



17th triennial Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
June 2009

STORY IDEAS

COL's New Three-year Plan for 2009 – 2012:

COL has finalised its new Three-year Plan for 2009 – 2012 (*Learning for Development*) and is seeking the endorsement of Commonwealth Ministers when they meet in Kuala Lumpur in June.

COL's mission is to help governments and institutions expand the scope, scale and quality of learning by using new approaches and technologies, especially those subsumed under the general term of open and distance learning (ODL).

The theme of COL's new plan, *Learning for Development*, expresses a vision that reaches beyond formal education to embrace areas of learning that are vital for better livelihoods, greater prosperity and a safer environment. Understanding development as the process of increasing the freedoms that people can enjoy, COL pursues this vision operationally within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the campaign for education for All (EFA) and Commonwealth values.

Learning for Development includes an executive summary, a welcome message from our Board Chair, H.E. the Hon. Burchell Whiteman, a foreword from COL President, Sir John Daniel, a fold-out Logic Model and a summary of the external evaluation of COL's work during 2006-2009.

The plan's eight initiatives in two programme areas (Education and Livelihoods & Health) include open schooling, teacher education, healthy communities and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

Partnerships, models, policies, capacity and materials are key to COL's work.

Also available on COL's website is the external evaluation of COL's work during 2006-2009 COL in the Commonwealth, 2006-2009, a compendium of reports on COL's work in each Commonwealth country in the last three years.

COL is also working with Ministries of Education in preparing Country Action Plans in order to ensure that the implementation of Learning for Development in each country will closely match the Government's priorities for COL's work.

www.col.org/3yp



Virtual University for Small States:

The Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth is an emerging network of Ministries of Education that is working to strengthen national tertiary institutions. It embraces professional human resource development, the creation and offering of new courses and the establishment of a transnational accreditation mechanism. These countries, comprising of both land-locked and island states, all face issues of isolation and brain drain and are mostly very susceptible to various impacts of climate change.

VUSSC was conceived by Ministers at their triennial Conference of Commonwealth Ministers of Education in 2000. The Commonwealth of Learning was asked to investigate possible models and presented a proposal to Ministers at their next conference in 2003. The concept of a virtual university as a network was approved and COL was asked to help countries collaborate and strengthen the capacity of national education institutions through this mechanism.

The concept of sharing course materials and programmes was a fundamental principle from the start and gained momentum as the trend to open courseware and Open Educational Resources developed.

With no prior examples to follow that quite matched the circumstances and requests, a new model was developed, along with an action learning approach that enabled the methodology to be changed based on lessons learned. International workshops have helped to improve the ICT skills of professional educators who have, in turn, trained colleagues in the use of computers and collaborating online. Materials are developed using COL's Instructional Design Template and shared using online project management services. Materials that have been developed carry open copyright licenses such as CC-BY, CC-BY-SA and CC-BY-NC – all of which allow the free reuse and usually, customisation of materials – and are available on COL's website.

VUSSC works with governments and national institutions, many of which have established national qualification frameworks. The VUSSC is working with these governments to establish a "Transnational Qualifications Framework" (TQF). The TQF will be a translation point between the systems in different countries and regions and help provide momentum to the transfer of courses, qualifications and learners between countries. National institutions that wish to offer educational programmes that are co-branded with VUSSC will have these approved within the institution, by the national qualification authority and where applicable, the regional qualification authority. The programmes that fulfil these requirements will be posted with their accreditation status on the VUSSC website that will be launched in 2009.

COL Clipping: www.col.org/progServ/report/clippings/Pages/2009-04-VUSSC.aspx
www.col.org/vussc and www.vussc.info



Lifelong Learning for Farmers:

Lifelong Learning for Farmers is a COL initiative aimed at giving farmers easier access to the information, knowledge and financing that could improve their livelihoods. Officially launched in December 2004 in two rural areas in South India, the programme spreading spontaneously as word of its success becomes known.

COL Clipping: www.col.org/progServ/report/clippings/Pages/2008-11-LL.aspx

Open schooling:

Increasingly, Open Schooling is recognised as a solution to the dilemma of increasing access to secondary education in developing countries. Recent progress towards the achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE) means that many more children are completing primary education and looking for opportunities to enter secondary education. There is little likelihood that governments facing the challenges of meeting the UPE target will be able to vastly increase access to secondary education. Rapid expansion of secondary provision to meet the needs of primary school leavers and young adults previously denied secondary education will require investment in approaches that are less tied to traditional methods of schooling.

COL Clipping: www.col.org/progServ/report/clippings/Pages/2008-11-OS.aspx
www.col.org/OpenShcooling

Learning4Content

Learning4Content is a COL initiative that is building the skills of educators to develop open educational resources (OERs) using wiki technology. The programme is aimed at building a community across the Commonwealth that works collaboratively to develop free content lessons and other educational materials that can be used by educators, students and lifelong learners anywhere.

COL Clipping: www.col.org/progServ/report/clippings/Pages/2008-11-L4C.aspx
www.wikieducator.org/Learning4Content

Degree Mills: a special threat to ODL and eLearning

Open and distance learning (ODL) is a favourite mode of operation for spurious providers of education, commonly referred to as "degree mills". These bogus colleges are multiplying in response to the exploding demand for higher education in the developing world. Unfortunately, a number of small Commonwealth countries are considered to be safe havens for operators of these disreputable operations. This poses a serious risk to the expansion of genuine tertiary education, especially in those small states thought to provide cover for degree mills.

COL Clipping: www.col.org/progServ/report/clippings/Pages/2008-11-DM.aspx
www.col.org/DegreeMills



Open Educational Resources and Open CourseWare – and Copyright

The term OER (Open Educational Resources) was first coined in the summer of 2002 at the UNESCO forum on the impact of open courseware for higher education in developing countries. OERs have received significant support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (www.hewlett.org), which has sponsored organisations such as MIT in the USA, the UK Open University and the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth. OERs are digitised learning materials that are offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and re-use for teaching, learning and research. Copyright is struggling to keep pace with these changes.

COL Clipping: www.col.org/progServ/report/clippings/Pages/2006oer.aspx
www.col.org/oer www.WikiEducator.org www.col.org/IntroducingCopyright

Regional Agency, Asia – and Community Radio:

COL's regional agency, the Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), implements COL's mandate in the eight countries of Commonwealth Asia. CEMCA is also very actively and effectively engaged in the use of mass media for development, particularly community radio.

www.col.org/ceemca www.cebca.org

More about COL:

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. COL helps developing Commonwealth countries to increase access to learning using distance education and appropriate technologies.

Through its own resources and its extensive networks, COL provides a wealth of services and collaborative opportunities for policy makers, institutions and distance education practitioners. COL promotes policies and systems to make innovation sustainable and works with international partners to build models, create materials, enhance organisational capacity and nurture networks that facilitate learning in support of development goals.

COL's mission focuses on helping Commonwealth member states to use technology as a means of increasing the scope, scale, quality and impact of their education and training systems. The application of technology through ODL techniques has shown its power and value in many countries and for many purposes.

Further information:

COL's website: www.col.org

Quick Picks for the media: www.col.org/news/media (*this document and its links is also available here*)

News releases: www.col.org/newsreleases

COL Clippings: www.col.org/clippings

Contacts:

Media liaison at 17CCEM: Dave Wilson, www.col.org/dwilson

Spokespersons and personalities:

Sir John Daniel, President and C.E.O.: www.col.org/jdaniel and www.col.org/speeches

Professor Asha Kanwar, Vice President: www.col.org/akanwar