Hundreds of teachers across the Caribbean are rapidly developing their skills and knowledge of information and communication technology (ICT) with the support of COL. The Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration (CCTI) is an innovative open and distance learning programme that uses teachers to mentor other teachers on how to integrate ICT into school management, teaching and learning.

CCTI aims to improve the experience of teaching in the classroom with ICT and increase school managers’ involvement in ICT implementation. Originally offered by SchoolNet South Africa in many African countries, CCTI is now available to Ministries of Education and teacher training institutions throughout the Commonwealth. Materials can be freely used as is or adapted to suit local needs.

Typically a two-year part-time course, CCTI helps to build local capacity in ICT by training mentors – teachers who each go on to train 25 more teachers. In The Bahamas, 50 mentors are being trained. Another 54 are being trained in Trinidad & Tobago, and Antigua & Barbuda is initiating mentor training in the last quarter of 2011. Guyana’s experience is highlighted in the sidebar on page 2. The course can be offered as a full qualification, as part of existing qualifications or as in-service modules.

CCTI is well-suited to provide professional development to in-service teachers. All course materials are provided on CD-ROMs. Teachers are assigned to mentors who oversee the completion of modules, give advice and coordinate assignments. Activities are practical and school- or classroom-based. Group interaction is an important feature of CCTI; teachers and managers gain a better understanding of ICT and enhance their learning through online interaction. These activities are normally organised by Ministries of Education.

Each country decides how the course will be conducted, how it will be accredited/recognised, which technologies to use and what learning management tools to deploy. Modules cover themes such as:

- The range of ICT in schools,
- The different roles of teachers and managers and how ICT can support them,
- ICT skills for teachers and managers,
- Assessing ICT integration,
- Developing ICT teaching and learning resources, and
- ICT leadership in schools.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
Accreditation is organised through local teacher training institutions.

“There are two urgent demands on teachers related to ICT: in addition to being able to introduce technology to learners, teachers must be able to use those technologies to enhance teaching and learning,” said Ms. Trudi van Wyk, COL Education Specialist, eLearning. “Our aim is that every teacher, manager and administrator is ‘ICT capable’ – that they have the ability to effectively use ICT creatively and innovatively.”

Teacher ICT integration involves three overlapping elements:
• Content: Knowledge of what they teach in their subject/learning area
• Technology: Knowledge of technologies that support teaching and how to use them
• Pedagogy: Knowledge of teaching methods

COL, SchoolNet SA and other partners are constantly assessing the relevance of the course materials. Two new modules are being developed: one for ICT and the development of 21st century skills and one on the use of ICT for classroom management. Other modules are being repurposed and updated to keep track of new developments in ICT and needs in countries.

The CCTI is aligned with the internationally recognised UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (CFT) (http://tinyurl.com/UNESCO_CFT).

The CCTI is part of a larger joint initiative between COL, Microsoft and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The three partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding earlier this year covering 18 Caribbean countries and territories, setting the stage for a much broader regional roll-out of ICT education initiatives in the Caribbean.

COL envisions extension of the partnership and the CCTI to interested countries in Africa and the Pacific.

www.col.org/eLearning

**NARROWING THE DIGITAL GAP IN GUYANA**

Recognising that increasing ICT literacy in the Education sector is essential to narrowing the digital gap, the Government of Guyana has embarked on an ICT in Education strategy in partnership with COL, the Commonwealth Secretariat and Microsoft. The partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding in November 2009 to develop and implement an ICT Professional Development Strategy for Teachers in Guyana.

The National Centre for Educational Resource Development (NCERD) within Guyana’s Ministry of Education is leading the strategy, which has ambitious goals. In addition to training all teachers in basic computer literacy by 2012, the Government has committed to equip all schools (65 primary and 80 secondary) with computer laboratories and conduct extensive ICT training with educators.

Nearly two years into the five-year programme, the Ministry of Education recently reported the following progress:
• 3,500 teachers have been trained in basic computer literacy.
• 30 schools are running SuccessMaker software, which offers online learning programmes.
• More than 100 secondary school teachers are competent to deliver Computer Science syllabi.
• The number of students studying Computer Science has tripled in the past two years.

**IMPROVING COMMONWEALTH CONNECTIONS**

COL convened a “Commonwealth Connects” expert group meeting in Vancouver, Canada in August. The issue: making it easier to find online educational materials through improved search techniques on the new Commonwealth Connects Portal (C2P).

C2P is an online platform for co-operation and collaboration among Commonwealth agencies and individuals. To be launched at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth, Australia in October, the portal enables technology and knowledge transfer while acting as a collective voice and information source for the Commonwealth community and the public.

The Vancouver expert group meeting included representatives from BCcampus, the C2P development team, COL, the Knowledge Media Institute at the U.K. Open University and OpenText Corporation. Discussions centred on enhancing online searches for educational materials by developing a taxonomy (classification) of educational terms in the post-secondary sector.

The group agreed to continue work with a trial directory of open course materials using a blend of RSS feeds and indexing for search.

**OER WORKSHOP MATERIALS AVAILABLE AS AN OER**

COL has developed a one-day workshop to introduce institutions to open educational resources (OER). Appropriately enough, the workshop is freely available for download, re-use or adaptation as an OER. Workshop materials – including presentations, documents and links – can be used in a workshop setting or by individuals as a self-directed activity to understand how OER can be developed, used and re-purposed to support teaching and learning.

The OER workshop was developed as part of the joint UNESCO-COL initiative, “Taking OER beyond the OER Community”. Aimed at increasing use of OER, the initiative included seven capacity building workshops, online discussion forums, and a policy forum at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in December 2010.

http://col-oer.weebly.com
COL LEADS GLOBAL PUSH FOR OER

COL is spearheading a push to get governments worldwide to recognise officially the importance of sharing open educational resources (OER). The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation approached COL to undertake the initiative, which is being led by COL President Sir John Daniel.

Sir John is working in partnership with colleagues at COL and UNESCO to consult with governments and develop a statement that supports the principle of open access to educational materials developed with public funds. The aim is to have this statement adopted at the UNESCO World Open Educational Resources (OER) Conference in Paris in June 2012.

OER are materials that are offered freely and openly for anyone to use and adapt for teaching, learning, development and research. While OER are mainly shareable in digital formats, they can also be in print formats. In recent years, a global community of OER producers has emerged, and institutions are incorporating these resources into their teaching and learning strategies.

“Until governments actively support open access to educational materials, OER will remain outside the institutional mainstream,” explained Sir John. “The UNESCO World OER Conference provides us with an international platform for taking this important step forward in improving access to quality education.”

This new initiative, entitled “Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally”, is an extension of the current UNESCO-COL partnership to spread awareness of the value of open content: “Taking OER beyond the OER Community”. COL’s work with OER also includes the “OER for Open Schools” initiative (see page 8), the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth and the development of numerous resources, including “A Basic Guide to Open Educational Resources” (see page 15).

www.col.org/OER
http://oerworkshop.weebly.com

INTRODUCING COL’S NEW INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN TOOL

Developing quality course materials requires a specific set of skills. COL’s new Instructional Design Tool is a rigorous, yet simple resource that supports the development of quality courses and learning materials. Through this tool, COL is encouraging institutions to maximise the effectiveness, efficiency and appeal of the learning experience.

COL’s Instructional Design Tool includes different elements that can be used in various ways such as:

- A self-help tool to strengthen developers’ skills in developing courses,
- Templates for developing courses and learning materials,
- A resource for training in Instructional Design, and/or
- A five-day face-to-face workshop to build the capacity of developers in developing courses.

The Instructional Design Tool is freely available for download and use from the COL website.

www.col.org/IDtool

FOCUS ON QUALITY LEARNING MATERIALS IN GUYANA: IN COLLABORATION WITH UNIVERSITY OF GUYANA’S INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION (IDCE), COL HELD AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN WORKSHOP IN APRIL FOR 21 COURSE WRITERS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF GUYANA AND THE CYRIL POTTER COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

TRAINING FOR TVET COURSE WRITERS IN AFRICA: EIGHTEEN COURSE WRITERS FROM EIGHT TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET) INSTITUTIONS IN KENYA, TANZANIA AND ZAMBIA PARTICIPATED IN AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN WORKSHOP AT THE TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL TEACHER’S COLLEGE MANAGEMENT BOARD, ZAMBIA IN APRIL
TVET IN AFRICA: INNOVATING TO MEET DEMAND

COL’s Flexible Skills Development programme is helping African technical and vocational training and education (TVET) institutions reach more learners and improve learning outcomes. Currently, younger people with insufficient secondary education, out-of-work adults, rural inhabitants and women with children have little access to TVET.

Flexible Skills Development activities in recent months have focused on online training, promoting awareness, working with national policy makers, developing an online community of practice and training TVET teachers to create open and distance learning (ODL) courses.

- **Online training:** A third group of TVET institution managers and policy makers is taking part in COL’s online course in the management of Flexible Skills Development. Meanwhile, a second cohort of teachers from TVET institutions is taking part in the Flexible Teaching and Learning online course that introduces eLearning and other flexible teaching methods. In addition to developing skills and knowledge in ODL, these courses are providing teachers and managers with valuable insight into the experience of being an online distance learner.

**COL is creating a network of leaders who will act as champions for flexible learning approaches in TVET.**

- **Promoting awareness:** Fifty members of the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA) took part in a one-day COL workshop about Flexible Skills Development prior to the annual CAPA conference in Kampala, Uganda in May. The focus of discussions was the benefit of using ODL methodologies in TVET and the challenges of delivering a more flexible, technology-enhanced TVET programme. The participants included principals and lecturers from TVET institutions and government representatives.

- **Developing champions:** By identifying 11 African TVET institutions to be “Key Institutions”, COL is creating a network of leaders who will act as champions for flexible learning approaches in TVET. COL is providing training for these institutions and assisting with ICT infrastructure; in return, these Key Institutions will support other TVET institutions in their country in their efforts to expand the reach of their programmes through ODL. At a meeting of Key Institutions in Uganda, principals reported that curriculum content is being developed for 30 technical and vocational courses that incorporate flexible learning approaches or new uses of technology.

- **Community Learning Network:** The Flexible Skills Development Community Learning Network now has more than 260 members. This online forum is becoming an important source of information and support for people involved in ODL approaches to TVET in Africa. To join the Community Learning Network, contact flexibleskills@col.org.

- **Developing capacity in instructional design:** An important part of introducing more flexible learning approaches in TVET is providing quality ODL courses. This requires a thorough understanding of the needs of distance learners and how to engage and support them. To help build capacity in this important area, COL facilitated instructional design workshops at four TVET institutions in Kenya and one in Nigeria in recent months.

- **Working with national policy makers:** COL hosted a workshop in Nairobi to introduce industry associations, curriculum developers and officials from the Department of Technical Education to how Key Institutions in Kenya are working to increase access and quality in TVET through flexible and blended approaches.

ONE-STOP SHOP FOR COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA

COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), has established a Community Radio Facilitation Centre (CCFC) to support the expansion of community radio in India. Opened in August 2011 with grant support from the Ford Foundation, CCFC is working closely with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to develop community radio stations.

While community radio continues to expand rapidly in India, many applicants find the licence application process difficult to negotiate. CCFC helps applicants navigate this process. It functions as a “one-stop shop” for community radio aspirants, applicants and licence holders, helping them to develop a solid infrastructure, build capacity and advocate for spectrum allocation. Services are available free of charge. CCFC is also developing toolkits, guidelines and other resources to support community radio stations.

CCFC is nurturing 10 grassroots leaders who will act as policy advocates for the community radio movement, and it is training 24 interns in all aspects of facilitating the licensing process.

CCFC has a toll-free telephone help line and a website that offers support and resources.

www.ccfcindia.net
CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS FOR NOMADS

While the Universal Basic Education programme has led to unprecedented expansion of primary education in Nigeria, it is not meeting the educational needs of some vulnerable groups, particularly nomadic people. Out of 9.3 million nomads in Nigeria, 3.1 million are school-age children. Their average level of literacy is less than two per cent, and two-thirds of nomadic teachers don’t possess even the prescribed minimum teaching qualification, the Nigeria Certificate in Education.

As part of its Child-Friendly Schools initiative, COL, in partnership with UNICEF, is working to overcome one of the main challenges facing nomadic education in Nigeria: teacher quality. A new programme in Adamawa State is creating an interactive radio instruction (IRI) learning programme for the continuing professional development of nomadic primary school teachers. By building the capacity of nomadic teachers on Child-Friendly Schools concepts, models and approaches, the IRI initiative aims to improve teachers’ knowledge, skills and classroom effectiveness. The ultimate aim is to deliver quality education, which is the right of every child.

The IRI programme brings together partners representing a teacher training institution (the Federal College of Education Yola), the Ministry of Education (the State Universal Basic Education Board, SUBEB) and two radio stations (ABC and Radio Gontel). COL facilitated planning and script-writing workshops earlier this year. The partners are now developing radio broadcasts and supporting print materials that will build teachers’ capacity. Given that nomadic teachers have very few opportunities for professional development, the IRI programme will meet a huge need for anywhere, anytime learning.

The IRI learning programme for nomadic teachers will start broadcasts in early 2012, targeting 448 nomadic teachers from more than 100 schools in Adamawa State. The plan is to replicate the programme in other regions of Nigeria and other countries with a need for nomadic teacher training.

www.col.org/cfs

mLEARNING FOR FARMERS IN JAMAICA

By Mr. Brad Clarke, ICT Manager, Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA)

Jamaica is embarking on several initiatives to increase the rate of technology adoption by farmers. The Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), the extension agency of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, has introduced mobile learning as part of a partnership with COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programme.

RADA has expanded its use of mobile technology to enhance the training of farmers using voice messaging. One-minute voice messages are sent to farmers’ cellular phones on specific subject matters. The system was tested successfully using a sample of 35 farmers primarily in the major potato-producing parish of Manchester. In addition, COL is assisting with the strengthening of farmer organisation capacity for profitable farming through sustainable linkages with extension, financial and marketing institutions.

Since 2009, Jamaican farmers have been receiving text message alerts to their cellular phones from RADA. The facility allows RADA to communicate quickly with its primary stakeholders registered in its database. Of the 144,000 farmers currently registered in the National Farmer Registration database, approximately 75 per cent have cellular phones.

The L3F initiative has supported the transmission of over 60,000 text messages to farmers. The short, targeted text messages inform and alert farmers about issues such as:

- Pest and disease outbreaks and their management,
- Weather advisories, and
- Important and urgent activities within the agricultural sector.

An example of a weather advisory is “RADA/MAOF Flood Warning Alert: Farmers be prepared to move animals to higher ground, clear waterways, secure farm records, fertiliser and pesticides. Pass message on.” Farmers have expressed tremendous appreciation for such timely message alerts at the start of the annual hurricane season in June.

The text-messaging facility is part of a wider initiative by RADA to expand its use of technology in the delivery of its extension services and to transfer adaptable technologies to farmers. Equipped with notebook computers, GPS units and soil-testing equipment, extension officers are able to provide immediate in-field response and remedy farmers’ agricultural related problems.

RADA has also implemented a toll-free telephone line to allow farmers to provide feedback, make inquiries and speak with subject-matter specialists.

www.rada.gov.jm
www.col.org/L3Farmers

PARTICIPANTS AT AN IRI SCRIPT WRITING WORKSHOP IN YOLA, NIGERIA MADE A SITE VISIT TO A LOCAL NOMADIC SCHOOL IN MAY 2011

A FARMER AND RADA EXTENSION OFFICER DISCUSS TEXT MESSAGING
Before breaking new ground with open and distance learning (ODL), some spade-work needs to be done. An important element in COL’s work is building individual and institutional capacity in ODL. Recent examples are from India and Nigeria.

COL is providing support to the State Resource Centre, Kerala in southern India to develop a Certificate in Community Development. This includes holding a two-week workshop for 21 staff and faculty from the State Resource Centre and partner organisations. Led by Professor Santosh Panda from Indira Gandhi National Open University, the workshop provided training in ODL concepts and methodologies, curriculum design, use of technology and skills development through distance education. Workshop participants also developed a plan of action for the design, development and delivery of the Certificate in Community Development programmes, including logistics, financial requirements and time frames.

COL facilitated workshops on “Writing for Distance Learning” in May and June for educators at the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) in Nigeria. Many of the 21 participants who attended the May workshop also attended the follow-up workshop in June. After learning about the main features of ODL course materials and defining a structure for NIEPA course materials, participants started work on course outlines and study units for their continuing professional development programme in educational management.

Developing literacy is a necessary element of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in some Commonwealth countries. COL is leading the development and introduction of literacy and numeracy modules to augment Basic Trades courses in the South Pacific.

After developing three Basic Trades courses, Working with Timber, Working with Concrete and Small Engine Maintenance, in partnership with The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (TOPNZ), partners raised the issue of the need to help learners improve their basic literacy before taking part in these courses. Literacy challenges in Pacific Island countries are numerous and diverse. Papua New Guinea has 800 recognised languages. The illiteracy rate in the Solomon Islands is 77 per cent and 60 per cent in Vanuatu. Tuvalu has just one secondary school.

To respond to these challenges and ensure the effectiveness of TVET efforts, COL sponsored the development of a vocational literacy course by educators from seven Pacific Island countries last year. Following pilot programmes in four countries, TVET managers from those countries met in June 2011 with TOPNZ staff in Wellington, New Zealand to evaluate the pilot delivery. After discussing challenges, such as catering to a range of literacy levels, limited resources and lack of certification causing learners to be less motivated, the workshop participants collaboratively revised the learning modules and map out action plans for each country. Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have committed to rolling out the vocational literacy course in conjunction with Basic Trades training.
With the rapid expansion of mobile phone use in the developing world, COL is exploring how to increase learner engagement with community learning programmes through this communications tool. COL consultant Mr. David Leeming led a three-day workshop, “Introducing Mobiles into Community Learning”, at the New Dawn FM radio station in Buka, Papua New Guinea in May. The 13 participants included New Dawn staff and representatives from partners in the Bugenvil Mere Tede community learning programme – Bougainville Interchurch Council Women’s Network, CARE International and the PNG Ministry of Community Affairs and Women. Launched in 2008, New Dawn FM is the only independent radio station serving a population of about 200,000 in Bougainville.

Workshop participants discussed how mobiles can be used to support learning and development, ICT applications that use mobile phones and how mobiles can be integrated into local community learning programmes. Some of the ideas that were developed included communicating with teachers and students involved in women and youth literacy by text message, sending information about health issues such as HIV/AIDS and inviting radio listeners to respond to quizzes after learning programmes are broadcast.

New Dawn FM did a test of a system that sent updates to mobile phones following polling in local elections. Radio listeners who texted the radio station with the keyword “Update” would receive regular auto-replies with election news. In the first day, New Dawn received 800 requests for updates, a solid indication that this could be an effective way of reaching and engaging with listeners.

COL plans to replicate the module used in the Buka workshop in training for partners involved in other community learning programmes in the Pacific and around the Commonwealth.

They say something is only as good as its foundations. When COL realised that weak foundations were threatening the existence of the Isabel Learning Network, it quickly stepped in to provide support. COL originally started working with the Isabel Learning Network – a network of eight community radio stations around Isabel Province, Solomon Islands – by providing training and support to produce a series of Healthy Communities radio programmes. These programmes were hugely popular around the province and created strong linkages between the stations and local health services.

Recently our Healthy Communities programme was threatened by other issues. Management problems had arisen within the stations, and the question of ownership and responsibility was unclear, causing major issues to the sustainability of both the programmes and the Network itself.

Recognising the importance of having strong organisational foundations in order to ensure long-term sustainability, COL has since provided support to the network to help resolve these issues. COL provided financial support for a network meeting in Buala (the capital of Isabel) for the chief operators and committee chairs of every station. This provided a valuable opportunity for those involved in the network to meet and discuss goals and challenges, and to develop and commit to a new Memorandum of Understanding with Isabel Provincial Government, the key network partner.

COL funded a tour around the province to visit each station and develop an individual station Action Plan. COL also provided support in developing a new Strategic Plan that will build the Network’s organisational management capacity, financial sustainability and content production skills. The Strategic Plan has been central to gaining support from other stakeholders.

The Isabel Learning Network is now working toward its goal of strong and sustainable stations that provide participatory learning programmes across the Isabel community. The road ahead is still long and will provide many more challenges, but the Isabel Learning Network is confident it can get there, thanks to support from COL.
CONNECTIONS
COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING

IN FOCUS

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: OER FOR OPEN SCHOOLS

EXPANDING ICT EXPERTISE AND QUALITY SECONDARY EDUCATION

COL recently concluded a multi-year, Pan-Commonwealth initiative that will help meet the growing global demand for secondary education. “OER for Open Schools” helped educators in six countries improve their knowledge and skills in developing effective open and distance learning (ODL) materials. These Master Teachers used their new skills to develop 20 new secondary-level courses that can be freely downloaded, adapted and re-used by open schools across the Commonwealth and beyond. This innovative initiative will have far-reaching effects beyond the development of these open educational resources (OER).

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN STUDENTS GRADUATE FROM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?

The success of the Education for All campaign and the drive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, particularly universal primary education, have had numerous impacts on education in the developing world. In addition to vastly improving access to primary education, these efforts have resulted in rapidly growing demand for secondary education – demand that cannot be met by conventional “bricks and mortar” schools.

As governments stretch their resources to make progress toward universal primary education, it is unlikely that funding the expansion of secondary provision will be a priority. And even if one new secondary school were to be built every month for the next 10 years, the increased demand would still not be met. Many countries have launched major initiatives to introduce free primary education, but what happens when students graduate from elementary school?

Increasingly, open schools are seen as an important part of the solution to the challenge of expanding secondary education. Through innovative use of information and communication technology (ICT) and by delivering quality education through open and distance learning (ODL), open schools can educate a broader range of learners – out-of-work adults, women with family responsibilities and youth who have not succeeded in past schooling.

STEP 1: AN AMBITIOUS PLAN

In 2008, COL proposed a large-scale project to help open schools “raise their game”. Educators from open schools in six Commonwealth countries would be trained in developing ODL course materials. These Master Teachers would then share this learning with colleagues in their home country. They would also create content for the complete syllabus of one subject at a Grade 10 or 12 level in both print and online formats. The result: 20 sets of self-instructional learning materials would be available as OER that could be freely accessed and used by open schools throughout the Commonwealth and beyond. The development and distribution of OER will help broaden access for millions of secondary school students who would otherwise not have had the opportunity for learning.

The idea took root, open schools and Ministries of Education signed on, important partners, such as The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, came on board and the “OER for Open Schools” initiative was launched.

STEP 2: DEVELOP THE PEOPLE

The main focus of “OER for Open Schools” was to develop learning materials. That required, firstly, developing people. Participating open schools in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia identified 100 Master Teachers who would undergo training and collaborate to develop ODL course materials. Master Teachers took part in three intensive training workshops where they learned ICT skills and instructional design of course materials. That training continues to cascade to hundreds more teachers through in-country workshops led by the Master Teachers.

The training and ongoing collaboration with other Master Teachers had a dramatic effect on participating teachers.

“We built capacity beyond what we expected,” explained Ms. Frances Ferreira, COL Education Specialist, Open Schooling. “The programme inspired the Master Teachers, and they are sharing their enthusiasm and knowledge with colleagues. The teachers are proud of what they’ve learned, and there’s much greater awareness of the use and potential of OER.”

The training and experience of developing courses has vaulted teachers across the digital divide, Ms. Ferreira said.
“At the beginning, teachers in our workshops didn’t know about SMS, Skype or social networks such as Facebook and Ning. Now they can embed a video from YouTube in a course or lead a workshop about Moodle.”

“All fully employed in other jobs, the Master Teachers worked hard to develop course materials. The project timelines were achieved more slowly than expected due to challenges such as inadequate access to computers, limited connectivity, time constraints and insufficient training. Project leaders adjusted schedules and encouraged Master Teachers to complete print-based materials before creating electronic versions.

“Developing a culture of sharing was a significant challenge. “OER for Open Schools” leaders thought teachers would embrace the culture of sharing nurtured by the worldwide OER movement. In reality, it was not easy to leapfrog into a culture of sharing among countries and among teams. Country teams tended to work as a collection of individuals rather than a team. Clearly, practices and norms within institutions had an impact on how collaboration developed within teams.

“Shifting to online communication was an unanticipated challenge. Working with computers on a daily basis and after hours required a paradigm shift from the normal practice of face-to-face meetings. Some teachers resented the time it took to write an email and/or upload a file due to limited bandwidth. Email wasn’t a regular form of communication at their open school, so they were slow to embrace it for their work with “OER for Open Schools”. They engaged more fully with social platforms. A Facebook page dedicated to the initiative sparked constant sharing of information. By developing their own Facebook pages, participants got connected to a larger OER community.

“By the end of 2010, the first 16 subjects were completed; the remaining subjects are being finished this year. The final evaluation and review of the learning materials will be complete by the end of this year, with the official launch expected in early 2012. Learning materials will be available as OER in multiple formats to suit as wide a range of users as possible. This includes course materials in Braille and Daisy to allow access for learners with disabilities. Electronic versions of the courses will be freely available online. Copies of the materials will also be put on CD/DVD and distributed to Ministries of Education or institutions that have difficulty accessing them online.

“STEP 4: ACKNOWLEDGE LESSONS LEARNED

There were several reasons why the “OER for Open Schools” initiative took longer than expected. Teachers often weren’t able to commit the time required to develop their courses, and interest wavered over the course of months and years. Technology was a challenge – whether it was inconsistent power supply, intermittent Internet connectivity or inadequate equipment. There were also varying levels of commitment from governments in the participating countries.

“As a result, project leaders learned to balance high expectations with an understanding of the realities faced by the Master Teachers.

“Several lessons were learned from the “OER for Open Schools” experience.

• Motivation: In a long-term project like this, it is important that all participants remained committed and motivated. Ideally, the same group of people should be involved from the outset to successful completion. This will ensure continuity, strengthen relationships among participants and minimise the time and money required for training. Regular contact – via workshops, group sessions or online communication – is important. The best way to keep people interested is by providing proper incentive: remuneration, recognition or the promise of personal development.

STEP 3: NEVER GIVE UP

Mrs. Corne Botes, a teacher at the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), shared her experiences as an “OER for Open Schools” participant at COL’s Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in India last year. This is excerpted from her presentation:

“At the beginning of 2010, when I was approached to become part of the project, I did not really grasp what was expected of me and I was a bit hesitant since I already had a very full programme. At that stage, I did not even have an email address and I had never sent or received email.

“During and after the workshops, my fears regarding the technological aspects slowly but surely vanished as I gained the necessary skills to do the required tasks. When we were first introduced to Moodle, I honestly considered quitting the entire project. I did not think I would ever get it right! After the training, I changed my mind and realised I could do it. I could now do things on the computer that I had never thought would be possible. I felt empowered.

“Internet connectivity proved to be a major frustration when I started developing my web lessons. Sometimes the whole system would simply bomb out and I would have to start all over again. It was an extremely time-consuming process.

“I am very proud to be associated with this project. I am grateful for the skills that I have acquired because of my involvement in the project and for the relationships formed during the process.

“Apart from sending and receiving emails, I have also learned how to use the Internet more effectively. I now constantly use it to do research or find resources to use in the classroom. I was made aware of sites where one can find wonderful educational resources to use in class.

“This experience made me realise once again that teaching and learning is, and should be, an enjoyable and creative process. This project has inspired me to become involved in educational projects and development in my country. I realised once again how important it is to make education available and accessible to everyone since we all know that knowledge empowers people.”
LIFELONG LEARNING FOR MAURITIUS

Lifelong Learning for Women’s Empowerment, a version of COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programme, has been launched in Mauritius. COL is partnering with the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council (NPCC) to empower targeted groups at the grassroots level to improve their livelihood through lifelong learning.

NPCC is working with several partners, including the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. Learning materials have been produced to respond to the needs of women using different media. Partners are exploring the use of mobiles for learning and interactive DVDs. Learning materials on legal literacy for women and business development planning are being prepared with input from a consultant and the National Equity Fund. The University of Mauritius is preparing DVDs, and the NPCC is using a web-to-SMS platform to send text messages.

A website has been developed to host and make accessible all the learning materials produced by the partners.

WOMEN LEADERS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

COL hosted a leadership training workshop for female academics in West Africa in May. The workshop at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), co-hosted by the Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDOL), brought together 42 women from higher education institutions in West Africa. They discussed the special challenges of university administration and particularly the obstacles faced by women as academic leaders.

“Very few women are in leadership positions in universities in West Africa,” explained Professor Madhulika Kaushik, COL Education Specialist, Higher Education. “In this workshop, we tried to address some of the barriers, which include socio-economic issues and leadership styles. Women are starting to find their place in leadership positions, and we’d like to encourage and support this important development.”

ENABLING eLEARNING IN ANTIGUA

In partnership with the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL) and the Centre for National Distance Learning and Open Schooling, COL hosted an OER workshop for 32 academics in Ghana. The three-day workshop at Koforidua Polytechnic introduced participants to the OER movement, web search techniques and copyright issues. Participants began creating open source content and conducted peer assessments. They now have the knowledge and skills to develop, share and use OER, which will increase their access to quality learning materials.

Fourteen faculty and staff members at Antigua State College successfully completed a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) Moodle workshop in August 2011. Led by consultant Dr. Roger Powley with technical support from college IT personnel, the workshop provided training in using Moodle, an open source learning management system.

Participants were taught how to convert print-based course materials to online formats. They also learned about open educational resources (OER) and how to find appropriate academic materials online that they could use when building their own courses. The participants left the workshop with a new set of skills and a good start on building their online course.
ICT IN OPEN SCHOOLS: NO WOMEN ALLOWED?

In many countries, information and communication technology (ICT) remains a male-dominated domain. The impact is felt in many aspects of open schooling, from limited leadership opportunities for women to underserved female learners.

The role of gender and ICT in open schools was the focus of a workshop supported by COL and organised by the National Institute of Distance Education in Mozambique in July. Twelve delegates from nine countries in the Caribbean, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa took part in the three-day “Towards a Gender-Sensitive ICT Strategy for Open Schooling” workshop.

Workshop leaders used a participatory gender audit process that promoted dialogue about issues, best practices, challenges and opportunities. A draft Gender-Sensitive ICT Strategy has been circulated to workshop participants for comment and input. The strategy will then be available to guide open schools in introducing their own gender-sensitive ICT strategies.

www.comosa.org
www.col.org/OpenSchooling

A SECOND CHANCE FOR PACIFIC ISLAND DROPOUTS

Open schooling offers significant potential as a strategy for “second chance” education in the Pacific Island countries, according to research commissioned by COL.

The desk study report, “Open Schooling as a Strategy for Second-Chance Education in the Pacific”, explores the nature and scale of school dropouts and out-of-school youth and adults in Pacific Island countries. It provides 11 individual country reports along with a combined overview of education issues and patterns.

The research revealed key findings, including:

- The incidence of dropouts is partly a result of students being pushed by a system that is not working for them.
- There must be a closer link between education and the world of work.
- Educational reform must be total, not piecemeal. This includes a reform of teacher education.
- Building on the Pacific’s long history of regionalism, regional co-operation and integration must continue to be the direction for development.
- With innovative teacher training that integrates material development, learner support and the use of information and communication technology, open schooling provides opportunities that can begin almost immediately anywhere and anytime.
- Several models of open schools should be considered, depending on local needs.

This study is the first of three phases in the Pacific Island Open Schooling Project, which is being implemented by a project team comprising the University of the South Pacific (USP) School of Education and regional USP campuses in collaboration with regional stakeholders and COL. The next two phases will see pilot open schools established in Kiribati and Tonga and region-wide expansion of open schools.

The new research report:
www.col.org/OpenSchooling

GENDER eLEARNING FOR WORLD BANK STAFF

COL is expanding its professional development services for the World Bank with a new course for the Agricultural and Rural Development sector. At the World Bank’s request, COL’s eLearning for International Organisations (COL eLIO) team is developing a short eLearning course to help World Bank staff mainstream gender into project and programme design, implementation and evaluation.

COL eLIO is working with COL’s Learning for Farming programme in adapting the course from the Gender in Agriculture Source Book. The three-hour course, which will be available on CD-ROM to staff in the Agricultural and Rural Development sector, introduces learners to a breadth of gender issues affecting agricultural development and food security. It provides practical guidance on designing, developing and delivering gender-sensitive, inclusive and equitable projects and programmes in the context of the World Bank agricultural sub-sector.

The stand-alone eLearning course is designed with reflective activities and self-assessed quizzes. Upon successful completion of all three modules, learners will receive a certificate as evidence of participation.

Close to 1,000 World Bank staff members in 100 countries have completed the Report and Correspondence online writing course, which was also developed and delivered by COL. The average completion rate is about 80 per cent.

www.col.org/COLeLIO

PARTICIPANTS FROM BANGLADESH, MOZAMBIQUE, SEYCHELLES AND ZAMBIA PARTICIPATE IN THE WORKSHOP IN MOZAMBIQUE

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GETTING TO KNOW VUSSC AND THE TQF

Heads of post-secondary institutions in Seychelles received an in-depth briefing about the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) and the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) in August. Mr. John Lesperance, COL’s VUSSC Education Specialist, and Mr. Jean-Michel Domingue, CEO of the Seychelles Qualifications Authority’s (SQA), presented the TQF to leaders from seven institutions and encouraged them to offer courses developed by VUSSC.

“For some of the heads of institutions, this was the first time that they have heard of the TQF,” said Mr. Lesperance. “They were eager to learn more about the TQF, especially how it could benefit their institution.”

The Seychelles Institute of Technology is working with COL and the SQA to develop unit standards for the Linux for IT Managers course. The course will be validated by the SQA and approved by the TQF Management Committee before it is offered.

The TQF was developed by VUSSC to encourage the portability of quality assured qualifications and the mobility of learners among countries by providing a means for the comparison of national qualification frameworks.

www.vussc.org

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: OER FOR OPEN SCHOOLS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

- Institutional ownership: The development of OER should be considered an integral part of the institution’s work, not a separate project. Any institution involved in the development of OER should have a vision for why they have educational resources freely available.
- Commitment from senior management: To develop sustainable OER models, it’s important to have the full support of senior management. This is necessary to find solutions to challenges such as bandwidth and workloads.

Despite the challenges, “OER for Open Schools” was ultimately a success. Teachers involved in this process are becoming leaders who are educating and inspiring colleagues. Most importantly, open schools have free and open access to quality learning materials that will enable them to expand access to learning.

“OER for Open Schools” evaluation reports: www.col.org/OpenSchooling

COL’S PRESIDENT MEETS WITH CANADA’S GOVERNOR GENERAL


Photo credit: MCpl Dany Veillette, Rideau Hall
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OPENING DOORS FOR OPEN SCHOOLS

Just two years after it was formed, the Commonwealth Open Schools Association (COMOSA) is making significant strides in expanding the availability and quality of open schooling across the Commonwealth. In recent months, COMOSA has established a new online community and released its first research report.

OPENSCHOOLINGCONNECT

A new online community that brings together open schooling practitioners and stakeholders has already attracted more than 100 members. Billed as “a community for educators interested in using technology to increase access to quality education”, OpenSchoolingConnect allows members to engage in discussions, post videos and photos, share resources and promote events. The online community emerged as a result of the “OER for Open Schools” programme (described in detail in “In Focus” on page 8).

Participation in OpenSchoolingConnect is by invitation. For more information, contact Ms. Frances Ferreira, COL Education Specialist, Open Schooling, at fferreira@col.org.

The full report: www.comosa.org

MARRYING PRACTICAL AND ACADEMIC EDUCATION

One of the research priorities identified at the first COMOSA annual general meeting in 2010 was integrating vocational education in open schools. There is a growing belief that open schools can offer increased value and relevance to learners by providing them with transferable skills that employers need along with academic learning.

Five COMOSA members offered to participate in a research project on “Integrating Vocational Education with General Education in Open Schools”, supported by a consultant provided by COL. Research was conducted between May and August 2011, drawing upon the experience of five open schools:
- Bangladesh Open University,
- Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL),
- Institute for Adult Education, Tanzania,
- National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India, and
- National Open School of Trinidad & Tobago.

The report outlines the challenges and opportunities related to combining skills-related and general education in open schools. It also provides a Framework for Integrating Vocational Education with Academic Education in Open Schools.

SOLOMON ISLANDS ADOPTS NATIONAL ODL POLICY

The Solomon Islands has approved a new Strategic Framework for Distance Education and Flexible Learning. Developed with support from COL, the new national open and distance learning (ODL) policy focuses on two key areas: teacher education and post-basic education (including technical and vocational education and training). It is based on a vision, “that all Solomon Islands education and training providers, and those advising them, should consider distance education and flexible learning approaches when they are planning and designing new programmes”.

UPCOMING EVENTS

International Conference on Lifelong Learning 2011
Transforming Nations through Enculturation of Lifelong Learning
Co-organised by Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia; Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Open University Malaysia
14–15 November 2011, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
http://iclll2011.oum.edu.my

Critical Women: Women as Agents of Change through Higher Education
Co-organised by the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka
6–8 March 2012, Cinnamon Grand Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka
www.acu.ac.uk/conferences/gender_2012

2012 Distance Education Association of New Zealand Conference
Shift Happens - Resilience, Relevance and Reform
11–13 April 2012, Wellington, New Zealand
Deadline for abstracts: 16 December 2011
http://tinyurl.com/deanz2012
Task Force on QA in eLearning

UNESCO and the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) convened a Global Task Force on Quality Assurance in eLearning, which met for the first time at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, France in June. The Task Force includes representation from COL, the African Council for Distance Education, the Asian Association of Open Universities, the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Education (CALED) and UNESCO.

The Task Force aims to present the latest developments in quality assurance in eLearning and create opportunities for regional enhancement by sharing latest approaches and developments. Members have agreed to submit a report about quality assurance issues related to eLearning by the end of 2012.

http://tinyurl.com/ICDE-News

Honours for JET FM in Jamaica

JET FM 88.7 Volunteers Ms. Romae Ormsby (Left) and Mr. Orane Brown (Right) flank Michael Manley Foundation Chairman, Mr. Delano Franklin (2nd Left) and President of the Jeffrey Town Farmers Association, Mr. Wordsworth Gordon, holding the 2011 Michael Manley Award for Community Self Reliance. The Community Radio Station, which has received training and support from COL, was recognised for its contribution to community self-reliance for its programmes on climate change, maternal health, child care, HIV/AIDS and other social issues.

Profile: Wawasan Open University

In this occasional series, Connections highlights open universities around the Commonwealth. In this issue, a new and rapidly growing higher education institution in Malaysia – Wawasan Open University.

Just five years old, Wawasan Open University is the only private, non-profit open learning university in Malaysia. It is supported extensively by the Wawasan Education Foundation, a charitable organisation dedicated to providing lifelong education to the public.

Wawasan Open University started its inaugural academic term in January 2007. Its administrative headquarters and main campus are located in the heritage-listed Homestead Mansion in Penang. The university’s founding CEO and Vice Chancellor was Tan Sri Emeritus Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, who was COL’s second President from 1995–2004. Professor Dr. Wong Tat Meng succeeded Dr. Dhanarajan as CEO and Vice Chancellor of Wawasan in 2009.

Wawasan offers graduate certificate, graduate diploma, Bachelor’s degree and Masters programmes. The university’s four schools – the School of Business and Administration, School of Science and Technology, School of Foundation and Liberal Studies and the School of Education, Languages and Communications – currently offer 38 programmes. The university’s programmes are certified by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency. Programmes and courses are subject to internal and external quality assurance monitoring.

As an open university, Wawasan provides anywhere, anytime self-paced learning. Content is provided to learners in various forms – online, by phone, teleconferencing, podcasts and traditional print-based formats. Students may attend weekend tutorial sessions and meet instructors face-to-face at seven regional learning centres located in key cities. Learner support is also provided through WawasanLearn, a learning management system that connects students, tutors and administrators.

Today more than 8,000 students are enrolled at Wawasan Open University, a rapidly emerging force in ODL in Asia.

www.wou.edu.my
GUIDELINES FOR OER IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Stemming from the open educational resources (OER) policy forum last December and wide consultation, UNESCO and COL have developed Guidelines for OER in Higher Education. The guidelines are intended to help key stakeholder groups (governments, higher education institutions, teaching staff, student bodies, quality assurance/ accreditation bodies and academic recognition bodies) as they assess the implications of OER for their future policies and actions. Sir John Daniel and UNESCO Director-General Ms. Irina Bokova will launch the publication at the UNESCO General Conference on 1 November.

Ms. Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbić has retired from her post as Chief of UNESCO’s Section Higher Education. She was a longtime member of the UNESCO Higher Education team and a valued COL partner. Earlier this year, COL President Sir John Daniel paid tribute to Ms. Uvalic-Trumbić as “the highly respected face of UNESCO Higher Education in the outside world” and noted that her role as COL Focal Point at UNESCO has contributed to increased collaboration between the two organisations. Ms. Uvalic-Trumbić will continue to collaborate with COL as a consultant on the new initiative “Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally” (see page 3 for details).

Dr. Daniel Rakgomo Tau, Executive Director of the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL), was awarded the Presidential Order of Merit for his contribution to the growth of the Education sector in Botswana, especially in open and distance learning.

Dr. Sugata Mitra has been appointed Visiting Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab. Known for his “Hole in the Wall” experiment where he installed an Internet-connected computer in an urban slum in New Delhi, India, Dr. Mitra has made numerous contributions toward closing the digital divide.

A BASIC GUIDE TO OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

This joint COL/UNESCO publication provides a simple, user-friendly guide to OER. It defines OER and identifies the key issues relating to the development and implementation of OER. It is a comprehensive guide to OER that targets developing countries, particularly those that are not completely aware of the issues and implications of OER, government officials, senior education sector leaders, researchers, faculty members, students and administrators who may have a general interest in OER.

Professor Vincent Ado Tenebe, Vice-Chancellor of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), has been named a UNESCO-COL Chair in Open and Distance Learning. COL’s Honorary Chairs are a network of distinguished serving academics who represent the academic face of COL, complementing the political and administrative role of COL Focal Points and Honorary Advisors.

www.col.org/COLChairs

COL President Sir John Daniel’s article about the guidelines in the University World News: http://tinyurl.com/ UWN-OER

www.col.org/oerBasicGuide

www.col.org/oerGuidelines

http://oerworkshop.weebly.com

http://tinyurl.com/UWN-OER

http://media.mit.edu

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www.col.org/oerBasicGuide

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http://media.mit.edu
An emerging trend in the eLearning practice is the use of Web 2.0 tools such as blogging. Back in 2006, a group of technologists who saw potential of blogs/Web 2.0 and online social networking for eLearning created an open source platform called Elgg. This platform enables blogging/micro-blogging, file repository and profiles for individual users.

Unlike public social networking services (such as Facebook or MySpace), this platform allows a high degree of control to individual users. They can decide what is public and what is limited to a group or to private areas. All entries can be tagged by the users so that people with similar interests can connect with each other through online searches. Elgg can be installed locally in a LAN of an organisation or accessed as a service via the web.

In COL, a trial installation of Elgg has been created for staff members, with all features enabled. It is currently used to discuss specific interests and documents or to create informal papers collaboratively. Informality is preferred as other spaces are available for more formal collaboration. Our idea is to understand how this platform can offer support for learners and facilitators in a typical open and distance learning environment.

HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) is the coding used to put content on web pages. The newest version, HTML5, is being developed by two global agencies: the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and the Web Hypertext Application Technology Working Group (WHATWG). It could affect how we design and use websites.

What’s new with HTML5?
• Users can watch video without a plug-in like Silverlight and Flash. This frees up memory, which can speed up your computer’s response time.
• Some features of HTML5 are still under development, but when it arrives, it will usher in a new generation of web technologies. Microsoft, which released Windows 8 beta in September, has withdrawn support for Flash on mobiles because it uses HTML5 in its browser.

The open educational resources (OER) movement has its parallel in the Open Access movement. While OER focuses on learning materials with or without accreditation values, the Open Access paradigm is premised on unrestricted sharing of research documents, especially those arising from a peer review process. Open Access covers research data sets as well.

Many academic research institutions have established institutional repositories online. Such repositories may cover a faculty in a university or an entire institution. Scholars, teachers or researchers in an institution can deposit a copy of the pre-print of a research publication in their institutional repository. Most commercial publishers today agree to reprints being deposited and made accessible online with or without a time embargo.

DSpace is popular open source software used for maintaining institutional repositories. It is estimated that nearly 800 institutional repositories are currently operational using DSpace.

An institutional repository is being set up in COL using DSpace. It can be accessed at http://dspace.col.org. As of August 2011, this repository contains over 370 entries and provides access to all COL publications and most of the learning materials. More entries are being added; all are available in full text. This complements the publication’s link in the COL website. The difference is in the way the repository appears and in the way indexing engines and search engines locate information in it.

Use of DSpace to host repositories of educational materials is relatively new. COL is among the small number of organisations to try this out. The Joint Information Systems Committee in the UK is a known leader in this area. DSpace is also used by COL to support access to online educational materials via the new Commonwealth Connects Portal, C2P. A group of interns at COL have initiated steps to generate DSpace datasets for direct use in advanced search techniques.