Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors

May 2012

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.
Country Reports, 2009-2012

7. COL in the Commonwealth, a compendium of individual Country Reports, is published at the end of each triennium and presented to Education Ministers when they meet every three years. Preliminary versions of this year’s reports were provided to Ministers and Senior Officials at CHOGM 2011 (Perth, October 2011) and are also being distributed to country representatives at this year’s annual meeting of the Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors.

Three-Year Plan, 2012–2015

8. COL will present its new Three-Year Plan for 2012 – 2015 to Commonwealth Education Ministers when they meet in Mauritius in August.

9. 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. Learning for Development remains the overarching theme that best captures both the focus and the scope of COL’s work.

10. 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 considers this to be the optimal means of realising its vision – namely, that of seeing the achievement of human development goals through universal access to learning. This commitment is manifest in the plan’s emphasis on programme continuity overall.

11. 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 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.

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

13. Although continuity in programme direction and activities are 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:

a. skills development in both of the two programme sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health;

b. the education and training of girls and women, and

c. the promotion 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.

14. 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).

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. For instance, after a decade of commitment to open schooling, COL is now the world’s leading source of practical expertise on this approach and on ODL. 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.

18. 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 become more prosperous. Other stakeholders, having observed this success, are now replicating the model in a number of countries.
19. 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.

20. The programme initiatives are:

**EDUCATION**

**Open Schooling:** 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. [www.col.org/OpenSchooling](http://www.col.org/OpenSchooling)

**Teacher Education:** 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. [www.col.org/TeacherEducation](http://www.col.org/TeacherEducation)

**Higher Education:** 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 levels of quality. Where appropriate, COL will link to major initiatives in technology-mediated learning at both graduate and undergraduate levels in Member States. [www.col.org/HigherEducation](http://www.col.org/HigherEducation)

**Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth:** 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. [www.col.org/VUSSC](http://www.col.org/VUSSC)

**LIVELIHOODS & HEALTH**

**Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD):** 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. [www.col.org/SkillsDevelopment](http://www.col.org/SkillsDevelopment)
Learning for Farming: COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (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. www.col.org/L3Farmers

Healthy Communities: Health is a major challenge in the developing Commonwealth. 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. www.col.org/HealthyCommunities

21. eLearning and gender are the two most significant common themes underpinning all seven initiatives:

eLearning: 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 open educational resources (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 (“Fostering Governmental Support for OER Internationally”). www.col.org/eLearning

Gender: 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 it 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. COL also maintains a Gender Policy and regularly updates its Gender Action Plan – and a Gender Microsite provides links to resources and research on gender and ODL. www.col.org/Gender  www.col.org/GenderMS

22. Each sector pursues its aims through five core strategies: partnerships, capacity, materials models and policies. These strategies focus on co-creating value with COL’s extensive network of partners and stimulating new developments.
23. 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). COL is now working with partners to identify similar partially funded regional centres in the Pacific and the Caribbean regions.

24. 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.

25. 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](http://www.col.org/advisors) [www.col.org/chairs](http://www.col.org/chairs)

26. 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.

27. 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**

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

29. 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 have been 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.

30. At last year’s CHOGM (Perth, October 2011) Australia’s then Foreign Minister, the Honourable Kevin Rudd, announced that Australia would be re-joining the
Commonwealth of Learning (COL) as a financial partner. Australia had withdrawn its support for COL in 2004 during a streamlining of its foreign aid expenditures.

31. Thirty-five countries have contributed to-date during this fiscal year (ending 30 June 2012). Last fiscal year, COL received financial contributions from a total of 44 countries.

Examples of COL’s work

32. 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.

33. 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

34. 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 asked COL’s partners to develop a proposal for district-level L3F. www.col.org/L3Farmers

35. 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. As the preferred partner for the Government of India’s Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for its community radio outreach activities since 2007, CEMCA established a Community Radio Facilitation Centre (CCFC) last year. Funded by the Ford Foundation, CCFC acts as a “one-stop shop” for information and resources about navigating the community radio licensing process and establishing a successful community radio station. [www.cemca.org](http://www.cemca.org)

Africa

36. 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 community media content creation, programme development and scriptwriting with local partners, and often with UNESCO, throughout the Commonwealth including most recently, in Africa, for media, education, health and development workers in Cameroon, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Tanzania.

37. 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.

38. 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). The initiative has provided training and produced several studies, action plans, and resources including a *Quality Assurance Toolkit for Open Schools*, have been published to help administrators and policy makers. COL has been assisting with planning for new open schools in Cameroon and Ghana and is conducting an institutional assessment for the Zambia College of Distance Education. Launched this year, open schools in Africa have access to quality learning materials through COL’s *OER for Open Schools initiative*. The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) has shared their knowledge and skills with open schools in other African countries and, as a result, open schools in Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia have developed strategies for integrating digital content.
39. 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. [www.col.org/resources/crsMaterials/osoer](http://www.col.org/resources/crsMaterials/osoer)

40. 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.

41. 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**

42. 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.

43. 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.

44. Technical/vocational education and training (TVET) teacher training has long been identified as a priority area for the Caribbean. COL is working with the Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies at University of Technology, Jamaica to build the capacity of their staff to expand their region-wide, online teacher training programme. In St. Vincent & the Grenadines, the TVET Division of the Community College (SVGCC) has set ambitious strategic objectives to bring their courses online.
45. The Commonwealth Secretariat, Microsoft and the World Bank are collaborating with COL in its activities related to teachers’ ICT policy development and implementation in the Caribbean.

46. Nine Caribbean countries participated in an ICT in Education survey for the Caribbean. The final survey report will consist of eight country reports and a final summary report with regional trends. The Bahamas developed an additional module called *ICT: Potential and Possibilities* for the Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration.

**Pacific**

47. 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 and 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.

48. 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.

49. COL is working to improve access to quality higher education in the Pacific by working closely with the University of the South Pacific (USP), the primary provider of off-campus tertiary education in the region. USP offers COL’s Graduate Diploma in Legislative Drafting, which builds capacity in planning and writing laws and policies.

50. 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**

51. 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. 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

52. 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 (OER), 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.

53. VUSSC course materials have been developed at a series of pan-Commonwealth workshops facilitated by COL. Over the past seven years, the Governments of The Bahamas, Lesotho, Maldives, Malaysia, Mauritius, Samoa (2), Seychelles (2), 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 and training others after returning home.

54. 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.

Pan-Commonwealth

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

56. The collaborative Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programmes have attracted a cumulative enrolment of over 15,000 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 produced by faculty members representing partner universities in Jamaica, Malaysia, Nigeria and Sri Lanka. www.col.org/CEMBA

57. 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

58. 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/CELIO

59. 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

60. 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 www.col.org/kf

61. 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
62. 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

63. OER repositories and directory services that COL offers to partners and the public are being enhanced to take advantage of the latest technologies and tagging methods.

64. “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

65. COL and UNESCO, with funding support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, have embarked on a major initiative to encourage more governments to adopt policies that encourage open educational resources (OER). “Fostering Governmental Support for OER Internationally” seeks to increase understanding by governments of the significance of OER and gather support for the principle that the products of publicly funded work should carry open licenses. This new initiative builds on the awareness-raising work in the previous partnership with UNESCO, “Taking OER beyond the OER Community”. Regional consultations will culminate in the presentation, and hopefully adoption, of a Paris Declaration at UNESCO’s World OER Congress in June 2012.

66. 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 20,000 registered users, in over 100 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 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 over 10 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. The WikiEducator community is also the force behind the Open Education Resources University (OERu) initiative. 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

67. 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.

68. COL’s Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning is generally 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. COL’s Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF7) will be held in Abuja, Nigeria in November 2013, co-hosted by the Federal Ministry of Education. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is the lead partner institution. www.col.org/pcf  www.col.org/dea
Leadership

69. At its June 2011 meeting, COL’s Board of Governors unanimously re-appointed the Honourable Burchell Whiteman, O.J. for a second three-year term as Board Chair.

70. The Board has appointed Professor Asha Kanwar, one of the world’s leading advocates for learning for development, and current Vice President of the COL, to succeed Sir John Daniel, whose term as COL’s President ends on 31 May.

Conclusion

71. 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
Mid-term stakeholders survey, November 2010: www.col.org/3yp
COL and the Millennium Development Goals: www.col.org/MDGs
Regional summaries: www.col.org/regional
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 and presentations: 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 Country Reports, 2009 – 2012 (preliminary version)

April 2012