital technologies along with other forms of learning materials suited for an open, flexible, and distributed learning environment.”

B.H. Khan, *Managing E-Learning: Design, Delivery, Implementation, and Evaluation*, 2005

Although the phenomenal spread of mobile technologies has narrowed the digital divide, the issue of connectivity continues to loom large. Over 80% of people in the U.S. have access to the Internet compared to only 10% of people in Sub-Saharan Africa. eLearning aims to build the capacity of governments, institutions and individuals to ICT for learning in both formal and non-formal contexts and will complement the work of all initiatives. Many governments are looking for technical advice in ICT policy development and in the adoption of appropriate technologies for teaching and learning.

COL's work will continue to raise levels of digital literacy and the ICT competencies of teachers by facilitating the creation of high-quality learning materials made available as OER. COL will continue its partnership with UNESCO for the global advocacy of OER and the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will:

- develop eLearning capacity in governments, institutions and communities;
- maximise economies of scale in both the delivery and management of eLearning;
- promote ICT competency among teachers;
- promote the development and use of OER; and
- provide technical advice on emerging technologies and their implications for learning outcomes.



Gender

“I was totally unequipped for a job.... Distance education has helped me rebuild my life [after being widowed]. I can take care of my children and give them the education and facilities that my husband and I had hoped they would have.”

Anuradha Datt,

Brave New Women of Asia: How Distance Education Changed Their Lives, 2001

One-third of the world’s poor live in Commonwealth countries and two-thirds of them are women. Poverty has a female face. COL recognises that the advancement of the goals of gender equality and women’s empowerment is central to its agenda of learning for development. For COL, gender equality is a cross-cutting corporate goal which requires that both women’s and men’s views, interests and needs shape its programmes.

Open and distance learning (ODL) can be especially helpful in enabling women and girls to access educational opportunities while also fulfilling other responsibilities. COL uses ODL to help promote gender equality.

COL has adopted gender mainstreaming as an organisational strategy. Implementing a mainstreaming strategy includes identifying gender-specific activities and initiatives, as appropriate, whenever girls/women or boys/men are in a particularly disadvantageous position. A gender equality perspective is taken at all stages of the programme cycle — planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation — to ensure that the initiatives offer equal opportunities, benefits and participation to girls/women and boys/men.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will:

- continue to harness the potential of open, distance and technology-mediated learning to expand access to quality education and training for girls/women and boys/men in both formal and non-formal sectors;
- promote the development of gender-sensitive policies, systems and materials;
- integrate gender concerns in all its initiatives and support at least one gender-related activity in each initiative;
- track gender-related data and results;
- develop capacity in gender, internally and among partners; and
- be proactive in disseminating COL’s work on gender to stakeholders.



Photo credit: Andrew Moore





2.6 Core Strategies

COL has identified five core strategies to achieve outcomes and impact: partnerships, capacity, materials, models and policy. In practice, most COL activities incorporate more than one of these strategies and, in some cases, all five.

Partnership

Partnership refers to a dynamic relationship between organisations and institutions based on mutually agreed goals with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. COL leverages its modest resources through partnerships in virtually everything that it does.

COL has two main types of partnerships. *Upstream partnerships* (that is, strategic partnerships) enable COL to broaden its vision and complement its resources. Such partnerships can be with multilateral organisations (e.g., UNESCO), regional bodies (e.g., the Economic Community of West African States), national governments or commercial organisations (e.g., Microsoft). *Downstream partnerships* come into play at the implementation level. COL partners with government agencies, public institutions, civil society and other organisations to improve and extend teaching and learning services to people in the developing Commonwealth.

Both kinds of partnerships are based on collaboration and shared values and goals.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will leverage existing networks, act as the catalyst for bilateral linkages, and expand its circle of partners by promoting:

- both south-south and north-south collaboration;
- public-private partnerships; and
- regional and international co-operation.

Capacity

Capacity development refers to processes that enable people and organisations to achieve their objectives more effectively. This can mean training but also networking and other processes that enable and empower people and organisations to develop appropriate policies, adopt and adapt models, and develop and use materials. In short, capacity development pervades all COL activities. It focuses primarily on human resource development.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will continue to:

- invest in the capacity development of partners in all aspects of ODL, including policy;
- develop capacity, particularly in the use of appropriate technologies; and
- promote sustainability by developing capacity in monitoring and evaluation and gender mainstreaming.

Materials

By materials, COL means learning and teaching resources. These can be course materials, toolkits and frameworks for quality or policy-making. Course materials, and often also the toolkits and frameworks, are produced by partners with COL support.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will:

- publish all its new materials as OER;
- promote the development and use of OER by others; and
- build capacity in materials development.

Models

A model is a coherent set of structures and processes that has been shown to work in more than one context to achieve specific results. Models can range from broad approaches — such as Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) or the blended application of community radio for achieving health-related outcomes — to more specific instruments, such as the COL Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM) or the COL instructional design (ID) template.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will strive to innovate and achieve scale by:

- developing new models relevant to 21st-century challenges; and
- promoting the replication of models, particularly through south-south co-operation.

Policies

A policy is a high-level statement of ambition that specifies the outcomes to be achieved and that guides decision-making through a defined course of action. COL supports the development of policy for organisations and institutions as well as for governments.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will continue to:

- be proactive in policy advocacy for ODL and OER;
- support regional and national policies for ODL, OER and ICTs;
- build capacity to develop institutional and organisational policies in ODL and OER; and
- promote the effective implementation of policy.

2.7 Theory of Change

The “theory of change” will help COL define its roadmap and achieve its goals.

COL’s vision and goals are embedded in the principles of development. COL believes that ODL can enhance access to education and training and thereby enable Commonwealth citizens — particularly women, youth and marginalised poor communities — to lead productive and healthy lives. How will COL achieve this change?

Some of the key challenges facing Commonwealth developing countries include:

- lack of access to quality education, particularly for women and other marginalised groups such as nomadic communities and out-of school children; and
- food insecurity, lack of skills training and inadequate provision of health-related knowledge and services.

COL will harness the potential of ODL and appropriate technologies to address these issues. Lack of understanding of the potential of ODL and restricted capacity to provide quality ODL by stakeholders limits COL’s capacity to deliver change. During this triennium, COL will focus on advocacy for ODL, capacity development, innovations and model-building to scale up its impact. In order to be effective, COL must continue to receive adequate financial and intellectual support from Member States and stakeholders. If partners do not provide the requisite support, COL’s ability to deliver results may be compromised.

COL’s theory of change describes the path through which COL will enable its partners, such as governments, civil society, private sector and communities, to use the knowledge and acquired skills in a scalable and sustainable manner. This path is determined through a participatory dialogue with stakeholders and is manifested in the following:

1. a **strategic plan** that defines COL’s vision, mission, core strategies and goals;
2. a **corporate Logic Model** that defines the broad framework for delivering results; and
3. **initiative logframes** that describe: the clearly identified risks and assumptions underpinning key actions; the links between inputs, outputs and outcomes; and how the process leads to achieving impacts.

The theory of change raises the following questions:

- What is the challenge? Why is it a challenge?
- What needs to change to address this challenge? What is preventing this change?
- How can COL overcome the identified barriers?
- What assumptions underpin COL’s approach? What are the key risks?
- What outcomes will this change achieve? What impacts will it deliver?

For each initiative, a strategic plan will be developed for 2012–2015 based on these questions and will involve the following stages:

- Needs assessment (relationship building, needs assessment, asset and champion identification, context mapping)
- Development of change-readiness
- Action planning (COL acts as a change agent)
- Support of change through capacity development
- Building of ownership for sustainability
- Planned exit by COL



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

Mission: To help governments and institutions to expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open and distance learning

Core Strategies: Partnerships, capacity, materials, models and policies

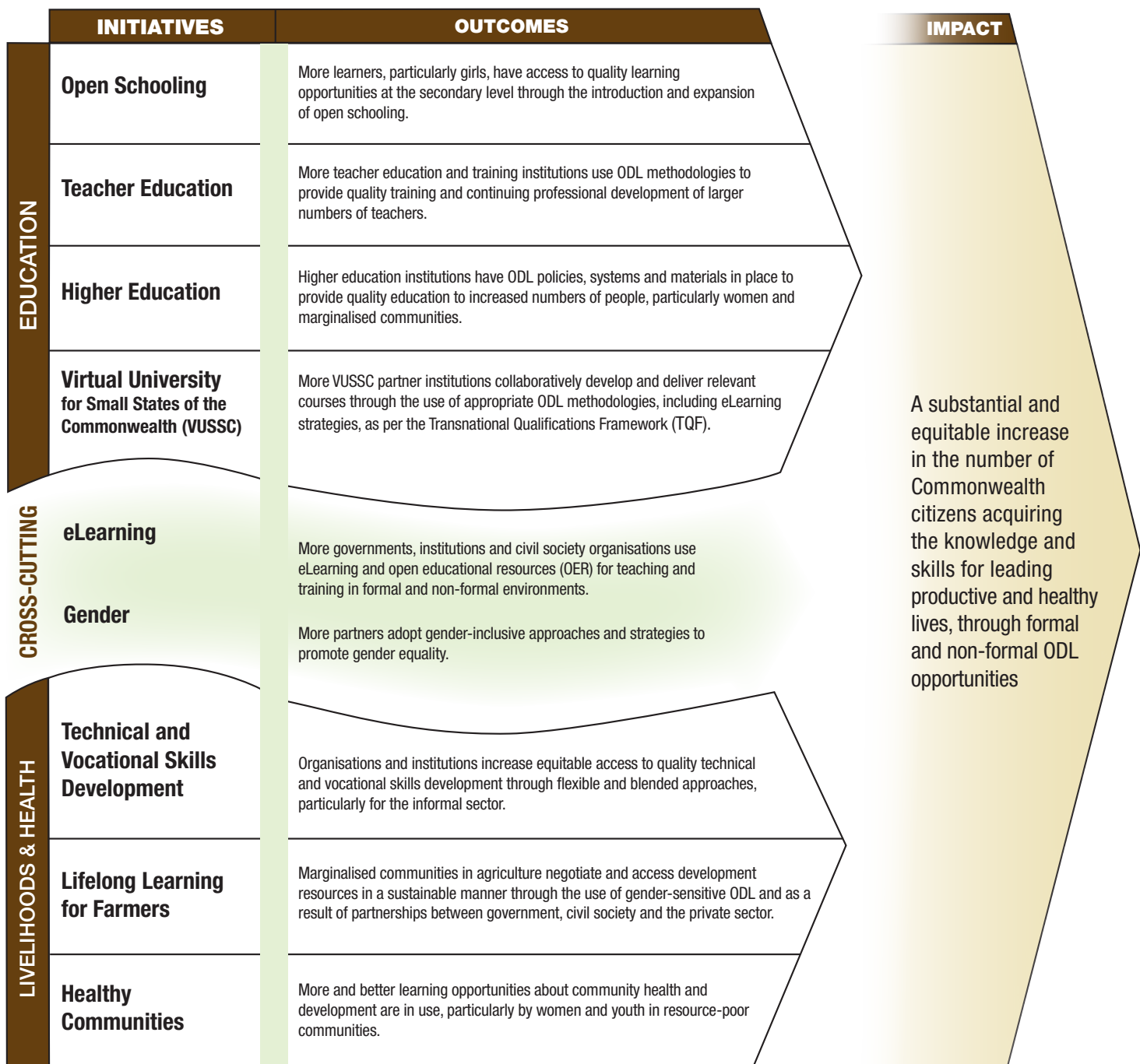
STRATEGIC GOALS

1 Quality education for all Commonwealth citizens

Increased access to affordable primary, secondary and tertiary education, especially for girls, women and the marginalised

2 Human resource development

Sustainable and replicable learning systems and skills development in the workforce





Open and distance learning in the Commonwealth

Systems in place for farming, health and formal and informal sectors

Harnessing open and distance learning (ODL) and technologies to achieve development goals

Improved capacity of governments and civil society to provide quality learning for achieving Millennium Development Goals and Education for All goals

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS*

EDUCATION

Open Schooling

- 4 additional countries establish new open schools to expand access to equitable learning opportunities for girls and boys.
- 10 existing open schools substantially increase enrolment and performance by adopting new policies and systems.
- At least 10 open schools introduce 5 new vocational subjects and 5 new technical subjects to attract learners who would otherwise have been excluded.
- 10 open schools adopt and use OER.

Teacher Education

- At least 4 additional institutions – from each region of the Commonwealth – adopt gender-sensitive ODL methodologies to substantially increase the number of teachers trained or upgraded.
- 10 teacher education institutions in 4 countries in all regions of the Commonwealth enhance the quality of their curricula through the development and use of new materials, including OER.
- 10,000 teachers and teacher educators are trained on various aspects of ODL, including the development and use of OER.

Higher Education

- At least 2 governments in different Commonwealth regions create enhanced access for learners by implementing ODL policy.
- At least 4 institutions in 3 different regions of the Commonwealth implement ODL policies and systems to substantially increase the number of learners.
- Higher education institutions in 10 countries provide increased access to improved gender-inclusive content, including OER.
- 10 institutions in 4 countries improve the quality of their programmes through the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms and leadership training, with at least 4 of them putting in place an institutional quality policy.

VUSSC

- 10 institutions use gender-inclusive OER to offer 9 new certificate/diploma/degree programmes at least 5 of which are registered on the TQF.
- 16 VUSSC countries reference their qualifications framework to the TQF.
- 10 institutions increase their use of ICTs to deliver programmes to larger numbers of learners.

CROSS-CUTTING

eLearning

- 6 governments and 10 institutions in 3 Commonwealth regions develop and implement eLearning and OER programmes.
- At least 6 governments adopt OER policies.
- 2,000 teachers and trainers use eLearning effectively (including OER and mLearning).
- 10,000 learners across sectors (including civil society) effectively use eLearning (including OER and mLearning).

Gender

- 10,000 girls and women have increased access to quality education and training.
- 5,000 boys and men have greater access to targeted training in areas where they are disadvantaged.
- At least 10 partners mainstream gender in their programmes.
- 60,000 additional women access non-formal education, leading to increased income and better health-seeking behaviour.

LIVELIHOODS & HEALTH

Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

- 10 institutions implement flexible and blended TVSD policies and strategies.
- 20 institutions or organisations in 15 countries across all Commonwealth regions start or strengthen flexible and blended learning and substantially increase their learner enrolments, particularly for the informal sector.
- 15 new quality TVSD courses are in use, and are available as OER.
- New technology-enhanced quality TVSD course components are in use in 20 institutions.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)

- 50% increase in the empowerment of participants in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions.
- 25% increase in the income of participants identified by social groups and gender in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions.
- Social rate of return achieved of 1 to 3 among 20,000 participants, disaggregated by social groups and gender, in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions.
- L3F, as a sustainable system, is replicated by secondary stakeholders with enhanced investment in 8 countries of all Commonwealth regions.
- At least 50% of the participants are women.

Healthy Communities

- 30 new or significantly enhanced relevant and gender-sensitive community ODL programmes are delivered in resource-poor communities in at least 16 countries in 3 Commonwealth regions.
- There are 60,000 users of community ODL programmes in two key social groups (60% women and 40% youth).
- Learning achievements and positive changes in health-seeking behaviour are evident.

*Baseline data: From results of Three-Year Plan 2009–2012 and other sources.

2.8 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

"I came as a raw hand to participate in the CEMCA baseline survey. I never knew anything before about nutritious meals. Now I follow the [radio] programmes and also wait for repeat broadcasts so that I can complete my notes. I am very grateful to Vishnu Community Radio Station for making a difference in my life and home. I also thank CEMCA for asking our needs and views."

Anasuya Alluri, Enamadaru Village, Andhra Pradesh

CEMCA was established in 1995 to encourage, develop and foster the exchange and sharing of educational media techniques and resources, with a focus on educational television. Over the years, in step with rapidly changing advances in educational technology, CEMCA widened its scope to embrace emerging educational technology formats, even while broadening the scope of education itself to cover formal, non-formal and lifelong education at all levels.

Currently CEMCA fully aligns itself with the COL programme, with initiatives in both sectors: Education, and Livelihoods & Health. With a small staff of seven people, CEMCA retains its regional focus and devises appropriate learning solutions while maintaining a balance between the aspirations of its stakeholders and available resources. Promoting appropriate and low-cost technology options underpin all of CEMCA's interventions.

During this Three-Year Plan, CEMCA will:

- support the articulation of policies that promote the development, adoption and use of OER;
- collaborate with quality assurance bodies to ensure the development and effective deployment of quality multimedia materials;
- design and create systems and models for sustainable community media initiatives;
- empower women in media literacy, health, democracy and leadership;
- create and support a network of clearinghouses for content exchange through multiple platforms, formats and media; and
- support research on emerging technologies, including use of mobile devices for effective use by ODL students.



2.9 Regional Support

The **Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL)** is located at the National Open University of Nigeria and supported by COL to develop capacity in ODL in West Africa. Even though it has a regional remit, its services are being requested across the continent.

RETRIDOL develops annual work plans with COL, based on national and regional needs, and implements these by conducting workshops in eLearning, quality assurance, learner support, multimedia, leadership training and research methods in ODL. RETRIDOL promotes ODL research by publishing the *West African Journal of Open and Flexible Learning*.

The **Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE)** is hosted by the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning, with the remit to develop ODL capacity in the Southern African region.

SADC-CDE develops annual work plans in consultation with COL and regional partners and implements these by: holding training workshops for ODL practitioners; supporting effective delivery of ODL programmes; offering scholarships in distance education, research and gender; fostering collaborations; and promoting ODL research. COL supports the activities jointly agreed upon in the annual work plan.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will:

- proactively support and strengthen RETRIDOL and the SADC-CDE as key agents of COL in the region; and
- work with partners to identify similar partially funded regional centres in the Pacific and Caribbean regions.



2.10 eLearning for International Organisations

“Great course (Writing Effectively) with very useful materials. On top of that to have a tutor that can be contacted by email was very much appreciated. From my point of view, the tutor was as important as the material.”

UNHCR learner

The COL eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO) is a fee-for-service arrangement that responds to the capacity enhancement needs of international organisations. COL will customise eLearning solutions to address the specific training needs of international organisations. These solutions use open, distance and technology-mediated learning to provide equitable and quality professional development opportunities for women and men working in the field and at headquarters. Success rates for the learners have been over 80% because of the effective combination of quality course materials and personalised delivery.

Courses in effective communication, report writing, operational data and debt management, gender mainstreaming and youth development have been developed and/or delivered.

Building upon stakeholders’ repeat business and support, eLIO will continue to, during this Three-Year Plan:

- update existing courses and develop new ones;
- deliver courses on the COL Virtual Learning Environment (COL-VLE), an open source Web-based Moodle platform; and
- increase its reach through improved services and word-of-mouth marketing by its stakeholders.



3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

“Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.”

Albert Einstein

3

Monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of results-based management. COL adopted the results-based management approach with its 2003–2006 Three-Year Plan. Since then the organisation has been regularly developing and improving its monitoring and evaluation work, learning from its own and others’ experiences.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will carry out monitoring and evaluation at two levels:

1. COL will undertake an impact evaluation of its work from 2006 to 2015 to determine the extent to which its interventions in “learning” have led to “development”; and
2. COL will monitor and evaluate the outcomes achieved during this current 2012–2015 plan.

Impact Evaluation

The impact evaluation will measure the extent to which COL’s programmes, over a period of nine years, have resulted in a “substantial and equitable increase in the number of Commonwealth citizens acquiring the knowledge and skills for leading productive and healthy lives, through formal and non-formal open and distance learning opportunities.” (Impact statement, Logic Model)

This evaluation will be done over the next three years and will involve baseline data for selected initiatives, field studies and a synthesis report. The evaluation is expected to contribute to development discourse in terms of what works and what doesn’t and will be shared with policy makers and practitioners at appropriate forums.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation of the programme for 2012–2015 will consist of the following main components:

Clarifying realistic expected results

The Logic Model defines the expected results and is COL’s central planning and communication framework. The outcomes stated capture results to be achieved in the medium term (i.e., three years).

Monitoring through performance indicators

Several performance indicators, with targets, are identified for each initiative and for cross-cutting themes (eLearning and gender) through a rigorous, collaborative process. Indicators are linked to feasible data sources and instruments.

Alignment of planning, monitoring and evaluation

COL works with annual logical frameworks (“logframes”) at the activity level. Their output indicators — which evolve over the three-year period — relate logically to the outcomes specified in the Logic Model. Here, results will be achieved in the short term (i.e., annually). These logframes also identify the risks and assumptions relating to each activity and the means of verification.

Integrating evaluation

Every initiative identifies, before the inception of the Three-Year Plan, a key activity or theme to undergo an evaluation. This usually involves both a formative mid-term review and a summative evaluation in the final year of the plan. COL also commissions a comprehensive external evaluation of its Three-Year Plan.

Analysing, reflecting and incorporating lessons

Both the monitoring and the evaluations inform decision-making at operational and strategic levels. The evaluations in the final year are timed to feed into decisions on the next Three-Year Plan.

Reporting to stakeholders

COL reports evidentially to different stakeholder groups in ways that are meaningful to them. For example, it reports by country, activity and initiative to Ministers of Education, the Board of Governors, Focal Points and partners among a range of stakeholders. COL reports progress on key performance indicators, and its evaluations are published. COL has developed a Management Response to the external evaluation of its Three-Year Plan 2009–2012 and will continue to track and report progress on the recommendations to the Board of Governors.

In particular, COL will pay attention to evaluating impacts and outcomes and will:

- develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation strategy for each initiative;
- support partners in monitoring outputs and outcomes on an ongoing basis;
- track and evaluate gender-related results;
- report to COL's Board of Governors on an annual basis;
- commission an external evaluation of the plan period; and
- commission an impact evaluation of its work for the period 2006–2015.





4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

4

Effective stakeholder engagement enables COL to leverage its modest resources and enhance its impact. COL maintains close links with a diverse range of stakeholders: Member States, partner institutions and organisations, donors and individuals. In order to develop a more systematic and interactive relationship with Member States, COL has established a network of Focal Points, Honorary COL Chairs and COL Advisors. These three networks complement each other and provide COL with an increased visibility in the field.

COL reports its work in each country every three years as Country Reports. As well, COL employs a variety of media in communicating with its stakeholders, and co-hosts a biennial forum on open learning. It also supports conference organisers and professional development opportunities for a range of stakeholders.

4.1 Focal Points

Under this initiative, each Minister of Education in the Commonwealth is invited to nominate a Focal Point. The role of the Focal Point is to interact with COL, co-ordinate with other ministries (e.g., agriculture, health), disseminate COL-related information to interested stakeholders, and keep the Ministers briefed about COL's work.

This network extends to all Commonwealth countries and has become an important feature of COL's planning and reporting processes. Triennial regional meetings of Focal Points enable COL to get first-hand information of country priorities that contribute to the development of COL's next Three-Year Plan. The Focal Points have given COL valuable visibility and a strong presence in the field. See list of Focal Points in Appendix 4.

COL will continue to strengthen its network of Focal Points during the next three years.

4.2 Honorary COL Chairs

The network of COL Chairs seeks to establish COL's academic presence in the field by encouraging research and capacity-development activities in open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communication technology (ICT) enhanced education. The Chair is an honorary position, supported by COL for specific activities.

In some cases COL Chairs tie into UNESCO's Chairs programme.

COL will further strengthen and extend this network to all regions of the Commonwealth during the next three years.

4.3 COL Advisors

COL has a network of 12 Advisors across the Commonwealth, comprising eminent ODL and development professionals. They are a valuable resource for consultations and advice on COL's future plans and provide intelligence and insight into the changing socio-political and educational developments in their respective regions. Member States seeking advice on ODL and technology-mediated learning can turn to the Advisors for guidance. They are goodwill ambassadors for COL, providing expertise in ODL and development.

COL will support and renew this network during the next three years.

4.4 Country Action Plans and Country Reports

In order to address the unique needs of each country, COL develops Country Action Proposals based on extensive in-country consultations. These are then discussed with Focal Points and country partners before being confirmed as *Country Action Plans* against which progress is tracked annually.

At the end of each triennium, COL prepares *Country Reports* which consolidate and present the work that COL has done in each individual country. These country reports are collected in a compendium entitled *COL in the Commonwealth*, which is then submitted to all Ministers of Education and stakeholders in a spirit of transparency and accountability.

COL will continue to implement this process during the next three years.

4.5 Communications and Publications

In communicating with stakeholders and the wider public, COL employs a variety of media, as appropriate. COL is continuing to increase its use of Web 2.0 technologies, taking advantage of opportunities for increasing user interactivity through blogging, audio, video and RSS/news feeds and for engaging in popular social media sites.

COL's website, newsletters (*Connections/EdTech News* and *EduComm Asia*) and electronic resources will continue to be updated to be relevant to stakeholder needs. Governance and financial information — including Board minutes, financial statements and the President's quarterly reports to the Board — is also available on the COL website.

COL indexes large numbers of documents about ODL and international development that can also be accessed through COL's website.

COL will continue to produce and disseminate high-quality freely accessible publications and resources during the next three years.

4.6 Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning and COL Awards

COL's biennial Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF) has become one of the world's top international conferences on learning and global development.

Forums are generally held biennially and each is co-hosted with a partner in a different region of the Commonwealth. The five-day programme is designed to address ODL's role in widening educational access, bridging the digital divide and advancing the social and economic development of communities and nations at large. Thanks to an active sponsorship programme and low registration fees, most participants come from developing countries. COL presents its Excellence in Distance Education Awards and confers Honorary Fellowships at each forum.

The Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF7) will take place in late November 2013, in Abuja, Nigeria, co-hosted by the Federal Ministry of Education. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is the lead partner institution.

4.7 Attachments and Conference Support

COL contributes to professional development and training in ODL knowledge and skills by providing individuals with opportunities to work in areas involving the planning and/or execution of COL activities, including the use of ODL methodologies, application of ICTs and researching of policy issues.

COL also supports conference organisers in the planning, organising and running of conferences within the Commonwealth where the aims and objectives are consonant with COL's mission and values.

These interventions strengthen COL's stakeholder relations and strategic partnerships.

COL will continue to offer attachments and conference support to enhance the impact of ODL during the next three years.

5 MANAGING FOR RESULTS

5.1 Accountability and Oversight

Accountability and effective use of resources remain paramount for COL.

Accountability entails:

- regularly reporting to the Board of Governors, Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM), Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and Foreign Minister, and other partners;
- adhering to plans and budgets, as well as complying with operational policies and procedures;
- monitoring performance against indicators, making adjustments as needed; and
- conducting periodic evaluations of reported results and responding to recommendations from those evaluations.

COL, using the Three-Year Plan as the basis for accountability, will continue to:

- adhere to documented functions, authority and accountability between the Board and senior management;
- adhere to the established reporting cycle for communication with the Board and its Committees engage in an annual financial statement audit perform independent evaluations, and prepare management responses on implementation of recommendations;
- maintain a robust information retrieval system to track and provide information on the status of COL's work and progress towards targets set; and
- review and update policies and procedures as required in a changing landscape.

5.2 Critical Success Factors and Risk Management

COL serves the Member States of the Commonwealth through its mission, *Learning for Development*. As a small organisation with a large mandate, COL leverages its present strengths while minimising the risks. The following factors have implications at the corporate and programme levels and require effective management.

Financial Stability

COL is dependent upon voluntary contributions from the Member States. During the 2011 financial year, 44 countries contributed, a historical high for COL. It is significant that in spite of the global economic crisis, the number of contributing countries did not decline. Retaining the confidence and contributions of the Member States at a time when some will experience continued economic challenges is critical to the successful implementation of the 2012–2015 plan. The programme activities can be severely compromised by non-availability of adequate financial resources. In-kind contributions, trained human resources and intellectual inputs are critical to the success of COL programmes.

Risk: Global financial crises continue to affect a number of nations. Some Member States may find it difficult to continue funding COL at the same level. Any interruption of contribution by a major donor or a decline in the number of contributors could seriously compromise COL's capacity to deliver its programme outcomes.

Mitigation strategy:

- Maintain COL's established cash reserve, within limits approved by the Board, through prudent budget management.

5

- Seek additional contributions consistent with the mission, *Learning for Development*.
- Have a plan to alter, curtail or terminate initiatives should contributions decline.
- Maintain effective communication with major donors.
- Use careful planning, effective budgetary controls and close monitoring of multiple scenario options to help COL generate and optimise the use of available resources.



Probability: Medium

Impact: High

Managing Expectations

The significant increase in the number of countries and their continued financial contributions through a period of economic crisis reflect the goodwill and respect of the stakeholders towards COL for its ability to fulfil its promises and to deliver results within accepted time frames. This also raises stakeholder expectations.

Risk: Not being able to deliver on the long wish-lists of Member States may adversely affect the reputation and credibility of COL.

Mitigation strategy:

- Initiate and engage in strategic communication with designated Focal Points in Member States on COL's specific mission and mandate so that the requests are focused on COL's areas of competence.
- Use Country Action Plans to focus attention on activities approved for the Three-Year Plan.
- Distribute activities geographically and temporally under the Three-Year Plan to meet the expectations.

Probability: Low

Impact: Low

Partnerships

The substantial social capital that COL has accumulated through its partnerships provides considerable leverage to its modest budget. COL has also accumulated considerable experience in working with a diverse range of partners, large and small, institutional and field-based. Partners' inability to implement the programme at the same pace and level of quality may compromise COL's standards and credibility. Mismatch in size and budget cycles can create barriers to equal partnerships and timely outcomes.

Risk: Some partners may be under-resourced in terms of capabilities and institutional aspects and may not be able to meet the deliverables in a timely manner. Choosing partners with care, nurturing multiple partners and establishing an exit strategy for partnerships that do not work must all be considered.

Mitigation strategy:

- Focus on partner strengths and needs and align them with COL's priorities.
- Emphasise follow-up and maintain effective communication with partners.

Probability: Low

Impact: Low

Technology as an Emerging Issue

COL is a small organisation that is focused on the use of technology to enhance learning and to expand its reach. Careful identification of appropriate technologies and their judicious use and deployment are critical to the success of COL's mission.

Risk: Not being able to keep up-to-date in a rapidly changing technology scene could result in COL's technology systems and advisory services becoming obsolescent. An equally significant risk is that COL could recommend and/or deploy technologies that are not relevant to the context and that could contribute to widening of the divides and gaps, especially in gender terms. ICT development varies across the different regions and countries of the Commonwealth; and because of differing infrastructure, connectivity and capacity, it may not be possible to achieve expected results for the programme activities within specified time frames.

Mitigation strategy:

- Sustain and advance staff and specialists' capability to sense changes.
- Sensitise staff and partners to total costs of ownership in technology-mediated learning activities.
- Identify and build robust platforms and systems that are future-proof and vendor-proof.
- Make use of appropriate technologies that are available, accessible and affordable.

Probability: Low

Impact: Low

Visibility

COL has been able to develop and implement an effective and integrated stakeholder strategy that has ensured its visibility across the Commonwealth. This needs to be taken to the next level where COL is seen as a trusted partner of choice by Member States.

Risk: As a small organisation that provides technical advice, COL can be overshadowed by donors and bigger international organisations with access to more resources.

Mitigation strategy:

- Have a work plan relevant to national priorities.
- Ensure that stakeholders at both the governmental and institutional levels are aware of COL's work.

Probability: Low

Impact: High

5.3 Resource Management

Comprehensive, results-based operational plans, derived from the Three-Year Plan, will guide the allocation of resources.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will ensure:

- continued monitoring of transparent and competitive procurement methods;
- strengthened programme design through leveraging of resources and cost-sharing with partners;
- consistent monitoring and evaluation;
- continued use of national and regional expertise and technologies wherever possible in the execution of its work, while balancing this with the availability of national and regional expertise;

- the building of local capacity and aligning with Commonwealth and country priorities;
- responsible financial management to achieve value for money, which is COL's underlying principle for use of funds; and
- the use of gender equality, women's empowerment and culturally sensitive approaches to guide its operations at all levels.

5.4 Human Resource Management

COL's ability to be successful in fulfilling its mission depends on the commitment and professionalism of its staff. To enhance delivery and effectiveness, human resources have to be aligned with the needs of the organisation so that the skills mix and staff capacity meet organisational requirements.

COL will continue to operate with a small core staff of about 45, including its staff at the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) in New Delhi, India. Staff turnover is expected to remain low over the life of this Three-Year Plan, with vacancies arising under the rotation policy from time to time for professional staff in the international category. While potentially disruptive to programme delivery, this policy makes succession planning reasonably timely and ensures new talent and approaches to COL's work.

COL will also continue to make use of fixed and non-fixed terms, depending on the nature of the job and the services required. Together, these give COL the capability to respond to emerging needs, to scale up and down the staff complement when circumstances warrant, and to hire the right expertise when it is needed.

COL completed a review of its job grading system in 2011, which will serve COL's human resource requirements well in this triennium. A culture of performance-based pay is now widely accepted at COL, and COL is committed to recognising staff performance through pay increments. COL must stand by its pledge that its staff is its most important resource. COL will strive to adjust compensation for any inflation over the period of the plan, subject to availability of resources and approval by the Board.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will:

- maintain and continue to attract a stable, highly qualified and motivated workforce that actively delivers on results;
- ensure that staff have capacities to implement the plan with ongoing staff development;
- through timely succession planning, minimise the time that a position might be vacant;
- enhance the human resource information system to provide timely information on human resource matters;
- remain committed to the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all citizens of the Commonwealth; and
- endorse professional merit as the primary guiding principle, combined with gender equity, as well as — within the constraints of its size — the need for an appropriate balance of regional and national backgrounds from around the Commonwealth for internationally recruited positions.



5.5 Financial Resources: Needs and Flows

Planning and delivering COL's three-year programme requires assured future funding. The average number of countries contributing annually per triennium has been on the increase, growing from 22 countries in 2003–2006 to over 40 in 2009–2012. COL has increased the number and level of voluntary contributions by maintaining close links with each Member State and by ensuring that its programme provides value in meeting the national priorities of the contributors while remaining within COL's mandate. A list of contributing countries is provided in Appendix 1.

Australia has re-joined COL as a financial partner. If the United Kingdom extends its earlier offer to contribute 30% of the total funds provided by Commonwealth countries, the aggregate of funding would increase from the 2011–2012 funding levels of \$8.2 million to over \$9 million annually. Such an increase would serve as a funding incentive for other countries.

Additional contributions composed of (i) grants in support of approved programme initiatives and (ii) fee-for-service work are expected to make up close to 20% of revenues in 2012–2015 — the same level as was forecast in 2009–2012 (Appendix 2). Additional contributions are essential if COL is to increase the impact of its programme and reach its longstanding \$12 million resource target. COL's policy for additional contributions ensures that funds will be received and spent in alignment with the priorities of this Three-Year Plan, and that they will not have a disproportionate effect on the overall level of programme and administrative support required in any area.

An appropriate level of costs will be recovered from these additional activities to sustain optimal levels of support for core activities. Grants must cover the additional costs of the extra work involved, while fee-for-service activities will aim for full-cost recovery.

Miscellaneous revenues will account for the balance, composed mainly of interest on investments, royalties and licensing fees from earlier works and other support. These are not expected to increase from previous plan levels, given low interest rates and COL's policy on open educational resources (OER).

COL has built and recently increased its cash reserve fund for use in the event of unexpected events, and is committed to following prudent budget management and to seeking additional contributions in support of the programme.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will:

- work to retain the confidence and the contributions of Member States, at a time when some will experience even more economic challenges than in the previous plan, and aim to increase their contributions;
- aim to increase the number of multi-year commitments;
- increase additional contributions by strengthening co-operation with inter-governmental institutions, bilateral donors, development banks and foundations and by diversifying the source of contributions in line with programme sectors;
- continue to maintain adequate cash reserves for unexpected events and times, and to use any surplus amounts to address possible shortfalls in funding over planned expenditure levels; and
- ensure a minimum of 80% of COL's funding will be directed to the programme and not more than 20% to organisational management and governance.



Revenue and Expenditures

All currency figures in this Three-Year Plan are expressed in Canadian dollars, unless otherwise noted.

Revenue

(\$ Millions)	Total 2012–2015	Total 2009–2012
Member governments' contributions	\$ 27.0	\$ 24.5
Additional contributions	6.2	6.2
Other	0.3	0.2
	<u>\$ 33.5</u>	<u>\$ 30.9</u>

Expenditures

(\$ Millions)	Total 2012–2015	Total 2009–2012
Programme: sectors, regional support and services	\$ 31.8	\$ 26.4
Organisational management and governance	4.5	4.0
Fixed-asset upgrade and replacement	0.2	0.2
	<u>\$ 36.5</u>	<u>\$ 30.6</u>

Includes projected figures for 2012–2015 and provisional figures for the year ended 30 June 2012.

Approximately \$5.0 million in unrestricted cash reserves are on hand at 30 June 2012.

5.6 Knowledge Management and Information Technology

COL's internal Knowledge Management and Information Technology systems are designed on the principle of compatibility with the needs and requirements of a small organisation and its partners, the majority of which are in developing countries. Corporate business continuity and data and information integrity are key factors in the operation of these systems. Appropriate risk management procedures are implemented and reviewed periodically. COL ensures that it is free to move its own data across service providers to avoid potential vendor lock-in.

During 2012–2015, COL will continue to provide highly reliable network services to staff and will assist in the scaling up and scaling out of ODL-relevant technologies developed by COL and its partners. COL will work with partners to deploy information services and trial platforms for ODL with a special focus on small states.

A comprehensive, semantically enabled records and document management system will be built as an integral component of the corporate intranet. Platforms for collaboration and co-creation features will be available and new features developed. The COL Virtual Learning Environment will be augmented with relevant new features. Trials for new learning management systems and learner-oriented social networking platforms will be carried out. Online repositories and directory services will be enhanced with new materials. Open source software for re-use of OER will be supported.

COL continues its global advocacy for OER with a focus on re-use through open licences. COL will remain at the cutting edge of all aspects of OER technology. Advisory support will be provided to address partner concerns with intellectual property/ copyright and open licences for digital learning materials.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will:

- deploy information services and trial online platforms with a special focus on small states;
- conduct trials on new learning management platforms while augmenting existing ones; and
- enhance the OER repositories and directory services it offers to partners and the public.

5.7 Governance

“Learning is necessary for human survival. It enhances the development of identity and adaptability of learners. Education includes training in the language and skills necessary to perform specific tasks and the development of critical thinking, problem solving and creativity that enable the learner to deepen understanding and use knowledge wisely.”

COL Governance Manual

COL’s Board of Governors has provision for up to 14 members, consisting of the Chair, major donor representatives, regional representatives from the four regions of the Commonwealth, as well as the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, the Secretary-General’s appointee and the President of COL (ex-officio).

The Memorandum of Understanding establishing COL and signed by Commonwealth Governments in 1988 gives the Board of Governors general responsibility for determining the principles, policies and priorities that guide COL in its activities. This includes approval of the strategic plans and annual work programmes, the monitoring of their implementation and the evaluation of the results.

In fulfilment of their accountability to member countries of the Commonwealth, COL reports to meetings of Commonwealth Ministers of Education and Heads of Government (including Foreign Ministers) on the activities of COL.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL’s Governors will:

- monitor the overall performance of COL as well as the contributions from Member States, and make appropriate representations when those contributions are delayed;
- assist in the sourcing of new revenue sources as appropriate; and
- monitor effective risk management strategies.

See current Board membership in Appendix 3.



APPENDIX 1:

Member Governments' Contributions

Years ended 30 June

	2010	2011	2012	Total
Antigua & Barbuda	\$ 6,195	\$ 4,969	\$ 5,013	\$ 16,177
Australia	–	–	501,550	501,550
Bahamas	64,920	61,980	60,438	187,338
Bangladesh	31,704	30,990	31,164	93,858
Barbados	45,225	46,485	45,117	136,827
Belize	32,460	31,290	30,762	94,512
Botswana	48,960	46,485	45,783	141,228
Brunei Darussalam	–	–	–	–
Cameroon	–	–	–	–
Canada	2,600,000	2,600,000	2,600,000	7,800,000
Cyprus	18,619	15,859	16,606	51,084
Dominica	5,212	5,000	5,000	15,212
Fiji	–	–	–	–
The Gambia	5,170	4,883	5,140	15,193
Ghana	–	185,382	61,548	246,930
Grenada	5,440	4,840	–	10,280
Guyana	16,320	15,345	15,039	46,704
India	936,004	897,541	867,416	2,700,961
Jamaica	48,690	43,947	46,040	138,677
Kenya	45,590	41,298	43,760	130,648
Kiribati	–	20,256	–	20,256
Lesotho	73,541	71,260	71,603	216,404
Malawi	–	–	–	–
Malaysia	50,531	50,000	50,000	150,531
Maldives	5,025	4,840	4,969	14,834
Malta	15,816	15,270	15,121	46,207
Mauritius	60,000	60,000	60,000	180,000
Mozambique	51,895	47,765	50,825	150,485



Years ended 30 June

	2010	2011	2012	Total
Namibia	40,920	58,596	80,208	179,724
Nauru	5,214	4,938	5,100	15,252
New Zealand	622,240	604,865	661,905	1,889,010
Nigeria	750,000	549,662	455,559	1,755,221
Pakistan	35,000	35,000	35,000	105,000
Papua New Guinea	16,230	–	15,199	31,429
Rwanda	–	13,429	13,130	26,559
St. Kitts & Nevis	11,622	40,668	30,699	82,989
St. Lucia	38,510	19,142	17,962	75,614
St. Vincent & The Grenadines	–	–	–	–
Samoa	64,920	61,980	60,156	187,056
Seychelles	17,490	15,345	15,271	48,106
Sierra Leone	–	15,192	15,450	30,642
Singapore	–	–	–	–
Solomon Islands	–	5,064	5,000	10,064
South Africa	250,000	250,000	250,000	750,000
Sri Lanka	–	–	–	–
Swaziland	31,800	30,540	–	62,340
Tanzania	30,343	28,594	–	58,937
Tonga	–	20,066	20,068	40,134
Trinidad & Tobago	81,150	77,475	75,195	233,820
Tuvalu	10,820	10,330	10,026	31,176
Uganda	–	14,330	15,420	29,750
United Kingdom	1,932,260	1,730,190	1,768,030	5,430,480
Vanuatu	–	–	–	–
Zambia	32,460	28,659	30,522	91,641
	\$8,138,296	\$7,919,750	\$8,212,794	\$24,270,840

APPENDIX 2:

Additional Contributions

Years ended 30 June

	2010	2011	2012*	Total
Grants				
Commonwealth Secretariat/CFTC	\$ 464,610	\$ 22,361	\$ 112,070	\$ 599,041
Ford Foundation	–	–	49,440	49,440
Government of India – Dept. of Science & Technology	28,347	22,600	55,450	106,397
Government of India – Ministry of Information & Broadcasting	136,593	84,625	220,350	441,568
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation	413,820	213,803	463,850	1,091,473
Memorial University, Canada	36,544	13,456	–	50,000
United Nations Children’s Fund	304,981	786,558	672,000	1,763,539
Other	109,711	153,381	88,510	351,602
	<u>1,494,606</u>	<u>1,296,784</u>	<u>1,661,670</u>	<u>4,453,060</u>
Fee-based Services				
eLearning for International Organisations	575,722	558,171	650,820	1,784,713
	<u>\$2,070,328</u>	<u>\$1,854,955</u>	<u>\$2,312,490</u>	<u>\$6,237,773</u>

*Includes provisional figures for the year ended 30 June 2012.

APPENDIX 3:

Board of Governors

30 June 2012

CHAIR

The Honourable Burchell Whiteman, O.J.

Senior Advisor, Office of the Prime Minister, Government of Jamaica

Former Jamaican High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, retired Senator and former Minister of Information and former Minister of Education and Culture, Jamaica

MEMBERS

Commonwealth Secretary-General

His Excellency Mr. Kamallesh Sharma

Appointments by Major Donors

Government of Canada: Ms. Janet Ecker, ICD.D, *President, Toronto Financial Services Alliance*

Government of India: Ms. Vibha Puri Das, *Secretary, Higher Education, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development*

Government of New Zealand: Dr. Linda Sissons, CNZM, *Chief Executive Officer, Wellington Institute of Technology*

Government of Nigeria: Her Excellency Mrs. Mariam Yalwaji Katagum, *Ambassador/Permanent Delegation, The Permanent Delegation of Nigeria to UNESCO*

Government of South Africa: Ms. Jennifer (Jenny) Glennie, *Director, South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE)*

Government of the United Kingdom: Ms. Jo Bourne, *Head of Profession for Education, Education Department, Department for International Development*

Regional Appointments

on the Advice of Commonwealth Ministers of Education

Africa: Professor Akilagpa Sawyerr, *Former Secretary-General, Association of African Universities (AAU) and former Vice Chancellor, University of Ghana*

Asia: Professor Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, FRS, *Coordinator-General, OIC Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation, COMSTECH Secretariat, Pakistan*

Caribbean: Professor Clement Sankat, *Pro-Vice Chancellor and Campus Principal, St. Augustine Campus, The University of the West Indies, Trinidad & Tobago*

Pacific: The Honourable Dame Dr. Carol Kidu, *Member of Parliament and former Minister for Community Development, Women, Religion and Sports, Papua New Guinea*

Appointment by the Commonwealth Secretary-General

Mr. Martin Bean, *Vice Chancellor, The Open University, United Kingdom*

President (Ex-Officio)

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

Advisor

Professor John Wood, *Secretary-General, Association of Commonwealth Universities*

APPENDIX 4:

Focal Points

Antigua & Barbuda	Ms. Peecheeta Spencer
Australia	Ms. Robyne Leven and Dr. Chris Chung
The Bahamas	Ms. Michelle Sears
Bangladesh	Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam Khan
Barbados	Mr. Laurie King
Belize	Mr. Christopher Aird
Botswana	Dr. Godson Gatsha
Brunei Darussalam	Mr. Adinin Md Salleh
Cameroon	Professor Ivo Leke Tambo and Dr. Daniel Akume Akume
Canada	Represented on COL's Board
Cyprus	Professor George Angelos Papadopoulos
Dominica	Ms. Marcella Powell
The Gambia	Mr. Musa Touray
Ghana	Professor Jophus Anamuah-Mensah
Grenada	Mr. Andrew Augustine
Guyana	Ms. Inge Nathoo
India	Shri Anant Kumar Singh
Jamaica	Mr. Philbert Dhyll
Kenya	Mr. Omido Ongonga
Kiribati	Ms. Karabi Bate
Lesotho	Dr. H. Manthoto Lephoto
Malawi	(vacant)
Malaysia	Professor Dr. Rujhan bin Mustafa
Maldives	Dr. Ali Fawaz Shareef
Malta	Mr. George Borg
Mauritius	Mrs. Janick Jaunbocus



Mozambique	Ms. Zaida Paz Helena Baùle
Namibia	Mr. Beans Uazembua Ngatjizeko
Nauru	Dr. Maria Gaiyabu
New Zealand	Ms. Miriam Freeman-Plume
Nigeria	Dr. Joy Chinwe Ndefo
Pakistan	Professor Dr. Parveen Munshi
Papua New Guinea	Mr. Ouka Lavaki and Mr. Charles Mabia
Rwanda	Dr. Erasme Rwanamiza
Samoa	Mrs. G.T.T. Afamasaga
Seychelles	Ms. Marie-Reine Hoareau
Sierra Leone	Mrs. Musu M. Gorvie
Singapore	Mr. Lim Tze Jiat
Solomon Islands	Mr. Bernard Rapasia
South Africa	Ms. Pat Bulling
Sri Lanka	Mr. S.U. Wijerathne
St. Kitts & Nevis	Ms. Jacqueline Flemming
St. Lucia	Dr. Rufina Frederick
St. Vincent & The Grenadines	Mrs. Susan Dougan
Swaziland	Mr. Peterson S. Dlamini
Tanzania	Mrs. Lambertha H. Mahai
Tonga	Mrs. Peaua Heimuli
Trinidad & Tobago	Ms. Karen Rosemin
Tuvalu	Ms. Katalina P. Taloka
Uganda	Mrs. Elizabeth K.M. Gabona
United Kingdom	Represented on COL's Board
Vanuatu	Mr. John Niroa
Zambia	Mr. Victor Muyatwa



APPENDIX 5:

Common Abbreviations Used in the Report

AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CCEM	Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers
CEMCA	Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
ICT/ICTs	information and communications technology/technologies
IGNOU	Indira Gandhi National Open University, India
L3F	Lifelong Learning for Farmers
NOUN	National Open University of Nigeria
ODL	open and distance learning
OER	open educational resources
PCF	Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning
RETRIDOL	Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning
SADC-CDE	Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education
TQF	Transnational Qualifications Framework
TVSD	Technical and Vocational Skill Development
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VUSSC	Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth



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