



Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors

May 2011

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 and action plans and activities are reviewed regularly.
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 (OER), 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, O.J.) 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 current plan, *Learning for Development*, which continues the theme for 2009-12, 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 was to tighten the focus. COL's two programme sectors, *Education* and *Livelihoods & Health*, embrace just eight initiatives that help governments pursue the twin goals of expanding access to learning and using public funds cost-effectively.
11. The second response was 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 current 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

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

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

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

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 intermediaries. 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 equality (see paragraphs 64 – 68 below), quality assurance 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. COL adds strength to its regional networking by working with a group of eminent ODL professionals from across the Commonwealth who act as Honorary COL Advisors. Five COL-UNESCO Chairs, who work in specific research areas, have also been named. www.col.org/advisors
www.col.org/chairs
20. COL practices Results-Based Management (RBM). 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. Programme results are reported to COL's Board of Governors in an RBM framework.

21. Programme monitoring and evaluation, together with ongoing adjustments are key components of COL's RBM practice. A "Critical Success Factors and Risk Mitigation" matrix is updated every quarter.

Funding

22. COL's core budget comes from voluntary contributions of Commonwealth member states.
23. 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.
24. Thirty-seven countries have contributed to-date during this fiscal year (ending 30 June). While some have contributed more than expected, others fell short of forecast due to changes in foreign exchange rates. Last fiscal year, COL received financial contributions from a total of 38 countries.

Three-Year Plan, 2012–2015

25. COL's planning for 2012-2015 is well underway. A mid-term term stakeholders survey and a staff/partners priority setting session were both conducted in late 2010 in conjunction with COL Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF6) – and programme activity at PCF6 also contributes to COL planning. Four intensive regional consultations with COL Focal Points are being held during 2011, the first of which took place in Trinidad & Tobago in March and the next in Mauritius in May.

Examples of COL's work

26. 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.
27. 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

28. 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. Augmenting this programme, 5,000 rural workers in India 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). As a follow-up to the signing of a Memorandum by 25,000 villagers in November 2010, the National Bank of Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD) in India has asked COL's partners to develop a proposal for district-level L3F. www.col.org/L3Farmers

29. 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. CEMCA and UNESCO's Delhi Office have signed a collaboration agreement. www.cemca.org

Africa

30. 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. COL facilitates training in content creation, programme development and scriptwriting with partners throughout the Commonwealth including most recently, in Africa, for media, education, health and development workers in Kenya and South Africa.
31. 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 is working closely with members of

- the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa on programmes to introduce flexible skills training.
32. 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, Ghana, 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 were completed last year and several open schooling resources, including most recently a *Quality Assurance Toolkit for Open Schools*, have been published to help administrators and policy makers.
 33. African partners are actively involved with COL's Open Educational Resources for Open Schools (OER4OS) initiative, which is largely funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. New OER for 20 secondary courses have been created and are now freely available online. The self-instructional learning materials were developed by educators from Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia. The 100 Master Teachers involved in this training are now providing training to colleagues in their countries. <http://en-gb.facebook.com/OERs4OpenSchools> www.colwiki.org
 34. Teacher Education is of critical importance in Africa and COL is showing how in-situ ODL programmes can work very well. COL is working with various teacher training institutes in Africa, as well as with the TESSA consortium, on introducing and improving such training programmes and qualifications. 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.
 35. 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

36. 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 and their expansion into open schooling.

37. 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.
38. 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.
39. Nine Caribbean countries have agreed to participate in an ICT in Education Audit for the Caribbean. The Bahamas developed an additional module called *ICT: Potential and Possibilities* for the Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration.
40. In March, Microsoft Trinidad & Tobago Ltd., ComSec and COL signed an addendum to their existing Letter of Understanding to extend the Partners in Learning Initiative until 28 June 2013. This enables schools in the Caribbean Region to licence Microsoft software at minimal costs.

Pacific

41. COL facilitated the establishment of the Pacific Association for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PATVET) and the creation of basic skills courses that are being shared throughout islands in the Pacific. Following the successful creation of basic trades training materials, COL has worked with seven Pacific countries and the National University of Samoa to develop associated vocational literacy materials. COL has supported Solomon Islands in its efforts to scale up distance education by assisting with development of a strategic plan and policy framework for distance and flexible learning.
42. COL spearheaded the establishment of a community learning network in Isabel Province, Solomon Islands. The network brings together government ministries, health authorities, media, ICT facilities and a wide range of community partners to provide training and develop community learning programmes about local health and related development issues. Following the 2009 tsunami, COL supported training for a new FM radio station on the remote island of Nuiatoputapu, Tonga, helping local residents to plan, create and broadcast radio programmes about important local issues such as tsunami recovery and preventing outbreak of disease.
43. Eight Pacific countries (Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) are members of the collaborative network of 32 small states that are part of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC, see below). Two VUSSC training workshops have been held in Samoa.

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

44. 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-two countries from all Commonwealth regions are now actively engaged in making the VUSSC a reality.
45. 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
46. 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.
47. VUSSC course materials have been developed at a series of pan-Commonwealth workshops facilitated by COL. Over the past five years, the Governments of The Bahamas, Lesotho, 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 create course materials, continuing their collaboration after returning home.
48. VUSSC course materials are available through the VUSSC web site, which provides free access to these university-level courses along with many other courses as open educational resources, and are often being delivered through the new VUSSC Moodle Learning Management System. A Transnational Qualifications Framework for the VUSSC has been developed with the help of the South African Qualifications Authority. This facilitates the transfer of courses and credits between countries and give students confidence in the legitimacy of these eLearning programmes.
49. 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

50. COL's Pan-Commonwealth initiatives facilitate the development of an important programme by local institutions and then encourage its adoption elsewhere.
51. The collaborative Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programmes have attracted a cumulative enrolment of over 10,000 students studying through one or more of the participating institutions in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana; National Open University of Nigeria; Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan; Bangladesh Open University; the Open University of Sri Lanka; Wawasan Open University, Malaysia; University College of the Caribbean, Jamaica; University of Guyana; and the University of Papua New Guinea. (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
52. UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) and COL are collaborating to help promote its Child-Friendly Schools programme. Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) models are now the major means through which UNICEF advocates for and promotes quality in education. CFS 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. The overall goal of the programme is to successfully mainstream CFS into the pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes of the partner countries – Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia – and contribute to the improvement of quality education in schools. The partnership promotes and improves a gender sensitive, rights-based approach to schooling and supports child-centred learning-teaching methodologies that emphasise learner participation and inclusion.
www.col.org/cfs
53. 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
54. COL is facilitating collaboration among seven universities that are producing culturally appropriate respect and understanding ("civil paths to peace") material

for use in their respective jurisdictions and video interviews have been produced by CEMCA to support this initiative.

55. COL is recognised as a foremost source of knowledge on open, distance and technology-mediated learning. A wide range of start-up guides, quality assurance toolkits, monographs, consultant reports and other resource material is freely available on COL's website. www.col.org/resources
www.col.org/publications
56. 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 to support partners. COL also maintains an information resource centre and collects ODL news and resources from large variety of sources, including education statistics, policies and statutes from Commonwealth member states. www.col.org/irc www.col.org/NewsFeeds
<http://dailynews.col.org> 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, COL can now be found Facebook, Twitter and Weebly, and 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 a quite active COL blog, where COL's President and senior staff post their thoughts about COL's work and the world of ODL. 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. A COL/UNESCO joint initiative aimed at increasing use of open educational resources (OER) has concluded with agreement that as the use of OER expands, quality control must be maintained and developing countries must be creators of knowledge, not just users.
60. "Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity" was launched by COL in partnership with UNESCO's Higher Education Division in early 2010. The objective is to promote the wider use of OER by expanding understanding of OER by educational decision makers and quality assurance experts. The initiative, which focussed on universities in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, was implemented as part of the COL/UNESCO Joint Work Plan

Agreement, with financing from both organisations and the Government of the United States. Four capacity building workshops were held in India, Mali, Namibia and South Africa involving more than 140 people representing governments, higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies; three online discussion forums facilitated information sharing among more than 340 participants; and a forum at UNESCO headquarters all contributed to collaboration. An OER Dossier that presents evidence that the use and adaptation of existing OER raises the quality of teaching and/or reduces costs has been produced and “Guidelines” are being established. An academic publication will also result. <http://oerworkshop.weebly.com>.

61. 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 has become its own entity under the umbrella of the Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand and is being supported by COL, Canada’s Athabasca University and BC Campus, SUNY Empire State College, Michigan State University and other global educational institutions. WikiEducator has grown to a large global online community of educators, teachers, lecturers or trainers (72%) to a total of over 19,000 registered users, in 110 countries, who 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 licenses, which permits the use, reuse, adaptation, copying of free education materials, with attribution. WikiEducator is one of the top one hundred most active global websites with 10.5 million hits per month. It has also 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. There are other active chapters in Bangladesh, Ghana, Samoa Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia. www.WikiEducator.org
62. 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.
63. 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) took place from 24 – 28 November 2010, in Kochi, Kerala, India, in partnership with India's Indira Gandhi National Open University. Six hundred educators and officials from nearly all of the Commonwealth countries and others, including many subsidised delegates, explored how open and distance learning can help achieve international development goals and education for all. www.col.org/pcf
www.col.org/edea

Gender equality:

64. Gender equality is one of COL's cross-cutting corporate goals. The advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment are central to its *Learning for Development* agenda.
65. At the organisational level, the aim is to strengthen COL's internal capacity to ensure that it is a model organisation which mainstreams gender in all its processes and at all levels. Within COL's programme, implementing a mainstreaming strategy includes the identification of gender-specific activities and initiatives, as appropriate, whenever girls/women or boys/men are in a particularly disadvantageous position. Gender-specific interventions can target:
 - girls/women exclusively;
 - girls/women and boys/men together; or
 - only boys/men.
66. ODL can be especially helpful for women and girls to access educational opportunities while also fulfilling other responsibilities – and COL uses it to help promote gender equality practices by its partners. COL also has a growing number of initiatives aimed at fostering the full participation of women and girls (more fully in politics, school completion or technology, for instance) to address unequal gender relations that prevent equitable development. Initiatives have also been implemented for men and boys (where appropriate) in areas such as formal education.
67. COL maintains a Gender Policy and regularly updates its Gender Action Plan. www.col.org/Gender
68. COL's Gender Microsite provides links to resources and research on gender and ODL: www.col.org/GenderMS.

Conclusion

69. 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 more than 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:

Web: www.col.org

Three-Year Plan, 2009-2012, and logic model: www.col.org/3yp

Mid-term stakeholders survey, November 2010: www.col.org/3yp

Board of Governors: www.col.org/board

Staff: www.col.org/staff

President's Quarterly Reports to the Board: www.col.org/GovInfo

Board minutes and Financial Statements: www.col.org/GovInfo

Reporting documents: www.col.org/reporting

Speeches: www.col.org/speeches

COL/UNESCO workplan agreement: www.col.org/col-unesco

COL/Commonwealth Secretariat collaboration agreement: www.col.org/col-comsec

 Connections/EdTech News: www.col.org/connections

 COL blog: www.col.org/blog

 COL videos: www.col.org/videos

 COL facebook page: www.facebook.com/COL4D

Handout:

COL's Three-Year Plan, 2009 – 2012

April 2011