Commonwealth education ministers meeting in Malaysia in June reaffirmed their commitment to internationally agreed education goals, while emphasising the need to plan beyond 2015.

Delegations from 40 countries, of which 37 were led by ministers, attended the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (17CCEM) held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 15 to 18 June 2009. This year’s conference celebrated 50 years of Commonwealth education ministers meetings and was the largest ever gathering of its kind, with about 1,200 delegates attending the various events.

During 17CCEM, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan Endowment Fund was launched with contributions of £1.4 million so far. Ministers also agreed to commence work towards establishing a Tertiary Education Facility in the Commonwealth.

The ministerial meeting was supported by four parallel forums representing teachers, university vice-chancellors, youth, and civil society and the private sector. All forums developed communiqués, which will be presented to Commonwealth Heads of Government when they meet in Trinidad & Tobago in December. 17CCEM’s theme was “Education in the Commonwealth: Towards and beyond global goals and targets”.

COL was quite visible through presentations by staff and board members, as well as programme partners, at Ministerial plenaries and roundtables, the Vice-Chancellors Forum, the Stakeholders Forum, the Youth Forum and the Exhibition. Open and distance learning was prominent throughout the various aspects of 17CCEM.

A meeting of COL’s Board of Governors also took place in conjunction with 17CCEM.

STAKEHOLDERS FORUM
Stakeholders representing civil society and the private sector released a communiqué that noted the uneven progress in educational development since the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in 2006. The Stakeholders Forum highlighted the continued need for action in four areas: access, equity, efficiency and effectiveness. They urged Ministers to consider these issues when taking steps to improve the reach and quality of investment in education.

VICE-CHANCELLORS FORUM
Vice-Chancellors from 180 Commonwealth universities discussed issues related to higher education, ranging from the impact of the global recession and commitment to global development goals to equitable access and the contribution of ODL. The 2009 Kuala Lumpur Higher Education Declaration, released as a self-standing declaration by the Vice-Chancellors Forum, called upon Commonwealth Ministers of Education to foster a strong and sustainable university sector by:

• ensuring there are appropriate processes for accreditation of universities,
• ensuring that universities have access to adequate funding for teaching, research and community engagement, and
• maintaining the appropriate balance between university autonomy and public accountability.
The Commonwealth Conversation

A lively online debate has emerged in a global public consultation on the future of the Commonwealth. Facilitated by the Royal Commonwealth Society, “The Commonwealth Conversation” seeks to gain input about the role of an organisation that celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. People are encouraged to follow the online debate and post comments. Topics of discussion have included the role of the monarchy, the relevance of the Commonwealth and suspending the membership of particular countries.

Results of the conversation will be presented to the world’s leaders at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Trinidad & Tobago in November 2009. The Royal Commonwealth society will publish a full report of findings in January 2010.

It’s an open discussion. Readers of Connections may wish to start a discussion on matters related to open and distance learning (ODL) in and for the Commonwealth, such as open schooling, learning for farming or the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth.

www.thecommonwealthconversation.org

17CCCEM MARKS 50 YEARS CONTINUED

Youth Forum

The 17CCCEM Youth Forum included student leaders, successful young people outside of formal education, disabled persons, people from marginalised groups and Commonwealth Regional Youth Caucus representatives. In their statement to the Education Ministers, the Youth Forum made recommendations in three areas:

- Student representation: Students should be involved in decision-making bodies within the education system.
- Mode of delivery: Arguing that traditional methods of teaching are not adequate in this age, the Youth Forum advised Ministers to facilitate the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and establish a special Commonwealth fund for ICTs in education.
- School to life transition: Vocational and technical disciplines should be incorporated into the mainstream system, and work experience and community involvement should be a mandatory part of the education process.

Teachers Forum

Teacher organisations from 29 Commonwealth countries urged their governments to invest in teachers and in developing the teaching profession. The current financial crisis cannot be used as a pretext for failing to invest in education, participants asserted. A statement developed by the Teachers Forum addressed issues of teacher professionalism, teacher motivation and effectiveness, and the role of teachers in addressing diversity. The Forum called upon Commonwealth Ministers to protect and increase investment in education.

Ministers concurred with many of the recommendations from the forums. Specifically, they recognised the importance of:

- delivering improved access to early childhood care and education,
- improved access to secondary education,
- expanded access to skills development and higher education,
- improvements in the quality and professionalism of teachers,
- good governance in education administration, and
- “gender mainstreaming” across all interventions.

Ministers also agreed with the need for partnerships at all levels, the vital role of teachers and the need to provide them with necessary support structures, the importance of youth involvement at all levels in policy dialogue and curriculum development, the importance of information and communications technologies, the need to ensure diverse and inclusive education and the importance of involving communities.

COL’s Role Affirmed

Ministers also endorsed COL’s Three-Year Plan for 2009-2012 at CCEM. COL received praise in the ministerial communiqué:

13. Ministers commended the Commonwealth of Learning on its work since 16CCEM; endorsed the three-year plan for 2009-12 ‘Learning for Development’; and reiterated commitments to continued financial support. Ministers especially praised the work of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), and encouraged its expansion in terms of capacity-building in the use of ICTs in education, and the development and delivery of courses, with particular emphasis on mechanisms for quality assurance.

17CCEM was organised by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia and the Commonwealth Secretariat, in collaboration with other partners, including COL. The next Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers will be held in the Bahamas in 2012.

www.col.org/3yp
www.17ccem.com
Over 1,500 ministers of education, senior officials and university leaders converged on Paris for UNESCO’s World Conference on Higher Education in July. A similar meeting had been convened in 1998. This year’s title, *The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research*, emphasised the considerable transformation of higher education (HE) in just 10 years. Quality assurance, for example, barely featured on the 1998 agenda whereas it now receives sustained attention in most countries and was a recurrent theme at the conference. Similarly, although open and distance learning (ODL) was already well established in the 1990s, the steady development of information and communications technologies (ICTs) has given new prominence to alternative methods of teaching and learning. Five regional conferences were held before the main event, and summaries presented in the first plenary revealed common global trends and specific regional concerns.

UNESCO’s intergovernmental conferences are different from academic conferences. Their aim is to go beyond analysis of developments to influence the future through action plans. Ministers from developing countries often articulate policy on the basis of the trends reported at these meetings. This gave particular significance to the conference communiqué and ensured that its drafting committee was the scene of tussles between different visions of higher education that continued until dawn. For example, although private HE is burgeoning almost everywhere, the diehards hoped it would go away if references to it were expunged from the communiqué! Protagonists and opponents of globalisation drew different implications from the generally agreed statement that higher education is a public good.

Reasoned discussion of such issues made the final communiqué a good summary of the current state of play. It highlighted:

- the social responsibility of HE,
- the need to strive for access, equity and quality simultaneously,
- the important – and different – trends of internationalisation, regionalisation and globalisation,
- the need to for research and innovation in learning methods, and
- the particular challenges of HE in Africa.

COL participated in the conference in three ways. First, at the request of the organisers, COL’s Education Specialists all contributed to a substantial document on *ICTs for Higher Education* (see New Resources, page 10), which was given to delegates in English and French. Second, I was privileged to have a spot in an early plenary session at which I argued that the explosively growing demand for HE can only be satisfied through greater use of ODL and technology-mediated learning. Third, Dr. Emma Kruse Vaai, Chair of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) Management Committee, and I gave a parallel session on HE in small states citing the work of VUSSC. These contributions helped to bring COL’s work and values to the attention of an important global audience of decision makers.

The success and “buzz” of the conference reflect great credit on its executive committee, and I gave a parallel session at which I argued that the explosively growing demand for HE can only be satisfied through greater use of ODL and technology-mediated learning. Third, Dr. Emma Kruse Vaai, Chair of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) Management Committee, and I gave a parallel session on HE in small states citing the work of VUSSC. These contributions helped to bring COL’s work and values to the attention of an important global audience of decision makers.

COL and the Commonwealth Secretariat have signed a Collaboration Agreement for 2009-2012. While COL and the Secretariat have worked together since COL’s inception, this is the first official agreement. It further harmonises their work in education to avoid duplication and ensure that synergies are achieved. It lists the organisations’ distinct roles, joint activities and how they will work together in four key areas: teacher development, the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, healthy communities and Civil Paths to Peace (the Commonwealth’s “Respect and Understanding” initiative).

www.col.org/col-comsec

**UNESCO’S WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

*By Sir John Daniel, President & CEO, COL*

Protagonists and opponents of globalisation drew different implications from the generally agreed statement that higher education is a public good.

**CLOSER COMMONWEALTH COLLABORATION**

Dr. Caroline Punterfact, Director of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Social Transformation Programmes Division (left). At the collaboration agreement signing in Vancouver in July with COL Vice President Professor Asha Kanwar

**STRONG TIES WITH INDIA**

India’s High Commissioner to Canada, H.E. Mr. Shashishekhar M. Gavai (left), met with COL President, Sir John Daniel at COL’s Office in Vancouver in July, along with other COL Staff and Mr. Ashok Das, Consul General of India, Vancouver. COL’s strong ties with India include the country’s long-standing status as a major donor to COL and COL locating its Regional Agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), in New Delhi.
COMMUNITY MEDIA RESEARCH

COL and UNESCO are working on a joint applied research project to explore the potential for mobile-friendly content developed in association with local and community media in developing countries. Launched earlier this year, the study aims to help media build capacity to make innovative use of mobile handsets and other devices in reaching populations with local content and news. Research results will be reported next year.

www.comminit.com/en/node/294122/307

NEW WEBSITE & MANAGEMENT FOR VUSSC

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) has launched its own website (www.vussc.org). The site is a gateway to information about VUSSC activities and resources, including online courses in subjects such as disaster management, entrepreneurship, life skills and tourism. Developed for VUSSC by VUSSC partners, the courses are freely available to anyone for download, adaptation and use.

A Management Committee is now directing VUSSC’s activities, supported by COL’s Education Specialist for VUSSC, Mr. John Lesperance. The Committee includes representatives from small states in all regions of the Commonwealth:
• Dr. Emma Kruse Vaai, National University of Samoa (Asia/Pacific), Chairperson
• Mr. Ricaud Auckbur, Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Mauritius (Africa, Mediterranean)
• Dr. Leon Higgs, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, The Bahamas (Caribbean)
• Dr. Mamolete Mohapi, National University of Lesotho (Africa, Mediterranean)
• Ms. Karen Rosemin, Ministry of Science, Technology & Tertiary Education, Trinidad & Tobago (Caribbean)
• Dr. Ali Fawaz Shareef, Centre for Open Learning, Maldives (Asia/Pacific)
• Mr. Kaylash Allgool, Mauritius Qualifications Authority, (ex-officio as Chairperson of the VUSSC Transnational Qualifications Framework Committee)

At its first meeting in Vancouver in August, the Management Committee agreed on its terms of reference, finalised a funding proposal, and prepared a budget and plan of action.

The Management Committee also approved the implementation plan for the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). The TQF is an important step forward in establishing credibility for VUSSC as it provides a widely recognised system of accreditation for VUSSC courses and facilitates the movement of courses and learners between states. Ministers of Education in all 32 VUSSC member states will be asked to formally endorse the TQF implementation plan.

One of the key themes that arose in the VUSSC Management Committee meeting was the need to continue building capacity in online materials development among educators in small states of the Commonwealth. VUSSC will continue to hold intensive training workshops or “boot camps”. The next one, scheduled for late 2009 in Samoa, will focus on creating learning materials related to the maritime industry.

VUSSC is a network initiated by, and built on the support of, Ministers of Education of developing small states of the Commonwealth. It is committed to the collaborative development of open content resources for education, training and capacity building and the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to broaden access to education.

www.vussc.org
www.col.org/vussc

SCRIPTWRITING FOR AFRICAN RADIO BROADCASTERS

COL is working with Farm Radio International to build capacity in rural communities through its support of a scriptwriting competition on smallholder farmer innovation in Sub-Saharan Africa. Competitors are invited to submit a radio script that tells the true story of a farmer (or farmers) from their region who has developed an innovation.

Participants were offered a free two-month on-line scriptwriting training course, developed with support from COL, to help them prepare their radio scripts. The deadline for the scriptwriting competition is 1 November 2009, and winners will be announced in January 2010. The competition is run in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Inter Press Service (IPS) Africa, the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), USC Canada and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC).

http://scriptcompetition.farmradio.org
BEST PRACTICES IN ODL

“OPERATIONAL DATA MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME FOR UNHCR”

COL’s eLearning for International Organisations programme provides skills training to development workers worldwide through open and distance learning (ODL). Working primarily with international agencies, COL develops and delivers customised courses, usually supported by online one-on-one tutors. One of its newest courses, “Operational Data Management for UNHCR”, is helping to build important skills among United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees staff and, in turn, making a significant difference to the displaced people served by the agency.

The eLearning programme has been delivered to 90 UNHCR learners in 35 countries. The 80 percent completion rate is considered to be high for this type of programme, especially given the unpredictable environments in which the UNHCR staff work and live.

The programme is already having a profound impact on the people UNHCR serves, Ms. Gornall explained.

“So far, 70 percent of the learners have completed the self-study and also participated in the 4-week face-to-face workshop and a graduation project. Learner support, an important element of any ODL programme, is provided by four tutors in four countries: Ms. Jess Gao (Canada), Dr. David Murphy (Australia), Dr. Gajendra Naidu (India) and Dr. Mike Robertshaw (UK). Dr. Robertshaw, who has tutored more than 40 people in the programme, says his role goes beyond guiding learners through their studies. “Some of the graduation projects so far include procedures to speed up a resettlement programme for Iraqi refugees, a system to track sexual- and gender-based violence in Yemen, dozens of new data systems and local training for field staff to spread the learning.”

Learner support, an important element in any ODL programme, is provided by four tutors in four countries: Ms. Jess Gao (Canada), Dr. David Murphy (Australia), Dr. Gajendra Naidu (India) and Dr. Mike Robertshaw (UK). Dr. Robertshaw, who has tutored more than 40 people in the programme, says his role goes beyond guiding learners through their studies.

“My counselling tasks are to assist them in the development of appropriate study skills for their first experience in distance education, to reduce their sense of isolation and to provide a human presence to help them with their problems,” he explained. “It’s important to appreciate the potential challenges faced by each participant who has to continue their normal duties while studying. The unexpected influx of a large number of new refugees that have to be processed, a change in the local security situation, health problems and the need to cover a colleague on leave are just a few of the potential factors affecting a participant’s studies. I have great admiration for my students who are pursuing their studies in one of the most challenging learning environments.”

“The support and motivation of the e-coaches is absolutely essential in helping students get through this very technical material,” Ms. Gornall said. “The tutors also ensure a high level of quality in the learners’ assignments, which gives credibility to the programme.”

A second cohort of English- and French-speaking students will start the course early next year. UNHCR plans to offer the programme to 60 staff annually. www.col.org/COLeLIO

COL RECEIVES LESOTHO PRIME MINISTER

THE R.T. HON. PAKAUTHA MOISILO, PRIME MINISTER OF LESOTHO, AND FIRST LADY, MRS. MATHATO MOISILO, MET WITH CHILDREN FROM DEEP COVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN NORTH SAANICH, BRITISH COLUMBIA WHILE VISITING COL’S OFFICE IN VANCOUVER IN SEPTEMBER. THE COUPLE (PICTURED HERE WITH MERRIL McMillan, LEFT, AND ROSE ChISHOLM) THANKED THE CHILDREN, WHOSE SCHOOL HAS RAISED OVER CDN $1,000 TO HELP REBUILD A SCHOOL

IN NORTHERN LESOTHO IN COLLABORATION WITH A CANADIAN NGO, HELP LESOTHO.

THE DELEGATION FROM LESOTHO THAT MET WITH COL STAFF ALSO INCLUDED THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE, DR. MPHU RAMATAPENG, AND THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, MR. MOLABI KENNETH TSEKOA.

LESOTHO IS A MOUNTAINOUS KINGDOM OF TWO MILLION PEOPLE THAT IS COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY SOUTH AFRICA.

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STUDENTS LEARN HOW TO USE GPS RECEIVERS AT THE NAIROBI “OPERATIONAL DATA MANAGEMENT FOR UNHCR” WORKSHOP IN MAY 2009
**ONLINE LEARNING RESOURCES FOR OPEN SCHOOLS**

Open schools in six Commonwealth countries – Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia – are developing new learning materials for 20 subjects through COL’s Open Educational Resources for Open Schools initiative. This two-year partnership between COL and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation is focussed on improving access to secondary education by developing open educational resources (OERs) and training “master teachers” in online materials development.

Following training workshops on developing OERs in early 2009, the master teachers are creating self-instructional learning materials. Country Management Committees are ensuring the materials comply with the country’s syllabi and will conduct peer reviews of materials developed in other partner countries. The completed OERs will be freely available for download, adaptation and use by open schools and other institutions, creating a valuable new pool of quality learning resources.

The first of two evaluation reports about the OERs for Open Schools project has been conducted by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE). The Input Indicator Evaluation Report examines two elements of the initiative: master teachers and their competence regarding materials development, and the quality of training provided by consultants. The evaluation report found that while the teachers have considerable teaching experience, their background in materials development is generally more limited. As a result, Country Management Committees need to accommodate teachers with diverse experience. Satisfaction with the quality of workshops and facilitators is generally high, according to the report. The major issues were time constraints and, most importantly, access to reliable computer and Internet facilities.

The Input Indicator Evaluation Report is available on COL’s website, along with numerous other reports and resources.

**www.col.org/OpenSchooling**

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**SUPPORTING A NEW OPEN SCHOOL IN CAMEROON**

COL has supported a strategic development plan for the establishment of a new open school in Cameroon.

As a highly indebted developing country, Cameroon faces numerous challenges related to education including high rates of repetition and drop-out, a shortage of qualified teachers and quality learning materials, limited school infrastructure and a mismatch between the curriculum and the needs of the labour market. Open schooling has the potential to help Cameroon overcome many of these challenges.

Initially, Cameroon National Open School (CAMNOS) programmes will focus on three groups of learners: primary failures, junior secondary failures, and unemployed youth and adults. The pilot phase, running from July 2009 to September 2010, will focus on developing learning materials, creating administrative and academic support services, and carrying out trial runs in several regions.

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**COL IN SECOND LIFE**

COL has created a Second Life site to showcase its work and provide an online meeting space for Commonwealth institutions. To visit, one needs to create a Second Life avatar – a virtual character that can move around the site. COL’s Second Life space includes a tree with rooms and platforms that serve as meeting areas, as well as an amphitheatre and pagoda.

“Our Second Life site enables us to profile COL and the Commonwealth to a group of people who might otherwise not know about us,” said Mr. Paul West, COL’s Director of Knowledge Management and Information Technology. “It’s important that we have a presence at the extremes of bandwidth so that, in addition to communicating with those who have little or no access to technology, we can also communicate with ‘early adopters’ through a rich online presence.”

COL is seeking volunteers to create buildings on its Second Life site to represent Commonwealth areas or activities. For more information, contact Mr. West at pwest@col.org, http://tinyurl.com/colsecondlife

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**SECOND LIFE BOOK LAUNCH, COPYRIGHT GUIDE**

COL hosted a virtual book launch for Introducing Copyright: A Plain Language Guide to Copyright in the 21st Century on 26 May 2009. Participants signed up for a free Second Life account (if they didn’t already have one) and logged into COL’s Second Life space. Others chose the audio-only option and listened to the book launch on Elluminate. Online book launches are an increasingly popular way to generate awareness of new books while overcoming geographic barriers.

CHANGING THE TECHNOLOGY OF LEARNING

By Desmond Bermingham

Enrolments of over 350,000 students per year. Student/teacher ratios of over 1,000 to one. Students living hundreds of miles from the nearest school. Sounds like the worst example of an underfunded education system?

No. In fact, it is an example of what COL President Sir John Daniel calls “mega-schools”: open schools that use technology and networks of distance tutors to support the learning of literally millions of students through flexible programmes designed to meet their needs without requiring full-time attendance at a traditional school.

Open schools are not new. The figures above refer to the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in India, which was launched in 1979. NIOS has enrolled more than 1.5 million students over the past four years at secondary and senior secondary levels, and has supported the establishment of open schools in 16 states. The list of open schools in both developed and developing countries is growing.

Open schools come in various forms: some are designed to complement conventional schools, others offer alternative courses and still others are fully integrated into the main schooling system. The common feature of all open schools is that they change the technology of learning by abandoning the assumption that education can only be achieved through face-to-face teaching in traditional schools. Open schooling shifts the focus away from teaching and onto learning. It recognises that students learn in different ways, at different speeds and at different times of their lives. Distance learning combined with periodic face-to-face tuition allow students to learn at their own pace and to combine studying with work or other commitments.

As someone who has worked in the education and aid world for over 15 years, I was aware of the use of open and distance learning (ODL) in many countries — and indeed have been a lifelong learner through the U.K. Open University myself. But until my recent attachment at COL, I had not fully realised the extent to which developing countries have already adopted ODL — and particularly open schooling — as part of their response to the growing demands for quality education at all levels. This has important implications for the international education community, particularly aid agencies and donors providing support to education programmes in low income countries.

It is clear to me that developing countries will not be able to achieve the goal of providing Education for All (EFA) without including ODL programmes as part of their response to the challenge. The numbers are daunting: 72 million primary aged children not in school; estimates of up to 400 million secondary aged children without a school place; 10 million new primary teachers needed. It is unlikely that open schools and other forms of distance learning will ever replace traditional schools and colleges. But, as Sir John points out, ODL and the new technologies will allow countries to achieve significant economies of scale and thereby maximise the use of their scarcest resource: high quality, trained and experienced teachers and tutors.

The international donor community (with one or two exceptions) has largely failed to grasp the potential contribution of ODL in the global effort to achieve EFA goals.
The term “open educational resources” is a relatively new one. First used by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) in 2002, OERs were defined as “technology-enabled, open provision of educational resources for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes”. The key is that the resource has to be widely accessible, and users must be able to alter or adapt it.

A growing supply of OERs – both formal and informal course materials – is available online. COL’s online search tool for OERs and open courseware offers access to thousands of OERs from several dozen institutions worldwide. MIT’s OpenCourseWare programme alone offers free lecture materials, exams and videos for 1,900 courses.

UNESCO’s OERs wiki (http://oerwiki.iiep-unesco.org) provides a collaborative online workspace for some 900 people in more than 100 countries. The wiki also offers access to an extensive list of resources, including UNESCO’s first openly licensed publication. Released in June 2009, Open Educational Resources: Conversations in Cyberspace brings together background papers and reports from the first three years of activities in the UNESCO OER community to document issues, ideas and innovations in the nascent movement.

COMBATING INFORMATION IMPERIALISM
One of the criticisms of OERs is around the issue of “information imperialism” – there is concern that OERs are largely created in the developed world and imposed on the developing world. Collaborative content development is considered by many to be a strategy to combat this problem.

From the beginning, the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) has focussed on “South-South” collaboration. Supported by COL, VUSSC has built capacity in online content development among educators from small states of the Commonwealth. Gathering at intensive training workshops – or “boot camps” – the educators learn skills and then apply them by developing learning materials. Their collaboration continues upon their return to their home country. And they are encouraged to share their learning with colleagues, further expanding knowledge and skills in online content development.

Over the past four years, COL has hosted six intensive training workshops. The materials developed by workshop participants for VUSSC are forming a library of OERs that are freely available for use and adaptation. (See “New website, management for VUSSC” on page 2 for more details.)

Another example of OERs being created in the developing world for the developing world is the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) consortium. Eighteen organisations, universities and teacher training institutions in Africa are collaborating on an extensive range of multilingual OERs focussed on teacher training. It’s estimated that half a million teachers are working with these OERs.

WikiEducator is also playing an important role in building capacity in online content development. Now an independent entity operating out of Otago Polytechnic’s OER Foundation in New Zealand, WikiEducator

One of the keys to achieving international development goals such as Education for All is the development of new course content. As this requires time, money and specialised skills, many consider open educational resources (OERs) as a solution. Educators freely adapt and re-use OERs, gaining access to valuable new sources of learning materials. So goes the theory. The reality is that there are still obstacles to overcome before OERs deliver on their promise.

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Open educational resources (OERs) are teaching and learning materials that you may freely use and reuse, without charge. OERs often have a Creative Commons or GNU license that state specifically how the material may be used, reused, adapted and shared.

**WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF OER MATERIALS?**
- Full university courses, complete with readings, videos of lectures, homework assignments, and lecture notes.
- Interactive mini-lessons and simulations about a specific topic, such as math or physics.
- Adaptations of existing open work.
- Electronic textbooks that are peer-reviewed and frequently updated.
- Elementary school and high school (K-12) lesson plans, worksheets and activities that are aligned with state standards.

**WHAT CAN I DO WITH OERs?**
Here are some real-life examples of people using and contribution to OERs.
- As a teacher, you could reuse and repurpose material for use in your own classroom and augment your school’s limited resources. A physics teacher could use video from an introductory physics class at MIT or use interactive simulations from University of Colorado at Boulder’s PhET project.
- You can learn about subjects that interest you, without cost and without needing to be near a school. A cross-country trucker listens to philosophy lectures from a UC Berkeley professor while he drives long stretches of highway.
- You can contribute to open math and science textbooks that will be used by students in South Africa.

From [www.oercommons.org](http://www.oercommons.org)

**WHAT ABOUT INCOMPATIBLE CONTENT?**
Most educational content available on the Internet remains “all-rights-reserved” due to the default rules of copyright. When OERs include these materials, the openness of the OER is compromised. This issue and solutions are explored in a recent paper by cclearn, the Creative Commons education programme titled “Otherwise Open: Managing Incompatible Content within Open Educational Resources”.

ICTs FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

BACKGROUND PREPARED BY COL
FOR THE UNESCO WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, PARIS, JULY 2009


ICTs for Higher Education provides a comprehensive and current review of the roles that information and communications technologies (ICTs) can play in strengthening the three traditional strands that make up the mission of higher education institutions: research, service to the community and teaching. The publication outlines the need for institutional and national policies to support the use of ICTs in research. It examines the role ICTs can play in reinforcing the development role of higher education institutions in their communities, as well as the role of ICTs in improving quality, widening access and cutting costs in the teaching function. It highlights, with examples, current trends in the use of ICTs and the new dynamics that they are creating in higher education. After explaining the essential elements of ICTs (hardware, software, connectivity and the Internet), the review looks at the role of ICTs in relation to the four key operational functions of higher education institutions: research, community engagement, teaching and administration.

www.col.org/reporting

COL IN THE COMMONWEALTH, 2006-2009 COUNTRY REPORTS
A companion document to COL’s Three-Year Plan for 2009-2012, this report reviews COL’s work and results over the past three years, country by country and by region. The compendium also outlines COL’s Pan-Commonwealth activities and facilities.
www.col.org/reporting

RESULTS-BASED MONITORING AND EVALUATION AT THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING
Glen M. Farrell
A resource for COL staff, consultants and partner organisations, this handbook outlines COL’s approach to and expectations for results-based monitoring and evaluation. Since adopting results-based management (RBM) six years ago, COL has worked to improve and embed monitoring and evaluation processes, which are an important part of RBM. While much progress has been made and many lessons have been learned, the application of results-based monitoring and evaluation is, by definition, a process of continuous improvement. This handbook is part of COL’s commitment to that end.
www.col.org/MEHandbook

QUALITY ASSURANCE TOOLKIT FOR DISTANCE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND PROGRAMMES
Kondapalli Rama, Andrea Hope and Uma Coomaraswamy, Editors
Produced and published jointly by COL, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Higher Education and UNESCO, this new quality assurance toolkit seeks to support higher education institutions as they strive to meet growing demand for higher education while sustaining a culture of continuous improvement. It provides important background information about quality assurance, performance indicators and best practice case studies from across the Commonwealth. The toolkit will help distance teaching institutions evaluate and improve their internal systems, policies, plans and programmes.

COL also offers the Quality Assurance in Teacher Education Toolkit. Published by Indian’s National Assessment and Accreditation Council in collaboration with COL, this publication includes Quality Indicators and case studies demonstrating best practices from across the Commonwealth. Freely available on COL’s website, the Toolkit can be used for internal assessment by teacher education institutions or external assessment by Ministries of Education or quality assurance agencies.
www.col.org/QAToolkit_HE  www.col.org/QAToolkit_TE

LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER: USING DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING
Rawwida Baksh and Tanyss Munro, Editors
As the number of violent conflicts around the world escalates, peace-building is an increasingly important priority – particularly at the community level, where attitudes are often formed and reinforced. This book brings together accounts of a range of community peace-building experiences that apply open and distance learning (ODL) approaches. The case studies offer insights into the challenges and successes of these interventions and how they can be built upon. They show that ODL can be an effective and efficient way to involve many of the people most affected by conflict to become part of its prevention, mitigation and resolution.
www.col.org/LiveTogether

DISCOURAGING DEGREE MILLS
The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and UNESCO have published a joint Statement on Effective Practice to Discourage Degree Mills in Higher Education. COL’s President, Sir John Daniel, participated in the experts group that developed this statement. “Toward Effective Practice: Discouraging Degree Mills in Higher Education” is available through COL’s website.
MORE ONLINE RESOURCES

COL maintains a list of resources in education and technology in education, including organisations, databases, online journals, email and news digests and portals, national consortia and professional development resources.

www.col.org/resources/OtherResources

INNOVATION GUIDE FOR NGOs

Developed with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Human Centered Design Toolkit helps non-governmental organisations (NGO) staff and volunteers understand people’s needs in new ways, find innovative solutions and deliver solutions with financial sustainability in mind. The free kit is divided into four sections that bolster listening skills, running workshops and implementing ideas and is specially designed for NGOs and social enterprises working with communities of need in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

www.ideo.com

ACADEMICINFO

AcademicInfo is an online education resource centre that provides extensive subject guides and distance learning information for prospective and current students and researchers. It currently features more than 25,000 resources and is updated daily.

www.AcademicInfo.net

DISTANCE AND BLENDED LEARNING IN ASIA

By Colin Latchem and Insung Jung

This book draws upon Asian research and theory and is the first to describe developments and issues in all sectors of Asian education and training, from Japan to Turkey and from Sri Lanka to Mongolia. Distance and Blended Learning in Asia is a unique and comprehensive overview of open and distance learning and information and communications technologies. It draws conclusions from the successes and failures, and recommends ways in which planning, management and practice may be developed for the world’s largest concentration of adult open and distance learners. Published by Routledge Education.

www.routledgeeducation.com/books/Distance-and-Blended-Learning-in-Asia-ism9780415994101

STAFF NEWS

Ms. Alison Mead Richardson has joined COL as Education Specialist, Skills Development. An experienced distance education manager, practitioner and consultant, Ms. Mead Richardson has worked on more than 21 international projects in Botswana, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa and Zambia. She has also worked for international development agencies including the African Development Bank, the European Union, the New Zealand Agency for International Development and the U.K. Department for International Development. She holds a Masters degree in Distance Education from the University of London and is currently carrying out doctoral research with the University of South Africa.

Ms. Trudi van Wyk is COL’s new Education Specialist, eLearning. She has worked for the South African Department of Education for the past 13 years, most recently as Director of Curriculum Innovation where she focused on information and communications technologies (ICTs) in education policy, applications and its implementation in education and training. Ms. van Wyk was COL’s Focal Point in South Africa and managed various international ICT collaboration projects. She holds a Master of Education degree from Rand Afrikaans University (now the University of Johannesburg).

Ms. Mead Richardson and Ms. Trudi van Wyk

Colleagues pay tribute to COL staff who have left recently to pursue other career opportunities:

Ms. Helena Fehr, former Board Secretary and Gender Officer: In addition to her education and experience, Helena brought passion, a smile and a ready ear to all her work at COL over the past ten years. This contributed to her diplomacy and success working with COL’s Board and sister organisations, as well as being key to forwarding gender mainstreaming at COL as our Gender Officer. In her earlier years at COL, she had great success expanding our Youth Internship programme, sharing her love of international work with young Canadians.

Helena is now taking her diplomacy, passion and ODL expertise to the British Columbia Industry Training Authority to tackle the 21st century challenges of scale and quality in lifelong learning, as well as keeping her toe in international waters through consultancy.

By Ms. Alex Hennig, Designer

Dr. Tanyss Munro, former Education Specialist, Governance: Tanyss worked in the relatively unexplored area of non-formal ODL as a means to support community development with a special focus on governance, both at the local level as well as within organisations and institutions. She made important contributions in moving the focus away from print towards the use of folk and more traditional media such as video and radio, which have far greater relevance in poor and marginalised areas that form a special mandate for COL.

Tanyss is an active and thoughtful listener, a skill clearly evident in the type and strength of partnerships that she developed in her tenure at COL and which continue to bear positive results. She brought a sharp wit and wonderful sense of humour. We miss her laughter in the hallways.

By Mr. Ian Pringle, Education Specialist, Media

Mr. Joshua Mallet, former Education Specialist, Learning & Livelihoods: Joshua came to COL in early 2004 on secondment from the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. As an educator, Joshua has always had a passion for providing opportunities for low-income and rural populations – and especially for young women – to help improve their livelihoods through open and distance learning, literacy, vocational and entrepreneurial training programmes.

Never without a smile and a positive spin on anything confronting him, Joshua built a significant network of like minded partners who worked with COL on many successful programmes throughout the Commonwealth. He also is known for delighting audiences and conference participants with valuable presentations that he delivered with flair and often accompanied by eye-catching attire, which could be anything from traditional Western African to modern Western Cowboy.

By Mr. Dave Wilson, Communications Manager

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A DECADE OF ODL IN THE COMMONWEALTH

In collaboration with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and UNESCO, COL held a forum on “A Decade of Open and Distance Learning in the Commonwealth: Achievements and Challenges” from 18 to 20 May 2009 in Abuja, Nigeria. The objective of the forum was to identify the achievements and challenges facing open and distance learning (ODL) in the Commonwealth and develop strategies to improve access, enhance quality and reduce costs in the next decade. The forum was attended by 146 delegates from 13 Commonwealth countries.

The forum’s communiqué, Blueprint for the Next Decade, is available on COL’s website at www.col.org/DecadeDE.

TEACHER EDUCATION PARTNERS MEETING

Promoting collaboration and building partnerships in teacher education was the focus of a meeting at COL’s office in Vancouver, Canada in July that brought together representatives from COL, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Consortium on Teacher Education for Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA), the West African Consortium for Teacher Development (WACTED), UNESCO, UNICEF and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

There’s a need for strong partnerships to achieve greater synergy and increased impact, the group agreed. There was also recognition that the partners’ different comparative advantages strengthen the case for working together to scale up teacher education.

In addition to existing activities, the group identified two areas for potential future collaboration:
- Teacher Resource Centres: improving connectivity and management of Teacher Resource Centres so they can meet needs for open schooling and teachers’ professional development.
- Capacity development and quality assurance: scaling up access to quality assurance toolkits and teacher education materials already developed by partners.

The partners will promote the meeting’s Statement of Commitment within their organisations and networks and invite others to participate.

WORKSHOP ON OPEN SCHOOLS FINANCING

COL continued its efforts to build capacity among managers of open schools with a workshop on costs and financing of open schools in Delhi, India in July 2009. Twelve senior managers from open schools and education boards from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka attended the five-day workshop, which provided training in planning, negotiating and managing finances in open schools. Using self-study materials developed at a similar workshop in Botswana in 2007, participants learned about different types of costs, setting fees, acquiring and managing funding, budgeting, and how to measure efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

The self-instructional resource book used at the workshop, Costs and Financing in Open Schools, is freely available on the COL website.

www.col.org/Costs_OpenSchools
COMMUNITY ODL: WORKING TOGETHER TO USE MEDIA FOR LEARNING

Through its new Healthy Communities initiative, COL is helping to build capacity in the use of community radio and other local media to support non-formal education programmes. Partnering with local organisations, COL is facilitating a series of activities and workshops to seed new collaborative, community-based open and distance learning (ODL) programming in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

LEARNSHARE HIV/AIDS AFRICA

COL hosted a community ODL training workshop in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire in April 2009 in conjunction with the AMARC Pan-African Community Radio Conference, and in partnership with EcoNews Africa, the International AIDS Society and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC). Thirty broadcasters from Commonwealth countries were introduced to LearnShare HIV/AIDS Africa, an initiative that aims to increase HIV/AIDS treatment literacy. Workshop participants received training in community ODL programme development and how treatment literacy can be used as a strategy to fight HIV/AIDS.

LearnShare aims to encourage and support a significant increase in access to learning about HIV/AIDS in communities across Sub-Saharan Africa by facilitating collaboration among media, health and education groups. LearnShare brings together community partners to develop programmes for traditional media, such as radio, to reach marginalised communities.

The Abidjan workshop seeded new community learning programmes in Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Tanzania focussed on increasing HIV/AIDS treatment literacy, including what treatments are available and how they work. Community radio stations carry learning content; face-to-face meetings of community-based groups support the learning process. Early results of these programmes will be presented at a special session planned for the International AIDS Conference in Vienna in July 2010.

COMMUNITY MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN TANZANIA

Nineteen people from seven local radio stations and the newly formed Community Media Network of Tanzania (COMNETA) attended a workshop in Sengerema, site of a community media centre. COL facilitated the workshop in partnership with the Institute for Adult Education, Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Tanzania and UNESCO Dar es Salaam.

In addition to building organisational skills among community radio stations, in particular how to ensure community ownership and participation, the workshop launched the LearnShare HIV/AIDS initiative in Tanzania.

Following the workshop, a community radio station in Karagwe District, under the umbrella of the Family Alliance for Development and Cooperation (FADECO), is partnering with local public and civil society health groups and people living with HIV/AIDS to create a new non-formal ODL programme. The programme launch is planned for 1 December 2009, World AIDS Day.

New community ODL programmes are planned in Bangladesh, India and other countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Media, education, health and development groups that are interested in starting or enhancing community ODL programmes are invited to contact Mr. Ian Pringle, COL’s Education Specialist for Media at ipringle@col.org.

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS IN JAMAICA

Broadcast staff, teachers and volunteers at a COL-sponsored workshop in Jeffrey Town, St. Mary, Jamaica in July 2009 created a learning programme about solid waste management and organic farming. The educational drama is being broadcast on community radio station JET FM. The workshop was held in partnership with the Caribbean Institute for Media and Communications and the Jeffrey Town Farmers Association.

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The African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) held its first Vice-Chancellors’ workshop on 22 August 2009 in Nairobi, Kenya. The meeting focussed on two of ACDE’s key initiatives being implemented across Africa:

- the Technical Committee on Collaboration, a programme promoting collaboration for materials and curriculum development, joint offering of programmes, facilitation of student mobility and portability of credits between institutions, and enhancement of institutional capacity to deliver high quality ODL programmes, and

- the establishment of the ACDE Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency.

Also discussed at the workshop was the creation, customisation and use of open educational resources (OERs). COL’s Director of Knowledge Management and Information Technology, Mr. Paul West, contributed as a resource person dealing with the use of Creative Commons copyright licenses and how Vice-Chancellors can facilitate the sharing of learning resources. Workshop participants discussed the availability of materials and technological skill requirements for sharing and customising OERs.

Formally launched in 2004, the ACDE is comprised of open universities and other African higher education institutions that are engaged in ODL delivery. ACDE acts as a continental unifying body that facilitates the pooling of resources and provides leadership in shaping policies on distance education in Africa. The ACDE has a permanent secretariat based in Nairobi, Kenya and is funded by member universities and the South African Ministry of Higher Education and Training.

www.acde-africa.org

COL hosted a workshop in June 2009 to build capacity in open and distance learning (ODL) in Mozambique. Twenty-four educators attended the four-day meeting, which provided an introduction to ODL and open schooling, with particular emphasis on learner support. COL is working in partnership with Mozambique’s National Institute for Distance Education (INED) to explore how ODL can meet the Southern African country’s education challenges, particularly the need for in-service teacher training, expanding access to secondary and higher education, and helping young people acquire professional skills.

COL’s new Learner Support Tutor Guide, a self-instructional manual for ODL tutors, was translated into Portuguese for workshop participants in Mozambique. It is available on COL’s website.

www.col.org/openschooling
IGNOU EXTENDS ITS REACH

India’s Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is employing unutilised capacity at educational institutions to offer programmes at 100 community colleges across the country. Students who attend these colleges can acquire associate degrees, which will ensure them lateral entry to the Bachelor’s programme for formal graduation degrees. IGNOU’s role will be accreditation, quality monitoring and evaluation, certification and course development. The community colleges are providing skills-based education that will enhance livelihoods and eligibility for employment for the disadvantaged and underprivileged.

IGNOU is also collaborating with nearly a dozen universities worldwide to develop skills among 10 million rural people in the next six years. The region-specific programmes will be offered in local languages through telecentres across the countries, which include Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Hungary, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Uganda. Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IRDC) is partnering with IGNOU in leading the initiative.

www.ignou.ac.in

UKOU CELEBRATES 40 YEARS

The concept of distance learning, powered and supported by radio and television, was so revolutionary that a senior Conservative politician at the time called it “blistering nonsense”. Forty years later, powered by the Internet and online learning, it is an idea that has come so completely of age that it is easy to forget the trail the OU blazed.

Today, it is commonplace to find online interactive technologies used in learning. The huge and growing global market for education, driven by a young population in the developing world and an increasing commitment to lifelong learning in the developed world, has spurred universities and colleges into looking for ways to reach beyond their lecture halls and science labs. The OU has remained firmly at the forefront of these changes.

…The idea that inspired the founders of the OU will turn out to be fundamental to Britain’s economic prosperity in the 21st century. Not just the commitment to education as something that can and must be as widely accessible as possible. Not just the idea that it plays a key role not only early in life but throughout life. But also the idea that education is something flexible, something that people should be able to fit around jobs and geography.

These things were and are the genius of the OU. They are a lesson that Britain needs to keep on learning.

www.guardian.co.uk

WIKIEDUCATOR CONTINUES TRAINING

Recognised as a prototype for scalable open educational resources (OERs) development, WikiEducator is now an independent entity, part of the non-profit OER Foundation established by Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand. WikiEducator continues to provide training in wiki skills for content editing through free online and face-to-face workshops, with funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. For more information about getting involved as a host, participant, facilitator or sponsor, visit the Learning4Content page on WikiEducator. COL also provides financial support for WikiEducator.

www.WikiEducator.org/Learning4Content

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Chair: His Excellency, the Honourable Burchell Whiteman, OJ
President & CEO: Sir John Daniel

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THE CHANGING WORLD OF SEARCH ENGINES

By Amy Managhan
Manager, COL Information Resource Centre

Three interesting developments have taken place in the world of search engines in recent months:

- Microsoft Live rebranded itself as Bing. To the surprise of many, the actual performance of the search improved dramatically.
- Yahoo and Microsoft struck a search engine deal that sees Microsoft’s Bing providing the core, or algorithmic, search results for Yahoo when a user makes a query. Google also recently announced an improvement to its search, called Caffeine. The major differences are speed and the results returned. Caffeine is currently available for testing at www2.sandbox.google.com.

Google has been the search engine of choice for many years; 65 percent of US Internet searches in July 2009 used Google according to ComScore Inc. Both Yahoo and Microsoft Live have had a small market share (19 percent and 9 percent respectively), but the recent developments could change that. It will be interesting to see how this affects the rankings over time.

To compare the results of the three search engines side-by-side, there is a good blind trial at http://blindsearch.fejus.com. It will be a couple of years before the Microsoft-Yahoo integration is complete, so Yahoo results won’t be quite the same as Bing just yet. You can also find a comparison of regular Google and caffeine Google at www.facesearch.com/caffeine. Beyond the general search engines, there’s an “Invisible” web. Also known as the “Deep” or “Hidden” web, it contains information that Google, Bing and Yahoo cannot index. Some web pages include script that restricts search engines, and entire databases are often excluded. For example, individual library catalogues (library databases) are not searched by the general search engines. You need to go into either www.worldcat.org (which searches multiple catalogues all over the world) or each individual library catalogue. Library catalogues are only one example of databases that you need to search directly. You can use general search engines to locate databases by typing, for example, “higher education” and “databases” in the query line. If the database uses the word “databases” in its own web pages, then you are likely to find it in a general search engine. You can then go to that database and search it directly.

www.bing.com
www2.sandbox.google.com

UPGRADING YOUR OPERATING SYSTEM

Until recently, many software companies tried to convince users to upgrade their operating systems by adding more and more features. But systems have become big, bloated and slow-running on older machines. Now Apple and Microsoft are trying a new approach: they’re both releasing upgrades this year that are smaller and faster than older versions.

Apple’s Mac OS X 10.6 Snow Leopard, launched in September 2009, promises faster start up and takes up less space on the hard drive. There are also numerous system tweaks as well as new features, including the ability to record your screen activity as a movie.

Windows 7 from Microsoft, released in October 2009, is described as “simpler and easier to use”. New features include the ability to watch and record TV, and Device Stage technology that makes it easier to interact with devices connected to your system.

Another option for upgrading your system is making the switch to an open source operating system. There are dozens of choices of systems that make their source code available – or open – for users to read, use and possibly repurpose. Whether for philosophical, financial and/or system-simplicity reasons, a growing number of computer users are choosing open source systems such as Linux and Solaris.

So how do you know if it’s time to upgrade your system? Most operating systems should last for the life of your machine. For many people, the time to upgrade their operating system is when they can’t access documents that are sent to them. If you can’t open documents, you can’t work together; that’s a clear sign you need to upgrade.