

Friday 24 March

Launch of the Digital Readiness for Public Sector Leaders E-Learning Training Course.

Opening Remarks by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth,
The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC

Excellencies

Senior Officials

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to be with you today to introduce a new and important milestone achievement, which the Commonwealth has developed for our member countries in close collaboration with Intel.

Thank you for joining us - and I recognise the online presence of Intel's Vice President and senior leadership team in the room. We appreciate your partnership enormously.

At the last CHOGM, our Heads of Government highlighted the transformative impact of technology. And they resolved to address the divides in digital access and skills across the whole Commonwealth, to support development, capacity building, skills and growth.

Today's launch is part of the implementation of that mandate.

This self-paced online course on “Digital Readiness for Public Sector Officials” provides a unique opportunity for public sector workers and leaders in Commonwealth member states to be trained in the fundamentals of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.

The course will lay the foundations for trust in these technologies, and confidence in our capability to use them effectively and responsibly.

It will help to advance our work towards a forward-thinking and fast-acting Commonwealth family, and help us to deploy digital skills across every sector.

As the technological revolution unfolds, AI and Machine Learning have become indispensable for leaders in both the public and the private sector, and a firm understanding of the transformative capabilities of tech is now essential.

In 2021, AI global funding doubled to \$66.8 billion, and a record 65 AI companies reached valuations of over \$1B: an increase of 442% from the previous year.

AI is becoming indispensable — so it is vital that Commonwealth member countries have the tools they need to maximise its value: not only to improve governance and economic opportunity

now, but also to build a brighter, smarter future for everyone.

National digital readiness demands that we build the necessary competencies: fostering knowledge and confidence in the capabilities of transformative technology.

Focusing on you - our public sector leaders - is key to catalysing the innovative spirit which exists throughout the countries you serve.

That goal is at the heart of this course.

Our Commonwealth is remarkable in its breadth and diversity. Our member countries have varying needs, capabilities, opportunities and challenges - but we are all united in our values, our goals, and our willingness to work together.

And in this Commonwealth Year of Youth, the need to understand and develop policies which can assist the 1.5 young people of the Commonwealth with the skills they need to seize the opportunities of today and shape a better tomorrow, is paramount.

This training builds on a range of initiatives undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat to close the digital divide and leverage digital infrastructure.

Under the leadership of The Gambia in 2019, members of the Physical Connectivity Cluster developed the Agreed Principles on Sustainable Investment in Digital Infrastructure.

These six principles, shaped by Commonwealth member countries, seek the following:

- Investment in Digital Infrastructure to achieve sustainable growth and development for commonwealth countries.
- Investment in Digital Infrastructure to enhance economic and social inclusion.
- Fostering Intra-Commonwealth Collaboration for Digital Infrastructure Development.
- Capacity Building Investment in Digital Infrastructure.

- Investment in Digital Infrastructure to promote Intra-Commonwealth trade facilitation and economic efficiency.
- And finally, Investment in Digital Infrastructure to encourage Smart Societies and Networks.

Across every sector - from health, education and trade, to governance, economic development and tackling climate change - we are committed to being one-step ahead of the rest of the world: boosting digital knowledge, capacity and confidence to co-create a Smart Commonwealth.

We are training women entrepreneurs across Asia and Africa to leverage digital infrastructure for e-commerce and digital marketing.

We are using big data and satellite monitoring to better anticipate the impacts of climate change and enable more sustainable agriculture.

We are deploying digital solutions to overcome barriers in trade, and access to health services.

We are training tens of thousands of young people in vital digital skills.

We are working to set up an AI Centre for Small States in collaboration with our partners.

And, starting today, as a direct response to the growing need for digital capacity-building and in line with our CHOGM mandate, we offer this training to committed public servants, expanding the scope and utility of digital skills in governments across the Commonwealth.

These skills, and this course, are an investment in our shared future.

I am proud that we are able to offer it, I thank you all for being here, and I am immensely grateful to Intel - for their pioneering work, and their willingness to use their expertise in support of our Commonwealth Family.

A more efficient, effective, digital-ready public sector - and a Smart Commonwealth - is within our grasp. And we take another stride towards it today.

Thank you.