DRAFT
STRATEGIC PLAN
2015-2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COL’s Strategic Plan 2015-2021 provides the direction and overall framework that will guide its work over the next six years. The theme of this Plan is “Learning for Sustainable Development” which marks a subtle but significant shift from COL’s earlier theme of “learning for development.” It takes into account current global concerns regarding the sustainability of present models of development.

Learning for Sustainable Development

This theme has two key dimensions: “learning” and “sustainable development.” It is important to realise that learning is more than formal education. It can take place in non-formal and informal contexts and can continue throughout life. Sustainable development has three key facets:

1. Equity and social inclusion so that all sections of society have access to quality learning opportunities and can take responsibility for their own development.
2. Economic empowerment when people not only have the knowledge and skills but also the opportunities for gainful employment and entrepreneurship.
3. Environmental protection so that social and economic development takes place in a manner that does not deplete or destroy natural resources.

COL’s mandate is to help governments, institutions and organisations expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate open, distance and technology enabled learning. COL will continue to deploy distance learning methodologies and technology based approaches to promote not just formal education but lifelong learning that leads to development which is scalable and sustainable.

During the 2015-2021 timeframe, COL will work in two sectors, education and skills. Education will focus on open schools, higher education, teacher education and the virtual university for small states of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). Education is an area of comparative advantage for COL and addresses the needs of governments as they seek to provide quality secondary and tertiary education to their citizens. The Skills sector includes community health, lifelong learning for farmers, technical and vocational skills development and ICT-enabled learning. Skills development is a major priority for Commonwealth Member States as they seek to provide livelihoods opportunities for their young people. Gender remains a cross-cutting initiative that underpins everything that COL does.

Each initiative has clear short-term outcomes that will contribute to achieving COL’s outcomes and impact. This results-based approach will enable COL to track its impact at both the mid-term and the end of the plan and to deliver value for money.
Why Six Years?

Commonwealth of Learning will promote open, distance and technology enabled learning to improve knowledge and skills leading to livelihoods and sustainable development. These improvements cannot be achieved in the short term and require a longer time-frame than the three-year plans that COL has developed and implemented in the past. This also means that COL is moving from outputs to outcomes and to achieving impact over a six-year term. This decision has been supported by consultations with the Board and the reports of the impact evaluation (2006-2015) (Appendix 1) and the outcomes-based evaluation (2012-2015) (Appendix 2).

Consultative Process

COL conducted extensive consultations over the last two years in preparation of the Strategic Plan. Meetings were organised in all four regions of the Commonwealth to consult with Focal Points in addition to two Board retreats. A range of partners were consulted in the wings of other COL events and a web-based survey was held, to involve members of the public in the consultative process.

Most stakeholders agreed that COL should ensure continuity from the previous Three-Year Plan together with

- an increased focus on improving organisational capacity to leverage ODL and technology
- ensuring this focus leads to equitable access to quality learning opportunities, and
- more opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

Focal points appreciated the shift to a longer timeframe, noting that the achievement of the long-term and intermediate outcomes would address their country’s needs and help build strong lifelong learning systems that address both formal and non-formal learning. The extension of COL’s work in non-formal education will focus on skills and building communities of practice that enable peer learning, support learners and organisations to take greater responsibility for their own learning. This is fundamental to both the sustainability of COL’s programme and to achieving sustainable development.

Implementing the Strategy

The continued use of the Results-based Management approach to planning and the resulting Theory of Change and Logic Model identifies the intermediate and long-term outcomes that will contribute to the achievement of the Goal/Impact. Performance targets have been identified to measure results at both the mid-term and the end of the Strategic Plan.

COL will continue with its strong focus on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and build on the recommendations made by the impact and outcomes-based evaluations. All initiatives will develop robust M&E plans during the six-year period and COL will conduct two
evaluations at the mid-term of the Plan and in the fifth year to assess results and determine a strategy going forward.

**Managing for Results**

To accomplish the goals of this strategic plan, COL will make the best use of its resources with value for money as the underlying principle. Planning and delivering on the Strategic Plan requires assured future funding through voluntary contributions from member governments and from additional contributions by way of grants and fee-for-service work.

COL’s most valuable asset is its staff. COL must be able to attract, retain and develop the people with the expertise and talent required to execute the strategic plan within a culture of excellence and thought-leadership through sound human resource management practices.

Robust processes and structures to direct and manage the operations and activities including appropriate technology and knowledge management systems will continue to be monitored and updated as needed. COL will have in place a robust communications strategy that addresses the unique needs and expectations of our different stakeholder groups.

COL recognises the requirement of an effective system of governance, at the head of which must be an effective board of governors. COL is most fortunate to have a distinguished board.
FOREWORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

COL’s Strategic Plan 2015-2021 comes at a very important juncture in history. 2015 is the target date when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will come to a close. A new set of post-2015 development goals will be put in place by the international community. The current Plan takes into account the unfinished agenda of the MDGs and the priorities of Member States of the Commonwealth and the new concerns identified in the successor framework.

The world has changed in several ways: there are one billion more people today than there were in 2000, when the MDGs were adopted. This has resulted in mass migrations of people from rural to urban areas and from one country to another. The youth bulge has been steadily increasing in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa and 50% of the population of the Commonwealth is under the age of 30. Unemployment among the youth is a growing challenge. Inequalities have widened. Climate change has become a more dire issue than was the case in 2000 and national economies are much more fragile after the global economic crisis. Another major difference is that the world instead of aiming to “reduce” poverty, now seeks to “eradicate” poverty by 2030. Education and learning will be central in this push towards sustainable development for all.

This Plan has been developed after wide consultations and two major evaluations. One clear message emerged: build on past strengths and continue with current initiatives in education and skills development to achieve longer-term impact. While you will note continuity, a subtle but significant change is evident.

1. COL has made a transition from “learning for development” to “learning for sustainable development.” The dramatic changes in climate affect many of our Member States, particularly small island states, much more today than was previously the case. COL will refocus its interventions in education and learning to integrate the concerns relating to economic growth, social development and environmental protection.

2. By moving to a six-year cycle instead of three-years, COL is confirming its commitment to delivering outcomes and impact rather than outputs alone. Development outcomes take time and a three-year window is insufficient to measure long-term results.

3. Within the framework of the theme of learning for sustainable development, COL will focus its efforts on building models. COL will develop innovative models using a range of approaches and technologies so that these are replicable and scalable. This holistic and integrated approach will contribute to learning that leads to enhanced livelihoods and greater social and environmental awareness and action.

What Will COL Do in the Next Six Years?

1. As the only intergovernmental organisation with the mandate to promote open and distance learning, COL will use its world-class expertise to promote the use of ODL and technology-based approaches to promote the achievement of development goals. ODL has primarily been used to expand access to formal education. However, more
development partners need to be aware of how the use of ODL can support learning in the non-formal and informal sectors as well. COL will do this through evidence-based advocacy.

2. COL and its partners will develop innovative models of sustainable development and help Member States to replicate, scale-up and institutionalise these models.

3. COL will remain at the forefront of technology developments to advise Member States on how these can be adapted to local contexts. For example, some of the new open universities emerging in Africa are using older delivery models such as print, audio, and video while other institutions in the Commonwealth are testing the frontiers of the MOOC model. As an intergovernmental organisation, COL will maintain a balance between the varying needs and contexts of its diverse stakeholders.

Learning can empower citizens to take greater responsibility for their own well-being and that of their societies and the environment. Through this Plan, COL will join global and national efforts to transform the idea of “sustainable development” into a concrete and actionable reality.
1. LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: OUR COMMON FUTURE

1.1 Evolution of COL

It is a very different world from when COL was first established. When Commonwealth Heads of Government met in Vancouver in 1987, they decided to create an organisation that would use distance learning and technologies to promote education and training in Member States and to strengthen Commonwealth cooperation. Today we can say that COL has fulfilled that vision and become a well-respected organisation that helps governments and institutions to expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning that leads to development. Over these years, COL has remained small, yet its influence and reputation today have grown far in excess of its small size. What are the reasons for this?

First, COL has always tried to remain relevant to the needs of its stakeholders. COL started out with the mandate to strengthen higher education using open and distance learning. With the adoption of the MDGs and EFA goals in 2000, COL understood the need to align its work to the global development agenda. In the last twenty-seven years, we can see a clear progression from higher education, teacher training and secondary education in the formal education sector to non-formal learning relating to skills development, agriculture and health. In short, COL paid attention to the learning and development needs of its stakeholders and embraced a lifelong learning perspective. There are still 23.3 million children out of primary school and 462 million adult illiterates in the Commonwealth. The scale of the challenge and the diversity of the needs require the deployment of innovative and targeted approaches. At the 18th CCEM, Ministers of Education “commended COL on its growing impact especially in relation to its needs-based work in each Member State” and for “developing innovations in technology to enhance access to education” (18CCEM Communiqué).

Second, COL has grown and developed from an outputs orientation to an outcomes-based organisation. The theme of COL’s previous two strategic plans was “learning for development”, which focused on how education and learning adds value to the development process. This approach encouraged COL to think beyond outputs such as training teachers to outcomes – or how this training would lead to better performance in the classroom and the impact this would have on learning outcomes.

Third, COL captures and disseminates the results of what it does. COL has been reporting regularly to various stakeholders to assure them that COL is not only efficient and effective but also delivers value for money. A report of what is done in each country is provided to the Commonwealth Education Ministers at their triennial meetings.

However, COL cannot rest on past laurels but must prepare itself for current and future developments to maintain its niche and relevance. UNESCO’s post-2015 education agenda calls for “equitable and quality lifelong learning for all by 2030.” Here we note three important elements: a call for equity and inclusion; an emphasis on quality and a shift from Universal Primary Education to Lifelong Learning. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group set up by Commonwealth Education Ministers, proposed access, quality and equity as the three
overarching goals for education beyond 2015, which are very similar to what UNESCO has identified.

COL is already active in promoting access, quality and social inclusion through the use of open, distance and technology based approaches and will continue to work towards these goals.

1.2 Learning for Sustainable Development

The theme of this plan is “Learning for Sustainable Development.” It is important to realise that learning is more than formal education. It can take place in non-formal and informal settings and can continue throughout life. Technologies have made it possible to make learning ubiquitous. If the post-2015 development goals are to be achieved, learning must lead to sustainable development. The Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It is not enough to achieve development but to promote development that does not destroy the environment or deplete our resources. The Cotonou Agenda of the Least Developed Nations, 2014 emphasises the need for education, learning and capacity building to achieve peace, prosperity and sustainable development. COL recognises the role of education and learning as a step towards achieving sustainable development.

1.3 Improving Impact

As COL embark on its new Plan, it will continue to build on its comparative advantages as a world leader in open and distance learning and OER; its expertise in learning technology and its Commonwealth-wide network of partners. It will align its work to national priorities and balance extensive coverage with in-depth interventions. This will mean greater focus on fewer key activities for the long-term so that outcomes and impact are achieved. Providing access to learning alone will not be enough. COL will continue to focus on quality learning that results in positive outcomes.

Learning must lead to livelihoods and economic opportunities, the ability to live together in harmony with other members of society as global citizens and to protect the environment. This is the principle that underpins the current Plan that seeks to secure our common future.
2. THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This six-year plan sets the strategic direction and provides the overall framework for guiding COL’s work from 2015-2021.

2.1 Constructing the Strategy

The strategy is based on wide and intensive consultations with Country Focal Points, regional stakeholders, Board members, partners and interim recommendations from both the impact evaluation (2006-2015) (Appendix 1) and outcomes-based evaluation (2012-2015) (Appendix 2). In addition, COL has noted the discussions leading to the global “post-2015 development goals” that will be adopted by the international community in 2015. The Strategic Plan is located within the Commonwealth values of peace, equality, democracy and good governance and its own mission and mandate.

2.2 Focal Points and Stakeholder Meetings

In 2014, COL convened four regional Focal Points meetings in the Caribbean, Africa & the Mediterranean, Asia and the Pacific and held consultations with various partners and stakeholders to ensure a balance between governmental, non-governmental, private and civil society perspectives.

The first two Focal Points meetings (Caribbean and Africa & the Mediterranean) identified the education and training needs within the Member States and these became the basis to frame a draft set of the areas that COL should focus on. Focal Points were further asked to review COL’s vision, mission, core strategies and strategic goals as well as what initiatives should be implemented in the new plan. The data were used to inform the construction of the draft Logic Model which was then discussed in the final two Focal Points meetings held in Asia and the Pacific.

The Focal Points meetings in the Caribbean and Africa & the Mediterranean regions agreed that COL needs to keep the current focus on education and livelihoods & health. There was a clear articulation of the need to enable Commonwealth citizens to have access to high quality education and training using technology and distance learning methods. In particular, the need for increased skills that can support livelihoods was noted. Other areas included curriculum reform, engaging with civil society and other organisations to support non-formal learning, working in partnership with the private sector, ensuring there was a strong focus on gender to address girls’ and boys’ learning needs and helping governments to build lifelong learning policies and systems. Focal points and stakeholders encouraged COL to maintain its strong participatory approaches to its planning and implementation processes. Focal points recommended that ODL and technology-based approaches need to be institutionalised within national education and training systems.

There was unanimity across the regions that COL’s longer-term intervention could address the education and training needs of Member States. This validation, together with the agreement to keep two sectors (education and skills) and gender as the only cross-cutting...
theme, was important to finalise the strategy and develop a sound implementation framework for the programme.

2.3 Stakeholder Survey

The Stakeholder survey was released in May 2014 via the COL website. The survey asked stakeholders and partners to respond to five key questions related to the emerging post-2015 development goals, priority groups for COL to focus on, the importance of COL’s current strategic goals, the development priorities and current initiatives.

The results noted that quality education and lifelong learning should be the key focus of COL. Empowering girls and women to achieve gender equality also ranked very high in the survey. The need for effective institutions to support education and skills leading to sustainable livelihoods was identified as a priority.

The respondents were clear that COL needs to focus on the youth (with emphasis on girls and women) to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities. The strategic goals were seen as highly relevant to the work of COL and needed to be maintained, together with the three existing priorities: skills, OER, women and girls. In addition policies and governance matters were also identified as important. The survey finally noted that the current initiatives were still important and reiterated the need for a stronger focus on skills. The results of the stakeholder survey have put a strong focus on sustainable livelihoods, quality learning and better organisational capacity.

2.4 Analysis of Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals

The international community has identified 17 goals that focus on sustainable development. The goals include poverty eradication, gender equality (especially empowering women and girls), education, health, food security, jobs and livelihoods, and good governance, in addition to ensuring peaceful societies and creating a global enabling environment for long-term economic development.

All the goals, aim to achieve five key transformations: leave no one behind; transform economies; implement sustainable development; build effective institutions; and forge new partnerships. These illustrate a more ambitious approach to sustainable development and are designed to tackle new and emerging global challenges that have arisen since the MDGs were first created in 2000. Such challenges include urbanisation, the global financial crisis and climate change.

Within this context, COL will address the goal of poverty eradication by strengthening sustainable livelihoods; gender mainstreaming by increasing equitable access to learning; provision of quality education and training by developing effective policies and systems; community health, food security, and the management of the environment by developing replicable models.
COL has also taken into account the report of the Commonwealth Inter-Ministerial Working Group on education after 2015, which has identified access, equity and quality as the three fundamental goals of education.

UNESCO’s framework for learning in the 21st century aims to “ensure equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030.” Underpinning the approach is the principle of sustainable and inclusive development and the belief that education is a fundamental human right that “contributes to economic growth, improved health, women’s empowerment, gender equality and strengthened social cohesion as well as [mitigating] inequality and the reduction of poverty.”

COL believes in expanding access to quality education and training so that learners have the values, knowledge and skills to achieve sustainable development.

### 2.5 Impact and Outcomes-based Evaluations

During 2012-2015, COL undertook two evaluations. The first focused on the impact that COL has had over the past nine years (Appendix 1). This evaluation reviewed previous evaluations, other reports and undertook field visits in all regions of the Commonwealth. The evaluators conducted 480 interviews, several workshops and focus groups and an Internet-based challenge dialogue. The results indicated that COL had indeed made an impact on individuals, institutions and society.

The report found that despite its limited funds, COL was able to leverage appropriate partnerships and networks to deliver on projects and achieve outcomes. This has generated local ownership of the outcomes, and developed local capability so that the work would continue beyond COL’s support. Issues of policy and capacity building were considered important to achieving the outcomes. The impact evaluation identified COL’s ability to connect “learning” to “development” as an important conceptual shift that had shaped the type of impact COL was seeking to make. This shift focused on the effectiveness of education in support of broader global development goals, a path the evaluators recommended COL continue to follow in the 2015-2021 Plan.

The ability to be more strategic was identified as important for COL and to align more strongly with national goals and challenges to provide increased support to Member States. Such support needed to take a more integrated approach to working in a country or region, increasing the range of partners to include other development organisations, foundations and the private sector and working within a clear strategy with commitments from governments and institutions.

Building such partnerships into effective communities of practice was identified as an important strategy to support COL’s work and to ensure that it continues even after the organisation leaves. This would require nurturing local champions passionately committed to COL’s work, and highly respected in their sector/country/region with the ability to connect COL’s work to national developments. COL’s ability to move to scale can be achieved
through strong ownership and local commitment, appropriate investments and sensitivity to local contexts.

The outcomes-based evaluation (Appendix 2) reviewed the implementation of COL’s programmes during the 2012-2015 Plan and determined the extent to which COL had achieved the outcomes expected for each initiative. The analysis of the data, interviews and meetings indicate that COL had achieved the outcomes noted in the current Three-Year Plan.

The evaluators identified partnerships as central to COL’s work and that many successful projects had been implemented through appropriate partners. The ability to identify partners that share COL’s vision and values was considered important and would require further careful planning. The use of effective consultants was also identified as an important contributor to COL’s success. This global network was committed to COL and its work.

The COL brand and its comparative advantage are well-recognised within the Commonwealth and globally. Key to this branding and advantage is to raise the profile of COL among a wider group of ICT/ODL professionals and organisations involved in development work. This would require a robust communications and stakeholder strategy, thought leadership and responding to the needs of stakeholders. While COL’s use of the logic model and RBM has been critical to its planning and implementation, the Evaluators noted the need to have a common understanding and use of various terms, methods and approaches.

2.6 Board Retreats

During the planning process, COL conducted two Board retreats which focused on the global development goals and the programmes that COL should be implementing. The Board members believed that COL should remain true to its mandate and build on its niche in ODL/OER/technology in relation to learning and development. This would require COL to be a responsive organisation that is able to identify models, work with various stakeholders to “scale-up” such models and reach the unreachable with quality learning opportunities. In implementing these, COL should focus on strategic partnerships at the international level and at the grassroots.

The emergence of lifelong learning as an important trend was noted and COL was encouraged to ensure that the new plan supports this. In particular, the need to include skills, non-formal education, support for early childhood development and adult literacy was noted. COL must maintain its focus on key areas of its comparative advantage. These trends would require COL to ensure it maintains its leadership position in the application of open, distance and technology-enabled learning to lifelong learning and development. This would require COL to expand the current models to include new areas of focus and build evidence and thought leadership in these areas.

2.7 Outline of the Six-Year Strategy

The above processes provide the framework for COL’s six-year strategy. COL’s programme will be guided by the following strategic goals and priorities
Strategic Goals:

- Human resource development in the Commonwealth
- Harnessing ODL/OER and technology to promote learning for sustainable development

Priorities:

- Open Education Resources (OER)
- Women’s and Girls’ education

COL will continue to have two sectors, viz. education and skills. Within each sector, there will be four initiatives with Gender being a cross-cutting theme. Gender will work with partners, support all eight initiatives as well as support COL’s organisational processes and practices.

The Education sector supports countries, institutions and organisations to develop formal education. It includes:

- Open Schooling
- Higher Education
- Virtual Universities for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)
- Teacher Education

The Skills sector will support institutions and organisations to develop skills in both the formal and non-formal sectors. It includes:

- Healthy Communities
- Technical and Vocational Skills Development
- Lifelong Learning for Farmers
- Technology-enabled Learning

The identification of two sectors, education and skills enables COL to clearly articulate its work and how it plans to achieve the identified Outcomes. The implementation of the strategy to achieve the outcomes (both at the Programme level and COL corporate level) will require collaboration between Initiatives and Sectors.
3. THE RBM FRAMEWORK

3.1 COL’s Use of Results-based Management (RBM)

As in the previous plans, COL applies a narrative theory of change to capture the key development challenges that its programme seeks to address. It then represents this narrative in the form of a Logic Model which summarises its interventions and the outcomes that it expects to achieve, as well as the Goal to which COL’s work is directed.

An implication of shifting to a six-year plan is that COL’s Logic Model includes long-term as well as intermediate outcomes. Long-term outcomes are those where COL expects to see significant positive change after six years; whereas the time frame for intermediate outcomes is typically two to four years.

The Logic Model is complemented by a results framework containing key assumptions as well as indicators and means of verification relating to the outcomes. These indicators will provide the main lenses of accountability as well as important benchmarks for a mid-term review and summative evaluation of the strategy. The key assumptions for the long term outcomes are: (1) Member States’ continued recognition and support of COL, (2) countries recognise that ODL and technology can have an impact and support ODL policy and implementation, (3) political, economic and institutional stability, and (4) countries integrate ODL models in their overall development processes to strengthen sustainable livelihoods. These assumptions, outside of COL’s immediate control, are important to achieving stated outcomes.

COL’s Initiative areas (Open Schooling, Higher Education, Virtual University of the Small States of the Commonwealth – VUSSC, Teacher Education, Technical and Vocational Skills Development, Lifelong Learning for Farmers, Technology-enabled Learning, Healthy Communities) along with Gender as a cross-cutting theme each have their own logic frameworks which contribute to achieving the strategic intermediate and long-term outcomes. Their interventions are expressed as outputs to facilitate measurement, and where appropriate, the pathway to the relevant intermediate outcomes contains short-term outcomes depending on the scale and time-frame of the particular intervention. Initiative outputs and short-term outcomes will be reviewed and may be redefined each year, unlike the higher level outcomes which are not expected to change before the mid-term review, if at all.

3.2 Theory of Change

What is the problem that COL is trying to address?

Human resources play an important role in economic growth and social development. Formal education, non-formal learning, in-service training and lifelong learning contribute to strengthening human capital development. Globalisation, the emergence of new economies and the ICT revolution are demanding new skills as well as the refinement of traditional skills and knowledge. Studies show that lack of quality education (formal and non-formal) in many developing countries affect their growth as well as their sustainable development since they
do not have the adequate resources for optimal investments in education and learning processes. Hence a large proportion of the population, particularly marginalised communities and women and youth, lack access to primary, secondary and tertiary education as well as non-formal learning.

Countries are trying to address these problems through open, distance and blended learning using various types of information and communication technologies in secondary and tertiary education through schools and universities. In the agriculture and health sectors, both of which are key to sustainable development, non-formal learning has started integrating the use of ICT and communication for development approaches.

In using ODL and technology-enabled learning, there is evidence that these approaches can influence the development process as reflected in the experience of COL and its partners. While there are still questions regarding the quality of human capital emerging through ODL, it is increasingly being recognised as an important part of a country’s education system, supporting economic growth and social development. ODL and technology are increasingly being seen as viable methods to reach the large numbers of people who are marginalised, particularly women and youth. However, still much work is required to enable models and processes to be developed, contextualised, and implemented to become part of the lifelong learning system of a country. The private and social returns of ODL-based education and learning as well as their ability to contribute to issues of sustainable development (such as social equity, economic viability and environmental sustainability) are increasingly being recognised, but still require further understanding, advocacy and institutionalisation.

**How to Solve the Problem?**

Open, distance and technology-enabled learning can be deployed more effectively by linkages with the labour market, economic and societal/community needs. Hence ODL institutions in formal education and non-formal learning need to move from an “institution centric” focus to a multi-stakeholder participatory approach; and from a “supply driven” to a “demand driven” system. The involvement of the labour market, civil society, industry, knowledge institutions, financial agencies and communities as well as stakeholders will enable ODL institutions to become more dynamic, innovative, “demand driven”, quality conscious and outcome-oriented in promoting communities of practice and purpose.

Targeting will help to identify the constituencies which are marginalised such as women and youth. ODL institutions need to look beyond conventional pedagogy and identify methods that support learners who are increasingly becoming autonomous for self-directed and self-determined learning, especially with new technologies. This requires increased development of learner capacity and capabilities so that all learners are prepared for sustainable livelihoods and lifelong learning. This will enable different constituencies of learners to get involved in participatory learning processes. ODL, flexible and blended learning need to move beyond formal ODL institutions and integrate into human resource development activities such as agriculture and health extension, in-service teacher training and continuous capacity building support to civil society and community based organisations.
**How can COL address these issues?**

COL as an intergovernmental organisation has been promoting open and distance learning in many Commonwealth countries. It has strong linkages with governments particularly with ministries of education and human resource development. It is actively associated with various formal and non-formal educational institutions such as universities, TVET institutions, secondary schools and research institutions. Its partnership with international agencies such as UNESCO and its association with industry, ICT organisations and civil society have created the network for COL to chart its path towards learning for sustainable development.

Since 2006, COL has been working in the two sectors of formal and non-formal learning: education and livelihoods & health. It has evolved innovative models and enabled proactive policies in higher education, teacher education and open schooling to enhance access and improve the quality of education thereby increasing opportunities for learners, particularly marginalised communities (women and youth) in the labour market and enterprise development. COL has had a special focus on the small states of the Commonwealth with reference to issues such as paucity of ICT infrastructure and lack of human capacity and institutionalised a collaborative virtual university. It brought a blended and flexible learning approach to technical and vocational education to enhance skills in the formal and informal sectors. The participatory approach of its initiatives showed that when the learners, communities and stakeholders come together, learning leads to development. In agriculture and community health, COL strengthened non-formal and community based learning using various available and affordable ICT. It facilitated its partners and learners to innovate, appropriate and domesticate technologies for communication and learning. Gender as a cross-cutting theme helped to understand the targeting process and its role in social equity.

COL’s models and approaches have proved to be effective (solutions that works) and efficient (low cost with higher benefits). The successful models need to be documented and disseminated while new models, taking an integrated approach, need to be developed. Integrating environmental sustainability, along with social equity, financial feasibility and economic efficiency will help to address the issues of sustainable development. The labour market and the social sector in many developing economies of the Commonwealth are demanding education and skills which are integrated with environmental sustainability, the economy and society. COL believes that convincing policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders of the effectiveness and efficiency of ODL will enable them to accelerate, through policies, strategies and replicable models, their efforts to provide learning for sustainable development.

For this reason, COL will adopt a two sector approach: Education and Skills. The Education sector will work with ministries, formal education and TVET institutions and organisations to strengthen higher education, teacher education, open schooling and the Virtual University for Small States in the Commonwealth (VUSSC). The Skills sector will focus on non-formal learning as well as formal learning in TVET, agriculture, community health and ICT, collaborating with governments, civil society, industry and community based organisations. Both sectors will support education and learning institutions to use ODL methods that
identify learners and needs, build relationships with stakeholders and offer an integrated approach to learning. This will enable learners and communities to effectively and creatively apply skills, competencies and knowledge to address issues of sustainable development.

### 3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is central to RBM. COL has been developing and improving its M&E since it started on the road to RBM in 2003. During this six-year plan, M&E will be carried out at three levels:

1. COL will monitor the implementation of Initiative plans primarily through their results frameworks. The frameworks will have annual targets at the output level and appropriately spaced milestones and targets at the short-term outcome levels. Data collection will focus on indicators, but will also capture informative wider results including those that are unexpected – both positive and negative. COL will also collect and analyse gender-related data at all levels. Implementation and results data will be regularly assessed by programme staff and partners. Additionally, every initiative will commission an external evaluation of one of its key components in both halves of the six-year plan period.

2. COL will undertake a formative strategic evaluation in the third year so that the results provide feedback to the Board and the Commonwealth Education Ministers on how well the organisation is doing and what corrective measures, if any, are required.

3. COL will undertake a summative evaluation in the 5th year so that the results provide strategic direction to the next planning process as well as provide accountability to the Board and the Commonwealth Education Ministers on what has been achieved over the six years.

COL will work with its partners to implement a strong M&E plan. The participation of its implementing partners is critical to its success and usefulness for both COL and them. COL will support partners and also learn from them.

The results of the three levels of monitoring and evaluation will be reported to different stakeholder groups in ways that are meaningful to them. COL will report to countries via the Ministers of Education and their appointed Country Focal Points. Further, COL will report quarterly and annually to the Board of Governors on the progress made with outputs and outcomes. These reports are made available to other stakeholders and the public via the COL website.
4. THE PROGRAMME

4.1 Education

4.1.1 Open Schooling

“If girls are not educated, they are compelled to early marriages. Most of these girls, who enter into early marriages, cannot even take care of themselves, so how can they take care of the hygiene of their children?”

Interview with a religious leader in the Bihar State, India, 2012

Access to quality education remains inequitable, especially in rural areas, with girls particularly disadvantaged. Despite the encouraging progress made to increase access to schooling, the latest edition of the Global Education Digest reveals that an alarmingly high number of children are repeating grades and leaving school before completing primary or lower-secondary education. New data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) show that “about 32.2 million primary pupils were held back a grade in 2010, and 31.2 million dropped out of school and may never return”. The most at risk are girls, under age, rural and poor children (UNESCO, 2012). The challenge is both in dealing with the out-of-school children, in particular girls, and in addressing the issue of retention and the learning outcomes.

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for one-half of all children, worldwide, who are out of school. The same region accounts for 35% of the global population of primary education repeaters (UNESCO, 2012). From this snapshot it is evident that, despite the progress globally, we are still faced with the daunting task of providing access to quality education which can reap the dividends for such an investment.

COL has worked with Ministries of Education and organisations and refined the Open Schooling model which traditionally delivered services through print based curriculum content only. With COL’s support, Open Schooling has evolved from using print based curriculum material to complementing it with television, radio and introducing online offerings using Open Educational Resources (OER).

Given that increasing access to schooling has not translated into real gains for many countries, there is a need to continue to innovate to address issues of access and quality. Open Schooling has proved itself to be an effective vehicle for innovation, and COL will identify new opportunities and support their take-up in, for example the inclusion of technical and vocational education (TVE). Empirical research has shown that gaining TVE skills while in school pays off in the transition to work and it also increases retention and completion (Results for Development Institute, 2012).

Over the next six years COL will work with countries and institutions to:

- Develop quality curriculum content in TVE subjects (aligned to skills needed for the world of work) using OER and various educational technologies.
• Enhance the quality of conventional schooling through the introduction of viable and cost effective models of schooling, including virtual schooling and the integration of quality curriculum content developed by Open Schools.

• Improve learner retention and success rates in open schools.

• Develop policy briefs and evidence-based research that improves ODL policy and organisational capacity in Open Schooling.

4.1.2 Higher Education

“Universities have long played a significant role in their respective societies, educating the next generation of professionals, driving innovations in research, and shaping national debates. As many economies transition from a focus on production to one founded on knowledge, the role of universities is ever more important. But gone are the days when universities have been able to focus solely on their national contexts. Graduates can be expected to work in all corners of the world and the need to be ready for this reality puts pressure on universities to ensure that curricula and teaching facilitate students gaining appropriate skills and knowledge.”

Promoting Regional Education Surfaces Integration: APEC Universities Association Cross Border Education Cooperation Workshop, 2014

A challenge facing developing countries is the low participation rates in higher education (HE). Participation rates in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have an average of less than 10% and 15% respectively compared to 40% to 50% in members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The factors that constrain access include lack of appropriate policies that provide for flexibility and for reaching the unreached. Quality and relevance are affected by inadequate learning resources and inappropriately trained faculty. Open and Distance Learning can provide a cost-effective means of increasing access to quality higher education and many governments are adopting this option.

COL has been working with Commonwealth governments and institutions to develop both national and institutional ODL policy frameworks and systems to increase access to quality higher education. In recent years, COL has promoted the implementation of a low-cost quality assurance tool as a contribution to improving the quality of management and delivery of ODL programmes and services; and has provided technical assistance to institutions in their transition to becoming open universities.

In 2015-2021 there will be new challenges for higher education as technologies continue to grow at a phenomenal pace and new delivery modes emerge such as MOOCs, there is a global trend towards the internationalisation of higher education, and the demands of the labour market. COL will work with Commonwealth governments, public and private (not-for-profit) higher education institutions (HEI), by expanding and scaling up the development and implementation of appropriate ODL policies, systems and learner support models to more Commonwealth countries and will build capacity for HEIs to harness appropriate technologies and develop learning resources. COL will further foster the linkage of HEIs, the labour market and students in transforming the curriculum by integrating skills for employability and entrepreneurship.
In 2015-2021 COL’s Higher Education initiative will:

- Support the development and application of guidelines, toolkits and strategies for integrating sustainable livelihood skills in programmes and courses.
- Support more governments and HEIs to develop and implement national and institutional ODL and quality assurance policy frameworks and systems.
- Facilitate institutional networking and collaboration in the development, adoption and use of ODL models, MOOCs, OER.
- Support the professional development of ODL practitioners including leadership training.
- Support the COL-Chairs to develop evidenced-based research and policy briefs in ODL for sustainable development.

4.1.3 Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

“VUSSC provides the exposure and the process whereby practitioners get the opportunity to develop educational materials and enhance their digital skills. VUSSC also helps to build collaboration between tertiary institutions within the Commonwealth, which will allow tertiary institutions in the region to increase access to courses and programmes without necessarily increasing the size of “brick and mortar” institutions. At the same time, VUSSC can enable institutions to provide relevant programmes and thereby enhance the quality of human resource development within the various economic sectors.”

Antigua & Barbuda, VUSSC M&E Update Report, July 2014

The provision of tertiary education in the small states of the Commonwealth remains a challenge partly due to limited institutional capacity, small economies and small populations. However, when small states work together, size is less of a constraint and opportunities are enhanced. The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) provides a robust network for collaboration and encourages the sharing of expertise across the small states. It supports learning for sustainable development through capacity building to address issues of the environment, economy and society thus helping to increase the resilience of small states.

For example, small states have recently worked together to create materials to address the double threats of climate change and natural disasters. Eighty-six institutions are now active in the VUSSC model across a continuum of involvement from: participating in workshops and creating materials, to engaging in organisational planning and using VUSSC materials in courses, programmes and degrees, to enrolling and graduating learners, and more recently to creating systems for independently sustaining VUSSC activities. Through VUSSC, small states are becoming equal partners in the generation of knowledge and contributors to education in the global arena. VUSSC has made significant progress by building the capacity of educational institutions, supporting the creation of an accreditation mechanism (Transnational Qualifications Framework - TQF) and facilitating the offering of programmes.
During 2015-2021, COL will continue to put emphasis on supporting the development and adaptation of OER and the delivery of needs-based courses. Given the challenges the small states continue to face, COL will:

- Support institutional collaboration to increase access to learning opportunities using OER, technology and appropriate ODL methodologies.
- Leverage education to address climate change and environmental issues in the pursuit of resilience.
- Partner with organisations and institutions to identify industry-responsive education and training opportunities for young people.
- Support less involved institutions, using the VUSSC collaborative model, to move them across the VUSSC continuum to become more active in VUSSC thus ensuring its sustainability.
- Work with local and regional authorities to implement the TQF and promote a credit transfer system to increase learner mobility within a country and across regions.

4.1.4 Teacher Education

“The school is located in the rural Meru so this has been a challenge to teachers because learners transfer mother tongue to written assignments. Initially the learners would not speak in class because the moment their colleagues laughed at their poor English, they shied away and gave up trying again. This has changed with the introduction of the ORELT modules in the classroom. The modules are very effective, the learners are motivated. Some of the activities given are playful and fun, and this makes them attempt to speak in class.”

Kenyan teacher from a poorly performing Constituency Development Fund–funded school on the Open Resources for English Language Teaching (ORELT), Kenya, 2014

Teachers are critical to any education system and if the post-2015 development goals are to be achieved, then a lot will need to be done to address the many teacher education challenges still facing education systems, particularly in the developing world. If education is to play its role as a primary agent of transformation for sustainable development, countries need teachers that will help prepare learners to be involved in this transformation. However, there is still an enormous deficit of teachers across Commonwealth countries. For example, by 2020 Sub Saharan Africa alone will need 1,295,000 new teacher positions if Universal Primary Education (UPE) is to be achieved; and an additional 1,893,000 if Universal Lower Secondary Education (ULSE) is to be achieved (UNESCO – UIS 2013). Furthermore there is also a huge unmet need for teachers and trainers for the vocationalisation of secondary education. Apart from teacher numbers, the other major challenge is posed by the poor quality of teachers and teacher educators. The good progress towards UPE in many countries has often been at the expense of quality at this level.

Addressing these challenges starts with teacher education. Improvements are needed in Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), in the institutions’ capacity to train more teachers, in the capacity of teacher educators, and in the programmes and materials they deploy. Ensuring
well qualified teachers and trainers in vocational subjects at secondary schools will lead to increased value and interest in vocational education and will contribute to national development and improved livelihoods for the school leavers. To achieve these improvements, teacher education needs innovation across the spectrum of teacher preparation, teacher deployment and teacher support.

In 2015-2021 the COL Teacher Education programme will continue to focus on school based in-service models to increase the number of teachers trained and enhance the quality and development of teachers and teacher educators; with an additional focus on teacher educator development and the training of teachers for vocational subjects in secondary schools. The programme will support TEIs and Ministries of Education to:

- Revise/develop relevant and pedagogically sound programmes, including continuous professional development courses for teachers and teacher educators; and integrate ICTs and OER in the programmes.
- Improve institutional capacity to effectively use ODL methodologies and strategies to train more teachers and for the training of teachers of vocational subjects in secondary schools.
- Improve institutional capacity to effectively use ICTs to expand and diversify access to teacher education programmes; and to enhance the quality of these programmes.
- Collaboratively develop OER materials, and scale up the adoption/adaptation of available OER.

4.2 Skills

4.2.1 Healthy Communities

“Everything is connected in building healthy communities: Access to clean water and sanitation. Empowered women. Year round food security. Secured livelihoods. Protection of the natural environment. Strengthened community capacity to promote and sustain health.”

Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief

Good health is a basic precondition for learning and sustaining a livelihood. Communities across the developing Commonwealth, women and youth in particular, face a range of critical, preventable health problems yet have limited or no opportunities to learn about or take action on issues that affect them. Low levels of health literacy negatively affect the quality of life and individual and collective abilities to realise sustainable livelihoods.

Existing community health and development education strategies are often inadequate, particularly in resource-poor communities. There is a serious shortage of skilled community health workers and other learning/development intermediaries, an acute lack of coordination among key stakeholders, at local and national levels, and a dearth of innovation.

The healthy communities concept reflects a holistic approach that considers the social, economic, environmental, and physical factors that influence the health of individuals and
communities. It is based on strategies that build on a community’s existing capacities to improve health and wellbeing, including active community participation, particularly in decision-making, multi-sectoral collaboration and the use of appropriate information and communication technologies and models to achieve quality learning at scale and low cost.

COL’s Healthy Communities initiative enables communities to address local health priorities, including maternal and child health, communicable and non-communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, as well as youth and family health issues, such as gender-based violence, parenting and mental health. The intersections of these issues with climate change, food security and nutrition mean that promoting healthy communities is bound up with nearly all aspects of education, social and economic development and sustainable livelihoods.

COL’s efforts to date have resulted in increased capacity of local health/development intermediaries to build and deliver non-formal learning programmes on issues ranging from safe motherhood and malaria to anger management for male youth, teenage pregnancy, suicide, etc. In locations in which outcomes have been evaluated, there is evidence that COL’s community learning programme (CLP) model/approach has led to positive health- and development-seeking behaviour.

New directions for the Healthy Communities initiative are focused on health literacy, and skills development for health and development intermediaries. Building on tested participatory models and outcome-based research, COL will focus on non-formal learning in health and development sectors, including feedback and briefs for policymakers.

In 2015-2021, COL will engage strategic and implementing partners at all levels to

- Conceptualise, manage and implement activities which lead to capacity development in community health, using appropriate technologies.
- Refine and diversify community learning models through research, analysis and stakeholder dialogue.
- Strengthen health/development outcomes of community learning programmes and skills training through building communities of practice, capacity development, quality assurance and improved monitoring and evaluation.
- Advocate policy development, models and materials using participatory approaches and appropriate technologies for learning for sustainable development across sectors, with a focus on public agencies responsible for health, women, youth and rural development as well as civil society and private sector stakeholders.
- Working with a wide range of partners, support adaptation, scaling and take-up of tested community health models.
4.2.2 Technical and Vocational Skills Development

“Since education is considered the key to effective development strategies, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) must be the master key that can alleviate poverty, promote peace, conserve the environment, improve the quality of life for all and help achieve sustainable development. “

Bonn Declaration on Learning for Work, Citizenship and Sustainability. UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2004

The core problems that the TVSD programme seeks to address are poor quality in and low access to TVSD, especially for women. Increased access to basic education resulting from the global focus on Universal Primary Education has resulted in a surge in demand for post-secondary education and in the number of young people looking for education, training or work. This has put great pressure on TVET providers to expand their enrolment.

Nearly 75 million youth are unemployed around the world, and millions more are under-employed. Employment in the informal sector, once considered to be a temporary feature of national economies which would dissipate with development, is now a permanent feature of the employment landscape in the Commonwealth. Informal sector employment comprises over 70% of non-agricultural employment in developing countries. More women than men work in the informal sector.

TVET systems and institutions are multiply challenged to respond to these problems. Formal TVET systems rarely provide skills training to support the informal sector although this may be where most women and young people earn a living. TVET systems are still under-esteemed and under-resourced (ADEA 2014). There are not enough training institutions and facilities, especially for practical work. Current TVET curricula often do not benefit from input from industry and the community and require upgrading to be competency-based. Teachers require upgrading in new technologies and teaching approaches for competency-based education and training for sustainable development.

COL has been working with TVET partners in all Commonwealth regions to strengthen capacity in the use of Flexible and Blended (FaB) approaches to skills training for both formal and non-formal programmes. More than 40 TVET organisations in 22 countries have started using new flexible approaches. The FaB model of skills development which encompasses new organisational structures, flexible learning policy, the systematic use of technology to improve quality and new course design for formal and non-formal training has been developed and will be further strengthened.

In 2015-2021, the programme will have a stronger focus on national TVET policy advisers to scale up the model in target countries and concentrate on gender mainstreaming in skills training organisations and systems. Efforts will be made to engage the industry and community to meet the needs of sustainable livelihoods. Disadvantaged communities, youth and women will be targeted. Capacity in partner organisations will be strengthened to create new courses which enable learners to gain or strengthen skills for sustainable livelihoods – a key component of sustainable development.
In this six-year plan, COL will:

- Train policy makers, managers, teaching and administrative staff in the FaB TVSD model.
- Work with national TVET policy makers to scale up the use of the FaB TVSD model.
- Assist in national and institutional policy development and strategic planning.
- Support the development of new formal and non-formal curricula and learning resources in support of livelihoods in the formal and informal economy.
- Promote gender mainstreaming for TVET providers and systems.

**4.2.3 Lifelong Learning for Farmers**

“We found that the household food security of HIV AIDS-affected women in female headed households improved after they joined L3F programme.”

Dr. Rosemary Atieno, University of Nairobi

Inadequate human resource development among millions of farm families in many Commonwealth countries has been one of the major causes of livelihoods insecurity. The didactic mode of agricultural extension has limitations in addressing this problem. In addition, capacity building is less effective, if it is not linked to social capital and financial capital. The linkage will enable the farming community to build their capacity in the context of the agricultural value chain and strengthen their livelihoods.

The Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) initiative has developed models linking the capacity building of farming communities, particularly women, through ODL and flexible and blended learning with social and financial capital. The evidence during 2012-2015 showed that the L3F approach could provide capacity building for large numbers of farmers at a lower cost than conventional models of extension and was able to enhance the livelihoods security of marginalised farming households, particularly women in countries in Africa and South Asia. Studies found that every $1 invested yielded $9 worth of social returns to the farming communities. Financial institutions realised that they earned eight times more income from L3F participants and the cost of capacity building using ODL was a sixth compared to that of conventional face-to-face training. These results have attracted the attention of major government and international agencies, private sector and financial institutions as a viable strategy leading to development as well as to business opportunities. The efficiency and effectiveness of the L3F approach - with due regard to the unique set of circumstances and conditions in each location - have been established and the stage is set for expansion.

Until now the “development” in L3F was perceived from social, economic and financial angles. However, there is the need to integrate environmental sustainability as well. The focus will be on sustainable agriculture, “Good Agricultural Practices”, organic farming, etc. to ensure environmental sustainability as well as better economic and social returns to farmers.
During 2015-2021, the focus will be to scale up L3F at the provincial, national and international levels by convincing partners and stakeholders about the viability and advantages of the L3F approach. They will be encouraged to reach large numbers of farming communities, particularly marginalised communities, women and youth, and providing them with opportunities for strengthening their livelihoods in a sustainable manner. This period will signify the transition from the local level model to a self-sustaining model at the next level.

During this six-year period COL will:

- Work with governments, commercial and industrial firms, financial institutions, civil society and international and national development institutions in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean to replicate and scale-up the L3F approach at provincial, national and international levels.
- Continue to promote sustainable development with emphases on livelihoods security, social and gender equity, and environmental sustainability.
- Establish micro level models in small countries of the Pacific region to address issues related to sustainable natural resource management in agriculture, forestry and fisheries within the context of climate change and the rise of sea-levels.

4.2.4 Technology-enabled Learning

“Evidence of the impact on learning and teaching indicates that, where the use of ICT is most effective in enhancing the learning experience, teachers have been able to integrate a number of technologies such as laptops, interactive whiteboards and the internet. Such combinations of hardware, software and connectivity allow them to develop innovative approaches to learning and teaching.”

- Rae Condie and Bob Munro, with Liz Seagraves and Summer Kenesson, in *The impact of ICT in schools – a landscape review*, Becta, 2007

Despite the phenomenal growth of access to mobile technologies, there is inequitable distribution of access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) for learning, including in the Commonwealth developing countries. While many governments are making special efforts to increase bandwidth as well as provision for distributing computing devices, there is a need for more coherence in policy. At the same time continuing and new efforts must be made to develop the capacities of teachers and learners to make effective use of appropriate technologies for learning.

The Technology-enabled Learning programme aims to focus on increasing access to quality teaching and learning by supporting policy formulation and innovation in developing skills for the application of ICT in education. In COL’s experience, for technology to have a transformative effect in teaching and learning, it is necessary to focus on Policy-Technology-Capacity as a triangle and to base practice on research evidence. The Technology-enabled Learning programme considers the appropriate use of any form of technology for teaching and learning: OER, online learning, mobile devices, MOOCs as well as low-cost technologies such as audio and video, radio and TV.
In 2015-2021, the programme will:

- Develop ICT in education and OER policies and policy briefs in Commonwealth countries.
- Strengthen research on Technology-enabled learning for better development decision-making.
- Support the training of policy-makers in Technology-enabled learning.
- Help institutions to use Technology-enabled learning and online learning resources for programme delivery.
- Promote the use of open technologies, and development OER for skills development.
- Develop new models for learning using emerging technologies.

4.3 Cross-cutting Theme

4.3.1 Gender

“*We recognise that gender equality and women’s empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights. The advancement of women’s rights and the education of girls are critical preconditions for effective and sustainable development.*”

– Charter of the Commonwealth (Commonwealth Heads of Government, 2013, p. 6)

Gender disparities, or gaps, between the ability of women/girls and men/boys to shape, participate in and benefit from quality learning opportunities contributing to sustainable livelihoods are a key challenge. In the Commonwealth, there is significant inequality between women and men, in four critical areas: economic participation (e.g. job opportunities); educational attainment; political empowerment; and health and survival. Women and girls generally have less control and access to resources and a limited voice in decision-making which limits their human potential. Two-thirds of the poor in the Commonwealth are women and girls.

Gender inequality is not all about women/girls, as gender disparities may sometimes favour women and girls over men and boys, although this is generally the exception. In some Commonwealth Member States in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, boys’ academic underperformance and high dropout rates are a matter of concern.

Gender equality will continue to be a cross-cutting corporate goal for COL in 2015-2021. In COL’s experience, gender mainstreaming can be an important and effective strategy for addressing gender inequality. Gender mainstreaming ensures that both women’s and men’s views, interests and needs shape policies, plans and programmes.

COL is well-positioned to help its partners mainstream gender perspectives in open and distance learning. ODL institutions have made great efforts to address issues of access related to gender parity, where an equal proportion of women/girls and men/boys access learning opportunities. But, gender equality in learning requires that both women/girls and men/boys
experience the same level of quality and equitable outcomes, emphasising a greater need to focus on ODL practice, delivery and outcomes.

To address this, COL has been working to enhance its institutional capacity and that of its partner organisations to integrate gender equality considerations in ODL programmes, policies and planning.

In 2015-2021, COL will:

- Continue to integrate a gender equality perspective in its own programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Provide technical assistance to partners for the development and implementation of strategies to address inequities in access and outcomes. In doing so, COL will provide support in gender analysis and monitoring and evaluation.
- Provide technical assistance and support in the design and development of gender-responsive curricula and teaching/learning materials.
- Generate research and policy briefs to inform strategic directions in gender mainstreaming in ODL.
- Develop a gender mainstreaming model for further replication.

4.4 Regional Support

4.4.1 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

“Armed with training inputs from CEMCA, MDTV developed a series of 70 learning programmes on various health issues that were identified collectively by the team that included safe drinking water; healthy and balanced diets, special diets for pregnant women, cleanliness and general hygiene, common infections and diseases, tuberculosis among others.”

Chetna Sinha and Shivaji Yadav, EduComm Asia, April 2013

CEMCA was established in 1994 to promote the meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of media to serve the education and training needs of Commonwealth member states of Asia. Over the years, in step with rapidly changing advances in educational technology, CEMCA widened its scope to embrace emerging educational technologies, while broadening the scope of education itself to cover formal, non-formal and lifelong education at all levels.

CEMCA fully aligns itself with the COL programmes. With a small staff of seven people, CEMCA retains its regional focus and devises appropriate learning solutions while maintaining a balance between the aspirations of its stakeholders and available resources. Promoting appropriate and low-cost technology options underpin all of CEMCA’s interventions.
During this Strategic Plan, CEMCA will:

- Support the development of policies and capacity to promote the development, adoption and use of OER.
- Support ICT integration in teacher education programmes.
- Support the development of OER-based courses for skills development.
- Design and create systems and models to foster learning for sustainable development.
- Support and empower marginalised communities (including women) through the use of community media.
- Undertake research on emerging technologies, including the use of mobile devices.
- Collaborate to develop Communities of Practice for the sustainability of projects and initiatives.

4.4.2 Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL)

In partnership with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), COL promotes open and distance learning capacity building by supporting RETRIDOL, a regional institute for West Africa. The RETRIDOL mandate includes:

- Engaging in and supporting ODL research activities.
- Addressing the capacity-building needs of different groups in ODL.
- Serving as a centre of expertise in ODL for Nigeria and West Africa.

Over the next six years RETRIDOL will continue to execute and strengthen this mandate through specific interventions, based on consultations with partners.

4.4.3 Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE)

SADC-CDE is supported by the Botswana Ministry of Education and hosted by the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL). It was established to address the following mandate:

- Undertake and promote training and development in ODL.
- Engage in and support research activities in ODL to provide quality distance education in Southern Africa.
- Increase the provision of quality distance education in Southern Africa.
- Build and maintain a resource base on ODL with up-to-date information regarding programmes/courses/related materials, research documents, local experts/consultants in specific areas.

Over the next six years the SADC-CDE will continue to execute and strengthen this mandate through specific interventions based on consultations with partners.
4.4.4 Pacific Centre for Open & Flexible Learning for Development (PACFOLD)

PACFOLD is hosted by the University of the South Pacific at their Centre for Vocational & Continuing Education. The Vision of PACFOLD is of “a centre which empowers Pacific communities through lifelong learning to live free and worthwhile lives”. PACFOLD aims to enact this vision by being a capacity building “network of networks” which facilitates flexible and open learning for sustainable development in the Pacific through advocacy, capacity building, communication, innovation and research. The priorities for PACFOLD during this six-year plan are:

- Advocacy for flexible and open learning for development.
- Building capacity for flexible and open learning for development.
- Regional and national policies on open, distance & flexible learning.
- Research in flexible and open learning for development.

4.4.5 Regional Centre in the Caribbean

COL’s regional activities in the Caribbean are rooted in non-formal elements of learning for sustainable development, including community and lifelong learning. Addressing regional issues including climate change, boys’ underperformance and social development, the emphasis is on building healthy communities and strengthening sustainable livelihoods.

A key focus is dialogue and analysis about learning for sustainable development that engages a range of education, development and social change partners, from formal schooling and educational institutions to non-formal learning in community contexts and through media. This will lead to appropriate strategies designed to address regional issues using open, distance and technology-enabled learning.

The priorities for this Centre will be:

- Model building and capacity development in ODL particularly for the lifelong learning for farmers (L3F) and community learning programmes (CLP).
- Developing skills for community health.
- Strengthening TVET through flexible and blended approaches.
- Developing ODL materials and capacity.

4.5 Fee-for-Service

4.5.1 eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO)

eLIO is the fee-for-service arm of COL dedicated to providing accessible, equitable and applicable professional development services to the global staff of international organisations. eLIO’s niche is the customisation of course materials, providing strong learner support, and managing systematic course delivery logistics. In this age of readily available, off-the-shelf learning, COL’s approach sets it apart from others. The highly contextualised,
learner-centric courses provide for seamless knowledge transfer to the workplace. The one-on-one e-tutoring support empowers learners to overcome the traditional obstacles of distance learning and achieve completion rates, on an average, of 80%.

In the coming six years, eLIO will build upon its current strengths and venture into new directions to ensure long-term success by undertaking the following:

- eLIO will continue to be responsive and bid on UN and other international agencies’ projects, but it will also actively tap into the COL and eLIO distance education network to identify and partner with other humanitarian or development focused agencies to meet their human capital development needs.
- Tutor-mediated learning is a key contributor to high completion rates. eLIO has established and maintained a cadre of qualified and trained tutors supporting subject matters ranging from effective communication to programme management, operational data management and debt management. eLIO will expand its pool of distance tutors to meet the growing needs of international organisations for highly skilled and experienced experts to provide personalised coaching and mentoring for professional development.
- Technology is changing at a rapid pace. ICTs are breaking down the barriers of time and place. Learners want to learn what they want, when they want and where they want. eLIO will expand its course delivery media to harness the possibilities that new and emerging technologies provide: mobile courses, “learning on the go”, just-in-time mini-units, self-study and technology assessed learning.
- In the long term, eLIO will add value to the short courses by seeking credit value through COL’s Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) so that they can either be taken as “stand alone” or as part of a negotiated programme of studies leading to certificates, diplomas and degrees.

4.6 Core Strategies

To achieve the outcomes and impact of its programme, COL will employ five core strategies, namely partnerships, capacity, materials, models and policies. These strategies have worked well in previous plans, of which they are a continuation.

4.6.1 Partnerships

Partnership refers to the relationship between organisations, institutions and individuals that agree to cooperate to advance their commonly identified interests and goals. Such partnerships are based on clearly defined roles and responsibilities. COL leverages its modest resources through partnerships which are fundamental to everything that COL does.

COL has two main types of partnerships. Strategic partnerships enable COL to broaden its reach and to engage at a global, regional or national level. These would include multilateral organisations (e.g. UNESCO, COMSEC), regional bodies (e.g. CARICOM, ECOWAS), national governments and the private sector. Implementation partnerships support COL’s work on the ground and includes government agencies, civil society organisations, public and private (not-for-profit) institutions, corporations and community organisations.
In the next six years, COL will strengthen existing partnerships and networks and build new partnerships by promoting:

- both south-south and north-south collaboration.
- communities of practice and purpose.
- public and private partnerships, international and regional cooperation for accelerating progress towards achieving sustainable development.

4.6.2 Capacity

Capacity development refers to the activities and processes which help organisations, groups and individuals to achieve their objectives more effectively. While capacity is generally associated with training, it also includes networking, building communities of practice, developing systems that enable and empower people and organisations. Capacity development pervades all COL activities and focuses primarily on human resource development.

During this period, COL will continue to:

- build the ODL capacity of its partners to develop gender-responsive learning resources, implement courses and programmes, and manage policies and systems.
- develop capacity in the use of appropriate technologies.
- promote the transition from capacity building to capability development which is both sustainable and leads to sustainable development.

4.6.3 Materials

COL supports the development of learning and teaching materials that includes course materials, toolkits, guidelines for quality assurance, policy-making and institutional development. Such materials are produced by COL and/or its partners and designed to support curriculum development, policy and strategy implementation and are available as OER.

During this period, COL will focus on:

- publishing all its materials as OER.
- promoting the development and use of OER by others.
- building capacity in developing gender-responsive open materials.

4.6.4 Models

COL understands a model as a coherent set of structures and processes that is seen to work in more than one context to achieve specific results. COL has been developing models that range from broad approaches like the Virtual University of the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) and Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) to more specific ways to
develop online courses and quality assure higher education institutions, such as through COL Review and Improvement (COL-RIM).

During this Plan, COL will:

- develop and test models for each initiative that are replicable and scalable.
- use a range of approaches and technologies to develop innovative models to promote learning for sustainable development.

4.6.5 Policies

A policy is a high level statement of intent that guides decisions to achieve outcomes. COL supports the development of policy for countries, organisations and institutions that focus on ODL, OER, and technology-enabled learning.

During this period, COL will support:

- policy advocacy for ODL, OER, ICT in education and sustainable development.
- regional and national policy development and implementation strategies.
- capacity and capability development to enable governments, institutions and organisations to review policies and develop new ones.
5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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

COL reports its work in each country every three years as Country Reports, which are presented to Commonwealth Education Ministers at their triennial meetings. As well, COL employs a variety of media in communicating with its stakeholders. In addition to its own Pan-Commonwealth Forum, COL also supports conferences and professional development opportunities for a range of stakeholders.

5.1 Focal Points

Each Minister of Education in the Commonwealth is invited to nominate a senior official as the COL Focal Point. The role of the Focal Point is to interact with COL, co-ordinate with other ministries (e.g., agriculture, health), disseminate COL-related information to interested stakeholders, and keep the Ministers and other senior officials briefed about COL’s work.

This network extends to all Commonwealth countries and has become an important feature of COL’s planning and reporting processes. Triennial regional meetings of Focal Points enable COL to get first-hand information of country priorities that contribute to the development of COL’s next strategic plan. The Focal Points have given COL valuable visibility and a strong presence in the field. COL will continue to strengthen the network of Focal Points during the current six year plan. See list of Focal Points in Appendix 6.

5.2 Honorary COL Chairs

The network of COL Chairs seeks to establish COL’s academic presence in the field by encouraging research activities in open and distance learning (ODL), open education resources (OER) and information and communication technology (ICT) enhanced education. Chairs are honorary positions, supported by COL for specific activities and in support of future ODL researchers. COL will strengthen this network with a more focused research agenda.

5.3 COL Advisors

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

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

At the end of each triennium, COL prepares Country Reports which consolidate and present the work that COL has done in each individual country based on its needs and outcomes. These country reports are collected in a compendium entitled COL in the Commonwealth, which is then submitted to all Ministers of Education and stakeholders. This practice will continue during the current plan.

5.5 Communications

COL as an inter-governmental organisation serves 53 Member States and is funded by voluntary rather than mandatory/assessed contributions. COL must not only deliver on results but must also be seen to be doing so. An effective communications strategy is an important element to ensure that stakeholders know what COL does and how to benefit from its expertise and resources. COL’s reputation and brand as a world leader in open distance and technology-based approaches and OER lays the foundation for the success and uptake of its work.

A robust communications strategy must address the information needs of its diverse and dispersed stakeholders. COL must be able to communicate effectively with the Ministers of Education, development partners, institutions, civil society organisations and grassroots communities. It must also use appropriate channels of communication such as print, radio, audio, video, web-based and social media outlets.

In the past, COL has focused mainly on two key ODL constituents: policy makers and practitioners. The newsletter Connections and the website have been the key channels for addressing both the expert and the general audience. Professional publications, speeches at international forums and the organisation of a triennial Pan Commonwealth Forum (PCF) have maintained COL’s thought-leadership in ODL and OER and enhanced its public profile. The annual and quarterly reports to the Board serve to reassure the stakeholders that COL continues to be a vibrant and performing organisation. All reports are available on the COL website for transparency, information-sharing and accountability.

As an organisation with a mission to promote Learning for Sustainable Development, COL’s communications objectives are to:

- Sustain and advance relationships with Member States and development partners.
- Position COL as a thought-leader and innovator in ODL, OER and ICT-enhanced education.

COL has one core message: learning is fundamental to achieving sustainable development. This message will be disseminated in suitable ways for multiple audiences.
Maintaining a flexible and adaptive approach, COL will:

- Develop a Communications Action Plan that will be monitored regularly.
- Maintain a balance between contemporary and older technologies as channels for communication.
- Maintain a dynamic and interactive web presence.
- Publish important research documents and reports in e-Pub format for Open Access.
- Portray COL as an effective partner and an employer of choice.
- Promote the Commonwealth and its values.

5.6 Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning and COL Awards

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

Forums are generally held every three years and each is co-hosted with a partner in a different region of the Commonwealth. The programme is designed to address the role of ODL, OER and technology in widening educational access, bridging the digital divide and advancing the social and economic development of communities and nations. COL’s PCFs combine multiple types of events, including academic presentations, networking and capacity development sessions. Along with regional interests and priorities, COL’s development agenda is featured in the PCF programme.

Thanks to an active sponsorship programme and low registration fees, most participants come from developing countries.

COL presents its Excellence in Distance Education Awards and confers Honorary Fellowships to recognise outstanding contributions around the Commonwealth. The Eighth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF8) will take place in 2016, co-hosted by the Open University of Malaysia.

5.7 Attachments and Conference Support

COL contributes to professional development and training in ODL and OER knowledge and skills by providing individuals with opportunities to work in COL’s areas of competence.

COL also supports conferences where the aims and objectives are consonant with COL’s mission and values. COL will continue with this practice during the next six years.

All these interventions will strengthen COL’s stakeholder relations and strategic partnerships.
6. MANAGING FOR IMPACT

This section outlines the plan for the deployment of financial, human and technology resources to achieve the objectives of this Plan. The risks identified will be managed on an ongoing basis. The implementation of the Plan will be carried out within the context of COL’s Memorandum of Understanding and its mission and mandate.

6.1 Resource Management

Comprehensive, results-based operational plans derived from the strategic plan will guide the allocation of resources. The alignment of these operational plans with the strategic plan and attainable levels of resources will provide for coherent planning, balanced budgeting and reporting. COL will foster responsible financial management to achieve value for money, the underlying principle for the use of resources.

COL is committed to ongoing monitoring, transparent processes, leveraging of resources and cost-sharing with partners. COL will make use of local/national/regional expertise and technologies, wherever possible, to build capacities to address Commonwealth and country priorities. COL will ensure that gender equality, and girls’/women’s empowerment through culturally-sensitive approaches is a priority that underpins all its work.

6.2 Risk Management

An organisation dependent upon voluntary contributions from Member States operates in high-risk environment. For COL, risk is understood to cover both the possibility of a negative or adverse outcome and the magnitude or severity of the consequences of that outcome. COL identifies three categories of risk: Strategic, Operational and Financial. These risks are scored according to their impact, probability of occurring and COL’s own ability to mitigate and manage them.

This risk management system will enable COL to mitigate risks to the extent possible through advanced awareness and action. The key risks, mitigation strategies and impact/probability assessments are as follows:

1. Strategic

Strategic risks can arise from sources external to the organisation or they can be caused by internal decisions which could lead to serious disruptions of the work. The most likely strategic risks that COL can face and some of the corresponding mitigation strategies are:

Risks:
Unfavourable change in value placed on the Commonwealth as a whole.
Inability to manage country and donor expectations.
Failure to retain reputation.
Mitigation strategies:
- Deliver results to Member States and stakeholders to demonstrate the value of the Commonwealth.
- Maintain strategic communications with Ministers of Education, Focal Points and institutional leaders.
- Monitor reputation through stakeholder surveys, consultations and dialogues.

*Impact:* High
*Probability:* Low to Moderate

2. Operational
Operational risks lead to losses from inadequate or failed internal processes, people and systems or from external events and can arise from internal or external factors. Operational risks faced by COL and some corresponding mitigation strategies are described below.

*Risks:*
Inadequate funding.
Inability to recruit and retain talent, especially at the senior level.
Technology as an emerging issue.

Mitigation strategies:
- Sustained engagement with Commonwealth countries and stakeholders.
- Succession management in place combined with advance identification of possible talent for unplanned departures.
- Identify affordable and appropriate technologies to close the digital divide.

*Impact:* Moderate to High
*Probability:* Low to Moderate

3. Financial
Financial risk is a term that covers multiple types of risk associated with financial transactions, financing and compliance requirements. It can also cover losses associated with failures of processes and people. Possible financial risks that COL could face and related mitigation strategies are:

*Risks:*
Financial mismanagement.
Inadequate cash flow.
Mitigation strategies:
- Careful planning, effective budgetary controls and close monitoring.
- Maintain established reserves within approved limits.
- Seek additional contributions from non-traditional sources.

Impact: High
Probability: Low

6.3 Human Resource Management

COL aims to create a culture of excellence and thought-leadership by tapping into the pool of talent available in the Commonwealth. COL remains committed to non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all its recruitment policies. It endorses professional merit as the primary guiding principle combined with gender equity, and maintains an appropriate balance of regional and national backgrounds from around the Commonwealth for internationally recruited positions.

COL’s staff, its major strength, must continue to be world-class development professionals. Staff must contribute to innovation and research and must have a passionate commitment to making a difference in the field. Each and every staff member has a role to play in achieving the results outlined in this plan through shared responsibility and accountability for the delivery of the plan and a commitment to the success of COL.

To enhance delivery and effectiveness, human resources have to be aligned with the needs of the organisation so that the skills mix and staff capacity meet operational requirements. COL will continue to operate with a small core staff of about 45, including its staff at CEMCA in New Delhi, India. Human resources will be supplemented by short-term positions and consultancies as needed. COL will also continue to implement a rotation policy depending on the nature of the job and the services required. Together, these give COL the capability to respond to emerging needs, to scale up and down the staff complement when circumstances warrant and to have the right expertise, when needed.

COL has adhered to a culture of performance-based pay and remains committed to recognising staff performance through annual pay increments combined with responding to any inflationary pressures, subject to availability of resources and approval by the Board.

During this plan COL will continue to:
- Strengthen human resource practices, tools and capacities.
- Recruit and retain a competent and representative workforce with the appropriate skills.
- Focus on succession planning, professional development and knowledge transfer.

Delivering on COL’s Strategic Plan requires stable levels of voluntary funding from Member States of the Commonwealth. COL has maintained stable levels of funding and the numbers of countries contributing funds on an annual basis over the past six years is depicted in the figure below.

Figure 1: Levels of Member Government Contributions, Total Revenue and Number of Countries Contributing

COL expects the number of countries to remain relatively constant over the plan period where voluntary contributions from Member States have accounted for an average of 80% of COL’s funding over the past six years. The number of countries contributing annually over the same period peaked at 46 countries in 2013/14. This has been made possible by maintaining close links with each Member State and ensuring that COL’s programme responds to stakeholder needs within the framework of its own mission and mandate. A list of contributing countries is provided at Appendix 3.

Additional contributions comprising: (1) grants in support of approved programme initiatives, and (2) fee-for-service work are targeted to make up close to 20% of revenues in 2015-2021 (16% to date in 2012-2015). COL’s policy for additional contributions ensures that funds will be received and spent in accordance with the priorities of the plan and that additional contributions will not create a disproportionate demand on infrastructure and support services. An appropriate level of costs will be recovered as overheads from these additional activities to sustain required levels of support for core activities. Grants must cover the additional costs of the extra work involved while fee-for-service activities will aim for full-cost recovery. Additional contributions are essential if COL is to increase the impact of its programme and reach its longstanding $12 million resource target. See Appendix 4.
COL has built its reserve fund to cater to unexpected events and is committed to prudent budget management.

Resource Requirements for 2015-21 (estimated):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Total 2009-2015 (Final TBD)</th>
<th>Total 2015-2021*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>$51.2</td>
<td>$65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional/miscellaneous</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$61.9</strong></td>
<td><strong>$78.7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COL will

- Continue to liaise and follow up with all Member States for contributions.
- Aim to grow the number of major donors and multi-year funding agreements.
- Pursue additional contributions from non-traditional donors.
- Seek in-kind support from countries where direct funding is not possible.

### 6.5 Knowledge Management and Technology

COL is a knowledge organisation and its assets include people, knowledge, information and data. COL has followed a knowledge management framework that emphasises the importance of both people (tacit knowledge, wisdom and networks) as well as processes (involving capture, preservation, and dissemination). There is a recognition that knowledge flows occur through various pathways in the organisation and that harnessing them for efficiency can contribute to enhancing the overall impact. COL recognises the ongoing global shift in ICT from desktop to more network and mobile-centric computing (Cloud services, wider use of Tablets and smartphones) which will have a significant impact on learning technology in the coming years, especially in the developing countries of the Commonwealth. Costs and ownership of software are in a state of flux. New technologies continue to emerge. COL also recognises the increasing concern of Member States and partners regarding the importance of preserving the integrity of access to corporate data and information.

In addition to providing support to management and professional staff, COL’s KM and Technology team has promoted global discussions on technology innovations such as low-cost Tablets and Aptus. It has also piloted MOOCs for Development.

Knowledge Management and Technology at COL will:

- Continue to contribute to COL’s profile as a thought-leader in learning technology.
- Provide state-of-the-art services to staff and management (data capture and reporting for M&E, contacts management, customised news alerts).
- Create and manage platforms for online events including Learning Management Systems with a high level of reliability.
- Maintain a variety of information services to the public (Open Access repository for COL publications, Directory of OER, weekly news digests).
- Engage in trials of innovations (mobile devices, MOOCs).

6.6 Governance

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing COL as agreed by Commonwealth Governments in 1988 provides for a Board of Governors with general responsibility for determining the principles, policies and priorities that guide COL in its activities.

The Board has provision for up to 17 members consisting of the Chair, up to nine major donor representatives, regional representatives from the four regions of the Commonwealth, as well as the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Secretary-General’s appointee and the President of COL (ex-officio). This provides for regional spread complemented with rotation of representation.

The MOU was amended on June 10, 2014 to make provision for up to nine major donors (previously up to six) thereby enabling more countries to contribute at the level of a major donor category and have representation on the Board of Governors.

In fulfilment of their accountability to Member States, COL reports to meetings of Commonwealth Ministers of Education (CCEM) and Heads of Government (CHOGM) on its activities.

See current Membership (Appendix 5)
APPENDIX 1

Impact Evaluation Interim Report – Executive Summary
Stephen Murgatroyd, PhD and Janet Tully, MSc
Collaborative Media Group
November 2014

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”
Nelson Mandela Launching the Mindset Network, 2003

Context
The environment in which COL is operating is fast changing and challenging. Learning and education are seen as critical to the achievement of national development goals while learning and education are themselves changing in response to emerging technology and enhanced understanding of effectiveness and efficiency. A strong focus on return on investment is leading to new models for the design, development, deployment, delivery and recognition of learning. New competitors for COL’s position in this market for ideas and opportunity are emerging both from other development agencies and from the private sector. COL remains well positioned for now, but needs to respond to the emerging context with boldness and ambition.

Key findings
1. COL has had a major impact on individuals including farmers, senior and junior faculty members, institutional leaders in formal and non-formal learning, selected policy makers and educational administrators, individuals working directly with COL through partnerships and alliances and related institutional members, such as key individuals in UNESCO, Ford Foundation and others.
2. COL has some limited impact on formal post-secondary and school institutions within the Commonwealth – in some cases substantial, in others modest.
3. COL has had significant impact on selected non-formal and informal learning organisations and networks, especially through its work in Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F), Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD), Community Health and community based learning.
4. COL’s impact on public policy is modest at national level, except in relation to small island states. The Transnational Qualifications Framework represents a major opportunity for such states to increase learner mobility and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is also a nascent opportunity to increase access to quality learning in affordable ways for each of these States (but see below at 5).
5. COL needs to respond to the changed context and challenging conditions so as to increase the impact of its work (see below at 4).
**Strengths which COL needs to build on**

The following are areas of strengths in COL’s operation on which it now needs to build to further increase its outcomes and impacts in the next strategic plan:

1. COL’s ability to leverage partnerships to achieve outcomes
2. Certain kinds of policy development
3. Certain kinds of capacity building
4. Using Microfinance through partners to achieve Outcomes
5. Building local ownership, focus and alignment
6. Positioning ODL and OER as development options
7. Ensuring that Gender issues are front and centre
8. Connect learning to development
9. Evaluating outputs and outcomes
10. Position COL as a focused organisation

**Increasing impact**

The following recommendations suggest areas in which COL needs to significantly change or improve so as to increase its impact.

1. *Have More Ambition* – COL needs to be more ambitious and set challenging goals. This is especially needed in the case of formal education programmes and VUSCC.
2. “*Less Really is More*” – So as to have significant impact, COL needs to focus significant efforts to demonstrate the value of COL in 4-6 nations in which it can demonstrate the impact of its work in both formal and non-formal (and informal) education.
3. *Better Alignment with National Goals* – COL needs to articulate how its activities support the development goals of nations.
4. *Partnerships Need to be More Encompassing* – COL needs to expand its partnership horizons to look for strong partnerships whose values are aligned and who can bring additional resources to a specific challenge. In particular, COL should seek stronger links with the private sector, major development agencies and NGO’s working in the Commonwealth.
5. *Capacity Building Needs to be Matched by Strategy Building* – COL needs to do much more to help Commonwealth nations develop strategies for education, health and development which leverage flexible approaches to learning, including ODL and OER.
6. *Effective Communities of Practice* – COL needs to become more systematic and focused on the development of communities of practice where doing so supports the strategic intent of an initiative.
7. *Moving to Scale* – COL needs to dedicate real resources to the development and strategic communication of the models that work and the conditions necessary for them to work.

8. *Becoming More of a Social Impact Organisation than an Educational Development Organisation* – COL is in transition from an educational development organisation to a backbone organisation\(^1\) focused on social impact. COL should accelerate this transition.

9. *Rethinking its Funding Model* – COL needs to seek out a group of major donors who support its mission and strategy, developing strategic funds for each region of the Commonwealth, no strings attached.

10. *Rethinking its Strategic Communications* – A major rethink of COL’s strategic communications and its web presence is urgently needed.

**Conclusion**

This impact assessment should be seen as supportive of the work of COL and its people, but documents changes which need to be made as part of its current planning cycle for COL to have stronger institutional and national impact going forward. For COL to be more successful in being a social impact organisation having an impact on the development goals of nations, it needs to be more ambitious, strategic and focused and operate more collectively and less as an organisation of programme based silos.

*November 30, 2014*

\(^1\) For a description see [http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/understanding_the_value_of_backbone_organisations_in_collective_impact_1](http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/understanding_the_value_of_backbone_organisations_in_collective_impact_1)
The following summary is a distillation of findings, conclusions and recommendations that are discussed in detail in the various sections of the interim report. The study covers the first two years of the COL 2012-2015 Three-year Plan (3YP).

1. All the Initiatives are moving successfully forward, on time and within budget, and it looks certain from the period reviewed (first two years of the 3YP) that the large majority of the agreed Performance Indicators will be achieved by the Plan end date. Indeed many of the Indicators for the full period have already been met; there are some excellent examples of success and from each Initiative. The only concern is that there could have been too much caution when agreeing the original targets.

2. A significant success this 3YP has been engagement with all countries in the developing Commonwealth. However this has given rise to concerns that COL activities are being spread too thinly around many countries, which would imply a need for COL to consider focusing on fewer activities but in greater depth.

3. Each Initiative is being successfully delivered to the agreed Performance Indicators for the 3YP; it is not possible to suggest that some have “run their course.” However there is little evidence of developed exit strategies that would enable COL to “hand over” the Initiative to appropriate stakeholders. Any decision on reducing or reshaping Initiatives must relate to COL’s ambitions over the next six years.

4. A culture of monitoring and evaluation is embedded in COL but obtaining appropriate data from partners is a challenge. This will likely become more acute as greater emphasis is placed on addressing qualitative measures of outcomes and impact. Initial project design should include an M&E plan; if necessary establishing parallel research to gather appropriate information.

5. COL teams have employed RBM to good effect for this 3YP. Given the number and scope of activities across Initiatives, the rigour that RBM requires has ensured a sustained focus that, in turn, has contributed to successful delivery.

6. The Strategic Goals are appropriate and important; they have provided an overarching framework for the individual initiatives and link to the Mission Statement. There is no evidence that dividing the Initiatives into two Strategic Sectors has enhanced delivery; rather Initiatives tend to operate independently, with the staff involved sharing experiences and common concerns mainly on an informal basis.

7. COL’s core strategies of partnerships, capacity, materials, models and policy continue to be appropriate. But they are not all equal in importance; partnerships are a core process and integral to each Initiative, while materials and capacity
building are necessary strategies for achieving outputs, and enabling policies are vital if interventions are to be sustainable. Model building can be critical for scaling up an innovation.

8. The added emphasis that the Cross Cutting Themes, Gender and eLearning, have provided has improved understanding and outcomes. The support for Gender mainstreaming has been given a strong impetus through the employment of an internal professional and this has resulted in greater staff understanding and commitment. However, the application of eLearning is already an inherent feature within each Initiative and therefore questionable as a needed cross cutting theme.

9. There are many good examples that illustrate where COL has successfully catalysed cooperation within and between both countries and regions and across Initiatives; this has encouraged new approaches to delivery and enhanced outcomes.

10. COL has many partners including governments, their institutions and civil society organisations. The most frequent challenge to effective delivery is the availability of partner support resources – staff availability, infrastructure, equipment and funds. It is government organisations, particularly those in the formal education sector, where these problems are most acute. ODL and OER activities are new and often perceived as marginal activities.

11. COL interventions involve an iterative process, with lessons learned being employed to inform subsequent interventions. While many of the activities during this 3YP relate to capacity building and outputs; the challenge for the next plan is to build on these new understandings and deliver longer-term outcomes and impact.

12. There is a need to assess how best to minimise overlaps, exploit synergies and enhance the effectiveness of planning and delivery for the 2015 Plan. This includes clarification of responsibilities between and within current Initiatives and also the role of CEMCA vis-à-vis the Vancouver-based teams. For example, within COL education activities there are overlaps between Teacher Education, Higher Education, VUSSC and Open Schooling (and to a lesser extent TVSD and CEMCA).

13. The relative cost-effectiveness of COL has been commented upon favourably by external consultants, citing the many activities delivered and outcomes achieved for modest investment. Approaches to relate costs to unit outputs have been trialled, for example within Healthy Communities and TVSD, during this 3YP, and COL staff said they would welcome guidance to develop a structured approach to apply more widely.

14. While COL’s brand currently enjoys strong equity in terms of respect and loyalty, the application of ICT and OER in the international delivery of education is fast changing, with many new players and new approaches to delivery, and from both public and private sector. This is particularly apparent in global higher education. COL should review where it might add most value, including leverage from all new opportunities.

15. COL has had success in attracting funding, in addition to that provided by donor countries. The need for alternative revenue sources will likely grow in importance as demand for COL services increases. While COL’s strong track record and
brand equity has positioned the organisation for success, its capacity to attract new funds is limited.

Summary of main recommendations

Initiative-specific recommendations are set out at the end of each section throughout this study. Those listed below have organisation-wide implications.

1. Maintain the application of RBM and the logic model for planning and delivery, but ensure that Performance Indicators are ambitious and with a stronger focus on Outcomes rather than Outputs.

2. COL should concentrate on fewer activities but deliver them in greater depth.

3. Initial appraisal of plans for activities should be strengthened with alternative approaches considered and their relative costs assessed; this includes for activities continuing from a previous plan period.

4. Future plans should continue to use Strategic Goals as the overarching framework for integrating Programme Initiatives.

5. Initial project design should include an M&E plan and, as appropriate, with parallel research gathering appropriate information as required.

6. Strategies to ensure long-term sustainability of any successful intervention should form part of the initial appraisal; this would include exit criteria options.

7. All Initiatives should include models to enhance learning across projects among their Initiative Outcomes in the next planning period.

8. A review of the current team structures in COL should be undertaken to assess how best to minimise overlaps, exploit synergies and enhance the effectiveness of planning and delivery for the 2015 Plan. This might also consider dropping the concept of Sectors as a means of encouraging staff collaboration.

9. The Gender Specialist should continue to add value to COL; however the need for a dedicated Cross Cutting Theme to support eLearning as currently defined should be reviewed.

10. A rigorous assessment of the capabilities and resources of partners to meet the needs of the activity should be included at the appraisal stage, including agreeing risks and assumptions.

11. A practical methodology for analysing the relationship between costs, outputs, intended outcomes and impact should be developed, probably with external assistance.

12. COL needs to review continuously where it can add the most value and/or leverage in its endeavours.

13. A review of all COL’s activities supporting higher education should be undertaken (e.g. including Teacher Education, Higher Education and VUSSC – and possibly TVSD and Open Schooling).

14. COL should consider appointing a business pursuit manager.

November 30, 2014
## APPENDIX 3

### Member Governments’ Contributions

**Years ended June 30**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>Total</th>
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$8,212,864 $8,625,237 $9,208,080 $26,046,181
### APPENDIX 4

#### Additional Contributions

Years ended June 30

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APPENDIX 5

Board of Governors

CHAIR
Dr. Linda Sissons, CNZM

Chief Executive Officer, Wellington Institute of Technology

MEMBERS
Commonwealth Secretary-General
His Excellency Mr. Kamalesh Sharma

Appointments by Major Donors

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

Government of India: Mr. Satyanarayan Mohanty, Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development

Government of New Zealand: His Excellency Dr. The Right Honourable Sir Lockwood Smith, KNZM, High Commissioner, New Zealand High Commission, London

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

Government of South Africa: Professor Narend Baijnath, Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of South Africa

Government of the United Kingdom: Dr. Chris Berry, Head of Profession, Education, Education Department, Department For International Development

Regional Appointments
on the Advice of Commonwealth Ministers of Education

Africa: The Honourable Mr. Danny Faure, Vice-President and Minister of Finance, Seychelles

Asia: Professor Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, FRS, Chief Patron, International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences, University of Karachi, Pakistan

Caribbean: His Excellency Hubert John Charles, Ambassador of Dominica to the Organization of American States and the United States

Pacific: Letuimanu‘asina Dr. Emma Kruse Vaai, Deputy Vice Chancellor, National University of Samoa
Appointment by the Commonwealth Secretary-General

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

President (Ex-Officio)

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

Advisor

Professor John Wood, CBE, Secretary General, Association of Commonwealth Universities
# APPENDIX 6

## Focal Points

*November 30, 2014*

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<th>Country</th>
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<td>Ms. Mary Flanagan and Ms. Bronwyn Robbins</td>
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<td>Ms. Michelle Sears</td>
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<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam Khan</td>
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<td>Mr. Laurie King</td>
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<td>Belize</td>
<td>Mr. Christopher Aird</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mrs. Fancy Amey</td>
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<td>Mr. Adinin Bin Md. Salleh</td>
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<td>Shri S.P. Goyal</td>
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<td>Dr. H.M. Lephoto</td>
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<td>Mrs. Rhoda N. Mweetwa</td>
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### APPENDIX 7

#### Common Abbreviations Used in the Report

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<td>Caribbean Community</td>
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<td>eLearning for International Organisations</td>
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<td>RETRIDOL</td>
<td>Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADC-CDE</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>sustainable development goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEI</td>
<td>teacher education institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TQF</td>
<td>Transnational Qualifications Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVE</td>
<td>technical and vocational education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>technical and vocational education and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVSD</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Skills Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UIS</td>
<td>UNESCO Institute for Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ULSE</td>
<td>Universal Lower Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNEVOC</td>
<td>International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPE</td>
<td>Universal Primary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VUSSC</td>
<td>Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth</td>
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</tbody>
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