

COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

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PERSPECTIVES ON  
DISTANCE EDUCATION

Towards a  
Culture of Quality

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*Badri N. Koul and Asha Kanwar, Editors*

Published by  
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## COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

*The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.*

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## PREFACE

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*Towards a Culture of Quality* is third in the line of quality assurance publications that the Commonwealth of Learning has brought out as part of its Perspectives on Distance Education series.

The first, *Quality Assurance in Higher Education* appeared in 1994 partly “to provide a basis for the continuing attempt to develop quality assurance systems for distance education” and to “attempt to develop quality assurance systems for the Indian open universities and for the distance teaching components of conventional Indian universities.”<sup>1</sup> The collection presented four case studies (three from Australia and one from New Zealand) and the possible lessons that India could learn. That India did learn these lessons rather quickly is clear from the fact that today it has one of the largest systems of open and distance education in the world, with 12 open universities and 104 dual-mode institutions!

The second collection entitled *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Selected Case Studies* appeared in 1997, bringing together seven case studies (one each from Germany, Norway, United Kingdom, Israel, India, Hong Kong and Canada). Highlighting the importance of *the context* wherein the issues of quality assurance are being tackled, its aim was “to demonstrate that it would be of value to learn more about modern quality assurance systems for distance education in an international context... (as)... no quality assurance system can be transplanted from one institution to another across organisational, social, and cultural boundaries. The development must be home-grown, recognising its context.”<sup>2</sup> What appeared radically new in 1997 has become almost a “given” within ODL institutions, which recognise that *one size does not fit all!*

This volume is consistent with the thrusts of the earlier publications, yet differs by reflecting the new reality of the present decade. Like the first collection, it presents a few cases of best practice which may serve as exemplars for institutions developing their quality assurance systems. As in the second collection, it brings together 12 cases from different countries (two each from Australian and Indian institutions and one each from institutions in Botswana, Canada, the Caribbean, Hong Kong, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and the United Kingdom) that emphasise the importance of context in designing systems to suit specific needs.

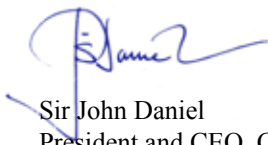
Similarities end there. While the earlier books were focused on higher education, this volume demonstrates that ODL methodologies have been successfully harnessed to service the entire spectrum of education and training, both basic and secondary on the one hand and postsecondary on the other. Additionally, this book attempts to move beyond *external* processes of quality assurance to *internal* mechanisms that promote the growth and sustenance of a *culture of quality* within institutions. The genesis of the quest for such essentials lies in the realisation that case studies, as individual and isolated

narratives of experiences, do provide an insight into those fundamentals which are so essential for building a culture of quality. The ultimate intention is not just to discover and display individual cases of good practice, but to establish a *quality culture*.

While the nineties was seen as a decade in which quality concerns dominated discussions of distance education, with the phenomenal proliferation of open and distance learning (national and cross-border) across the Commonwealth and the world, today quality matters more than ever. We estimate that there are now over six million distance learners across the Commonwealth! It is time for ODL institutions to progress beyond formal quality assurance processes towards a culture of quality.

How do we promote a culture of quality within institutions of open and distance learning? What would be the elements of such a culture? How are different institutions handling such challenges? Do such institutions require a different kind of leadership? Do they need a more decentralised, dialogic and democratic style of management? How does one generate a sense of ownership among the staff so that they are motivated to align themselves to institutional goals and give their best? What resources and training are needed? How can monitoring and evaluation become part of all processes, systems and sub-systems? What makes an institution reflect on its practice and commit to a continuous quest for excellence? Can the use of new ICTs help? With the increasing convergence of face-to-face, ODL and eLearning systems, is there need for separate quality assurance mechanisms or are the same criteria applicable to all systems? Are quality assurance agencies exclusive clubs? What level of credibility have they established? Who will accredit the accreditors?

These are some of the questions that this book invites you to address. We think it timely that the existing *best practices* are publicised, partly in recognition of their contribution and partly as models for other practitioners and policy-makers to emulate/adopt/adapt. The rich experience and wisdom of its authors and editors make this book a valuable addition to the growing corpus of literature in the field of quality assurance in ODL. The Commonwealth of Learning hopes this book will buttress its efforts to foster communities of practice and cultures of quality and, through them, to bring quality education and training to marginalised and under-represented groups everywhere.



Sir John Daniel  
President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning

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1       Deshpande, P. M. & Mugridge, I. (1994). "Preface" in P. M. Deshpande & I. Mugridge, (Eds.) (1994) *Quality Assurance in Higher Education..* p. iii. Vancouver: The Commonwealth of Learning.

2       Tait, A. (1997). "Introduction" in A. Tait, (Ed.) (1997) *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Selected Case Studies.* p. 2. Vancouver: The Commonwealth of Learning.

## THE CONTRIBUTORS

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**M. ASLAM** is a Professor and former Director of the School of Continuing Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, India, which he joined in 1992. He also looks after the Panchayati Raj Project as its Project Director. Earlier, from 1981 to 1988, he served as the Director (Training) at the Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), Dhaka, and prior to that (between 1976 and 1981) as a faculty member at the National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, India. Having an M.Phil. and a Ph.D. in sociology, he has worked as a trainer for the last 25 years, authored 6 books, published 40 papers and visited over 30 countries attending conferences and conducting workshops/seminars on various aspects of rural development. He is also a fellow of the Economic Development Institute (EDI) of the World Bank, Washington, DC.

**FELICITY BINNS** is the Executive Director of the International Extension College (IEC), an NGO committed to increasing equitable access to quality education. It specialises in open, distance and flexible learning, running non-formal education projects, delivering training programmes with the University of London, providing consultancy to ministries and institutions and undertaking research.

Originally a research scientist and having spent a number of years managing the finance and administration of a research establishment, Felicity joined IEC in 1988 to oversee the finance of the organisation. Very quickly, she became involved in the educational programmes and in particular the refugee programme in Sudan. Since that time, she has been instrumental in the development and implementation of teacher education projects in Uganda, Guyana, Nigeria and Ghana, non-formal education projects in Kenya and Sudan and more general ODL programmes in Mozambique, where a recent focus has been on secondary education.

Her particular interests include design and development of ODL capacity-building programmes, strategic and operational planning for ODL, non-formal project development and teacher education.

**BOB BUTCHER** has over 20 years' experience in higher education. After completing his Ph.D., he worked for several universities in the United Kingdom and was appointed as Senior Academic Manager at the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) in 1993. He now holds the post of Deputy Director of the Li Ka Shing Institute of Professional and Continuing Education at OUHK. The institute focuses on the provision of training and professional development and skills updating. His research interests include quality assurance, academic administration and teaching and learning models in distance education.

**ANURADHA DESHMUKH** is a Reader and Head of the Programme Evaluation & Quality Assurance Resource Centre (PE&QARC) of the Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nashik, India. She has a doctorate from the University of Mumbai and is a specialist in Counselling and Educational Psychology. A recipient of many prizes and fellowships, she began her career as a lecturer in psychology at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. Equipped with adequate experience, she later worked as a counsellor in a reputed industrial organisation (MICO, Ltd.) after which she practised as a consulting psychologist for a couple of years. She joined the faculty of the Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University soon after its inception in 1989 and has been working there ever since. During her first 10 years at the university, she concentrated on "student evaluation" processes, heading the university's Centre for Learner Evaluation Technology, a unit that is essentially involved with the development of evaluation technology suitable for distance learners. Now, as the Head of PE&QARC, her work primarily involves attention to quality assessment and accreditation and the preparation of related documents for the university. In the process, she has contributed to a wide range of activities encompassing planning, curriculum development, programme coordination, instructional material development, research guidance, writing and editing, organisation of workshops and conferences and presentation of papers.

**KUZVINETSA P. DZVIMBO** was born in Zimbabwe. He joined the African Virtual University in September 2003 as Rector from the World Bank in Washington, DC, where he was a Senior Education Specialist. Earlier, he was a Dean in the Faculty of Education and also a Pro-Vice Chancellor at the University of Zimbabwe, and then the founding Vice-Chancellor of the Zimbabwe Open University. He held teaching posts at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA; the University of the Witwatersrand and the Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg, South Africa; the School of Basic Studies at Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria; and was a deputy principal of a secondary technical teachers' college and trained primary school teachers through distance education in Zimbabwe.

He obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison (USA); an M.Ed. in Administration and Planning from Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria; a Diploma in Education from Fourah Bay College, the University of Sierra Leone; and a B.A. from the same university. He has worked in Africa as a consultant in teacher education, educational management and distance education. His main area of interest now is open, distance and electronic learning (ODEL). He has presented papers on ODeL and tertiary education and training in Africa, Australia, Canada, Europe, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, and the USA.

**ROGER EDMONDS** is the Manager, E-Schooling Services, Department of Education and Children's Services, Government of South Australia, Adelaide. He is recognised as an expert in the field of eLearning, eTraining and blended e-communication within the schooling sector in the Australia Pacific region. He has over 12 year's experience in project management and educational training, building creative and innovative eSolutions to improve learning outcomes for adults and children. He has spoken on eLearning best practices at conferences in Australia and overseas and has over 20 published papers to his credit. He was awarded the Centenary Medal of Australia in 2003 in recognition of his management of Australia's Centenary of Federation's Connecting the Kids online curriculum project.

**ANDREA HOPE** moved from the British Open University to become Registrar of the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) in 1990. From 2001 to 2003, she was the Education Specialist (Higher Education) at the Commonwealth of Learning, where quality assurance was a significant part of her portfolio. She is now Associate Academic Vice-President of Shue Yan College, a private post-secondary institution in Hong Kong. In that position, she is tasked with guiding the institution through the accreditation and legislative processes that will result in the award of university title. She has published extensively on the subject of quality assurance.

**ASHA KANWAR** is currently working as an Education Specialist, Higher Education and Policy Development, at the Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada. Prior to this, she was a Consultant at UNESCO BREDa at Dakar, Senegal (2002–2003) on loan from the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), India, where she holds a professorial position. Professor Kanwar has been a Pro-Vice Chancellor at IGNOU (1999–2000) and also the Director, School of Humanities (1996–1998). She completed her D.Phil. at the University of Sussex (1986) and carried out postgraduate research as a Fulbright Fellow (1992) at the Iowa State University, where she was invited to teach as a Visiting Professor (1996). A recipient of several prestigious awards, she has seven books and over 40 research papers and articles to her credit.

**CATHERINE W. KARIUKI**, a Kenyan national, is an Education Specialist in Teacher Education with the African Virtual University. Before joining the African Virtual University, she worked with a management training organisation as a Training Manager in Rwanda; with Tack Training International, a British training organisation as a Training Associate; and has also taught in several high schools in Kenya.

She earned her Bachelor's in Education from Egerton University in Kenya and is currently pursuing a Master's in Education Administration and Planning at the University of Nairobi. She has had a special interest in economic development for developing countries, a passion that saw her pursue short courses in this area at Eastern University College in Philadelphia, USA.

**BADRI NATH KOUL** works as a freelance consultant—distance education, adult education, higher education and teaching of English and Hindi as foreign/second languages. Earlier he worked as Head, Department of Distance Education at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, India; Director, Division of Distance Education and Schools of Education and Continuing Education, founding Director of the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE-IGNOU) and a Pro-Vice Chancellor at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, India; Coordinator/Head, the Distance Education/Open Learning Division at the Tertiary Education Commission, Mauritius; Director, Distance Education Centre at the University of the West Indies; and held a UNESCO Chair (Educational Technology) from 1999 to 2003.

His major contributions have been to conceptualise, develop and implement post-graduate training programmes in distance education which have benefited more than 20 countries in the Commonwealth. So far, he has put together 6 books and contributed over 110 articles on various aspects of distance education and language teaching, besides teaching languages, designing curricula and staff-development programmes and being the founding editor of *The Indian Journal of Open Learning*. In 2004, he was made an Honorary Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning.

**STEWART MARSHALL** (Ph.D.) is a Professor and the present Director of the Distance Education Centre at the University of the West Indies. Previously, he was the foundation Dean of and a Professor at the Faculty of Informatics and Communication at Central Queensland University in Australia. Although originally an electrical engineer with the Central Electricity Generating Board in the UK, Professor Marshall has worked in higher education since 1973 in England, Papua New Guinea, Australia, Southern Africa and now in the Caribbean. He was the foundation Professor of Communication at the Papua New Guinea University of Technology, foundation Professor of Communication Studies in the Faculty of Arts at Monash University in Australia, and foundation Coordinator of Academic Studies and Professor of Distance Education at the Institute of Distance Education at the University of Swaziland in Southern Africa. His research interests are in the role of communication and information technologies in distance education, especially in developing countries. Professor Marshall has published several books and over 90 book chapters, refereed articles and conference papers.

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His interests and experience include the design and development of distance learning systems; governmental agendas and awareness of the value of distance education in an international context; quality control and assurance of learner support, including assessment and validation; management, development, support and contracts of part-time distance tutors, including issues of managing at a distance; management of senior academic and administrative staff in distance education institutions; models of distance education in the context of global, national, regional and local scenarios; the role and management of local and regional centres; relationships with institutional headquarters; institutional governance and decision-making; management of devolved systems; the validation and accreditation of open and distance learning institutions; the management of partnerships; the impact of information and communications technology on all the above and evaluation of distance education programmes and systems.

**IAN MUGRIDGE** has been involved with distance education since spending three years as a tutor/marker in Grade 12 History for the British Columbia Correspondence Branch in the early 1960s. After a long period in which he studied for advanced degrees in United States History at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and taught at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, he took up an appointment as the first director of degree programmes at the new British Columbia Open Learning Institute (OLI) in January 1979. He held several positions at OLI and its successor institution, the Open Learning Agency, until 1996. At that time, having been associated since 1994 with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in the part-time position of Senior Consultant, Higher Education, he took up a full-time position at COL, where he remained until taking early retirement in 1997. Since then, he has taught in the Athabasca University Master's programme in Distance Education and undertaken a number of international consulting assignments building on his earlier experience at OLI/A and COL.

**ARON OTTO** has been involved in distance education in Uganda for many years. While working on the Northern Uganda Integrated Teacher Education Project (NITEP), he played a pivotal role in developing with his colleagues what came to be called “the culture of care,” a combination of formal and informal student support systems, specially designed to meet the difficult situation in Uganda. From NITEP, he moved on to work on the government programme Teacher Development Management System (TDMS) and then to Kyambogo University (KYU), where he is the Head of the Department of Distance Education, soon to be established as the Institute of Distance Education, in recognition of the importance of distance education in KYU. With him he brought “the culture of care” to serve the students of KYU. He has a particular interest in the design, development and use of media technology and ODL in teacher education.

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