CONSULTATIONS HELD WITH COL FOCAL POINTS

As part of the wide consultation process in the development of COL’s next strategic plan (from 1 July 2015), regional meetings with COL’s in-country Focal Points are held. Two of the four took place earlier this year. The Trinidad & Tobago Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training hosted the Caribbean gathering in March, and the Mauritius Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology hosted the Mediterranean and African representatives in May.

Focal Points discussed their national priorities and how these fit with COL’s mission and mandate. The meetings are also an opportunity to recall COL’s identity, purpose and programmes and to present the achievements in each country so far. “Sustainable learning for development” emerged as an important theme at both meetings.

AFRICA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Participants at the Africa and Mediterranean Focal Points meeting focused on COL’s assistance in programmes addressing gender mainstreaming, lifelong learning and improving the livelihoods of marginalised groups.

The Focal Points also suggested that COL could help in the mainstreaming and institutionalisation of open and distance learning at all levels of education, with an emphasis on capacity building for human resource development.

Also discussed were the roles of the two COL-supported regional agencies in Africa: the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL), hosted at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), and the Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE), hosted at the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning.

CARIBBEAN

The Caribbean Focal Points meeting demonstrated that there is strong support for regionally co-ordinated development activities in the Caribbean. Meeting participants also placed emphasis on the unique regional challenge of boys’ underachievement and on crime and violence. There were discussions on how existing COL initiatives such as open schooling, teacher education and skills development could be tailored to address these issues in the region.

PACIFIC ISLAND MINISTERS CALL FOR ICT AND OER

In her keynote address to the annual meeting of Pacific Island Ministers of Education, COL President and C.E.O., Professor Asha Kanwar, provided insights into global trends in education development, with particular focus on developing countries. She discussed issues of enrolment and access, disparities and inequities in education, and the focus of internationally agreed goals such as the MDGs and EFA.
NEW PACIFIC REGIONAL CENTRE

COL and the University of the South Pacific (USP) are preparing for the launch of the Pacific Centre for Flexible & Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD) in conjunction with COL’s regional Focal Points meeting, to be held in Samoa in September.

The establishment of PACFOLD was announced by COL President and C.E.O., Professor Asha Kanwar, at the annual meeting of Pacific Island Ministers of Education, hosted by the Government of the Cook Islands, earlier this year, under the aegis of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

Professor Kanwar also delivered the keynote address and provided updates on COL’s work in the region, which includes co-ordinating the activities of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) and other initiatives that help provide flexible options in open schooling and technical/vocational education.

Professor Kanwar assured ministers that COL will help them to address their concerns and will increase its work in the region with the help of the new regional centre that COL is establishing, in partnership with the USP, to raise the profile of and support collaboration in open and distance learning.

“The key stakeholders met in Vanuatu last year to identify the role of the new regional centre for advocacy and capacity building, and there will be an ongoing regional advisory council to provide overall direction. We are very grateful to USP and Vice Chancellor Professor Rajesh Chandra for providing personnel and space. COL will provide capacity building support,” said Professor Kanwar.

The new centre will be a “network of networks” to facilitate flexible and open learning for sustainable development in the Pacific through advocacy, communication, innovation and research. The centre will be housed at USP’s Centre for Vocational & Continuing Education, under the directorship of Mr. Hasmukh Lal.

CONSULTATIONS HELD WITH COL FOCAL POINTS

Focal Points also suggested that COL could help the region in developing programmes that would encourage “soft skills”, such as team work, anger management, respect, health and family life, in both formal and informal education. Sustainable tourism development was also seen as a priority.

CARIBBEAN STAKEHOLDERS’ MEETING

COL also held a regional stakeholders’ meeting in conjunction with the Focal Points meeting in Port-of-Spain. Seventeen organisations were represented, and COL’s consultants who are evaluating COL’s impact over the past nine years also attended.

The purpose of this meeting was to identify COL’s role in addressing the significant needs in the region.

Stakeholders noted their appreciation for COL’s assistance in extending their student base using a variety of technology and learning models in both formal and non-formal education. They sought further assistance in the areas of curriculum reform and critical thinking, and in problem-solving areas such as materials development and capacity building. They also supported COL’s leading role in promoting open educational resources (OER).

MEETING REPORTS AND COUNTRY PRESENTATIONS

Meeting reports and country presentations are available on COL’s website.

www.col.org/FocalPoints
GENDER GUIDELINES FOR OPEN SCHOOLS

Gender Equality in Open Schooling: A Guide to Integrating Gender Equity and Equality was developed by COL to provide a simple approach for the non-gender specialist to address the issue of gender equality in key aspects of open school planning, management and service provision.

Girls still continue to comprise the majority of out-of-school children, and women the majority of the world’s adult illiterates. However, achieving gender parity is only a first step. The challenge today is to go beyond parity and to broaden the focus to include both gender equity and gender equality in open schooling. The purpose of the new guide is to facilitate a more equitable approach to open schooling, to ensure that girls and women can avail themselves equally of the learning opportunities that an open approach to learning offers.

Through COL support and the leadership of each open school, pilot testing of the guide took place in Belize (Gwen Lizarraaga High School), India (National Institute of Open Schooling), Tanzania (Institute of Adult Education) and Tonga (University of the South Pacific, Tonga). The pilot testing identified specific recommendations for improvement of the guide, including context-specific gender issues and solutions, for its use on a wider scale.

COL OFFERS PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT COURSE FOR UNHCR

In May, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) issued an initial two-year contract to COL, through its eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO) team, to deliver a new e-course on Advanced Programme Management (PM2) for its staff. The course aims to help UNHCR programme officers to implement results-based management when developing programmes for refugees in the field. Currently, 60 senior managers are enrolled in a pilot phase under the mentorship of six experienced management experts.

PM2 has a blended design, with eight self-study learning modules supplemented by two online forums and a synchronous webinar delivered through the UNHCR Learn & Connect learning management system (LMS).

Good management principles and managerial tools are taught through interactive online materials developed by the Global Learning Centre (GLC) of UNHCR. Tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) situate the learning in real life, where programme officers manage complex and large-scale activities in various countries. TMAs are detailed, discursive and developmental, with individualised and customised teaching and learning taking place between learners and tutors. The group forums, conducted online “virtually”, establish communities of practice amongst programme officers who have traditionally had to work in isolation due to being located in remote or war-torn regions of the world. The online discussions enable sharing and cross-fertilisation of good practices and lessons learned in managing teams, budgets, activities and results.

The COL lead for PM2 is Ms. Angela Kwan, Learning Manager. Her team comprises Ms. Claire Carigi (Learning course advisor), Mr. Georges Gracieuse, Dr. Catherine Dunlop, Dr. Barry Carbol, Dr. Jess Gao and Dr. Robert Aucoin. They are based in Montreal, Vancouver, Beijing and Victoria.

COL’s eLIO initiative responds to the capacity enhancement needs of international organisations through fee-for-service arrangements. eLIO customises eLearning solutions to address the specific challenges of international organisations. These solutions use open, distance and technology-mediated learning methodologies to provide equitable and quality professional development opportunities for women and men working in headquarters, field and country offices.

A series of workshops were conducted that covered the guide’s three main focus areas: strategic planning, management systems and learner support services. Key stakeholders, such as students, parents, staff, management, community organisations, non-governmental organisations and governmental organisations, all participated.
FLEXIBLE TVET AT THE “HEART” OF THE CARIBBEAN

Caribbean technical/vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in The Bahamas, Jamaica and St. Vincent & the Grenadines have been expanding their skills and practice in flexible approaches to programme delivery.

COL is working with the College of The Bahamas to develop institutional policies and plans for flexible skills training.

www.col.org/tvsd

ST. VINCENT & THE GRENADINES

The Government of St. Vincent & the Grenadines is currently providing laptop computers to all secondary and tertiary students. In preparation, and with the goal of increasing access, the staff at St. Vincent & the Grenadines Community College (SVGCC) has been working with COL over the past two years to build capacity in eLearning and strengthen the ICT infrastructure at the college. They have established an eCollege team to further this initiative and support the teachers. COL has provided professional guidance on managing flexible learning, blended online learning and Moodle administration and has helped to train a cadre of eLearning Master Teachers. New eLearning courses are in development across all departments.

UTECH, JAMAICA

The Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies (FELS) at the University of Technology, Jamaica, in collaboration with COL, facilitated three workshops on strategies to strengthening capacity in blended and online teaching and learning. The blended approach is beneficial because it delivers a flexible and dynamic experience that supports students’ learning by engaging them inside and outside the classroom and by allowing them to learn at their own pace. This approach provides increased access as well as an active, flexible and dynamic experience that allows students more options.

The workshops have served to strengthen the capacity of FELS lecturers to plan for, develop and engage in teaching and learning online. The capacity building has returned positive results, as there are now almost 200 modules online. One course of study has been completed for full online delivery.

FLEXIBLE TVET TEACHER TRAINING

Expanding the cadre of trained technical/vocational education and training (TVET) teachers is a challenge many Commonwealth countries face. TVET and skills training are increasing in prominence in national development plans, and teacher shortages are becoming more apparent. Over the years, COL has worked with partners to improve TVET teacher training programmes such as the one developed with Caribbean partners, which can be found on the COL website (www.col.org/coursematerials).

COL is currently working with partners in Jamaica, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Zambia and the Pacific to develop new distance and flexible TVET teacher training programmes. At the University of Vocational Technology, in Sri Lanka, the existing pre-service programme is being reworked for eLearning delivery and to upgrade serving teachers. At the University of the South Pacific, the Centre for Vocational & Continuing Education is developing a new certificate programme for in-service training, to be offered across the Pacific. The Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies at the University of Technology, Jamaica is now offering a fully online TVET training programme for teachers in Monserrat. COL’s INVEST Africa partners at the Technical and Vocational Teachers’ College, in Zambia, offer TVET teacher training through print-based distance learning and are currently in training to advance their learning materials design.
LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS

L3F AND BROOM MAGIC

L3F pioneer Ms. Lakshmi Lokhande is a local celebrity in Mhaswad, in southwest India. She is a mentor working with two L3F partners, the Mann Deshi Foundation and the Mann Deshi Women’s Co-operative Bank. For a living, she hand-makes brooms and, with her husband, sells them in different villages on a bicycle cart.

She has become a magnificent inspiration to many women in her hometown, all of whom celebrated her recently receiving an entrepreneurship for women award from the FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO).

Travelling out of Mhaswad for the first time, on a flight, was an out-of-the-world experience for Lakshmi Tai! You can feel both the pride and the simplicity in her voice. “I only saw airplanes in the sky before, but I wasn’t scared to be on the flight. I felt like I was comfortably sitting at home.”

Her face lights up when she sees her picture on Mann Deshi’s brochure. She enquires about the pictures of FICCI’s award function, as she cannot wait to share these with her children. She says her grandchildren are really proud of her.

This, however, was not her first profession. She started out making ropes in a local agency, but it shut down due to water shortage and other issues. She had observed women making brooms and quietly learned from them. Exposed to the L3F programme in her community and motivated to succeed, she trained at Mann Deshi and took out loans to start her business; she proudly says she repaid all of the loans on time.

She is a regular listener to community radio, as well as being an L3F resource person for Financial Literacy and other programmes. Her eloquent advice is aired on Mann Deshi radio frequently. Lakshmi Lokhande is one of the many award-winning entrepreneurs whom Mann Deshi has helped to grow.

Life was not very easy for Lakshmi Tai, but she never lost hope and courageously moved ahead. The award celebrates this courage that will inspire more such women to break the barriers of poverty and reject the traditional, feeble identity associated with the rural women of India.

L3F PARTNERS IN JAMAICA INTRODUCED TO MOBILE PHONE-BASED ODL

During May 2014, two workshops were held with the Rural Agricultural Development Association (RADA) and local farmers in Jamaica to expand and strengthen the L3F initiative in the country. First, a workshop with RADA introduced staff to how mobile phone-based learning is working in other countries. COL’s consultant Mr. Daniel Ninsiima also led a workshop with local farmers in Mandeville, Jamaica on the use of open and distance learning (ODL) for extension.

This workshop gave farmers the opportunity to design and create their own text messages based on an extension topic of their choice. The finished products were shared amongst the group, and two messages were sent to participants as an example of how mobile phone-based learning could be used for extension.

Participants were enthusiastic about the possibility of using ICTs for knowledge sharing in their communities, and the increased opportunities that this kind of learning could bring about.
The Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD)-sponsored Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) initiative in Tanzania is up and running and already making a difference in the lives of local participants. 

Launched in November 2013, L3F aims not only to affect the lives of people in terms of skills, knowledge, empowerment and livelihoods, but also to act as a reference for stakeholders, such as governments, development agencies and the private sector, in strengthening education and the human resource development process.

To achieve these objectives, COL has partnered with a number of local organisations, which have been working to engage and mobilise local self-help groups and co-operatives. The Akowelimile-Bulinda Group, in Tanzania, is one community self-help group that has embraced the L3F programme and is seeing results in the way of improved learning and networking opportunities.

Established in 2012 with five members (four female and one male), the group endeavours to improve the livelihoods of its members through agricultural farming and small-business activities undertaken in the spirit of co-operation and mutual support. The group currently manages a number of small-scale enterprises, including table banking as well as sweet potato, banana, cassava, maize, bean and, most recently, sunflower cultivation.

After enrolling with COL partner Matumini Mapya (a Tanzanian women’s and children’s empowerment NGO), one group member of Akowelimile-Bulinda underwent training to become a local resource person for the community. Through the horizontal transfer of knowledge and the use of distance-learning methods, group members have learned about best-practice sunflower production, as well as how to access loans from banks and financial institutions.

As a result of this training, the group has opted to undertake sunflower production and currently has a plot of land dedicated solely to the cultivation of this crop. Akowelimile-Bulinda has also become a source of knowledge in the local community; the group’s banana plot is used as a community “field school”, where other farmers go to learn about good farming practices and see first-hand demonstrations of how to improve their crops.

This knowledge-sharing not only facilitates learning – it also helps to strengthen social capital and increase networking opportunities for L3F participants and community members alike. Through the monthly savings, the group is able to loan money on a rotational basis to other members, who in turn invest this rotating loan in the enhancement of their enterprise. While the group is still in the early phases of developing its new sunflower agro-enterprise, members are enthusiastic about the future of their fledgling business and the opportunities to come.

COL’s Education Specialist for Open Schooling, Ms. Frances Ferreira, provided technical support and facilitated two workshops on open and distance learning (ODL) and open schooling for the Papua New Guinea Department of Education’s Flexible Open and Distance Education programme (FODE). COL, in collaboration with the World Bank, is helping to enhance FODE’s policies and services.

As a comprehensive student information system is key in the planning for quality and sustainable ODL, one important area is to revamp FODE’s student database over the next few months.

During the workshop on curriculum development planning, the team did a process review and confirmed that through this workshop, their practices were infused with new ideas. An issue highlighted during the workshop was quality. Since curriculum development is a multilayered process where individual team members contribute to the bigger picture, the teams introduced checklists in the planning process as one way of managing quality assurance.

The participants were also introduced to developmental testing (trialling) as an external mechanism of quality assurance. One of the participants noted that “at first, I was apprehensive to trial my materials because I thought it would be too costly and would take up a lot of my time; but after learning that there are several methods of trialling and that FODE can choose one or two of these methods and combine them, I felt confident that we can do it, too.”
Following the development of a national ICT in Education and open educational resources (OER) policy in Antigua & Barbuda and the endorsement of COL’s “Open Textbooks” initiative by ministers of education of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), COL and the Antigua & Barbuda Ministry of Education, Science and Technology worked together to pilot the implementation of COL’s Open Textbooks prototype. The pilot was successfully completed in April with the development of course materials for secondary mathematics.

The prototype includes over 500 mathematics OER from 72 different service providers. These OER were assessed for quality by a specialist mathematics educator, then collected, tagged and stored within a repository and aligned to learning objectives of the Caribbean Secondary Education Curriculum (CSEC) mathematics syllabus.

The prototype is powered by a Drupal content repository that is linked to the Canvas learning management system (LMS). By integrating these two tools, an online mathematics “textbook” was created entirely from available, free, high-quality OER.

While this can be used as a traditional static textbook, its real power lies in providing students and educators with the tools to manipulate, customise and update their resources. In addition, because it uses a sophisticated LMS as the delivery platform, students and teachers have access to integrated multimedia and a range of tools available within the LMS. The prototype also includes automatically marked quizzes and tests, which can be adapted to suit local needs.

Additional curriculum taxonomies can be added and mapped against the existing taxonomy to enable linkages to appropriate OER already in the database. It is anticipated that, in time, as the “textbook” is used elsewhere, this mapping exercise will allow staff and students to access globally the same OER for similar purposes.

Training on uploading and tagging new resources – e.g., supplying required metadata, assigning the correct Creative Commons licence – was provided to teachers and IT personnel. A few specialised personnel were also trained in refining the taxonomy so that it better reflects the way the curriculum is structured in Antigua & Barbuda. Technical training was also provided for the maintenance of the Canvas LMS.

Teachers were given an orientation to both the repository and the LMS, with training on how to use and manipulate the OER Open Textbooks prototype. They had opportunities to create new modules, to add and remove resources in the LMS and to change the sequence of the OER. There was also discussion about how best to deploy the prototype within their teaching.
In August 2013, the School of Business and Applied Studies Limited (ROYTEC), at the University of the West Indies, signed a memorandum of understanding for a partnership with the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). In doing so, ROYTEC agreed to embrace open educational resources (OER) as an operating strategy.

ROYTEC’s first VUSSC offering is a locally adapted version of the Bachelor in Business and Entrepreneurship.

Here is the back story...

VUSSC

VUSSC is a collaborative network of over 30 small states that was initiated by COL and is now led by an independent management committee, with support from COL.

Fourteen courses and programmes are now being delivered by nine institutions in eight Commonwealth small states. In 2013, the first group of VUSSC students graduated with a Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture for Small States from the National University of Samoa.

Primarily through online collaboration, VUSSC countries have chosen to focus on creating post-secondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, professional development, disaster management, the fisheries industry, port management, construction safety and agriculture. These non-proprietary, digital course materials (OER), which can readily be adapted to the specific context of each country, are used in offering credit-bearing qualifications associated with a Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture for Small States.

ROYTEC

ROYTEC is a private, tertiary-level institution governed by the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine (Trinidad & Tobago). ROYTEC’s philosophy focuses on the seamless transition of young adults from secondary school to tertiary education, the development of teachers to support national objectives for creating a knowledge-intensive economy, and corporate training interventions.

In its more than 60 years of existence, the University of the West Indies (UWI) has evolved from a fledgling college in the Caribbean island of Jamaica, with 33 students, to a full-fledged university with over 45,000 students, approximately 9,000 graduates annually and more than 120,000 alumni. It serves 17 nations through four campuses and numerous regional centres. UWI’s Open Campus offers multi-mode teaching and learning services through virtual and physical site locations across the Caribbean region.

CONNECTIONS

HOW ROYTEC JOINED VUSSC, EMBRACED OER

By Nickisha Hamilton and John Lesperance

ROYTEC has now been mapped against national and regional frameworks throughout the Commonwealth.

UWI/ROYTEC

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INSTIGATION

The instigation for collaboration with COL came from the Office of the Principal of UWI’s St. Augustine campus in Trinidad. Pro-Vice Chancellor and Campus Principal, Professor Clement Sankat – who is also Chair of the ROYTEC Board of Directors and sits on COL’s Board of Governors – recognised that ROYTEC had the institutional capacity to favourably support VUSSC programmes:

- ROYTEC serves a target market of young adults, mostly in the 18–25 age group, who have completed the secondary school system with very little or no practical work experience, but with a demonstrated high level of interest in innovation and self-employment opportunities.
- ROYTEC has an outstanding reputation for online distance learning.
- ROYTEC has the adaptability to support the planning and implementation of two VUSSC programmes – the Bachelor in Business and Entrepreneurship and the Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture for Small States.
- COL and VUSSC saw ROYTEC’s high level of institutional adaptability – through a structure that facilitates resilience and the ability to reorganise and restructure while undertaking new initiatives – as a most encouraging aspect. ROYTEC has:

  1. the advantage of ease of engagement of local stakeholders, facilitating an understanding of their needs, interests and constraints in the shortest possible timeframe; and
  2. a team approach, facilitating consensus building within time constraints, e.g.:

- a healthy provision of policy and strategic direction from ROYTEC’s Board of Directors,
- the resource capacity and competence from ROYTEC’s management and staff,
- the re-purposing of OER and customisation of instructional content by faculty members,
- the alignment of national objectives with human resource development.
The training emphasised the importance of:

- licences initially for VUSSC programmes.
- ROYTEC and released under open content
-dle learning platform for courses owned by
- knowledge gaps in the use of the Moo
- faculty and administrative staff to address
- phase came next. COL assisted with this
- resource mobilisation and training

**PROGRAMME PLANNING**

*Developing an OER policy*

The first step for ROYTEC was to develop its own OER policy. A COL consultant, Mr. Tony Mays of the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), worked with ROYTEC staff and stakeholders in early 2013. The resulting policy shows how OER were embraced from the perspectives of the stakeholders:

- For students, OER encourages them to use their own experiences as a means of knowledge generation and critical thinking.
- For faculty, the sourcing, application and development of OER provide opportunities to keep their teaching relevant and contemporary.
- From governance, there is a commitment to provide leadership in promoting the use of OER among stakeholders.
- From government, there is continued connection with tertiary institutions to align programmes with national human resource development needs.

**Resource mobilisation and training**

The resource mobilisation and training phase came next. COL assisted with this by sponsoring two training workshops for faculty and administrative staff to address any knowledge gaps in the use of the Moodle learning platform for courses owned by ROYTEC and released under open content licences initially for VUSSC programmes. The training emphasised the importance of:

- preparing quality course materials specifically for online instruction,
- participating in online activities with students,
- posting articles and other academic materials,
- managing assignments, examinations, student projects and course-related research, and
- producing course management reports.

**Repurposing, integrating and designing new resources**

Later in 2013, Mr. John Lesperance, COL’s Education Specialist for VUSSC, led a workshop for ROYTEC staff on developing curriculum using OER, which focused on a blend of:

1. repurposing existing OER resources,
2. integrating relevant courses already available at ROYTEC, and
3. designing new courses to meet the educational outcomes and local requirements of the programme.

For ROYTEC, an unanticipated outcome of this workshop was the need to immediately expand the faculty team to include additional knowledge areas.

**Programme design**

Final programme design included programme structure; courses and course credits; assessment, teaching and learning resources; course outlines; learning outcomes; evaluation of teaching and learning; and ensuring alignment with transnational qualification frameworks (COL and ACTT).

During late 2013 and early 2014, ROYTEC worked on restructuring institutional policies, processes and plans to incorporate OER and distance learning practices and meet internal and external standards for quality assurance and accreditation. This involved rationalisation of:

- strategic plans,
- human resource management policies,
- financial budgets,
- quality management systems,
- technology plans,
- teaching and learning resources, including libraries,
- risk management plans,
- academic and programme administrative policies and regulations,
- academic boards and committee policy and integration,
- organisational structures,
- student management and records,
- student support, welfare and policies,
- academic advisement services,
- faculty management,
- teaching and learning evaluation policies, and
- student satisfaction surveys and tracer studies.

While this list is quite exhaustive, the requirements that presented the most challenges were:

1. the development of a programme-specific quality management system (QMS) that sets out the quality assurance protocols and performance indicators for OER and distance learning (as required for programme recognition and accreditation by ACTT) and
2. the preparation of a market research report to prove the need for the programme in Trinidad & Tobago.

COL helped with professional guidance in these areas. Of particular help was the COL publication *Quality Assurance Toolkit for Distance Higher Education Institutions and Programmes* (www.col.org/QAToolkit_HE), which was developed in collaboration with the Distance Education Modernisation Project (DEMP) in Sri Lanka.

**EXTERNAL EVALUATION**

The ACTT external evaluation is now underway this month. ROYTEC is confident that its leadership structure, policies and stakeholder support will ensure a successful evaluation.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

The implementation phase will involve:

1. rolling out the technology platform,
2. augmenting academic staff to meet the full range of teaching, learning and academic support needed to achieve the intended learning outcomes with the target group, and
3. modifying the existing programme review process with a new approach for OER.

**A POSITIVE INFLUENCE**

“Embracing OER is clearly having a positive influence on ROYTEC, its use of technology and its support for students,” commented COL Vice President, Mr. Vis Naidoo, in Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, earlier this year.

The ROYTEC project was supported by COL through a grant from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which has been funding VUSSC OER programmes since 2006. VUSSC will replicate the ROYTEC model in other small states to encourage the use of its OER courses and promote the use of educational technology to help increase access.

Ms. Nickisha Hamilton is ROYTEC’s Manager, Quality Assurance and Programme Development. Mr. John Lesperance is COL’s Education Specialist for VUSSC.

[www.vussc.net](http://www.vussc.net)
OPEN POLICY NETWORK LAUNCHED

Creative Commons, leading a partnership of 35 organisations internationally, has launched the Open Policy Network (OPN). The network’s mission is to foster the creation, adoption and implementation of open policies and practices that advance the public good by supporting open policy advocates, organisations and policy makers, connecting open policy opportunities with assistance and sharing open policy information.

Open policies promote open licensing of resources, financed through public funding, to maximise the impact of the investment. “If we are going to unleash the power of hundreds of billions of dollars of publicly funded education, research, data and software, we need broad adoption of open policies,” the website states. “For the purposes of open policies that contribute to the public good, we define policy broadly as legislation, institutional policies and/or funder mandates.”

Membership in OPN is open to any individual, organisation, company or other entity. One becomes an OPN member by agreeing to the OPN Participation Agreement.

UNISA APPROVES OER STRATEGY

“As the African University in service of humanity, we have a responsibility to share the gift of knowledge,” said Narend Baijnath, Pro-Vice Chancellor at Unisa – the University of South Africa – and COL Board member, when announcing Unisa’s new Open Educational Resource (OER) Strategy, in May. “OER provides the vehicle for our institution to lead by example in widening access to educational opportunity.”

The OER Strategy encompasses five priorities: managing teaching and learning material; harnessing OER for teaching and learning; releasing openly licensed materials; contributing towards global knowledge; and reviewing institutional policies to incorporate values of openness.

The Unisa OER Strategy also commits the university to its contribution agreement with the OERu network as a founding anchor partner.

EDUCATION GOOD PRACTICE AWARDS 2015

The Commonwealth Secretariat has called for submissions for the Commonwealth Education Good Practice Awards 2015, which will be presented at the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (19CCEM) in The Bahamas in June 2015.

Commonwealth ministries of education, educational institutions and civil society organisations, providing or promoting primary and secondary education, are invited to submit good practices taking place in their country in one or more of eight action areas.

MAURITIUS

OU TO OPEN BRANCH IN UGANDA

At the opening ceremony of the COL Regional Focal Points Meeting for Africa and the Mediterranean, held in Mauritius in May, Mauritius Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, Dr. Rajeshwar Jeetah, announced that the new Open University of Mauritius will open a branch in Uganda “as part of Mauritius’s humble contribution and moral responsibility to widen access to tertiary education on the African Continent.”

Recalling that Mauritius has witnessed major developments in the field of open and distance learning over the past three years, Minister Jeetah stated that the country now has a full-fledged open university, which has already started building its reputation as a prime open education provider with more than 70 per cent female enrolment.

“This development highlights the special importance given by Government to widening opportunities in education and making use of the latest technologies to bring education within the reach of the people, especially women and vulnerable groups,” he said. He also thanked COL for being “instrumental in the development of open and distance learning in Mauritius and in the setting up of the Open University.”

COL President and C.E.O., Professor Asha Kanwar, commended the open university and its staff. “We expect to see the Open University of Mauritius emerge as one of the centres of excellence in the Commonwealth,” she stated.

FORM 4, 5 STUDENTS ISSUED TABLETS

The Mauritius Ministry of Education and Human Resources, in partnership with Mauritius Telecom, issued tablet computers to 26,100 students and their educators earlier this year.

The tablets, equipped with educational content and classroom management concepts, were provided to all Form 4 and Form 5 students, in both state and private schools, and their educators.

Minister of Education and Human Resources, Dr. Vasant Bunwaree, expressed his satisfaction “that the Ministry is moving fast on the path of innovation and creativity as well as providing learning opportunities to all and enhancing learners’ critical and exploratory thinking.” He added, “It will encourage them to innovate and to adapt to changes in an increasingly globalised environment.”

The Mauritius Institute of Education assisted in the creation of interactive multimedia content and provided training to educators on information and communication technology use in classrooms.

At the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM), hosted by the Government of Mauritius in August 2012, COL, in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNICEF/Child-Friendly Schools and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, distributed low-cost, customised Android tablets to country delegations. The tablets and their content demonstrated the possibilities for low-cost technology in the classroom.
ISSUES IN ELEARNING VIDEO SERIES

COL has posted a series of videos that explore issues in eLearning and distance education. Prepared and narrated by COL’s Education Specialist for eLearning, Dr. Mark Bullen, the videos are short introductions to various topics, including:

WHAT IS ELEARNING? (5 MINUTES)
Dr. Bullen explains his perspective on the meaning of eLearning. His key message is that eLearning should be seen as a continuum of opportunities for using information and communication technology (ICT) in education. This can involve supporting and enhancing traditional face-to-face teaching, using ICT to provide blended learning or flipped classroom options, and delivering fully online distance education programmes.

WHAT IS INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN? (5 MINUTES)
Dr. Bullen demystifies instructional design by providing a simple and easy to understand explanation of the concept. His key point is that instructional design is all about crafting learning objectives at a level appropriate for the knowledge and skills that are being developed, then designing learning activities and assembling resources that help learners achieve those objectives.

DECONSTRUCTING THE DIGITAL NATIVES DISCOURSE (8 MINUTES)
In this video, Dr. Bullen looks at the “digital natives discourse” – the idea that young people are fundamentally different from previous generations because of their exposure to digital technology. He suggests we should be sceptical of the key claims associated with this discourse, because they are not supported by empirical research.

RECONSIDERING THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (9 MINUTES)
Learning management systems (LMSs) are a core and costly part of the IT infrastructure of just about every large educational organisation today, but do they provide good value? In this video, Dr. Bullen questions the value of the LMS and argues there are alternatives that have the potential not only to save money but also to provide a more appropriate learning environment.

THE SOCIAL AGENDA FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION (6 MINUTES)
Until the turn of the century, distance education was essentially about access: trying to reach the underserved populations and the second-chance and non-traditional learners, and helping developing countries educate large numbers of learners with limited resources. But Dr. Bullen argues that with the emergence of online learning in the late 1990s, this social agenda of distance education has given way to a more functionalist and technologically deterministic agenda.

All of the videos are freely available online.
www.col.org/videos

GENDER RESOURCES

COL’s Gender page and Gender micro-site have recently been updated. Useful and relevant information about COL’s work to advance gender equality and girls’ and women’s empowerment through open and distance learning, along with gender-related resource materials and links, are presented in a way that is now even more accessible and user-friendly.

www.col.org/Gender
www.col.org/GenderMS

GENDER ANALYSIS – THE CARIBBEAN

A Gender Analysis of Open and Distance Learning in the Caribbean Region was prepared for COL by Dana Peebles (Kartini International Consulting Inc., Toronto, Canada).

The report provides an overview and analysis of the existing literature on open and distance learning (ODL) in the Caribbean from a gender perspective. It covers a wide range of themes encompassing socio-cultural and economic factors. For some topics, no data or analysis directly related to gender issues was available, or the available data was over 10 years old. In these instances, the report summarises key ODL issues in that area and assesses the relevant gender equality issues and questions influencing the related current practices and status.

www.col.org/consultancies

MOOC ON MOBILES FOR DEVELOPMENT

For six weeks, beginning in October 2013, IIT Kanpur and COL delivered a massive open online course (MOOC) on the topic of moblies for development (M4D). This report, by David Porter (BCcampus, Vancouver), provides a pedagogical review of the M4D online course to assist IIT and COL staff in better understanding the outcomes of the prototype course, the participants, their participation and performance and their response to the course design.

www.col.org/consultancies

LEGISLATIVE DRAFTING MATERIALS NOW OER

COL and the Commonwealth Secretariat are pleased to release their Legislative Drafting course materials, now as open educational resources (OER).

The Legislative Drafting distance education materials, which have been used throughout the Commonwealth, were recently revised by COL and the Secretariat, working with Athabasca University instructors Mr. John Mark Keyes (Chief Legislative Counsel, Justice Canada) and Mr. Peter Pagano (Chief Legislative Counsel, Province of Alberta, Canada).

The instructor materials for the course have also been revised and are available for licensed use by partner institutions.

The Legislative Drafting programme is principally directed to anyone at the start of a career as a legislative drafter and offers a new approach to learning the skills and techniques of legislative drafting.

www.col.org/LegislativeDrafting
COL RIM, 2ND EDITION

COL has released the 2nd edition of its Review and Improvement Model for higher education institutions (COL RIM). First published in 2010, COL RIM is used to support quality assurance in higher education institutions throughout the Commonwealth. It is a guide to conducting effective quality internal audits and is freely available from COL’s website. www.col.org/COL-RIM

GUIDES TO QUALITY

Two guides to quality in online learning have been published by Academic Partnerships. Both were edited by Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić and Sir John Daniel:

The second guide is a follow-up to the first. The editors note: “In the year since we issued the first guide, alternative or ‘post-traditional’ approaches to higher education have continued to multiply. These approaches include new types of informal short courses and approaches to certification, growing openness in access to intellectual capital, and a lively diversification of teaching and learning methods, not least in MOOCs. This new Guide seeks to help individuals and institutions that are venturing into this post-traditional world.”

Both are CC BY-SA and freely available online. www.academicpartnerships.com

KNOWLEDGE HUB LAUNCHED

Pakistan’s Latif Ebrahim Jamal National Science Information Centre (LEJNSIC) has launched a new, and freely available, “LEJ Knowledge Hub,” which on one platform integrates course material resources sourced from quality institutions throughout the world.

This is a massive learning platform that includes thousands of full courses (about half a million lecture hours), skills development modules, research-based lectures and online mentoring sessions at school, college and university levels.

The programme is led by COL Board member Professor Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, FRS, as a service to the nation and the world at large.

http://lej4learning.com.pk

OER — A VIDEO PRIMER

Rory McGreal, UNESCO/COL and ICDE Chair in Open Educational Resources, shares his expertise in a series of 10 short, informative videos that address the what, why, where and how of OER. Through the videos, Dr. McGreal provides guidance on how to effectively find and make use of OER for more time- and cost-effective course development.

The video series was produced by Contact North | Contact Nord, Canada, and is freely available online.

http://contactnorth.ca/tip/tools/open-educational-resources/videos

COL BOARD

Dr. Linda Sissons, CNZM, Chief Executive Officer of New Zealand’s Wellington Institute of Technology (WelTec), has been named Chair of COL’s Board of Governors.

Dr. Sissons takes on her new role as the Honourable Burchell White- man, O.J., steps down after 12 years on the Board and eight years as Chair.

Dr. Sissons has worked in university and institutes of technology management roles in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. She holds a PhD from London University, is a graduate of the Harvard Business School Advanced Management Program, and is a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit. She is also the chairperson of Wellington’s Knowledge Business Committee and a director of both PINZ (Polytechnics International New Zealand Limited) and Le Cordon Bleu New Zealand Institute.

As a major donor, New Zealand has a seat on COL’s Board of Governors. New Zealand has now appointed His Excellency the Right Honourable Sir Lockwood Smith, KNZM, as its representative on the Board. Sir Lockwood is New Zealand’s High Commissioner to the U.K., a former senior minister, including of education, agriculture and trade, and former Speaker of New Zealand’s House of Representatives.

Dr. Sissons has previously been New Zealand’s representative on the Board. Mr. Whiteman, a former Jamaican High Commissioner to the U.K. and Minister of Education, was the Caribbean representative on the Board prior to taking the Chair.

www.col.org/board

COL STAFF

Dr. Manas Ranjan Panigrahi joined COL in May as Programme Officer (Education) at the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEM-CA), in New Delhi.

Dr. Panigrahi was previously an Associate Professor at the College of Education and Behavioural Sciences in Haramaya University, Ethiopia. He has served at Indira Gandhi National Open University, the National Council for Educational Research and Training, and Manav Rachna International University. He holds a PhD (Education) from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and masters degrees in History and Education from Utkal University, Orissa, and Kurukshetra University, Haryana.

www.col.org/staff
COL’s President and C.E.O., Professor Asha Kanwar, delivered the 19th Professor G. Ram Reddy Memorial Lecture in New Delhi on 2 July.

India’s Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) established the annual event to honour Professor Reddy, who was IGNOU’s founding Vice Chancellor. From before its creation in 1985, Professor Reddy foresaw, planned, designed and shaped the course structure and administrative set-up of this mega-university. Considered “the father of distance education in India”, he was a leading distance educator and institution builder.

Professor Reddy was also a founding member of COL’s Board of Governors and COL’s first Vice President.

Tan Sri Dato’ Emeritus Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, in office at the time as COL’s second President, delivered the inaugural Memorial Lecture in 1996 (“Face to Face with Distance Education”).

This year, Professor Kanwar, a former IGNOU Pro-Vice Chancellor, spoke on, “Open Universities in the Time of MOOCs: Reaching the Unreached?” Weaving Professor Reddy’s vision into modern-day distance education, Professor Kanwar suggested four guiding strategies for reaching underprivileged and vulnerable groups: a participatory approach, decentralised organisational structures, learner centricity and targeting mechanisms.

From her lecture:

The unprecedented growth in technologies, the changing needs of the labour market and the increasing demand for relevant skills from our young people all place a special responsibility on our institutions. As Professor Reddy cautioned, ‘Indian higher education is going to be tested for its resilience and vitality. The institutions of higher education and the academic community will have to live up to this challenge. Else, they will be rendered vestiges mutely and helplessly witnessing changes around, which they are not able to comprehend or catch up with.

Open universities have the opportunity to create new models of OER use and MOOCs … OER and MOOCs present us with new challenges and opportunities. Let us harness the potential of these emergent developments to use them as appropriate tools of Indian higher education to address the issues of equity and inclusion that Professor Reddy spoke of: That will be the best way to honour his memory.

www.col.org/speeches

COL WINS ACDE AWARD

At its 4th Conference in June in Zimbabwe, the African Council for Distance Education presented COL (in absentia) with an “Outstanding Institutional Supporter of ACDE” award for strengthening and supporting open and distance learning on the continent. COL continues to work with ACDE and its member institutions in promoting learning for development through the use of appropriate technologies.

www.col.org/wins-acde-award
COL and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) work collaboratively to support the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL), which serves as a centre of expertise in open and distance learning for West Africa.

In March, RETRIDOL conducted a COL-sponsored, two-day train-the-trainer regional workshop on developing and writing fundable research proposals. The workshop, held at the University of Ghana-Legon, Accra, was attended by 25 academic staff members, drawn from 10 higher institutions in Ghana and Nigeria, who have committed to cascading the knowledge and skills gained for the benefit of many others at home.

The workshop was facilitated by Professor Yaw Oheneba-Sakyi, Director of the Institute of Continuing and Distance Education, University of Ghana-Legon, and Professor Vincent Babatunde Ogunlela, Director of RETRIDOL-NOUN.

COL supported the development of institutional quality assurance policies for five open schools, starting with a five-day workshop in Lusaka, Zambia, which was attended by representatives from open schools in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.

The COL consultant used techniques that encouraged participants to apply practical skills and build on their existing policies. Over the past three months, four of the institutions have successfully negotiated and implemented the policies at their institutions.

Answering requests from open schools in the Commonwealth for help in making technical and vocational subjects accessible to more young people, COL sponsored an international workshop, held in Botswana, on how utilising open educational resources (OER) can help.

There is increasing recognition of a mismatch between the secondary education curriculum and labour market needs; in response, there has been a conscious move towards “vocationalisation” of secondary education in some open schools.

Access to quality training resources and qualified teachers, however, continues to be a challenge in technical and vocational subjects, particularly at the secondary school level. COL initiated the “donate to the pool of OER4TVET” activity to make a meaningful contribution to the expanded provision of technical/vocational education and training (TVET) at the secondary level and to encourage youth to develop their full potential and lead productive and fulfilled lives.

Several open schools have contributed to the pool of OER4TVET. Participants from Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania and Trinidad & Tobago attended the workshop. Some of the covered topics included: the OER Adaptation Handbook; How to Search for OER; Evaluation of OER; and Mapping the Curriculum against the OER. The participants developed individualised Resource Toolboxes, to which they added all the resources they would need as they embarked on the journey to develop OER4TVET.

The Open Knowledge Foundation, in collaboration with COL and the LinkedUp Data project (University of Hanover), hosted a workshop on open and linked data in support of education in developing countries.

Entitled “Making it Matter: Supporting Education in the Developing Countries with Open and Linked Data,” the workshop was held in London in May. The 30 participants were all international experts in the field. COL’s Director, Technology & Knowledge Management, Dr. Venkataraman Balaji, presented on open educational resources (OER) in the developing world and the use of Linked Data methods to assess the quality of OER. A video recording of Dr. Balaji’s presentation is available on COL’s website: www.col.org/speeches

An international competition has now been announced, with a track dedicated to exploring this area: http://linkedup-challenge.org/vici-focused-tracks
BIG DATA AND LINKED DATA: HOW IMPORTANT IS DATA IN EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT?

By V. Balaji

Big Data is a term now frequently used in the media. Its use has followed the hype-and-bust cycle that is almost standard in covering technology developments. With greater clarity after the backlash, we can take a more balanced look at the importance or otherwise of data in education. We can look at two different ways of making such use of data: Big Data and Linked Data.

“Big Data” – considered a buzzword by some – has its origins in the sciences. More than a decade ago, massive amounts of data were generated through research in astrophysics, genomics and other disciplines. The data volumes were so large that conventional management and analysis techniques would not work, so new methods were developed. Over the last few years, this approach has extended to other areas, such as retail. Today, one can talk of a Big Data package, comprising a host of online computational methods and the use of one’s own or outsourced data centres. Some of the Big Data applications have been so successful that some commentators even claim theories are no longer necessary – instead, just correlations across massive data sets will reveal trends.

After a decade of debate, there is now a widely held view that Big Data techniques do have some viable uses in many areas. Data is no longer a by-product of processes; it is a raw material in itself and has importance for governments and development agencies. There is even talk of data sovereignty.

Rapid advancement of massive open online courses (MOOCs) has resulted in the availability of masses of interactive data. Data is also generated in smaller quantities in online learning spaces.

Having access to so much data provides new opportunities for educational planners and administrators to effect improvements in teaching and in the delivery of services. “Learning analytics,” although not strictly in the Big Data ecosystem, is accepted as a useful set of methods and tools to improve learner experience. Use of data in education is always an accepted basis for decision-making but not in the way businesses use data in a competitive environment. Learning analytics provides new opportunities; for example, through an analysis of data in online learning spaces, a teacher can identify learners at risk of dropping out. In general, this will enable educational organisations to meet the challenge of providing rapid and well-informed responses to changes, while paying due attention to privacy laws and other considerations.

The other aspect of data in education relates more to educational resources. “Linked Data” is a term coined by Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web. It is a branch of computing that represents an advancement in web technology. Just as web pages are linked to one another through unique identifiers, data about those web pages can be interlinked and unique identifiers can be provided.

Documents in the web are open to linking by other users. Data, if held in databases, is not open that way. It will be open if data is held directly on the web, and Linked Data provides highly reliable ways to do so. This way, data is not locked up in a database management system but is more open to sharing. This is the basis of Open Data, an approach accepted by many governments and allied agencies throughout the world; examples from the Commonwealth are in British Columbia (Canada), the UK and India.

A relevant application of Linked Data in education is in the publication of university course catalogues, along with associated information such as costs.

Another relevant example is open educational resources (OER). When OER have Linked Data, for example, a user could pose a query that combined quality, level of prior achievement, media type, etc. to discover a highly relevant OER. The process would be fast and targeted. An analysis of COL’s Directory of Open Educational Resources (doer.col.org) shows that a number of developing countries of the Commonwealth are publishing significant quantities of OER (e.g., India, Nigeria, Pakistan and South Africa). It would be useful to incorporate procedures to publish the Linked Data for those OER, as doing so would significantly improve chances for their discovery and reusability.

Dr. Venkataraman Balaji is COL’s Director, Technology & Knowledge Management.
During April to June, COL’s Aptus system was made available for performance testing to volunteers at 20 sites in 15 countries. Aptus is a “Classroom Without Walls” that facilitates content sharing and learning interaction through WiFi, without requiring Internet connections.

Testers were invited to assess the start-up time, radius of connectivity, number and type of devices (laptops or smartphones/tablets), and maximum operation under one battery charge. Testers were also asked to assess the usefulness of ownCloud, an advanced “cloud services” software application included in Aptus, which facilitates the local exchange of files (documents, images or videos). (See below.)

Results have been received from 10 locations in nine countries so far. They show that Aptus is a robust device. It is able to withstand long transit times. It starts up easily (less than two minutes to boot up), is able to connect to many devices (maximum of 20 in one location in Nigeria) and can last for close to three hours. The ownCloud application was widely appreciated. Almost every tester said that content upload to Aptus at a local level is possible but should be made easier for users with limited knowledge of website management. Another important suggestion was to include the Simple English Wikipedia (http://simple.wikipedia.org), which has about 100,000 articles in basic/plain English and has limited graphics.

Currently, Aptus is configured using a mini PC (Rockchip-based) and has a total storage of 72 GB (8 GB on the mini-PC and 64 GB on a micro-SD card). It contains WordPress 3.9 as the primary content management system (CMS) and makes available Drupal 7 (CMS) and Moodle 2.7 (a learning management system). Content includes sample open textbooks, about 2,000 Khan Academy videos, Wikipedia for Schools and Simple English Wikipedia. www.col.org/aptus

The Moodle open source community has released version 2.7. It appears to be a good release that comes with a number of key features. Many of the plug-ins that were optional in earlier versions are now built in (such as Bookmaker). It is strong and stable and is now mobile-themed for a number of popular smartphones and tablets.

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is making extensive use of Moodle 2.7 using cloud-based installations. COL also conducted an online workshop with the Open University of Malaysia (June 2014) using Moodle 2.7, and participants were pleased with the experience.

www.moodle.org

Cloud computing services – the use of connected virtual computers hosted in remote locations – is a fast-growing business. A small number of global providers offer a range of cloud-based services for file sharing, office productivity and/or collaboration. A number of international and development organisations need the convenience of cloud-based sharing services but may not be able to afford them because costs can quickly rise.

The open source application ownCloud could be a no- or low-cost alternative for file sharing and collaboration. It can be configured to link to an email server for notifications. Access passwords and expiry dates can also be set.

As an open source solution, ownCloud is free to download and use. Initial set-up would normally require a trained individual, but anyone who is familiar with a PC can use its functionalities. There are versions available for both Android and iOS devices.

COL has been successfully testing ownCloud with an initial space of 50 GB. www.ownCloud.org

www.ownCloud.org

COL’s Director, Technology & Knowledge Management, Dr. Venkataraman Balaji, presents COL’s Aptus device to Ms. Vanita Shinde of Mann Deshi Women’s Cooperative Bank in Maharashtra, India