PARIS DECLARATION PROMOTES INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT OF OER

Following extensive international consultation, COL and UNESCO received approval for the Paris Declaration on OER at UNESCO's World Open Educational Resources (OER) Congress in June. The Paris Declaration is a commitment to supporting the use of OER to expand access to education. It was approved by an Expert Meeting of 300 people at the World OER Congress including representatives from many governments.

This Declaration is a significant step forward for improving the access, affordability and quality of education worldwide, according to Sir John Daniel, COL's outgoing President, who led the “Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally” initiative, which guided the drafting of the Paris Declaration.

“I am delighted that the Paris Declaration was approved by acclamation with no debate,” Sir John said. “This reflects the very careful work that we have done in consulting governments and institutions in all regions of the world about drafts of the Declaration. The key principle is that ‘educational materials developed with public funds be made available under open licenses (with any restrictions they judge necessary) in order to maximise the impact of the investment’.”

“Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally” is a joint COL-UNESCO partnership with major funding provided by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Conducted in the first six months of 2012, the initiative involved a survey of governments worldwide, six regional policy forums and drafting of the Paris Declaration.

SURVEY

COL and UNESCO conducted a survey, sending questionnaires to all the world's governments, asking whether they already have, or intend to develop, policies on OER. A report, “Governments’ OER Policies”, summarises key findings and was presented to all governments. The responses received from 82 countries provided valuable input to the Paris Declaration.

REGIONAL POLICY FORUMS

Recognising that there is little knowledge of OER among many governments, the project team conducted a survey of governments worldwide, six regional policy forums and drafting of the Paris Declaration.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

18 CCEM IN MAURITIUS

The 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM) will be held in Mauritius from 28–31 August. The triennial event brings together Education Ministers from over 50 countries of the Commonwealth to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest. The theme for this year’s CCEM is “Education in the Commonwealth: Bridging the gap as we accelerate towards achieving Internationally Agreed Goals (IAGs)”.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
organised face-to-face discussions between government officials and practitioners. These Regional Policy Forums were held in Barbados (Caribbean), Pretoria (Africa), Rio de Janeiro (Latin America), Cambridge (UK), Bangkok (Asia/Pacific), Sydney (Pacific) and Muscat, Oman (Arab region) between January and May 2012.

The regional policy forums confirmed that governments generally have limited understanding of the notion of OER and open licences. Simply declaring that materials on government portals are “freely available” is not sufficient, especially for users outside the country. In addition to intensifying dialogue with governments on OER and showcasing local OER policies, experts and initiatives, these meetings gathered input for the Paris Declaration.

PARIS DECLARATION

The project’s International Advisory and Liaison Group, consisting of government representatives from all UNESCO regions, non-governmental organisations and intergovernmental organisations, finalised a draft Paris Declaration in May. This document was presented as the advice of experts to governments at the UNESCO World OER Congress in Paris in June and received UNESCO approval as a non-binding agreement. Governments will now work on moving the Paris Declaration forward within UNESCO and through other avenues.

“The aim of the Paris Declaration is to get greater buy-in from governments to the promotion of OER and of open licences generally,” said COL President, Professor Asha Kanwar, who spoke at the World OER Congress. “Government backing for open licensing of public educational materials is essential if we are to make OER the normal way of doing business instead of a marginal, donor-driven phenomenon. This will contribute significantly to the increased use of quality educational resources around the world.”

The intention of “Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally” is to make way for OER to enter the educational mainstream through increased awareness among governments of their potential and the establishment of policies to support their development, use and adaptation. The widespread support for the Paris Declaration is an important step forward for learning for development.

www.col.org/oerCongress
www.col.org/oerSurvey
The full Paris Declaration:
http://oerCongress.weebly.com/paris-declaration

18 CCEM IN MAURITIUS

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Parallel events include a Stakeholder’s Forum, a Post-Secondary and Higher Education Leaders’ Forum, a Youth Forum, a Teachers’ Forum and an Exhibition/Showcase.

COL will present its new Three-Year Plan, 2012-2015 to Education Ministers for their endorsement at 18CCEM.

http://18ccem.gov.mu
www.col.org/draft3yp

COL and UNESCO Renew Co-operation Agreement. COL President, Professor Asha Kanwar, signs the new COL-UNESCO Work Plan Agreement for 2012-2015, with UNESCO’s Dr. Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education (left) and Mr. Janis Karklins, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information (right) at UNESCO’s Paris headquarters in June 2012. COL and UNESCO have co-operated in several programme areas through Work Plan Agreements dating back to 1994.

www.col.org/col-unesco
OPEN SCHOOLING ASSOCIATION CELEBRATES GROWTH

Twenty-six open schools were represented at the third annual general meeting of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA) on Mahé Island, Seychelles in March. In addition to launching a new collection of open educational resources (OER) for open schools (see “New OER for open schools”, below), members of COMOSA addressed pertinent issues such as eLearning and copyright.

All four Commonwealth regions were represented at the COMOSA meeting, including increased participation by open schools from the Caribbean and Pacific regions. Members agreed to activate regional chapters and developed an action plan for the next year. Six areas were identified as priorities: policy, ICT, content, gender, website/collaboration and networking, and research.

MEASURING eLEARNING MATURITY

COL hosted an eLearning workshop in conjunction with the COMOSA annual general meeting. Many open schools want to introduce online learning but do not necessarily have the requisite skills, strategies or systems.

This workshop introduced an eLearning Maturity Model (eMM), a tool used to measure the readiness of open schools to introduce eLearning. COMOSA members learned about eMM assessments, developing organisational eLearning capacity and eMM pilots. This provided helpful information for open schools that want to extend the reach of learning through online formats in a sustainable way.

POLICY ON OER AND COPYRIGHT

The experience gained through the OER for Open Schools initiative highlighted the importance of having a policy to guide the development, use and sharing of OER. In particular, there is a need to increase awareness among open schools of relevant issues related to copyright and Creative Commons licensing.

A second training workshop for COMOSA members focused on development of an OER policy. Led by Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, founding Director of both the International Centre for Open Education at Otago Polytechnic in New Zealand and of the OER Foundation, the workshop participants developed a policy that guides decision making at all levels of organisation, ensuring that copyright issues are addressed properly so that OER are truly “open”.

The COMOSA OER and Copyright Policy represents the first OER policy developed by an international organisation. In addition to increasing awareness about important licensing issues, the workshop generated enthusiasm for OER among open schooling leaders.

New OER for Open Schools

COL commissioned the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) to conduct a study about the role of open schools in providing vocational education and training. The study, “Narrowing the skills gap through VET”, is available on the COL website: www.col.org/publications

www.col.org/OpenSchooling

New Open School in Ghana

At the open school launch in Accra (L to R): Mr. Joshua Mallet, Director of the Centre for National Distance Learning and Open Schooling (CENDLOS); Ms. Frances Ferreira COL Education Specialist, Open Schooling; and Dr. Dominic Pialore, Director, Statistics, Research, Information Management & Public Relations, Ministry of Education. CENDLOS will use open and distance learning technologies to provide accessible, affordable and flexible learning to senior school learners, including adults who were unable to complete high school.

COMMONWEALTH EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME UPDATED

Offered through nine partner universities, the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Public Administration (CEMBA/MPA) programme helps meet a growing demand for post-graduate level education in business and public administration through open and distance learning (ODL). Developed 10 years ago, the programme has recently been revised. To support further revisions, COL is training faculty members in partner institutions in how to use open educational resources (OER).

The first online OER training workshop was held in April 2012. Twenty people from the nine partner institutions took part in the five-day online self-instructional workshop.

Revised CEMBA/MPA course materials are being distributed to partner institutions. COL will continue to provide online workshops to build capacity in use of OER for future programme updates.

www.col.org/cemba

COL in ACTION
The reach of mobile telephony into every part of the globe is unprecedented in scale. The number of mobile subscriptions increased tenfold in just over five years: from about 500 million in 2005 to 5 billion in 2010, according to estimates by the International Telecommunications Union. There is justified expectation that mobiles would be a tool that supports expanded and affordable access to education. In the mobiles for education approach, the emphasis is on pedagogy. This often requires use of smart phones or high-end phones, which can be expensive. Proprietary technologies are deeply involved and can eventually add a huge cost to the user.

India had a tele-density (number of telephones per 100 people) of less than five in 2000 at a time when Western countries had tele-densities close to or in excess of 100. The growth of mobile telephony in India has been spectacular. The number of mobile subscriptions surpassed one billion in early 2012, making the tele-density close to 100, an increase by a factor of 20 in 10 years.

COL decided to look at India to understand how such a massive growth in mobile telephony is harnessed in support of development, especially in learning for development. A Mobile Telephony for Development workshop convened by COL’s Technology and Knowledge Management team, in partnership with the National Institute of Banking Management, brought together leading social activists, technology developers, telecom policy researchers and experts in rural and agricultural extension. Participants discussed technology opportunities, commercial and policy-level challenges and gaps between rural requirements and available technologies.

Besides connecting people for conversation, a major driving factor in the growth of mobile phone use in India is accessing Hollywood film music, especially for ring tones. This factor outranks all the others (such as delivery of cricket scores) by a multiple of 10, according to Mr. Ravi Mantha, who analysed this growth for COL.

So how does one transform the Bollywood-driven growth in mobiles to a development advantage?

There are more than a billion mobile subscriptions in India, but there is no clear estimate of the proportion of subscriptions in rural areas where over two-thirds of the population lives. COL estimates that that number is about 120 million. This user group is characterised by low-cost phones generally. A sizeable proportion has multiple SIM cards to access services opportunistically from different telecommunications companies. The bandwidth available to cater to this user group is huge and possibly surplus, but innovations in this area are still rare. For-profit organisations are deterred by the costs of providing customised mobile services in health, agriculture and education. Most handsets cannot display text messages in local characters. Given these limitations, voice is an important medium for delivering learning through mobiles in India.

At COL’s Mobiles for Development workshop in Pune, a team from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur campus demonstrated a technology that helps address this dilemma. The programme, in use by over 10,000 farmers in three different regions of India on a trial basis, links a local expert with specific farm interest groups. Farmers receive voice messages that are specific to their crops and areas. They can connect with experts using voice. This service is not restricted to a particular handset or telecommunications company.

Gram Vaani Community Media, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), demonstrated a technique that brings community radio and mobile telephony closer for more effective news dissemination. Vidiyal, a COL partner, demonstrated the use of “Green” SIM cards provided by IKSL, another COL partner, to help over 6,000 women farmers access livelihoods information.

Clearly, this is an opportunity for social activists, Learning for Development thinkers and tech developers to work together. The scope of the work can cover all developing countries of the Commonwealth since the approach is independent of specific handsets or devices or telecommunications providers.

www.gramvaani.org

**VUSSC UPDATE**

Representatives from seven countries involved in the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) attended the launch of the OER for Open Schools course materials and implementation of VUSSC-developed courses and the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) in Seychelles in March. Presenters from post-secondary institutions and qualifications agencies from small states in all regions of the Commonwealth shared their experiences in using VUSSC learning materials and implementing the TQF, the VUSSC system of accreditation.

VUSSC course materials were developed by educators in small states and are available as open educational resources (OER). They are now being used by a number of the 33 small states that belong to VUSSC.

NEW ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE PROGRAMME

Educators from The Bahamas, Botswana, Jamaica, Mauritius, Namibia, Samoa and Seychelles took part in a 10-day VUSSC workshop at the University of Seychelles (UniSey) to develop a tertiary-level programme in Environmental Science. A team from UniSey led development of the programme. They presented their draft course outline to the workshop participants for discussion and review. The group then worked collaboratively to complete the programme. Workshop participants also took part in training about instructional design, OER, copyright and eLearning.

The Bachelor in Environmental Science will be an applied BSc degree with three exit points: Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor’s degree. UniSey officially launched the Environmental Science programme at the closing of the workshop. The online programme is available to learners in all small states of the Commonwealth.

www.vussc.org
RETRIDOL BUILDS ODL CAPACITY IN WEST AFRICA

COL’s work in West Africa is aided by the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL), which is based at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Following is a summary of RETRIDOL’s recent COL-supported activities:

• Learner Support in ODL, Nigeria
  COL, the National Universities Commission and RETRIDOL hosted a national workshop on tutoring in ODL in Abuja, Nigeria in February. Forty-six participants from NOUN study centres and Nigerian universities learned about issues such as effective online tutoring, facilitation techniques and best practices in providing feedback to learners.

• Course Materials Development for ODL, Nigeria
  This four-day workshop hosted by COL and RETRIDOL provided training in writing self-instructional course materials for ODL. Twenty people attended from two dual-mode universities. This workshop used a train-the-trainers approach, with the intent that participants at this session will “cascade” learning to more course writers.

• Quality Assurance Framework, The Gambia
  This two-day session validated a Draft Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education that had been developed by the Gambian Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology. The new Framework was developed following a previous COL-RETRIDOL quality assurance workshop.

• Research
  Dr. Clifford M. Amini, Principal Research Fellow with RETRIDOL, has completed a study on students’ perceptions of learner support services at NOUN. Two investigators are completing a research project on “Assessment of Competency-Based Learning Elements”.

• West African Journal of Open and Flexible Learning
  RETRIDOL has published the second edition of its research journal, the West African Journal of Open and Flexible Learning.

• Leadership
  NOUN Professor Vincent Babatunde Ogunlela has been named Director of RETRIDOL.

TEACHER EDUCATION PARTNERS’ MEETING

Partners from around the Commonwealth met in Paris in February to discuss teacher education initiatives and priorities for the next three years.

Partners from seven Commonwealth countries met with representatives from COL and UNESCO at a Partners’ Consultative Meeting on Teacher Education at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. This annual meeting serves as a forum to review teacher education initiatives, discuss opportunities for improvements and identify strategies to strengthen partnerships and scale up activities.

The meeting featured an update on teacher education initiatives from representatives from every region of the Commonwealth. COL and UNESCO speakers reinforced their commitment to collaborate to help improve teacher supply and teacher quality in support of achievement of the goal of Education for All by 2015.

Meeting participants agreed to pursue bilateral and multilateral collaboration where two or three partners work together to address a common problem. The 13 priority areas identified for 2012-2015 include gender, ICT integration, mobile learning and open educational resources.

Caribbean and Pacific Universities Adopt CCTI

Key regional universities in the Pacific and the Caribbean are adopting COL’s Commonwealth Certificate for Teachers’ ICT Integration (CCTI). The University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of the West Indies (UWI) have committed to training teachers in the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into teaching and learning. COL is working with both institutions to support implementation of the CCTI.

The CCTI is an advanced qualification in education that aims to improve teachers’ experience of teaching in the classroom with ICT and increase school managers’ involvement in ICT implementation in the school.

http://ict4td.weebly.com

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http://ict4td.weebly.com

Attending a CCTI workshop in Sydney, Australia are (from left): Dr. Salanieta Bakalevu, Acting Head, USP School of Education; Ms. Trudi van Wyk, COL Education Specialist, eLearning; Professor Rajesh Chandra, Vice Chancellor and President of USP; Dr. Akanisi Kedrayate, Dean of Faculty of Arts, Law and Education; and Ms. Alanieta Lesuma-Fatiaki, Instructional Designer, USP.

Partners’ Consultative Meeting on Teacher Education report: www.col.org/TeacherEducation
COMMUNITY LEARNING TARGETS HEALTH ISSUES

COL has supported the development of new community learning programmes that address health and development issues in all regions of the Commonwealth. Three recent initiatives were in Cameroon, Jamaica and Sierra Leone.

- **Mother and child health in Cameroon.** A COL story design workshop brought 16 people together representing community radio stations, community groups and health organisations. They worked on developing a second phase of a community learning programme about mother and child health. Launched in 2010, the programme aims to reach 1,000 learners in Menji, Lebialem District in the country’s south west region through face-to-face sessions and 20,000 listeners through Lebialem Community Radio. In this second phase, programmes will address topics such as family planning, nutrition, accessing health care and preventing the spread of communicable diseases.

- **Healthy lifestyles in Jamaica.** COL partnered with the Spring Village Development Foundation to provide training for team members at community radio station Spring FM and local health services. Workshop participants developed a radio series about healthy lifestyles targeting young people. Issues identified ranged from HIV awareness and teen pregnancy to late-night loitering and gambling. The programmes will be broadcast on Spring FM, will be available online for download or podcast and will be made available to community groups on CDs.

- **Water and sanitation in Sierra Leone.** Fifteen people from local women’s associations and community groups, development stakeholder and media groups collaborated to design a new community learning programme about health issues related to water and sanitation. The activity in Kailahun District in eastern Sierra Leone was led by the Health and Social Development Association of Sierra Leone with training by the Media and Training Centre for Health (South Africa) in partnership with COL.

Read about how COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), is helping to improve the health of women in resource-poor settings through the “Science for Women” community radio programmes: www.col.org/clippings

EXPANDING FLEXIBLE APPROACHES TO TVET IN AFRICA

COL’s Flexible Skills Development initiative continues to help technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in Africa extend the reach of their training through flexible approaches to learning. In recent months, COL consultants and staff have made institutional visits to help partners pursue their strategic objectives and develop new courses. This includes:

- **New media for Tanzania:** consultation with the Mbeya Institute of Science & Technology to help with planning for their new TV and radio stations and outreach centres.

- **Staff development in Kenya:** training in materials development, learning theory and teaching practical subjects at the Kenya Technical Teachers College, the Coast Institute of Technology and the Mombasa Technical Training Institute in Kenya.

- **Building skills in The Gambia:** Flexible Skills Development workshop at the Gambia Technical Training Institute.

- **Quality assurance in Zambia:** quality review of open and distance learning (ODL) programmes at the Zambia Institute of Business and Industrial Practice (ZIBSIP) and the Technical and Vocational Teachers College.

The quality review is giving us answers to challenges we have been wrestling with for a long time. We are learning to create study manuals that inspire students, incorporate activities that enhance learning and create DVDs for students who aren’t able to attend a lecture. We are gaining confidence in our ability to deliver effective ODL.

Mubanga Makupe, ODL Co-ordinator at ZIBSIP

- **Expanding Flexible Skills Development in Zambia:** introductory workshop for 11 Zambian institutions who wish to introduce ODL TVET programmes. The institutions developed ODL implementation plans at the workshop and will complete the COL ODL readiness survey.

The COL team is encouraged by the developments in all these partner institutions.
L3F REJUVENATES COMMUNITY FACING EXTINCTION

The Batwa is an indigenous community of forest dwellers who have lived and gathered wild honey in the areas surrounding Africa’s Great Lakes for 4,000 years. The dramatic decline in the forest eco-system in Uganda has affected their livelihood security. The Batwa are now some of the poorest people in the world with a high infant mortality rate, low life expectancy and an HIV/AIDS infection rate exceeding 60 per cent. With no possessions, no land, no means of livelihood and little or no education, the Batwa face a bleak future.

In 2009, COL partnered with the Open Distance Learning Network from Makerere University Research Institute Kabanyolo (MAURIK) to launch Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) for 500 Batwa and Bakiga communities living in settlement camps in southwestern Uganda. Faced with low literacy rates, the L3F initiative uses open and distance learning (ODL) through radio and mobile phone technologies to reach learners. Five radio programmes were produced in collaboration with Voice of Kigezi, a local radio station in Kabale. Broadcast over five months, the radio programmes provided information about improved honey harvesting methods, adding value to wild honey and accessing honey markets. With support from African International Christian Ministries, a local non-governmental organisation, the L3F initiative bought five mobile phones for use by Batwa leaders and AICM extension offices. They receive learning in the form of audio messages, which they share with others at monthly self-help group meetings. The audio content is delivered in local dialects and tailored to their learning needs.

Through the L3F activities, the Batwa are learning to make and use modern bee hives. These hives are more suitable for changing climatic conditions and can produce honey throughout the year. The L3F participants have formed five self-help groups, which facilitate sharing of information. Men and women are equally represented in the groups. Some of the self-help groups are starting to accumulate savings, which will be used for further investments.

L3F is also creating social change. At first, community members who gained knowledge were treated as aliens who threatened their culture and lifestyle. They were considered outcasts and were banished from their communities. This changed over time, and now there is greater acceptance of new knowledge. Some of the Batwa have integrated with the Bakiga to form successful inter-tribe self-help groups.

By facilitating learning, this powerful partnership offers scope for improving livelihoods among participants, ensuring the survival of an ancient indigenous community.

In an example of south-south co-operation and knowledge transfer between COL initiatives, L3F partners in Uganda recently provided training for a Flexible Skills Development partner in Kenya.

The success of Makerere University’s mLearning programme for farmers drew the attention of educators at Masai Technical Training Institute (TTI), who saw the potential to introduce mobile-based learning for the Masai population.

Four educators from Masai TTI travelled to Uganda in February to take part in a three-day training workshop led by MAURIK. The aim was to strengthen the capacity of the Masai TTI team to plan and implement a pilot mLearning programme in poultry farming. The workshop focused on how to use blended learning approaches that combine online and face-to-face approaches, best practices in mLearning and programme design.

“We plan to have a demonstration poultry farm at the college and develop a new course for Masai women. If they can be educated on poultry farming, this can help them to improve their economic wellbeing and improve the nutrition of their children,” said Masai TTI Deputy Principal Daniel Kimwea, who led the team to Uganda.
COL’s work is guided by comprehensive Three-Year Plans that are developed through extensive evaluation and consultation. COL’s new Three-Year Plan, 2012-2015 has been approved by COL’s Board of Governors and will be presented at the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM), in Mauritius in August for endorsement by Ministers.

The theme of COL’s new Three-Year Plan remains “Learning for Development”. This plan extends to 2015, the target date set for the achievement of a number of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). COL uses the internationally agreed MDGs, the Education for All (EFA) goals and the Commonwealth priorities of peace, democracy, equality and the rule of law as its framework for action.

**INPUTS FOR THE NEW PLAN**

The new Three-Year Plan, 2012-2015 is the product of broad and intensive consultations with stakeholders across the Commonwealth. It reflects feedback from COL Focal Points, members of COL’s Board of Governors, staff, partners and other stakeholders. Major inputs include:

- **COL Focal Points**: COL hosted Regional Focal Point meetings in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific to consult with its country contacts about the content of the new plan.
- **Mid-term Stakeholders Survey**: This assessed the views and experiences of stakeholders, partners and staff regarding COL’s behaviour as an organisation.
- **External Evaluation**: COL commissioned 10 “longitudinal” studies to trace the results of specific programme activities. These studies formed the basis of the overall evaluation, which measured COL’s progress against the Outcome Statements and Performance Indicators in the Logic Model for the Three-Year Plan, 2009-2012.

**OVERVIEW: THREE-YEAR PLAN, 2012-2015**

**Mission**

COL’s mission is to help governments expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate technologies, particularly those that support “open and distance learning” (ODL).

**Strategic goals**

- **Quality education for all Commonwealth citizens**
  - Increased access to affordable primary, secondary and tertiary education, especially for girls, women and the marginalised
- **Human resources development in the Commonwealth**
  - Sustainable and replicable learning systems in place for farming, health and skills development in the formal and informal sectors
- **Harnessing ODL and technologies to achieve development goals**
  - Improved capacity of governments and civil society to provide quality learning for achieving MDG and EFA goals

**Impact statement**

- A substantial and equitable increase in the number of Commonwealth citizens acquiring the knowledge and skills for leading productive and healthy lives, through formal and non-formal open and distance learning opportunities

**Education sector**

The four initiatives in the Education sector help countries improve the scope, scale and quality of formal instruction at all levels through the use of learning technologies. All Education initiatives include a commitment to support the development, adoption and use of OER.

- **Open Schooling**: The main focus will be on girls’ education. COL will continue to work with ministries and institutions to introduce and expand open schooling to increase learning opportunities including technical and vocational subjects.
- **Teacher Education**: COL will help governments of Commonwealth developing countries achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015 by increasing teacher supply and improving teacher quality. This initiative will focus on school-based, in-service training models.
- **Higher Education**: COL will continue to support policymakers, institutions and leaders in higher education to harness the potential of open and distance learning (ODL) to cope with the combination of increasing demand for higher education, rising costs, diminishing public funding and the need to maintain high levels of

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**IN FOCUS**
quality. COL will develop Action Plans aligned to the priorities of specific countries to increase access to quality higher education and forge partnerships with international and regional organisations to leverage its impact.

**VUSSC**: COL will continue to support the work of this partnership of 33 small states of the Commonwealth in increasing access to tertiary education. The emphasis will be on the adoption and delivery of VUSSC programmes.

**Livelihoods & Health sector**
The three initiatives in this sector help communities, civil society and institutions to improve the livelihoods and health of their members by using learning technologies to enhance skills, share knowledge and develop new economic opportunities.

**Technical and Vocational Skills Development**: COL has demonstrated that using information and communication technology (ICT) and flexible and blended learning approaches can increase access to quality technical and vocational skills development equitably. The role of Technical and Vocational Skills Development is to overcome urban-rural and gender divides that exclude learners from skills training to create a skilled workforce of lifelong learners for the informal and formal economies.

**Lifelong Learning for Farmers**: Through this initiative, COL is a catalyst in bringing together government, institutions, civil society and the private sector to build the capacity of the rural workforce in agriculture through gender-sensitive ODL. COL will continue to facilitate self-replication and scaling up so that Lifelong Learning for Farmers can reach marginalised communities in many more countries.

**Healthy Communities**: COL helps communities address urgent health and development challenges through community learning programmes that emphasise collaboration, participation, and blended and multichannel approaches. COL will continue to engage strategic partners to support community learning, particularly among women and youth in resource-poor areas.

**Cross-cutting themes**
Gender and eLearning underpin and complement all seven initiatives. COL uses ODL to help promote gender equality by increasing access to learning for women and girls. COL has adopted gender mainstreaming as an organisational strategy. This involves identifying gender-specific activities and initiatives, as appropriate, when girls/women or boys/men are in a particularly disadvantaged position. COL’s gender equality perspective ensures that its initiatives offer equal opportunities, benefits and participation to girls/women and boys/men.

“The increased emphasis on the education of women and girls will pay dividends for entire communities,” said COL President, Professor Asha Kanwar. “There is no doubt that poverty has a female face. The advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment are essential to COL’s overall mission of Learning for Development.”

COL’s eLearning work aims to build the capacity of governments, institutions and individuals to use ICT for learning in both formal and non-formal contexts. This includes raising levels of digital literacy and the ICT competencies of teachers and continuing to work with UNESCO for the global advocacy of OER and the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds.

**Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)**
COL’s regional agency in Asia is fully aligned with the COL programme and has initiatives in both the Education and Livelihoods & Health sectors. CEMCA maintains a regional remit and devises appropriate learning solutions. Promoting appropriate and low-cost technology options is the basis for all CEMCA interventions. CEMCA will continue its work supporting the development of OER policies, quality assurance in multimedia materials, sustainable community media, empowerment of women, a network of clearinghouses for content exchange and research on emerging technologies including use of mobile devices for learning.

COL also provides regional support to ODL in West Africa through the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRI-DOL) at the National Open University of Nigeria and in southern Africa through the Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE) at the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL).

**eLearning for International Organisations**
The COL eLearning for International Organisations is a fee-for-service arrangement that responds to the capacity enhancement needs of international organisations. COL has developed and delivered courses in effective communication, report writing, operational data management, debt management, gender mainstreaming and youth development. Efforts will be directed to updating existing courses, developing new courses, delivering courses on the COL Virtual Learning Environment and increasing the reach of eLearning programmes.

“The new Three-Year Plan is the result of our most extensive consultation ever,” said Professor Kanwar. “The result is a highly focused plan that harnesses the potential of open and distance learning to respond to learning needs of the Commonwealth countries we serve.”

**Review the Three-Year Plan, 2012-2015, the accompanying Logic Model, the mid-term stakeholder survey and evaluations:**
www.col.org/3YP
COL and its partners in several African countries are helping to build capacity in the planning and operation of community learning programmes. Recent workshops featured south-south co-operation.

**MAFETENG COMMUNITY RADIO, LESOTHO**

A new community multi-media centre in Mafeteng District, Lesotho includes the country’s first licensed community radio station and a telecentre with computers for public use. The objective is to engage community members in rural areas in development and health promotion activities by providing access to information. In partnership with UNESCO Windhoek, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Lesotho) and the Media and Training Centre for Health (South Africa), COL facilitated a three-day workshop in Mafeteng, Lesotho in February to help Mafeteng Community Radio partners identify issues such as development priorities, a vision and mission for the station, and an organisational structure. COL also supported a study tour of two South African communities that enabled Mafeteng team members to meet media groups and their partners. Mafeteng Community Radio has completed an operational plan, and broadcasting has begun.

**TRAINING TRainers IN MOZambique**

Mozambique has a thriving network of community radio stations across the country and a dynamic champion in the Forum of Community Radios (FORCOM). There is growing demand for the radio stations to help address social issues such as violence against women and child rights. COL facilitated two days of intensive training for 14 master trainers from across the country in programme planning and content creation. In an example of south-south co-operation, the sessions were led by trainers from Malawi who had assisted with the development of the successful Plinkusi la Moyo (Bag of Life) community learning programme. By using a train-the-trainers approach, FORCOM and COL seek to extend the reach of training to many more radio stations in Mozambique.

**PARTICIPATORY PROGRAMME DESIGN IN NIGERIA**

In partnership with COL, the Institute for Media and Society hosted a three-day training workshop for representatives from 11 communities including existing and prospective broadcasters and civil society partners working in health and development.

The workshop, led by trainers from Nigeria, Sierra Leone and South Africa, focused on how to plan, design and deliver participatory programming about health and development issues that affect their communities. This was the second phase of a three-part project that includes a pre-workshop online discussion and follow-up distance mentoring after the workshop.

[Link to COL’s website](http://www.col.org)

**“INVEST” INITIATIVE DEVELOPS COURSE BLUEPRINTS**

One of the most lively and innovative workshops to date in COL’s Flexible Skills Development programme was the INVEST workshop hosted by Thika Technical Training Institute in Kenya. Twenty-six people from six countries attended the workshop, which launched the Informal Vocational Education & Skills Training (INVEST) activity. Participants developed 20 course specifications, or blueprints, for new courses targeting women and workers in the informal sector.

“The workshop has benefited all the participants and we are looking forward to putting our new course design skills into practice,” Thika TTI Principal Jefferson Kariuki said.

[Link to COL’s website](http://www.col.org/SkillsDevelopment)

**MAKING WAY FOR WOMEN IN TVET**

A policy and gender workshop facilitated by COL at Auchi Polytechnic in Nigeria focused on flexible approaches used to overcome the significant under-representation of female staff and students at TVET institutions. Auchi Polytechnic’s thriving Women in Technical Education (WITED) chapter brings together men and women who work to improve female participation in TVET. The workshop was attended by representatives from Auchi Polytechnic, the National Board for Technical Education, seven federal polytechnics and other WITED Chapters. Workshop participants are continuing to develop the INVEST course materials collaboratively on the Flexible Skills Development’s online Community Learning Network. The plan is to share the INVEST course documents – both learning materials and planning documents – among TVET institutions worldwide.

[Link to COL’s website](http://www.col.org/SkillsDevelopment)

Eng Frances Osiki described the flexible approaches being taken by Auchi Polytechnic to encourage female participation at a policy and gender workshop in March
ICT IN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP
IN THE PACIFIC

Access to technology and the innovative use of information and communication technology (ICT) are vital for reforming education systems for 21st century learning. Studies show that two-thirds of the jobs that will be held at the end of this decade don’t even exist today. New skills will be needed to realise these opportunities. Teachers must play an important role in preparing the next generation’s workforce.

To support the Pacific region in equipping teachers with ICT knowledge and skills, COL, the Commonwealth Secretariat and Microsoft hosted an ICT in Education Leadership Forum in Sydney, Australia. The forum brought together 34 education policy leaders and stakeholders including Ministers of Education from Australia, Kiribati and Samoa, and Permanent Secretaries and other senior officials from these and other Pacific Commonwealth countries and territories.

The partners made key learning resources available to help Pacific educators implement the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers and have committed to continue working with Pacific countries to transform their teacher development strategies and education curricula.

A similar programme, sponsored by the same partners, has been operating in the Caribbean over the past several months. www.ictf2012.org

FLEXIBLE LEARNING
IN THE CARIBBEAN

COL is working with technical and vocational education and training (TVET) educators in the Caribbean to help them introduce more flexible approaches to TVET delivery. COL facilitated a workshop at the University of Technology (UTech), Jamaica on “Strengthening Capacity in Blended Online Teaching and Learning Strategies”.

Like many TVET training institutions, UTech is faced with increased programme offerings while dealing with the challenge of limited classroom space. Offering more online courses is one solution. Members of the Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies participated in the workshop, which explored effective blended teaching – where different learning approaches such as face-to-face and online are “blended”.

UTech staff created planning documents for blended learning courses, developed content for online delivery and explored effective instructional design to support flexible and blended modes of delivery.

This workshop is designed to develop a group of eLearning experts who can train other TVET educators in the Caribbean in how to employ flexible learning methods. COL is also helping to build capacity in flexible and blended learning in the TVET Division of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College.

“Our ultimate aim is to increase the reach and effectiveness of TVET in the Caribbean,” said Ms. Alison Mead Richardson, COL Education Specialist, Skills Development. “Building capacity among TVET educators for new flexible approaches is an important first step in making quality TVET more accessible.”

FSD Partners Meet in Africa:
The 11 Key Institutions taking part in COL’s Flexible Skills Development initiative in Africa met in Mombasa, Kenya from 4-6 May in conjunction with the annual conference of the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA). COL is working in partnership with CAPA to build capacity in the use of educational media and technology for TVET in CAPA member institutions. The partners reviewed activities and outcomes of the past two years and made plans for the next year.
COL’s Teacher Development initiative seeks to expand teacher education through the use of open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communication technology (ICT). Recent activities involve promoting the use of new technology to enhance programme quality and delivery.

- **ICT capacity building for teacher educators in Africa**: Teacher educators and heads of teacher training institutions from 13 teacher training institutions took part in a workshop on implementing ICT into administration, teaching and learning. Nigeria’s National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) partnered with COL to run the workshop in Abuja for teacher educators from The Gambia, Nigeria and Rwanda.

- **Developing a B.Ed. programme in The Gambia**: COL hosted an instructional design workshop to help course writers at the University of The Gambia to develop modules for its Bachelor of Education programme.

- **Open Resources for English Language Teaching**: COL led a Pan-Commonwealth initiative that saw educational institutions develop open educational resources (OER) that junior secondary teachers can use to teach English. The OER are freely available for use and adaptation through the Open Resources for English Language Teaching website: colorelt.org or orelt.col.org.

- **Interactive Radio Instruction for nomadic teachers**: COL has developed an in-service, school-based training programme for nomadic teachers in Adamawa State, Nigeria in partnership with the Adamawa State Universal Basic Education Board and the Federal College of Education, Yola. Combining radio instruction, face-to-face workshops and learner support, the programme is addressing an urgent need to build Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) capacity and improve the quality of teachers who serve nomadic populations. In addition to a workshop for nomadic teachers from three districts in March, the training initiative includes a weekly radio broadcast for six weeks and support through local resource centres.

> “Although radio is an old technology, it is still often the most effective way to reach remote communities,” said Dr. Abdurrahman Umar, COL Education Specialist, Teacher Education. “We are conscious of the need to use the most appropriate technology, which can vary considerably among different regions and countries.”

www.col.org/TeacherEducation

The aim of the conference was to address the urgent need to make skills training flexible, relevant, inclusive and sustainable. Delegates heard international case studies, debated issues such as competency standards and developed a framework to establish linkages between skills training and academic subjects at the secondary school level.

**COL Education Specialist, Open Schooling, Ms. Frances Ferreira’s video presentation to the NIOS conference:**

www.col.org/videos

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**The 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM)**
29 – 31 August 2012, Mauritius
Hosted by the Government of Mauritius
http://18ccem.gov.mu

**The Fourth International M-Libraries Conference**
24 – 26 September 2012
Hosted at The Open University, UK
www.m-libraries.org

**26th Annual Conference of Asian Association of Open Universities**
16 – 18 October 2012
The Open University of Japan
http://aaou2012.ouj.ac.jp

**Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF7)**
November 2013, Abuja, Nigeria
Co-hosted by COL and the Federal Ministry of Education with the National Open University of Nigeria
www.col.org/PCF7
LEARNING METRICS TASK FORCE

The Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics have launched the Learning Metrics Task Force. It is bringing together a diverse group of experts to develop recommendations for the global education and development communities about learning standards, metrics and implementation practices. The timeline of the project, early 2012 through late 2013, strategically aligns with the global policy discourse and processes, particularly related to the post-2015 Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agendas, as well as the United Nations Secretary General’s global education initiative.

Three co-chairs representing the UN, the private sector and civil society are leading the task force: Rukmini Banerji, Director of Programs at Pratham (India); Geeta Rao Gupta, Deputy Executive Director at UNICEF, and Sir Michael Barber, Chief Education Advisor at Pearson. The task force is a high-level group comprised of representatives from UN agencies, regional organisations, bilateral donors and civil society organisations.

The Learning Metrics Task Force will engage in a process of broad and consultative debate among a wide range of stakeholders to develop recommendations on measuring learning both within and across countries. As part of a global consultative process aimed at developing recommendations on measuring learning both within and across countries, the task force is seeking contributions through technical working groups and online consultation.

To learn more and sign up for updates on this initiative:
www.globalcompactonlearning.org/global-learning-metrics

CREATIVE COMMONS CREATES OER POLICY REGISTRY

Creative Commons is creating an OER Policy Registry to facilitate the sharing of OER legislation, OER institutional policies and OER policy resources. Policy makers and open advocates are asked to contribute OER policies, review a draft list of OER policies and spread awareness of this registry.

http://tinyurl.com/OER-policy-registry

WORLD BANK Launches Open Knowledge Repository

The World Bank has launched an open online collection of its publications. The Open Knowledge Repository, along with the World Bank’s new Open Access Policy (effective 1 July 2012), will improve access to World Bank research outputs and knowledge products for governments, civil society organisations, academics and the general public.

http://openknowledge.worldbank.org

$50 MILLION FOR eLEARNING IN AUSTRALIA

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) has received a $50 million grant from the Australian federal government to launch a new service that will streamline the digital and online experience for all USQ students. The funding, the largest single government grant ever received by USQ, will be used to launch the USQconnected programme, which will serve the university’s 20,000 distance learners including many in non-metropolitan areas.

www.usq.edu.au

“EMBRACING COMMONWEALTH VALUES” THROUGH eLEARNING

One hundred young people from four regions of the Commonwealth are participating in a 10-week pilot of the new Embracing Commonwealth Values eLearning programme developed by COL’s eLearning for International Organisations initiative for the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP).

The interactive learning experience for young people seeks to build the knowledge, skills and attitudes that strengthen Commonwealth values in individuals, families, communities and nations.

The Commonwealth Secretariat contracted COL to transform one module from their paper-based Diploma for Youth Development into a stand-alone online course that offers an engaging and fun virtual learning experience that can happen anytime and anywhere. In addition to the online course, COL has set up an online e-portfolio site where participants can share their thoughts on issues such as human rights, equality, empowerment, equity, democracy, development, diversity, dialogue and co-operation, and peace.

“The pilot, which began in May 2012, will be externally evaluated. Any necessary revisions will be made before roll-out of the eLearning programme at scale across the Commonwealth.

“We are really excited about this new eLearning course; it is an innovative and extremely cost-effective way to conduct training,” said Ms. Layne Robinson, CYP Programme Officer.

“CYP has had a long history in training young people and youth work practitioners, but this new product will offer greater access and flexibility to our stakeholders.”

www.colelearning.net/cyp
www.col.org/COLELIO
www.thecommonwealth.org/cyp

The COL team leading the new CYP eLearning pilot programme: (seated L to R) Dr. Mary Wilson and Ms. Sandy Hirtz, (standing L to R) Ms. Sharmila Gracieuse and Ms. Angela Kwan

CO
OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION Reflections from Practice

Jenny Glennie, Ken Harley, Neil Butcher and Trudi van Wyk, Editors

The newest title in COL’s Perspectives on Open and Distance Learning series, this book explores how resource constraints in developing countries affect demand for OER and their reuse. The case studies and reflections in this book, provided by 28 contributors, cover OER practice and policy in a variety of contexts, with a strong focus on events in developing countries. Policy makers and practitioners will be able to draw many precepts and possibilities from the rich variety of experience contained within this volume.

www.col.org/psOER

MARKETING AND BRANDING OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

By Glen Farrell

This latest title in COL’s Knowledge Series will help educational institutions develop marketing strategies. “Marketing and Branding of Open and Distance Learning” provides an overview and guidelines for implementing relationship-based marketing. It provides insight into how to build brand value and sustainable stakeholder relationships. The Knowledge Series provides start-up guides in distance education topics.

www.col.org/knowledge

ICT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR TEACHERS IN GUYANA

Author: Andrew Moore
Editors: Neil Butcher and Trudi van Wyk

This case study traces the development and implementation of an information and communication technology (ICT) strategy for teachers in Guyana. The experience demonstrates that ICT can be used effectively as a catalyst for educational changes. The potential benefits that can be derived from embracing ICT tools and content are significant and can enhance teaching, learning, administration and communication.

Although the strategy was originally devised in response to challenges in Guyana related to education, migration and the economy, it can be adapted to meet the needs of other countries in the developing world that are facing similar challenges. At the very least, it could provide some relevant lessons from which other countries contemplating the introduction of ICT could learn.

www.col.org/ICTforTeachersGuyana

SURVEY ON GOVERNMENTS’ OER POLICIES

By Sarah Hoosen, Neil Butcher & Associates

As part of their joint project Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources (OER) Internationally, UNESCO and COL invited governments to provide information about their policies in relation to OER to assess the current and potential uses of this approach to learning and teaching. This report provides an overview of the findings of the COL/UNESCO survey on OER policies and activity across all countries of the world, and puts forward some suggestions for promoting the use and development of OER and overcoming current obstacles to its implementation.

www.col.org/OERsurvey

THE RE-USE AND ADAPTATION OF OER
An Exploration of Technologies Available

By Ishan Sudeera Abeywardena

Although the OER movement has been successful in firmly planting the concept in the academic community, the reuse and adaptation of OER is not yet occurring on a large scale. One of the major inhibitors is lack of capacity among stakeholders to effectively utilise existing technologies to adapt and reuse OER. This has created a community of passive OER consumers who are not contributing to the expansion of the movement. This peer-reviewed report, prepared for COL, is a detailed catalogue of technologies available to teachers and learners for the reuse of OER material in the forms of text, HTML, audio, video and data. It also compares the technologies based on access, openness, usability and availability. The report will serve as a resource for teachers and learners for reusing OER.

www.col.org/consultancies

LEARNING WITH COMMUNITY MEDIA
Stories from the Commonwealth and Latin America

Ian Pringle, Ekta Mittal and Monica Valdes, Editors

This new publication from COL presents the experiences of a wide cross-section of education, development and community media groups in conceiving, designing, delivering and evaluating participatory communication programmes in more than a dozen developing countries of the Commonwealth and Latin America. The 24 chapters profile educational participatory communication from the perspective of facilitators and trainers, stakeholder agencies and individuals, and the participants themselves — ranging from farmers, social activists and indigenous groups to children and youth, expectant mothers, women combating domestic violence and people at risk for HIV/AIDS.

www.col.org/LearningWithCM
Professor Asha Kanwar took over as President and Chief Executive Officer of COL on 1 June – and attended her first Board of Governors meeting in this capacity seven days later. She succeeds Sir John Daniel, whose term as COL’s President ended on 31 May.

The Honourable Burchell White-man, O.J., Chair of COL’s Board of Governors, pays tribute to Sir John and Professor Kanwar:

Sir John Daniel’s leadership of COL between 2004 and 2012 has had a significant impact on the transformed and the transformative character of the organisation over the past eight years.

He managed to match his considerable intelligence and experience to a passion for the development of people and his conviction that open and distance learning represent the best hope for realising the collective development ambitions of people.

I have admired the patience and the skill with which he has been able to satisfy the changing moods and demands of the Board of Governors while remaining true to the broad developmental objectives of the organisation and to the principles of fairness and efficiency in the management of the human and material resources at his disposal. He led from the front, setting an excellent example of commitment and in thought leadership.

There is no doubt that by and large, the members of staff at COL have enhanced their own capabilities as a result of working with Sir John, and the organisation is on a trajectory which is decidedly in the right direction.

Moving forward, I am delighted by the Board’s appointment of Professor Kanwar as President of our organisation and look forward to working with her. With her profound knowledge and rich experience of open and distance learning and her vision for the Commonwealth of Learning in the medium term, I expect that she will take COL to a new level through a process of significant and sustainable evolutionary change. Her personal attributes and her international profile should prove to be valuable assets.

www.col.org/akanwar
www.col.org/jdaniel
www.col.org/board

UNESCO ICT IN EDUCATION WEBSITE

UNESCO’s ICT in Education website provides resources and advice for making effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education policies, strategies and activities. The intersectoral website compiles and indexes UNESCO resources and toolkits on policy, teacher training, access to lifelong learning opportunities, e-learning, open educational resources and ICT for educational administration and management. A recent example is the introduction of the UNESCO Working Paper Series on Mobile Learning.

http://tinyurl.com/UNESCO-ICT-in-Education

Dr. Sanjaya Mishra joins COL as Director of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) on 1 July 2012. Dr. Mishra is a leading scholar in open, distance and online learning in Asia. Most recently, he was Programme Specialist (ICT in Education, Science and Culture) at UNESCO, Paris.

Dr. Mishra has over 18 years of experience in design, development and management of open and distance learning programmes. During his service in different capacities at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), amongst many innovative activities and programmes, he developed the successful OER-based one-year Post-Graduate Diploma in eLearning.

Dr. Mishra has also previously served as Assistant Regional Director of one of IGNOU’s Regional Centres and as a Programme Officer at CEMCA (2001-2003). He succeeds Dr. R. Sreedher, who served as Director of CEMCA from 2007-2012.

COL’s President Professor Asha Kanwar worked closely with Dr. Sreedher while she (Kanwar) was Vice President. In wishing him all the best for his retirement – although we are sure that he won’t be “retired” – she notes that Dr. Sreedher will be remembered for three legacies:

- Giving a huge profile to the community radio movement on the sub-continent, especially in India and Bangladesh,
- Generating substantial additional contributions for CEMCA’s work with community radio and “women and health”, and
- Giving CEMCA visibility in the region.

www.col.org/smishra
www.col.org/rssreedher

Connections

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Chair:
The Honourable Burchell White-man, O.J.

President & CEO: Professor Asha S. Kanwar

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While open educational resources (OER) are emerging as important contributions toward advancing learning for development, their use in developing Commonwealth countries is limited by the difficulty in locating them online. OER authors do not characterise their own creations with a high level of consistency. Terminology and even spelling can vary, and the curricular or educational value of a resource is mostly inadequately described.

To overcome these challenges, COL advocates the use of semantic approaches. A well-tested approach, deriving from the work at the UK Open University on Linked Data, is ingrained in the Commonwealth Connects OER Directory. The Directory has deployed “edutags” specifically to help characterise a resource for its curricular value.

The OER Directory on the Commonwealth Connects portal is a web-based service that allows users to search for courses by various meta-tags, including subject, title, author and edutag. Developed and hosted by COL, the OER Directory offers access to more than 1,300 courses from Commonwealth universities, all available as OER.

A complementary yet different approach that is under development is pioneered at the Wawasan Open University by Ishan Abeywardena. His prototype creates tags on the fly. The software, called OER Scout, will visit a repository and create a map of linked terms. The linkage is generated statistically. The map also contains specific links to specific OER. By searching the map, a user can reach the specific OER easily. This work in progress offers new possibilities to overcome concerns about search inefficiency.

“The Re-use and Adaptation of Open Educational Resources (OER): An Exploration of Technologies Available” by Ishan Abeywardena: www.col.org/consultancies

TED-ED: VIDEOS WORTH FLIPPING

The non-profit group TED Conferences, LLC, which streams video lectures about ideas and innovations, has launched a YouTube channel for teachers and professors. TED-Ed offers educational videos and tools to “flip” videos so they become interactive lessons.

Once instructors select a video, they can select “flip this video”, which turns the video into a customised lesson to which they can add context, questions and follow-up suggestions. It is based on the concept of “Flip Teaching”, an evolving teaching method that reverses (or “flips”) classroom-based teaching time and traditional homework time. Students view video lessons outside of class, freeing up classroom time for higher-order learning activity.

When the instructor flips a video, they can select from pre-configured quizzes and questions, and add new questions. They can share the lesson with students via email, Facebook or Twitter. It also exists on its own page on TED-Ed. The instructor can log in to see who viewed the lesson and student responses to questions.

FREE ONLINE STORAGE

By storing computer files online, you can free up memory on your system, access your files remotely, share large files and folder systems with others, and establish a secure back-up. Among the many free online storage options, three currently dominate the market: Dropbox, Google Drive and SkyDrive. All three offer several gigabytes of free storage. You can synchronize storage with the hard drive on your PC, sync files with other PCs and access them from mobile devices and share them.

These three services differ when it comes to features such as photo capabilities, allowing Facebook connections and online document editing.

A recent ZDNet article compares Dropbox, Google Drive and SkyDrive: http://tinyurl.com/online-storage-compare