COL is working with the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA) to expand flexible and blended delivery approaches in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). COL and CAPA have launched a number of activities aimed at alleviating poverty by increasing access to quality skills development for young people and adults.

• **East Africa and Zambia TVET workshops**

Thirty-six TVET institutions in The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia have taken part in workshops introducing them to flexible approaches to skills development. The workshops, held in Kenya and Zambia, also identified institutions that have the potential to either start or increase the number of people reached through open and distance learning (ODL). Training needs for TVET managers and teachers were identified, particularly related to IT and the use of technology to support in-service training programmes.

• **Strategy and policy development in Zambia**

A COL consultant worked with the Department of Vocational Education and Training in Zambia’s Ministry of Science, Technology and Vocational Training to develop a report analysing Zambia’s use of ODL in TVET, including recommendations for the future. TVET stakeholders subsequently came together to discuss the report in a national consultation workshop. Ministry staff will use this report to develop a national strategic framework and policy guidelines that will guide TVET institutions in their use of ODL methods.

Informal sector employment combats poverty in developing countries, especially for women. In Africa, the majority of work is in the informal economy. TVET institutions tend to focus on full time, pre-service training for young people, accepting only those with good grades at the junior or secondary certificate level. Many TVET programmes are oversubscribed; popular courses such as business and information technology (IT) can attract more than 100 applicants for each place.

Younger people with lower secondary qualifications, older out-of-work adults and women with children tend to be squeezed out. Urban dwellers access
COMMONWEALTH EMINENT PERSONS GROUP

A pan-Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group has been created, charged with providing recommendations about how to strengthen the Commonwealth. The ten members, announced by Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma in July, all bring strong connections within the Commonwealth and a wealth of related experience. The Group was formed at the request of Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 2009 meeting in Trinidad & Tobago.

The Eminent Persons Group is expected to consult extensively with governments, civil society groups and professional associations, and individuals. They will present recommendations at the next meeting of Commonwealth leaders in Perth, Australia in October 2011. The Group is also tasked with looking at the format, frequency and content of Commonwealth ministerial meetings.

The Eminent Persons Group’s first meeting in London on 19 and 20 July included a telephone presentation by COL President Sir John Daniel. His remarks, “Small, Successful and not in London: Introducing COL,” provided a succinct description of COL’s unique role.

www.col.org/speeches
www.thecommonwealth.org/subhomepage/228488/

PCF6: 24-28 November 2010
CONTINUED FROM COVER

Keynote speakers include:
• Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Anuwar Ali, Vice Chancellor, Open University of Malaysia,
• COL President Sir John Daniel,
• The Honourable Steve Maharey, Vice Chancellor of Massey University, New Zealand
• Dr. Caroline Seelig, Chief Executive, The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand
• Ms. Chetna Sinha, founder of the Mann Deshi Business School in Maharashtra, and
• The Honourable Dr. Shashi Tharoor, social rights advocate and author, Member of the Indian Parliament.

In addition to COL and IGNOU, other PCF6 sponsors include the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), UNESCO, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS, India), the Open University (U.K.) and the University of London. Sponsorship funds are directed entirely to travel subsidies for delegates from Commonwealth developing countries to ensure that there is representation from as many member states as possible.

www.col.org/pcf6

EXTENDING THE REACH OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA
CONTINUED FROM COVER

TVET more than rural people; boys more than girls; the able-bodied more than those with special needs. Resolving this inequity is a central philosophy of COL’s approach, known as Flexible Skills Development.

COL is working with TVET institutions to adopt sustainable flexible learning approaches. By working in partnership – sharing costs and available infrastructure – these institutions will be better equipped to extend the reach of TVET.

COL is currently establishing an online Community Learning Network (CLN) through which information and resources will be provided for building capacity within TVET institutions to use information and communication technology (ICT) in administration and teaching. The CLN will provide a platform for anyone in the Commonwealth who wants to learn about and discuss flexible skills development.

Individuals and organisations interested in getting involved in Flexible Skills Development are invited to contact Ms. Alison Mead Richardson, COL Education Specialist, Skills Development at ameadrichardson@col.org.

Q&A WITH SIR JOHN DANIEL

Described as an “online and distance education pioneer”, COL President Sir John Daniel was the subject of a feature interview in the 26 September issue of University World News, the weekly emailed newspaper for higher education practitioners worldwide. Sir John discussed the strengths and weaknesses of open and distance learning (ODL), the challenges of cross-border education and the success of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth.

www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=2010092516094755

COLLABORATING TO INCREASE ACCESS TO LEARNING. COL AND THE OPEN POLYTECHNIC OF NEW ZEALAND HAVE SIGNED A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING, AGREING TO COLLABORATE ON THE USE OF OPEN, DISTANCE, FLEXIBLE AND TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED LEARNING TO INCREASE ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES, PARTICULARLY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR MARGINALISED AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; FORMALISING THE AGREEMENT IN VANCOUVER IN JULY ARE COL PRESIDENT SIR JOHN DANIEL AND OPEN POLYTECHNIC CHIEF EXECUTIVE DR. CAROLINE SEELIG. MOREonline
The Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) for the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) was formally launched in Windhoek, Namibia, on 3 May 2010. COL President Sir John Daniel presided at the occasion, which heralded the introduction of probably the most international, collaborative system for capacity building, skills development and greater access to quality assured qualifications.

The timing and venue for the TQF launch was most opportune as it coincided with the 2010 Forum of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies (INQAAHE), which was hosted by the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA).

Present at the launch were representatives from a wide spectrum of role players in education and training including guests from the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC), INQAAHE, UNESCO, the World Bank and Regional Quality Networks in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and Latin America. Many international leaders from within the education sector certainly became aware of the TQF and its benefits as a result of this meeting and the presentations.

Read the full article at www.vussc.org

WHAT IS THE TQF?

The TQF is a system of accreditation for VUSSC courses that facilitates the movement of courses and learners among states. VUSSC is an international online course development initiative, not an accrediting or awarding body. That means the institutions that offer courses must accredit them locally. The aim of the TQF is to ensure all open educational resources (OERs) created for VUSSC can be adapted into recognised courses that students can take for credit through educational institutions in small states. The TQF should act as a translation point for modules/units and qualifications among countries. An additional benefit is that the TQF will discourage bogus providers (also known as “degree mills”), which are active on the Web in trying to sell fake qualifications.

ONLINE OER DISCUSSION

COL and UNESCO are hosting an online discussion forum on aspects of Open Educational Resources (OERs). This is part of a joint COL/UNESCO initiative entitled, “Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity” (http://oerworkshop.weebly.com).

The forum includes three online conversations:

• “Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity”, 23-29 September
• “What works, what does not and under what conditions?”, 20-26 October
• “Copyright and the development and re-use of OERs”, 10-16 November

CREATING CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

More than 300 teacher educators from five Commonwealth countries have taken part in workshops this year that promote Child-Friendly Schools. The Child-Friendly Schools approach is based on the concept that quality education is multi-dimensional and concerned with the total needs of the child as the central focus and beneficiary of all education decisions. Quality goes beyond good teaching methods and learning outcomes to also include the health and nutrition status of learners; adequacy of facilities, services and supplies; and the safety of the learning environment.

In partnership with UNICEF, COL is working to enhance the quality of education in schools by mainstreaming Child-Friendly Schools models and approaches into teacher training curricula in ten countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia.

The main areas of concentration for this project are:

- Integrating Child-Friendly Schools models and approaches into pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula, and training teacher educators and other educational personnel about Child-Friendly Schools, and
- Strengthening the role and Child-Friendly Schools capacity of teacher resource centre managers, schools heads, inspectors and other in-service educational personnel.

Ten workshops facilitated by COL thus far this year have focussed on introducing Child-Friendly Schools, reviewing curriculum and developing teacher training materials that incorporate Child-Friendly Schools principles, concepts and methods. Many of the training materials are currently being piloted and will then be made freely available to teacher training institutions.

Ministries of Education and teacher training institutions are showing a strong sense of ownership, demonstrated by their contribution of workshop resources, including facilitators, supplies, venues, transportation costs and accommodation costs.

www.col.org/cfs

OERs FOR OPEN SCHOOLS

Master Teachers in six Commonwealth countries are continuing to develop open educational resources (OERs) in secondary school subjects specifically for use by open schools. Over the past two years, COL’s “OERs for Open Schools” initiative has trained 100 Master Teachers from Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia in materials design using collaborative methods. They are producing print-based and electronic OERs in 20 selected subjects.

A mid-term evaluation report conducted by the South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE) identified several factors that have led to a slower than expected timeline for the project. Lack of access to computers, inadequate connectivity, time constraints and insufficient training are the main factors hampering progress. The report identifies how sample units can be improved and recommends that print-based materials be completed before electronic versions are created. The project timeline has been adjusted, and work is continuing on the materials.

Master Teachers have made significant progress with the first 15 subjects, and close to 200 completed units are being reviewed. COL has uploaded the units onto the COL Wiki (www.colowiki.org).

“OERs for Open Schools” is funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Once the OERs are complete, they will be freely available for open schools – and other educational institutions – to download, adapt and use.

www.col.org/OpenSchooling
IMPROVING QUALITY IN MULTIMEDIA MATERIALS

As the use of multimedia materials proliferates along with expansion of open and distance learning, the quality of these materials is increasingly an issue. COL’s regional office, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), is working to promote quality assurance in multimedia learning materials. In 2009, CEMCA collaborated with partners in India and Malaysia to develop a framework for quality assurance in multimedia learning materials, QAMLM (Quality Assurance in Multimedia Learning Materials).

CEMCA is now encouraging agencies that develop multimedia learning materials to implement the guidelines. Earlier this year, CEMCA hosted a four-day QAMLM meeting in collaboration with the Educational Multimedia Research Centre at Kamaraj University in Southern India. Forty delegates from multimedia user and developer groups in India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka shared feedback about the guidelines. The consensus was that the guidelines are useful and needed, but modifications, including more detailed instructions, are required.

CEMCA is currently developing more detailed guidelines in collaboration with two partners: the Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC), the umbrella organisation representing 17 educational multimedia research centres across India that develop e-content for higher education and the Central Institute for Educational Technology (CIET), which is overseeing a Government of India project to develop secondary school level multimedia learning materials. The revised guidelines will be offered to a wider user group later this year.

www.cemca.org

COMMUNITY RADIO EXPANSION IN INDIA

In an effort to streamline license applications for community radio stations, India’s Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has introduced an online application system. Developed in association with COL’s regional office, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), the online application system can be easily accessed by anyone interested in applying for a community radio station license. The system allows the application to be sent simultaneously to different government ministries, enabling quicker clearance and swifter communication between the government and the applicants.

Backed by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India and CEMCA, community radio outreach and awareness are rapidly expanding in India. Between May and July 2010, the number of operational community radio stations grew from 57 to 82. More than 230 Letters of Intent have been signed, signalling more growth ahead.

www.mib.nic.in
www.cronlineindia.net

AGRICULTURE OERs FOR AFRICA

In partnership with the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), COL has developed a database for open educational resources (OERs) related to agriculture in Africa. More than 300 high quality agricultural OERs, released under Creative Commons licensing, have been uploaded to the OER Africa website. The primary purpose of the Agricultural OER space is to provide African agricultural higher education institutions with access to relevant learning materials. The materials are freely available to anyone to download, adapt and use.

www.oerafrica.org/agricultureoer

CHINESE AND COL COLLABORATE. COL PRESIDENT SIR JOHN DANIEL MET WITH A DELEGATION OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATORS FROM CHINA AT COL’S OFFICE IN VANCOUVER, CANADA IN SEPTEMBER 2010. THEY DISCUSSED ASPECTS OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING, PARTICULARLY ITS APPLICATION TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE USE OF MOBILE PHONES.
The Maldives Minister of Education, Dr. Mustafa Lutfi, launched the country’s mini-laptop programme with a class of Grade 3 students in August. Dr. Lutfi presented mini-laptops to the young students, saying that he has “been dreaming about this event” since he was appointed Minister of Education in 2008. His hope is that all students in the third grade will be using mini-laptops for learning by 2011.

The mini-laptop, originally known as the Eduframe, was developed by COL’s regional office, the Commonwealth Media Education Centre for Asia (CEMCA). In addition to enabling wider use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning, the mini-laptops will also ease the heavy load of textbooks students have to carry because the books are pre-loaded on the laptops. This pilot research project in Maldives will assess the information and communication technology (ICT) skills of the students as well as the user friendliness of the Eduframe.

CEMCA led development of the Eduframe, which was originally a digital photo frame that carried educational content. It evolved into a low-cost laptop, which is now marketed by M/S Orbit Peripherals Pte Ltd., Singapore as the Datamini Netbook for US $74. The Eduframe has a seven-inch screen and uses a 2 GB flash drive for storage. It runs on Windows CE and has 128 MB of memory, three USB ports and a battery that lasts about two hours.

Ms. Janet Ecker has been nominated as the Government of Canada’s new representative on COL’s Board of Governors. Ms. Ecker is currently President of the Toronto Financial Services Alliance and a Public Policy Advisor in the Tramore Group. Previously, she has served as Minister of Education, Minister of Finance, Minister of Social Services and Government House Leader in the Government of Ontario.

Her Excellency Mrs. Mariam Yalwaji Katagum has been nominated as the Government of Nigeria’s new representative on COL’s Board of Governors. Mrs. Katagum is Ambassador and Permanent Delegate for the Federal Republic of Nigeria to UNESCO. Previously, she was Deputy Director for Policy Planning, Management and Research at Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Education.

COL thanks Ms. Denise Chong (Canada) and Professor Michael Omolewa (Nigeria) for many years of dedicated service and contributions as Board members. As major funders of COL, Canada and Nigeria are entitled to a representative on the Board of Governors.

Ms. Janet Ecker
Ms. Mariam Yalwaji Katagum
Ms. Denise Chong
Professor Michael Omolewa

Dr. Venkataraman Balaji has been appointed Director, Technology and Knowledge Management with COL. A specialist in information and communication technology (ICT) applied to rural development, Dr. Balaji has been active in the area of learning technology for the past decade. He received the World Technology Award in the Education category in 2001.

Dr. Balaji holds a Masters degree from the Indian Institute of Technology and a PhD in Energy Studies from the University of Madras. He has worked with a host of international organisations. While on the staff of the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation in India, Dr. Balaji led development of the Information Villages research project that has created a globally recognised model for applying contemporary ICT in rural development. Dr. Balaji served as the Global Leader for Knowledge Management and Sharing with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and most recently led groundbreaking ICT projects with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

www.eduframe.net/maldives
www.cemca.org/eduframe
www.col.org/board
www.col.org/vbalaji
SUPPORT FOR COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARS

Opportunities for financial assistance are expanding with the introduction of the Rothschild World Scholarship in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat, which supports Penn World Scholars from Commonwealth countries. The Penn World Scholars programme offers financial assistance to outstanding students to attend the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, USA. The Rothschild World Scholarship is supported by Sir Evelyn and Lynn For ester de Rothschild. The Rothschild family also recently helped created the Manmohan Singh Undergraduate Scholarship Fund at Cambridge University, UK in honour of India’s Prime Minister.

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL RESTRUCTURES

The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) is reorganising to improve strategic planning, business development and marketing. Operations have been divided into three areas: corporate services, examinations services and business services. The restructuring involves the establishment of a Corporate Strategy and Business Development Unit, which will oversee leveraging CXC’s intellectual property, developing new products and services, and fundraising.

CXC is also working with COL to explore the creation of an open school. Currently, less than half of all secondary school students in the region complete five or more secondary school subjects – the standard for entry-level employment and for matriculation into tertiary schools.

Funded by Caribbean governments, donors and fees, CXC is an examining body that provides educational certifications in 16 English-speaking Commonwealth Caribbean countries and territories.

www.cxc.org

UPDATE: GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE PARTNERSHIP

Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), the world’s first multi-stakeholder network promoting innovation and advanced in knowledge and information and communication technology for development (ICT4D), has introduced a new strategic direction.

Following recommendations from a Task Force, GKP is shifting its focus from advocacy for ICT4D to supporting practitioners and community members with ICT interventions. Recognising that a much higher proportion of poor and marginalised people now have access to at least some form of ICT, GKP will take on an advisory role in ICT4D initiatives, facilitating partnerships and assisting with deployment of programmes. The new strategic framework was adopted earlier this year.

COL has been re-elected to GKP’s Executive Committee and is represented by Vice President Professor Asha Kanwar.

www.globalknowledgepartnership.org

SHARING COMMUNITY RADIO KNOWLEDGE

In June, Ms. Loretta Bailey went on a COL-sponsored exchange to CHUO FM radio in Ottawa, Canada. As the Sales and Administrator Coordinator for ROOTS FM in Jamaica, Ms. Bailey had the opportunity to see the inner workings of another community radio station. She provided this report about her experience.

“This was my first trip to Canada. CHUO FM is located in a basement at the University of Ottawa. It felt like home to me, but a more upgraded home. CHUO FM has more space than we do at ROOTS FM, about 200 volunteers, a music library and more up-to-date equipment.

This equipment would make our day-to-day operations less complicated in Jamaica. If ROOTS FM had just half of what CHUO FM has, we would be in a far better position. As I said to my counterpart, Karen McHarg, Director of Sales & Marketing, “Just give us half of what you have – we would work miracles each day for our inner city community!”

CHUO FM programming content is not different from ROOTS FM’s. As community radio stations, we both air programmes that are geared towards the poor, programmes that are uplifting and educational. They have Caribbean programmes, which are the selling points at CHUO FM. These programmes reminded me of being at ROOTS FAM and listening to the station. Their listeners respond just as ROOTS listeners would. Their Caribbean programmes consist of wide range of music including reggae, dancehall and others.

As community radio stations, CHUO’s and ROOT FM’s operations are similar. Music sheets are a requirement at both stations, as well as the airing of commercials and programming that provides an alternative to commercial radio. One area of difference is advertising rates. ROOTS FM’s prices are based on the length of commercials, while CHUO FM’s prices are based on the volume of commercials purchased. Karen and I exchanged ideas about sales, mainly on how to sell the station and how to work with our target audience and the little money they have. Karen’s influence and work knowledge has prompted me to become a lot more professional and interested in my work area. She has given me the encouragement and determination to promote and sell ROOTS FM.

The experience is something I am grateful for. Upon my return to ROOTS FM, I was asked where I would prefer to work. The answer was easy and simple: just give us the equipment and we will do the work no matter where we are!

www.cxc.org

CREATING CONNECTIONS: LORETTA BAILEY (RIGHT) AND KAREN MCHARG

OCTOBER 2010 7
As higher education institutions in the developing world struggle to meet growing demand, the issue of quality assurance is in the spotlight. A number of initiatives—including COL’s “do it yourself” approach to quality assurance audits—are rising to meet this challenge.

UNESCO’s World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) held last year in Paris was a notable international event that drew some 1,200 participants. One of the results was the identification of eight new dynamics in higher education. They are:

- Rising demand and massification
- Diversification of providers and methods
- Private provisions
- Distance education
- Cross-border higher education
- Quality assurance
- Teacher education
- Academic profession

Each of these new dynamics is related to open and distance learning (ODL). See the joint speech by UNESCO’s Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, Executive Secretary of the WCHE, and COL President Sir John Daniel to Shanghai TV University in May (www.col.org/speeches) for a discussion of how these new dynamics relate to distance education.

Quality assurance—and particularly the internationalisation of quality assurance—is one of the most striking new developments in higher education. It is a worldwide concern because of the growth of cross-border education, eLearning, ODL and Internet use. As education spreads across borders, so too, must quality assurance.

UNESCO has responded in several ways:

- Capacity building: global forums on quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications. This has facilitated the revision of quality standards within universities and accreditation processes in many countries.
- Web portal on Recognised Higher Education Institutions: a list of accredited higher education institutions that are recognised or otherwise sanctioned by competent authorities (http://portal.unesco.org/education).
- Deterring degree mills: joint publication with the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation of “Toward Effective Practice: Discouraging Degree Mills in Higher Education”.

**Distance education should not fear quality assurance.**

Sir John Daniel

**QA AND DISTANCE EDUCATION**

“Quality distance education is a subset of quality education,” said COL President Sir John Daniel in another recent speech. “Distance education should be subject to the same quality assurance mechanisms as education generally.”

This allows for comparisons to be made between the quality of distance and face-to-face provision—comparisons that can reflect well on distance education. For instance, the UK Open University was rated fifth out of 100 institutions by England’s Teaching Quality Assessment System. This assessment found that the quality of teaching at UKOU was superior to many august institutions, including Oxford University.

**LEARNING FROM INSTITUTIONAL AUDITS**

COL was involved in two institutional quality audits in 2007 that provided excellent learning for all involved. Sir John chaired an international visitation panel to the University of Ghana, which sought to re-establish its former national eminence. The panel of ten international experts made two visits to the University of Ghana and submitted a final report that addressed academic programmes, governance and administrative structures, infrastructure and resources. (www.col.org/GhanaVisit)

Both the university and the Government of Ghana found the report valuable, and it stimulated major reforms. But the costs were high: this was not a model for quality improvement that could be rolled out on any scale in developing countries.

Also in 2007, the University of South Africa (UNISA) asked COL to conduct a trial audit to help them prepare for an institutional audit by the South African Council on Higher Education. Dr. Willie Clarke-Okah, COL Education Specialist, Higher Education, co-ordinated a panel of seven international members and one local member. The panel held a preliminary meeting in the UK with UNISA officers and then visited UNISA for a week, publishing its report two months later. (www.col.org/UnisaTrialAudit)

Once again, UNISA found the panel’s report most helpful, both as a dry run for the official audit and for the learning it provided about creating an institutional culture of distance learning while engaging in continuous improvement. But, like the University of Ghana institutional audit, the exercise was an expensive one.

Following this experience with institutional audits, COL decided to create a model that would yield similar benefits but at a much lower cost. Two lessons emerged from the institutional audits experience in Ghana and South Africa:

- Much of the value in quality assurance comes from self-assessment.
- It is essential to have some mechanism that encourages staff institution-wide to take quality assurance seriously.

**A COST-EFFECTIVE, DIY APPROACH**

Over the past two years, COL has worked with partners to develop a quality assurance model called COL Review and Improvement Model. COL RIM was designed to help institutions, particularly those which are not yet embedded in effective national quality assurance systems, to develop a quality culture without significant out-of-pocket costs.

COL RIM combines internal and external quality assurance in a low cost “do it yourself” approach that does not require a
panel of external experts. It offers several significant benefits:

- It develops systemic thinking and organisational learning.
- The process offers the opportunity to build credibility without high stakes consequences for poor performance.
- Participating staff can build their skills and knowledge.

COL is working with the Dominica State College, the National University of Lesotho, the Open University of Sri Lanka and the University of Calabar (Nigeria) to implement COL RIM. The model has been introduced to higher education institutions and accreditation and quality assurance agencies through workshops and meetings in several regions of the Commonwealth. Just as COL RIM encourages continuous improvement, COL is committed to improving the model as feedback emerges from institutions that use it.

By facilitating institutional audits, COL is helping developing countries to provide greater access to quality higher education without adding significant costs.

For further information, please contact Dr. Willie Clarke-Okah at wclarke-okah@col.org.

The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) has introduced a free online course for the training and professional development of QA professionals. Developed in partnership with UNESCO and the World Bank, the Quality Assurance Professionals programme consists of four modules. www.inqaahe.org

THE COL REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT MODEL

Primarily intended for higher education institutions’ own use for improvement and capacity building, COL RIM can also be used to help meet external quality assurance requirements. It consists of five steps:

1. **Initiation**
   Institutions determine if they are ready and able to implement COL RIM. The institution assesses whether they are prepared to change, have open discussions about what needs to improve and accept new ways of doing things. It also means that senior management must be committed to leading the process and allocating people and resources to it. This step concludes with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with COL.

2. **Internal staff survey**
   Administered to all staff electronically by COL in partnership with the institution, the survey asks staff to rate a set of quality indicators and share opinions about how they perceive practices in their own areas of work.

3. **Self-review**
   The core of the COL RIM model, self-review relies on a team of senior staff members to investigate outcomes of the institution, focussed both on good practice and areas for improvement. The team produces a report that answers key thematic questions dealing with issues such as communication with stakeholders, community engagement, capacity development and performance monitoring.

4. **Verification**
   An external Lead Verifier, working with an internal team that has not been involved in the process so far, verifies the self-review. This team confirms the rigour of the methods, findings and recommendations of the self-review while also building quality assurance skills among staff involved in the team.

5. **Follow-up**
   This final step is when the recommendations made in the self-review that have been verified, expanded or modified through the verification exercise are implemented. Institutions are invited to provide COL with feedback on the effectiveness of the model; COL reports to stakeholders periodically about the collective outcomes of institutions that have implemented COL RIM as well as refinements to it.
LAPTOPS FOR EDUCATION: AN UNHEALTHY OBSESSION WITH RETAIL PRICES?

By Michael Trucano

When I started working full time exploring issues related to the use of educational technologies in developing countries about a dozen years ago, many ministries of education would express their desires for introducing computers in schools by saying things like “We want something that can enable students and teachers to do x and y and z”.

More recently, this conversation has switched in many places, as increasing numbers of ministries (and especially their most senior officials) have initiated their related planning processes by saying, “We need a computer that costs $___”.

The implications of this shift on planning practices in many places have actually been pretty profound.

Now, it is true that, in the early days, the initial rationales behind putting computers in schools were expressed in rather vague terms (e.g. “We want children to access the world of information on the Internet”). That said, such formulations often presented a useful starting point for discussions of what the educational goals of a particular ICT programme for schools might be. For the past half-dozen years or so, however, it appears to me that there has been a much greater focus in many quarters on only the retail prices of various devices, with discussions of what specific learning goals these devices are meant to help meet – and how – shunted to the side.

I recently heard, for example, of at least one place that has been distributing huge numbers of laptops to teachers based on price point alone, sporting technical specs that are out of date and with little attention on how these computers are actually meant to be used. One practical consequence of this is that the laptops themselves are seen as “junk” by the teachers who receive them, and so they are not used. Penny wise, pound foolish, as my grandmother used to say.

The cost of the end-user device is typically only a fraction (and often a small fraction) of the actual “costs” to a system associated with the introduction of a given technology – at least if it is meant to be integrated into the “system”. And if research on ICT use in education is clear on one thing, it is that simply buying hardware – and nothing else – and expecting positive things to happen may not be the most prudent course of action!

How big of a fraction? It depends. Research studies have it ranging anywhere from 5-20% over a period of five years or so (depending on definitions of “total cost of operation” and the variables considered). Absent complementary investments in technical support and maintenance, teacher training, content development and deployment – and typically the re-engineering of various current processes as well – the end value or impact of investments in ICT may be negligible.

While one cost component is regularly (and dramatically) dropping, the price of other components – much larger in aggregate – is often not dropping as well (and may, in fact, actually increase in some cases). Estimating costs related to ICT use is often rather tricky, and the cost savings realised as a result of drops in hardware prices may not have as large an impact on the overall cost equation as one may expect.

My point is not to criticise the organisations behind various low-cost laptop initiatives (including COL), the devices themselves, nor the larger movements focussing on providing low-cost computers to students. What I do mean to criticise is the often single-minded focus, even obsession, on the retail price of ICT devices alone, which is in many ways a distraction from more fundamental discussions of the uses of educational technologies to meet a wide variety of educational goals in ways that are relevant, appropriate and cost-effective.

Mike Trucano is the World Bank’s Senior ICT and Education Policy Specialist, serving as the Bank’s focal point on the topic within the education sector. His blog, EduTech: A World Bank Blog on ICT in Education, is at http://blogs.worldbank.org/edutech.

COMMUNITY BANKING FOR FARMERS

COL hosted a six-day travelling workshop about community banking for universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and banks from Kenya and Uganda that are active in L3 Farmers programme. The workshop, which was held in Tamil Nadu, India, introduced participants to the principles and practices of community banking in L3 Farmers. This increased awareness will help strengthen L3 Farmers in Kenya and Uganda and will help the rural poor access loans and other financial services.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND AGRICULTURE

INTEGRATING CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES AT THE FARM LEVEL WAS THE FOCUS OF A WORKSHOP IN NAIROBI, KENYA HOSTED BY COL AND THE COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION. PARTICIPANTS IN COL’S LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS (L3 FARMERS) PROGRAMME FROM KENYA, MAURITIUS AND UGANDA, AGRICULTURAL GROUPS AND EDUCATORS TOOK PART IN THE THREE-DAY MEETING, WHICH EXPLORED AGRICULTURE-CLIMATE INTERRELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATING COMPLEX CONCEPTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE TO RURAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL).
RADIO HELPS REBUILD A COMMUNITY

In partnership with the Rural Internet Connectivity System and the Regional Media Centre, both part of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), COL has helped launch a new community radio service in the outer island of Niutatoputapu, Tonga. The devastation of a tsunami in late 2009 highlighted the need for better communication and learning among residents of this remote island.

SPC provided a “radio in a suitcase”, enabling the Niutatoputapu community to broadcast locally on FM. The Regional Media Centre, with technical and financial assistance from COL, provided training for 20 local residents in designing, planning and creating radio programmes, including interviewing techniques, editing and using the Internet to gather information. A management committee was established to oversee a group of budding radio announcers.

Enthusiasm for the new radio station was such that it was launched ahead of schedule. On the day of the launch, the station broadcast for nine hours instead of the planned two hours. Since then, the station has been on the air for approximately six hours a day instead of two hours every Friday as originally envisioned. Government agencies on the island share the enthusiasm and have collaborated on recent programmes about an outbreak of bacterial skin infections and sanitation.

In the past, residents of Niutatoputapu would tune into radio stations from Tongatapu and Samoa that had spotty reception. Today the new community radio station is providing relevant local information that is helping the island recover and rebuild.

OERs FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

COL is spearheading an initiative to develop a bank of open educational resources (OERs) to support English language teaching in developing countries. Representatives from teacher training institutions in Ghana, Kenya, India, Nigeria and Tanzania have collaborated to produce six learning modules in both traditional text and multimedia formats for use by teachers at the Junior Secondary School level.

The draft modules were evaluated at a workshop hosted by the Central Institute of Educational Technology (CIET) of the National Council of Education Research and Training in New Delhi, India. A panel of 12 experts reviewed and critiqued the text and multimedia course materials, providing suggestions for improvement. Following the workshop, the course developers made the necessary revisions. The modules will be adapted for national contexts, pilot tested and then made available to teachers throughout the Commonwealth.

“OERs for English Language Teaching” supports school-based teacher training, which is seen as a solution to the lack of adequately trained teachers in the basic education sector. Other knowledge-based occupations and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS are reducing the stock of teachers in developing countries, particularly in Africa. As a result, many junior secondary schools are staffed by unqualified, under-qualified and incompetent teachers. This is likely to continue for many years.

School-based models of teacher training can help improve the effectiveness of in-service training, but there is an urgent need for up-to-date resources and support systems. By providing teachers with access to quality learning materials, “OERs for English Language Teaching” has the potential to make a contribution to improving the quality of learning at the Junior Secondary School level throughout the Commonwealth.

www.col.org/TeacherEducation
EXPANDING ODL FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Trinidad & Tobago

COL is supporting development of the Open and Flexible Training and Education Network (OF TEN) in Trinidad & Tobago. OF TEN is an ODL work-based training strategy that responds to the need to upgrade skills of people in the workforce, particularly in the public sector.

COL has provided the Government of Trinidad & Tobago with open educational resources (OERs) in topics such as Working with Concrete, Working with Timber and Small Engine User Maintenance. The OERs were originally developed as part of the Pacific programme of Basic Trades for Small Island Nations.

COL also arranged for The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (TOPNZ) to consult with its counterparts in Trinidad & Tobago. Following a three-week visit, the team from TOPNZ provided a business case and plan for a TVET system that uses flexible approaches to skills development. Trinidad & Tobago’s Distance Learning Secretariat in the Ministry of Science, Technology & Tertiary Education is now moving forward with plans for OFTEN, which will bring together a fragmented tertiary sector and expand access to quality TVET.

Nigeria

COL is helping Nigeria’s National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) to explore new approaches to skills development through ODL. NIEPA has the potential to offer their continuing education programme for education officials through ODL but requires assistance with distance education programme planning, costing and instructional design. COL Education Specialist, Skills Development, Ms. Alison Mead Richardson facilitated a capacity building workshop on distance education system planning at NIEPA in May.

NIEPA also benefited from a COL-funded consultancy carried out by Dr. Delvaline Mowes from the Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning at the Polytechnic of Namibia. This helped NIEPA managers to cost their distance education plans and make a submission for federal funding for the programme. COL will provide ongoing support for the development of course materials in print and eLearning formats. NIEPA staff members are also developing links with important ODL groups in the region such as the COL-supported Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL), where they attended a workshop by world-renowned instructional designer, Professor Alexander Romiszowski.

IMPROVING LITERACY FOR TVET

Educators from the Pacific Islands put aside the myth that literacy skills are not essential for technical vocational education and training (TVET). Eleven educators travelled from their island homes in Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu to join with six staff from the National University of Samoa to write an open and distance learning (ODL) course, “Literacy for Basic Trades”. The course is based on two trade areas, working with timber and with concrete. It responds to a great need to assist people who left school early and are now trying to access TVET but have varying levels of literacy. Educators in the Pacific islands had asked COL to help them develop a literacy course that would bridge these students into regular TVET programmes.

Delegates worked solidly for two weeks to establish the learning outcomes, develop the modular structure and write the Student Workbook and Tutor Guide. The course material was designed to be delivered to students in any location, particularly in remote communities, using local people as tutors.

The workshop was a collaboration between COL and the National University of Samoa’s Oloamanu Centre for Professional Development and Continuing Education. It was facilitated by Mr. John Bartram, a consultant from COL, and Gatoloiafa’aana Tilianamua To’omata Afamasaga, the Director of the Oloamanu Centre.

The workshop was declared open by the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the National University of Samoa, Letuimanu’asina Dr. Emma Kruse Vaai. “The development of TVET literacy materials is not merely to address literacy in TVET,” she said. “It is in fact integrated to a much bigger agenda – the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in education, the goals of Education for All and the Commonwealth values of peace, democracy, equality and good governance.”

The new learning materials will be piloted in three countries before being introduced throughout the Pacific. By improving literacy skills, learners will be able to pursue further levels of TVET that will improve their livelihoods and their communities.
COL partnered with UNESCO-UNEVOC to host the 4th African TVET Summit: “Flexible Learning: From TVET Policy to Skills Training Practice”, held prior to the eLearning Africa conference in Lusaka, Zambia in May. Close to 50 people from across Africa attended the pre-conference workshop on flexible and blended approaches to technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

COL also took part in the main conference, the 5th International Conference on ICT for Development, Education and Training, held in Lusaka, Zambia in May. More than 1,700 delegates from 78 countries attended the event, which is Africa’s largest conference on technology-enhanced education and training. COL sponsored five people from TVET institutions to attend the ICT in TVET Summit and the eLearning Africa conference, including Ms. Ndeshimona Afunde from Namibia, who provided this report:

“I work in the Learner Support Unit at the Namibian College of Open Learning. I was privileged to be sponsored by COL to attend the 4th International Conference on ICT for Development, Education and Training.

The conference focus was mainly on the use of ICT in the learning and teaching process. Discussions were thought-provoking; though it made me think about how many African children really benefit from the millions of dollars that are spent by governments and NGOs to buy ICT equipment. Purchases precede training of teachers and school managers in most African countries. As a result, in most places, these interactive boards, computers, etc. end up being white elephants decorating the store rooms.

Training for the use of ICT should include policy makers, managers (school principals and heads of institutions) and teachers/trainers. This will ensure the smooth implementation of strategies to include ICT in the learning-teaching process because all understand and support it.

It was indeed a privilege to listen to how ICT has been used in other countries and institutions to enhance the teaching-learning process.”

Thirty-one people representing Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA) members from 11 African countries and India took part in a three-day workshop at the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) that explored the role of monitoring and evaluation in open schools, results-based monitoring, tools and resources. The participants, including tutors, lecturers, directors and principals of open schools, developed conceptual frameworks, logframes and indicators for their own institutions. They have committed to sharing their knowledge and tools with colleagues upon return to their home countries.

This capacity building in monitoring and evaluation is part of COL’s efforts to improve the quality and reach of open schooling across the Commonwealth. The Namibia workshop drew upon COL’s publication, “Results-based Monitoring Evaluation at the Commonwealth of Learning”. This handbook is freely available on COL’s website at www.col.org/MEHandbook.

A new community learning programme launched in Belize is the result of a partnership that involves a community radio station, a local education centre, health authorities and a women’s group. COL and the Caribbean Institute for Media and Education (CARIMAC) at the University of West Indies Jamaica hosted a workshop in June 2010 that brought together the partners: the Tumul K’in Center of Learning, Ak’ Kutan Radio, Isabel Palma Policlinic (Ministry of Health), Belize Family Life Association and the Toledo Maya Women’s Council.

Three regional facilitators shared COL’s approach to community learning. After learning about programme design, the story-based approach to learning content, interview skills and blended learning strategies, participants designed a pilot radio programme about healthy lifestyles including nutrition, exercise, and warning signs of diabetes, hypertension and other illnesses. In addition to introducing a learning programme that will address health issues in the community, the workshop built capacity among both the delegates and the regional trainers. The local partners are continuing to collaborate on a weekly health radio programme.
Integrating multimedia learning with open and distance learning (ODL) was the focus of an August 2010 workshop in Swaziland. Twenty-six lecturers, teachers and managers from ODL institutions in Swaziland were introduced to multimedia learning methods and techniques during the five-day workshop. Participants learned about the skills and processes required for high quality digital content development.

This workshop is part of COL’s efforts to build capacity in multimedia content development among open schools. Recognising that the development of digital content requires different expertise than traditional print content, COL has provided training in integrating multimedia into open schools in several African countries. The Swaziland workshop exposed participants to devices for users to access digital content and outlined guidelines on the requirements of digital content production skills. This learning will enable institutions to develop a strategy for multimedia content development www.col.org/OpenSchooling

**ODL FOR MULTI-GRADE TEACHING**

COL and the Commonwealth Secretariat hosted a workshop on professional development for multi-grade teaching through open and distance learning (ODL) in Honiara, Solomon Islands in June. Representatives from teacher training institutions from Belize, Maldives, Namibia, Samoa and Solomon Islands attended the meeting, which explored how to expand and improve multi-grade teaching to help attain Education for All goals by 2015.

Multi-grade teaching plays a key role in providing rural and marginalised children with access to education. Country reports and the discussion paper presented at the workshop found that multi-grade teaching is at various levels of development in the five participating countries. In all countries, teacher training must be addressed. Participants at the Solomon Islands workshop developed action plans for a new ODL professional development course about multi-grade teaching. The five countries agreed to continue working together on the course, which is one of the areas of collaboration under the COL–Commonwealth Secretariat Collaboration Agreement for 2009-2012.
THE TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
Patrick Alan Danaher and Abdurrahman Umar, Editors

The global need for teacher education is greater now than ever before. Half of the world’s countries will have to expand their stock of teachers significantly – some by tens of thousands – if the Dakar Framework for Action goal of Universal Primary Education is to be met by 2015. It is widely accepted that conventional face-to-face teacher training cannot meet this huge demand for new teachers and that open and distance learning (ODL) offers the potential of large-scale educational provision.

The newest book in COL’s Perspectives on Distance Education series explores how ODL can be applied to help meet current and projected shortfalls in teacher supply and teacher quality. The contributors to the 13 chapters in this book are nationally and internationally renowned scholars in teacher education and ODL. This is an authoritative, contemporary and thoughtful discussion of the promise and ongoing challenges of mobilising the benefits of teacher education through ODL.

www.col.org/PSTeacherEd

DISTANCE EDUCATION: THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES
Selected speeches and website blogs of Sir John Daniel and colleagues
2009-2010

This collection of six speeches and nine blog postings from 2009-2010 by COL President Sir John Daniel and colleagues provides insight and opinion on issues ranging from combating degree mills and resistance to distance education to challenges of success and failure in the campaign for Universal Primary Education.

www.col.org/speeches

QUALITY ASSURANCE TOOLKIT FOR OPEN SCHOOLS

Created collaboratively by open schooling practitioners in several regions of the Commonwealth, this resource will help open schools address the challenge of quality assurance. Comprised of theoretical aspects of quality assurance, case studies and practical advice about creating and maintaining a quality culture, this toolkit is adaptable to open schools in different contexts.

www.col.org/QAToolkit_OS

ICT4E IN INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA

Information and communication technology (ICT) is increasingly being used to deliver on promises of universal education. Despite a growing number of ICT for education (ICT4E) initiatives in South Asia, there was, until now, no up-to-date and comprehensive information about the sector. To fill this gap, infoDev commissioned a survey of ICT4E in India and South Asia. The result includes country-level studies, sub-national reports for five Indian states, two detailed essays on distance education and teacher training in Pakistan, and five thematic essays on cross-cutting issues.

Published by infoDev, June 2010
www.infodev.org/en/Publication.889.html

TEACHER EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
By Hilary Perraton

Participants at a meeting of partner agencies working in the field of teacher education in Vancouver, Canada in July noted a widespread lack of awareness within Ministries of Education about alternative approaches to teacher education, particularly the role of open and distance learning (ODL). The partners agreed to commission a review of the role of ODL in teacher education worldwide, as an important step in building understanding about the potential of these alternative methods.

Dr. Hilary Perraton, one of COL’s Honorary Fellows and an internationally recognised expert in the field, conducted the review. Presented by COL at UNESCO’s 2010 World Teachers’ Day on 5 October, Dr. Perraton’s report provides a relevant and timely assessment of how ODL is used to meet the challenge of creating “more and better teachers”.

www.col.org/TeacherEd_RoleODL

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF MOBILE PHONES ON INDIAN AGRICULTURE
By Surabhi Mittal, Sanjay Gandhi and Gaurav Tripathi
Published by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations

The rapid growth of mobile telephony and the recent introduction of mobile-enabled information services offer the potential to bridge the gap between the availability and delivery of agricultural inputs and agricultural infrastructure in India. This timely paper explores important aspects of this topic including information most valued by farmers, the impact of mobile phones on agriculture and factors impeding the full productivity of mobile phones in the agricultural sector.

This study, the first in India to look at the impact of mobile phones on the crop sector and, in particular, on small farmers, finds that mobile phones can act as a catalyst to rejuvenate the collapsing extension services in the country. But while there is evidence that mobiles are being used in ways that contribute to productivity enhancement, significant improvements in supporting infrastructure and capacity building among farmers are required.

There’s an abundance of free software tools available, but how do you choose just a few to do certain tasks? I have selected seven tools that I use to keep my PC humming. I have added a download link (usually from www.cnet.com, which tests all the software for spyware before it offers it for download). The downloads do not start straight away; you can read about the product before hitting the download button.

The one drawback with no-cost software is that checking for updates usually has to be done on a manual basis. Most often there is an update button in the programme that you just need to click once in a while. And most often with malware/spyware removers, real time protection is restricted to the paid versions.

I have not included real time anti-virus software such as AVG or Avast-based on the assumption that most PC users will have some sort of anti-virus software running and there may be a conflict if another is added.

Defragging
There are two main types of defraggers: those that defrag your hard drives (usually C or D drives) and those that defrag your registry. This one will defrag your hard drive.

1. Auslogics Disk Defrag
   http://tinyurl.com/cnet-auslogics

Safer searching
2. McAfee Site Advisor – adds a simple green tick or red cross to indicate “unsafe” (if it is unsure, it will be a yellow exclamation mark) next to the site when searching via a search engine (e.g. Google).
   www.siteadvisor.com
   Or as Firefox extension:
   www.siteadvisor.com/download/windows

3. Web of Trust – one of 10 Firefox security extensions recommended by TechRepublic – provides similar graphical indicators to McAfee Site Advisor.
   www.mywot.com

Malware/spyware on demand scanner/remover
Using multiple removers is often the best defense, as some programmes will catch viruses that others miss. If you only want to have one loaded, then Malwarebytes is a good choice.

4. Malwarebytes Anti-Malware – considered the industry standard. Real time protection is restricted to the paid version.
   http://tinyurl.com/malwarebytes-remover

Maintenance
5. CCleaner – cleans up junk files and invalid registry entries. You can back up your registry before you remove invalid links. I did this at the start but found I never had a problem; however it might be a good idea if you feel uncomfortable around registry cleaners. The two functions, junk removal and registry clean-up, are separated and can be used independently of each other.
   http://tinyurl.com/cnet-ccleaner

6. Glarys Utilities – lots of options, including scanning for empty folders. In the one-click maintenance screen you have the choice of utilities to run. There is a registry cleaner that I have used without any problem, but if you feel uneasy about registry cleaners, uncheck the box.
   http://tinyurl.com/cnet-glarys

Uninstaller
Using the Add/Remove Programmes Windows tool will not fully remove unwanted programmes. Even after using Revo to uninstall programmes, I use CCleaner and Glarys to remove unwanted junk that Revo can miss.

7. Revo Uninstaller – in addition to a great uninstaller, there are other optional power tools.
   http://tinyurl.com/uninstall-revo

By Amy Monaghan
Manager, COL Information Resource Centre

Online Basics for Beginners
New computer users can access a free course that will orient them to the Internet. Online Basics is a website that offers five modules covering topics such as how to use a mouse and keyboard, how to email, how to search for information and staying safe online. The website also offers a guide that helps tutors and volunteers deliver the Online Basics courses.
   www.onlinebasics.co.uk

Teaching with Technology
A recent post on Mr. Walker’s Technology Blog, “50 Excellent Open Courses on Teaching with Technology”, provides a comprehensive list of freely accessible resources. Topics covered include creating open educational resources (OERs); using blogs, new media and games as teaching tools; and becoming an effective online teacher.