Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors

May 2010

Report of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

Background

1. Created by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987, COL is the only international, intergovernmental organisation that focuses exclusively on enhancing access to education, training and learning through the use of information and communications technology (ICTs) and open/distance learning (ODL).

2. COL works with governments and institutions to expand the scope, scale and quality of learning in support of development. It assists partners in developing policy, strengthening systems, building capacity, refining models, creating materials and nurturing collaborative networks.

3. Starting from Amartya Sen’s definition of development as freedom, COL considers that knowledge is the royal road to freedom and that expanding human learning is central to development. However, because conventional teaching methods cannot address the scale and scope of the challenge, it is vital to harness a range of educational technologies to promote learning for development.

4. To guide its work, COL uses a framework for development that blends the Millennium Development Goals, the Dakar Goals of Education for All and the Commonwealth values of peace, democracy, equity and good governance.

5. As a small and specialised intergovernmental agency, COL emphasises partnerships in all its activities, collaborating with other Commonwealth bodies and multilateral organisations and NGOs, as well as Commonwealth Governments, fostering communities of practice and nurturing regional bodies. Renewed partnership agreements were signed with the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNESCO in 2009.

6. ODL is a cost-effective approach to expanding education. Its use has grown rapidly over the 20 some years since Commonwealth Heads of Government established COL. Today, thanks to expanding connectivity and new developments in ICTs such as social software and open educational resources, ODL applications continue to accelerate. The interactive Web is a rich environment for learning and a powerful vehicle for expanding awareness about the possible futures of humankind.
Three-Year Plan, 2009–2012

7. COL’s Chair (the Hon. Burchell Whiteman) and President (Sir John Daniel) presented a new Three-Year Plan for 2009–2012 to Commonwealth Ministers of Education for their endorsement at their 17th triennial Conference (CCEM) in Kuala Lumpur in June 2009. Ministers warmly endorsed the new Three-year Plan and praised COL for its work:

Ministers commended the Commonwealth of Learning on its work since 16CCEM; endorsed the three-year plan for 2009-12 ‘Learning for Development’; and reiterated commitments to continued financial support. Ministers especially praised the work of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), and encouraged its expansion in terms of capacity-building in the use of ICTs in education, and the development and delivery of courses, with particular emphasis on mechanisms for quality assurance. (Ministers’ Communiqué, paragraph 13)

8. The theme of this plan, Learning for Development, which continues the theme for 2006-12, expresses a vision that reaches beyond formal education to embrace areas of learning that are vital for better health, greater prosperity and a safer environment. Understanding development as the process of increasing the freedoms that people can enjoy, COL pursues this vision operationally within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the campaign for Education for All (EFA) and Commonwealth values.

9. While building on the extensive pan-Commonwealth consultation conducted for the previous triennium, COL refreshed its understanding of current development priorities through various formal and informal channels including regional meetings with the country Focal Points appointed by Ministers of Education and COL’s Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (London, July 2008). A rigorous external evaluation of its work in 2006-2009 (which was reviewed at the May 2009 Commonwealth Secretariat Board meeting) enabled COL to play to its strengths in responding to these priorities.

10. Its first response is to tighten the focus. COL’s two programme sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health, embrace just eight initiatives that will help governments pursue the twin goals of expanding access to learning and using public funds cost-effectively.

11. The second response is to scale up its impact. Working with its country partners COL has developed powerful models for applying technology to learning for development. These models are now being applied at scale and extended to new countries.

12. The context of COL’s work has evolved. Its plan for the new triennium also addresses the three imperatives in the contemporary agenda for development:
A global economic slowdown requires billions of people to learn their way to new livelihoods and demands cost-effectiveness in educational spending;
Universal Primary Education is finally on the horizon and a surge towards secondary schooling must now be satisfied; and
Healthy communities, in which free individuals treat each other with respect and understanding, are best equipped to face contemporary challenges.

13. The plan also adapts to three trends in the technologies available for learning:
- Continuing expansion of connectivity is enabling much greater access to technology-mediated learning;
- New social software is transforming the Web into a vast space for online collaboration; and
- Open educational resources herald the emergence of a global intellectual commons.

14. The programme initiatives are:

**EDUCATION**

**Open Schooling:** Growing success in achieving universal primary education is creating a surge of demand for secondary schooling that many governments cannot afford to satisfy by building more schools. Open Schooling can deliver quality education cost-effectively at scale. [www.col.org/OpenSchooling](http://www.col.org/OpenSchooling)

**Teacher Education:** Achieving the MDGs and EFA will require millions of new teachers and on-the-job training for millions more unqualified teachers already in post. Teacher education institutions will not be able meet these demands without adopting the methods of ODL and COL will help them do this. [www.col.org/TeacherEducation](http://www.col.org/TeacherEducation)

**Higher Education:** Many universities face burgeoning demand after a period of neglect and some countries are creating open universities. COL facilitates the expansion of quality higher education and the sharing of programmes among institutions, including imaginative courseware to promote the Commonwealth agenda of Respect and Understanding. [www.col.org/HigherEducation](http://www.col.org/HigherEducation)

**Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth:** Hundreds of teachers and officials have acquired advanced ICT skills through this network. It produces and shares eCourses in skills-related areas within a new Transnational Qualifications Framework and links them together in a common portal. [www.col.org/VUSSC](http://www.col.org/VUSSC)

**LIVELIHOODS & HEALTH**

**Skills Development:** COL assists with the development of policy for the use of ODL in skills development and works with partners to design and deliver quality courses that are increasingly rich in ICTs. Partnerships among institutions at
different stages of development operate in a spirit of south-south cooperation. 

www.col.org/SkillsDevelopment

**Learning for Farming:** Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) is a successful grassroots model for increasing rural prosperity that uses ICTs to link banks and universities to village communities to exploit new economic opportunities. It is now being implemented at scale by extending the use of knowledge info-mediaries.  

www.col.org/L3Farmers

**Healthy Communities:** COL’s media empowerment model has proven its effectiveness for bringing health messages to communities. It is now being scaled up by training health groups and communities to create and share learning materials and make effective use of community media.  

www.col.org/HealthyCommunities

**Integrating eLearning:** Countries are eager to raise levels of digital literacy and deploy eLearning in their education systems. To build capacity COL is training educators to develop eLearning materials, to conduct eTutoring, and to share materials as open educational resources through communities of practice.  

www.col.org/eLearning

15. The three cross-cutting themes of gender, quality and appropriate technology are pervasive throughout the programme.

16. Each sector pursues its aims through five core strategies: partnerships, models, policies, capacity and materials. These strategies focus on co-creating value with COL’s extensive network of partners and stimulating new developments.

17. In order to be more present at the regional level COL has its own unit in India, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). In Africa it works with RETRIDOL (Research and Training Institute for Distance and Open Learning) in West Africa and SADC-CDE (Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education).

18. To adapt its programme to fit the unique needs of each country COL develops individual Country Action Plans after extensive consultations with Ministers, Focal Points and partner institutions. These are monitored and updated regularly. *COL in the Commonwealth*, a compendium of individual Country Reports, is published at the end of each triennium and presented to Education Ministers at CCEM.

19. Earlier this year, COL added strength to its regional networking by naming a group of eminent ODL professionals from across the Commonwealth who will act as Honorary COL Advisors. Four Honorary COL Chairs have also been named.  

www.col.org/advisors

20. COL practices Results-Based Management. This is summarised through a logic model that lays out the expected long- and intermediate-term results (impacts and outcomes) over the three-year period. Outputs and activities, and the inputs needed to achieve them, are set out annually in log frames that are integrated with the logic
model and are specific to each initiative. The log frames are regularly updated and have more detailed performance indicators.

**Funding**

21. COL’s core budget comes from voluntary contributions of Commonwealth member states.

22. COL’s financial strategy is based on three sources of revenue. Voluntary contributions from over forty Commonwealth member states provide approximately 80% of the annual budget. While the six largest donors are Canada, India, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom, COL much appreciates the financial support that it receives from all contributing Commonwealth countries. Additional contributions (from grants and fee-for-service work) and miscellaneous revenue account for the remainder. On the expenditure side a minimum of 80% of the budget is directed to the programme and not more than 20% to organisational management and governance.

23. Thirty countries have contributed to-date during this fiscal year (ending 30 June). COL is still expecting contributions from at least 10 more governments and is hopeful that a good portion of this amount will be received before June 30. Efforts have been redoubled to secure contributions from these governments.

**Examples of COL’s work**

24. COL’s purpose is to help Commonwealth governments and institutions use a variety of technologies to improve and expand education, training and learning in support of development. COL has a particular focus on open and distance learning (ODL) because it has proven its cost-effectiveness in many countries through economies of scale, country-wide geographical reach and flexibility.

25. The following examples of COL’s work are arranged by Commonwealth region although many of them are carried out in countries in several or all regions.

**Asia**

26. COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) programme takes aim at the fundamental Millennium Development Goal of poverty reduction. The programme began in India (Tamil Nadu) and is now being transferred, in partnership with local NGOs and government agencies, to Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Uganda. The simple but effective L3 Farmers model starts at the grassroots by getting the farmers to define their vision of a better future and the questions it raises. Local information providers then work together to answer those questions using commercial village ICT kiosks as a communications channel. The prospect of a more prosperous village encourages banks and businesses to get involved. The best success indicator is that the model is now
spreading spontaneously from village to village without COL’s involvement. More recently, through collaboration between COL and a local NGO in Tamil Nadu, India, 5,000 rural workers are receiving short educational messages daily through their mobile phones. The content, which is delivered in audio-mode (not text) is aimed at improving agricultural practice (e.g. goat rearing) and those participating are small/marginal farmers or landless labourers. In order to expand this system and allow feedback COL and the University of British Columbia, in Canada, are developing a mobile phone based Learning Management System called LIVES (Learning through Interactive Voice Educational Systems) www.col.org/L3Farmers

27. The collaborative Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programmes have attracted a cumulative enrolment of over 10,000 students studying through one or more of the founding partners: Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan), Bangladesh Open University and the Open University of Sri Lanka. The new Wawasan Open University in Malaysia joined the consortium in 2006 followed by universities in the Caribbean, the Pacific and West Africa in 2007. (India’s Indira Gandhi National Open University is no longer a member of the consortium.) Designed for senior and middle managers working in developing Commonwealth countries, the courses help developing nations meet the need for professionals who can contribute to economic growth and good governance. To enrich the Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme, nine case studies with accompanying teaching notes were recently produced by faculty members representing partner universities in Jamaica, Malaysia, Nigeria and Sri Lanka. www.col.org/CEMBA

28. COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), helps to implement COL’s mandate in the eight countries of Commonwealth Asia and has been particularly active in implementing community radio in India, in collaboration with NGOs and the Government of India, and Internet Radio in Maldives, in partnership with the Open University of Malaysia and the Ministry of Education. This year in Sri Lanka, CEMCA facilitated a brainstorming dialogue between 30 stakeholders on taking community radio forward in partnership with the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, Colombo. CEMCA and UNESCO’s Delhi Office have also just signed a collaboration agreement. www.cemca.org

Africa

29. COL’s Healthy Communities initiative takes a holistic approach to address the three Millennium Development Goals related to health. Working with local, national and regional partners, and using both face-to-face workshops and distance training, COL helps build knowledge and skills to use open and distance learning tools and strategies to address health and related development issues at the community level. The initiative brings together health and development experts, local media and technology groups, community networks and public health authorities into
collaborative, win-win partnerships. Experts provide knowledge; media (such as community radio, village cinema and, increasingly, mobile phones) provide scale. 
Active participation of community stakeholders ensures relevance, learning achievement, and social change. In Malawi in 2009, COL supported the development of a weekly radio programme about maternal and child health that broadcasts to a target audience of 80,000 pregnant women and new mothers; a network of 200 small community groups facilitates learning through discussion and collective action. Local health authorities ensure that content is accurate and linked to community health services and national priorities. The programme has over 3,000 active learners. Also in 2009, as a part of a regional competition on smallholder innovation, COL supported Farm Radio International to develop and run an online course in scriptwriting skills. One hundred and thirty broadcasters and rural development workers from Sub-Saharan Africa completed the course with fifteen winning scripts shared with over 500 radio broadcasters.

30. COL is supporting the development of a national ODL policy for technical and vocational training in Zambia in collaboration with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Vocational Training and COL’s Memorandum of Understanding with the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa has been renewed for a further three years.

31. Open/alternative schooling has proven to be a successful and cost-effective means of increasing access to basic and secondary schooling. In view of the huge challenge of expanding secondary schooling now that the campaign for Universal Primary Education is increasingly successful, COL is strongly advocating the adoption of open schooling systems. It has helped to establish the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA) which includes a consortium of open schools in Southern Africa (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zambia). A thorough evaluative review of open schooling in India and Namibia and a needs assessment and draft action plan for the establishment of an open school in Nigeria have been completed and several open schooling resources have been published to help administrators and policy makers. At a recent workshop in Maputo, Mozambique, representatives from open schools in Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia were trained to draft strategic plans for integrating multi-media in their open schools. Staff from NAMCOL (Namibian College of Open Learning) facilitated the workshop using a Manual on the Implementation of a Multi Media Strategy in Open Schooling that they had developed previously. Collaborative work has also begun on a Quality Assurance Toolkit for Open Schools.

32. Teacher Education is of critical importance in Africa and COL is showing how in-situ ODL programmes can work very well. In March, 60 course facilitators of Nigeria’s National Teachers’ Institute (NTI) were trained in distance education tutoring using a manual developed with COL support. In the same month, 30 course writers at Freetown Teachers’ College, Sierra Leone were trained in course writing for distance learning. The training will greatly enhance their capacity to develop the
modules for the Higher Teachers’ Certificate Course, which has been a long-standing priority for the college. A training manual for head teachers and principals in The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone was developed with support from Memorial University, Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada.

33. COL facilitated the establishment of a Centre of Expertise in ODL for West Africa, the Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL), at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and, in Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE), in partnership with the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL) and the Botswana Ministry of Education. Both of these regional agencies are building up a resources inventory and network of expertise and conducting regional ODL training workshops.

Caribbean

34. COL continues to support the newly created National Open School in Trinidad & Tobago. COL has also been working with the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) to assist it in expanding its capacity to manage the development and maintenance of ODL materials that support their curricula.

35. COL has a long-standing relationship with the University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech). The Technical Teacher Training Programme developed by COL through regional collaboration was piloted as a Special Diploma by UTech to students in The Bahamas and St. Kitts & Nevis. The materials produced through the initiative are available free-of-charge to publicly funded institutions in the region and have now been adapted for use in Africa.

36. COL is working with partners in the Caribbean toward the development of a pan-Caribbean entry-level instructor training programme using more flexible and blended approaches to skills development.

37. The Commonwealth Secretariat, Microsoft and the World Bank are collaborating with COL in its activities related to teachers’ ICT policy development and implementation in Guyana.

38. COL, in collaboration with UNESCO, The World Bank, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, and the University of the West Indies (St. Augustine), supported a regional conference this year in St Lucia to discuss the strategies for expanding the provision of higher education in the region, particularly in the smaller states.

Pacific

39. COL has facilitated the creation of the Pacific Association for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PATVET) and the creation of some basic skills courses which are being passed from island to island with whatever translation and versioning is required. Courses such as “Working with Timber,” “Working with
Concrete,” and “Working with Small Engines (Outboards)” are now in use in a number of countries. These courses are in simple formats but they have had a very positive impact. More courses are in development and a new initiative has been started to upgrade learners’ competency in English. COL and PATVET are also converting the Basic Trade Skills courses into online programmes using open educational resources (OERs).

40. In Solomon Islands, the Solomon Islands Development Trust has produced various video productions to address health, governance and tsunami relief, and two new community learning programmes in youth reproductive health and healthy environments were launched this year.

41. COL provided consultancy support to the Government of Solomon Islands in developing a national policy and strategic framework for distance and flexible learning. The draft policy and strategic framework has been accepted by the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development and is expected to be submitted to Parliament in mid-2010.

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

42. On behalf of Commonwealth Ministers of Education, COL is co-ordinating the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). Ministers conceived this idea at 14CCEM and endorsed a proposal for it at 15CCEM. Thirty countries from all Commonwealth regions are now actively engaged in making the VUSSC a reality.

43. VUSSC countries have chosen to focus on creating postsecondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, professional development, disaster management, the fisheries industry, port management, construction safety and agriculture. These non-proprietary, electronically-held course materials, which can readily be adapted to the specific context of each country, are used in the offering of credit-bearing qualifications in the countries’ postsecondary institutions, strengthening their educational capacity and outreach. Small states thus become active contributors to global development and leaders in educational reform through the innovative use of information and communications technologies (ICTs). The VUSSC is throwing a wide bridge across the digital divide.

44. The VUSSC course materials have been developed at a series of pan-Commonwealth workshops facilitated by COL. Over the past four years, the Governments of The Bahamas, Maldives, Mauritius, Samoa (2), Seychelles, Singapore, and Trinidad & Tobago have hosted VUSSC workshops to train educators in information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Participants at the workshops began to create course materials, continuing their collaboration after returning home.

45. Newly developed VUSSC course materials are available through COL’s website, which provides free access to these university-level courses, along with many other
courses, as open educational resources. More recently a Transnational Qualifications Framework for the VUSSC has been developed with the help of the South African Qualifications Authority. This will facilitate the transfer of courses and credits between countries and give students confidence in the legitimacy of these eLearning programmes.

46. The newly established University of Seychelles (UniSey) has chosen to offer VUSSC courses and will sign an MOU with COL. The Seychelles Tourism Academy will also be offering the VUSSC Tour Guiding course that was completed in 2009.

47. A Management Committee, made up of representatives of small states, is now directing VUSSC's activities, supported by COL. VUSSC launched its own website in 2009. www.vussc.org

48. Following the lead of Commonwealth Education Ministers at 17CCEM, Commonwealth Heads of Government, at their 2009 CHOGM, also expressed particular appreciation for the work of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), and encouraged the Commonwealth Secretariat to assist COL in securing new funding to continue and expand the programme in terms of capacity building in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education, and the development and delivery of courses.

Pan-Commonwealth

49. COL’s Pan-Commonwealth initiatives facilitate the development of an important programme by local institutions and then encourage its adoption elsewhere.

50. Sharing know-how is equally important. Here COL is helping to promote two developments that are vital for advancing the educational agenda defined by the Millennium Development Goals and the Dakar Framework of Education for All. To improve teacher education (both at a distance and face-to-face) it has developed Pan-Commonwealth Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Teacher Education drawing on the expertise of specialists from across the Commonwealth. Given the rapidly growing demand for secondary education, COL has documented the experience of open schooling to help countries and development agencies assess its potential for responding to this need. www.col.org/QAToolkit_TE www.col.org/OpenSchooling

51. To advance COL’s Healthy Communities programme, COL partner organisations from across the Commonwealth have developed plans to roll out community ODL programmes in different regions during the current three-year period and drafted the framework for an online toolkit.

52. In partnership with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Higher Education and UNESCO, COL has also produced a Quality Assurance Toolkit for Distance Higher Education Institutions and Programmes. COL has also developed the COL Review and
Improvement Model (COL-RIM) as an inexpensive process that allows institutions to do their own quality assurance with just the minimal external inputs necessary to verify that the process has been done rigorously. It is still being tested before COL makes it widely available. www.col.org/QAToolkit_HE

53. COL is facilitating collaboration among seven universities that are producing culturally appropriate respect and understanding (“cultural paths to peace”) material for use in their respective jurisdictions and video interviews have been produced by CEMCA to support this initiative.

54. UNICEF (the United Nations Children’s Fund) is collaborating with COL to help promote its Child-Friendly Schools programme. Child-Friendly Schools models are now the major means through which UNICEF advocates for and promotes quality in education. Child-Friendly Schools go beyond good teaching methods and learning outcomes to also consider issues such as: health and nutrition status of learners; adequacy of available facilities, services and supplies; and safety and protection afforded by the learning environment.

55. UN and international agencies such as UNHCR, UNAIDS, WHO, ILO, the UN Development Fund, the Commonwealth Secretariat, The World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are using COL’s eLearning for International Organisations programme to provide customised communications and data management skills training for their headquarters staff and field-based workers located throughout the world. This involves many hundreds of staff annually. www.col.org/COLeIO

56. COL is recognised as a foremost source of knowledge on open, distance and technology-mediated learning. As a leader in the fast-evolving field of knowledge management, COL also continues to develop its internal systems to organise information from its own work and support partners. COL also maintains an information resource centre and publishes ODL resources through a variety of media, including a collection of education statistics, policies and statutes from on and from Commonwealth member states. www.col.org/resources  www.col.org/irc  www.col.org/CountryInfo

57. COL is making greater use of Web 2.0 applications and Internet social media in its work. COL is present in many forums that explore the leading edge of these new media (e.g. the Global Learning Portal). Nevertheless, COL proceeds cautiously in promoting such new technologies. It neither wants to discourage countries and institutions with low bandwidth nor to undermine the impact of COL’s quality formal communications media such as Connections, the impact of which seems to grow with each issue. However, visitors to COL’s website will now find links to an increasing number of short videos, in some of which senior COL staff describe their programme areas, and there is now a COL blog with some initial postings. www.col.org/videos  www.col.org/blog
58. COL works with international experts and agencies to provide suggestions and information on copyright so that Commonwealth Governments may take action to implement education-friendly legislation that makes access to learning content affordable for more people. It is also supporting the use of free and open source software (FOSS) and is a leader in advocating creative commons CC-BY-SA (share and share alike, with attribution) content licenses through open education resources (OERs) and Open Courseware.  
www.col.org/copyright  www.col.org/oer

59. In conjunction with the Association of Commonwealth Universities and in partnership with UNESCO, COL offered workshops on OERs for Heads of Commonwealth Universities when they met in Cape Town in April of this year.

60. The WikiEducator initiative that was launched by COL in 2007 was handed over to the new Open Education Foundation under the leadership of its Director, former COL Education Specialist Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, in July 2009. It is hosted by Otago Polytechnic in New Zealand with support from COL, Canada’s Athabasca University and other global educational institutions. WikiEducator continues to create global online communities whose members create open educational content collaboratively. WikiEducator provides an online transnational workspace for a variety of educational purposes and is free for anyone to use. All materials submitted to WikiEducator are licensed under the Creative Commons CC-BY-SA 3.0 copyright license which permits the use, reuse, adaptation, copying of free education materials, with attribution. WikiEducator now has over 13,000 registered users and is one of 100,000 most active global websites. It has become the official planning and communication tool for the Distance Education Hub (DEHub), Australia – a consortium of five universities – and features prominently on the DEHub website and the Ministry of Education in New Zealand, which is actively building an online teacher education community using WikiEducator. India has launched its own WikiEducator country chapter and the Indian Government uses WikiEducator for staff development projects. Other active chapters have emerged in Bangladesh, Ghana and Samoa as well.  
www.WikiEducator.org

61. The Open Education Foundation’s Learning4Content programme, a continuation of the previous COL initiative, is likely the world’s largest effort to develop wiki skills for education. This ambitious and empowering project aims to reach the global educator community and continues to conduct free Learning4Content workshops supported by a grant from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The Commonwealth Computer Navigator’s Certificate, developed collaboratively by institutions across the Commonwealth, is a free course that enables people to acquire the skills included in the International Computer Driving Licence.

62. COL’s Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning is held biennially. It is co-hosted with different partners in different regions of the Commonwealth each time. The five-day programme is designed to explore applications of open and distance learning in widening educational access, bridging the digital divide and advancing the social and economic development of communities and nations at large. The
Forum’s focus is on topics relating to developing countries and participation of practitioners from these countries. COL’s Excellence in Distance Education Awards are also presented at the Forum. The Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF6) will take place in from 24 – 28 November 2010, in Kochi (Cochin, Kerala), India, in partnership with India’s Indira Gandhi National Open University. Several hundred educators and officials from nearly all of the Commonwealth countries and others, including many subsidised delegates, will explore how open and distance learning can help achieve international development goals and education for all. [www.col.org/pcf](http://www.col.org/pcf)

**Conclusion**

63. Although it is a tiny intergovernmental body, not a donor agency, COL has helped Commonwealth countries give millions of people new opportunities to learn over the two decades of its existence. The secret of its success is to empower governments, institutions and individuals to develop learning systems themselves without having to rely on donors.

**Further information:**

[www.col.org](http://www.col.org)
[www.col.org/3yp](http://www.col.org/3yp) (Three-Year Plan, 2009-2012)
[www.col.org/reporting](http://www.col.org/reporting)
[www.col.org/GovInfo](http://www.col.org/GovInfo) (Financial Statements and the President’s Quarterly Reports to the Board)
[www.col.org/board](http://www.col.org/board)

**Handout:**

COL’s Three-Year Plan, 2009 – 2012

_April 2010_