



COUNTRY PRESENTATION - CYPRUS

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ODL and Cyprus

The e-Learning initiative in Cyprus started effectively with the commencing of the activities of the University of Cyprus in 1992. Some of the University's Departments, notably the Department of Computer Science and the Department of Education started using at an early stage various content management environments, such as WebCT, Moodle, etc. These activities however were focusing mainly on the use of e-Learning as an auxiliary means to supplement traditional face to face teaching and did not go all the way to achieving Open and Distance Learning. These activities are still in progress and many more University Departments are now using ICT as a supplementary way to pursue their teaching activities.

In parallel, some of the academics started being involved in international projects, typically funded by the European Union, in promoting and exploring e-Learning and ODL techniques. These projects fell into a number of European Union (E.U.) initiatives, such as the Framework Programmes (for members of the E.U. and Associated States), EUMEDIS (for the Mediterranean and North African States, Leonardo da Vinci (mainly for vocational training), etc. All in all, the University of Cyprus was involved in tens of such projects with a total budget at the level of hundreds of EUR. As a result of this participation, the academics were trained in numerous modern techniques in e-Learning and ODL.

Aside from the activities of the University of Cyprus, the Ministry of Education introduced the use of ICT in primary and secondary education. In secondary education schools, there exist now more than 300 labs (in respective schools). In particular, there are 12.4 computers per 100 students, with the European average at 11.3 computers per 100 students, thus ranking Cyprus 11th out of 25 European countries. However, only 31% of the above mentioned labs have broadband connection, which ranks Cyprus 25th out of 27 E.U. member states.

Furthermore, the subject of ICT has been upgraded to meet the standards of the E.U. and is being taught typically 4 hours per week. Interestingly enough, almost 99% of the Cypriot students are computer literate but this is also true for only 25% of their teachers!

At the same time, the Ministry of Education has started examining the influence of e-Learning in primary education. A pilot project called “ODYSSEUS” ran for 2 years between 2000-2001, with the objective to examine the combination of traditional classroom techniques with novel e-Learning ones. This initiative led to the setting up of a virtual classroom between a number of schools and the studying of the pupils’ behavior in using e-Learning techniques.

Over the last 10 years the need for ODL has increased in Cyprus, due to the increased need of people living in remote locations, people with exceptionally busy schedules and/or scarce financial resources to upgrade their academic and/or professional knowledge. Most of the public education courses and in general lifelong education are offered mostly in the capital of Cyprus, Nicosia. This centralisation of such services makes it impossible for rural residents to access them.

Thus, in 2003 the Open University of Cyprus started its operation. The OUC uses exclusively ODL techniques in the offered courses. It currently runs 4 postgraduate courses, which are all very popular (each course receives typically 1500 applications for just over 100 available places). In parallel, the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, a government organisation that accredits all tertiary level degrees earned outside Cyprus, has established concrete procedures for accrediting qualifications earned by means of ODL techniques.

Due to the increased job competition and influx of new labor from the E.U., people in Cyprus need to constantly upgrade their academic and professional skills. And in combination with the recent accreditation of many Distance Learning Programmes, Cypriots are becoming more interested in Distance Learning Programmes with an exceptionally high pace.

The top priorities in Cyprus, related to E-Learning and ODL, include the following ones:

1. Expand the programs of study, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level, using ODL techniques.
2. Educators are taught the use of ODL and how it can be used to support their teaching activities.
3. Enhance the use of ODL in vocational training and lifelong learning.
4. Expand collaborations with other countries in the development and dissemination of common programs of study using ODL.
5. Develop a National Qualification Framework which will take into account ODL and e-Learning.

COL's initiative regarding the setting up of a Virtual University for the Small Commonwealth Countries (VUSCC) can be a driving force for all the above priorities. It is therefore expected that Cyprus will continue to be actively involved in the VUSCC initiative.