Day Two of the Eighth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF8) on Open Learning saw two inspiring keynote addresses. The first keynote was delivered by Mr Martin Bean, Vice-Chancellor and President of RMIT University, who looked at the future of educational technology and what that means for open, distance and online learning. He called on PCF8 participants to embrace innovation and plan not for today’s technology, but for tomorrow’s.

“Yes, we’ve seen the proliferation of technology. Yes, we’ve seen the schools that celebrate and allow for the use of computing devices on a daily basis, but some of the fundamentals of education — the way we produce content, instructional design, the way we assess — we’re in the Dark Ages around what could be done from an innovative perspective and that’s a problem,” said Mr Bean. But Mr Bean is optimistic: “If you look at the rise of value and you look at the innovation over time, it’s a wonderful time. I do not believe there has ever been a better time, if you believe in open education, than right now.”

Professor Dato’ Dr Mansor Fadzil, President and Vice-Chancellor of Open University Malaysia, delivered the afternoon keynote and spoke on the topic of quality and equity, saying that quality must be about people.

“Quality comes from quality people. For you to have quality, you, yourself, must be a good person,” said Professor Mansor. “If you are a good person, you can promote, propel, propagate the idea of having quality to everyone in your organisation. And hopefully our ODL institution will be an institution we can be proud of. There is quality in everything that we do.”

“I do not believe there has ever been a better time, if you believe in open education, than right now.”
The 8th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF8) co-organised by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the Open University of Malaysia (OUM) in Kuala Lumpur from 27-30 November 2016

Mindful of the following international statements including:

The Charter of the Commonwealth 2013, which recognizes the necessity of affordable education for sustainable development

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 4 of ensuring “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all”;

UNESCO’s Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, Education 2030, which sets as target 4.3 that “by 2030, ensure equal access for all to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education including university education” and elaborates that ‘a well established properly regulated tertiary education system, supported by technology, open educational resources and distance education can increase access, equity, quality and relevance’ (item 43).

The 2012 UNESCO - COL Paris Declaration on Open Educational Resources (OER) which advocates that States “Facilitate enabling environments for use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)”.

A. Recommends that governments, institutions, the private sector and civil society

1. Promote Lifelong Learning through the widespread availability of appropriate technologies and multilingual opportunities in formal, non-formal and informal learning which are open to people, open to places, open to methods and open to ideas;

2. Reinforce market-oriented skills development using Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and blended flexible learning in collaboration with education, industry, agriculture and service sectors to strengthen competitiveness in the global labour market, and ensuring decent work for all;

3. Encourage context-specific research and innovation in technology and methods in promoting access, equity and lifelong learning.

4. Develop tools and frameworks to ensure Quality in ODL through a focus on learning outcomes and support effective quality assurance systems in the ODL institutions

5. Strengthen teacher education and in service teacher training with ODL and blended, flexible learning and increase the supply of qualified teachers

6. Mainstream the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) by developing strategies and policies on OER at governmental and institutional level to enhance the quality and reduce the cost of education

7. Emphasise the key role of leadership in strengthening learner-centered ODL which can widen equity and access;

8. Ensure that the education of women and girls through ODL is given utmost importance with a targeted approach

9. Address the needs of persons with disabilities in accessing inclusive and quality education through ODL and blended flexible learning

10. Reinforce commitment to small island development states and small states in their efforts to advance education and learning with ODL, in tackling their particular economic, energy, climate change challenges and in building their resilience for the future

B. Brings the above recommendations to the next meetings of the Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers (CCEM) and Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) for further consideration and implementation.

Kuala Lumpur, 30 November 2016
Minister of Higher Education opens PCF8

Malaysia’s Minister of Higher Education, Dato’ Seri Idris Jusoh, officially opened PCF8 on 28 November 2016. He congratulated COL and OUM “for bringing together a diverse group of policy makers, experts and leaders in open, online and flexible learning to Kuala Lumpur.”

COL celebrates seven new Honorary Fellows

COL announced seven new COL Honorary Fellows at a special presentation on the second day of PCF8. Professor Asha Kanwar conferred the fellowships on the distinguished recipients, who join 53 other COL Honorary Fellows from previous PCFs. The designation of COL Honorary Fellow recognises outstanding individual contributions to distance education in areas such as leadership and service, published works including courseware, lectures and presentations, and mentorship. Consideration is typically limited to citizens of Commonwealth countries and designations are for life.

The new COL Honorary Fellows are: Mr Martin Bean, Professor Rajesh Chandra, Dr Luz Marina Longsworth, Professor Naveed Akhtar Malik, Professor Tolly Salvator Augustin Mbwette, The Honourable Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang and Ms Chetna Vijay Sinha.

Parallel Sessions

The PCF8 Parallel Sessions were well underway on day two, with 18 sessions held across the four sub-themes. Topics ranged from open educational resources, accessibility and learning outcomes to gender inclusivity, mobile learning and fostering a community of practice. The Parallel Sessions continue for the next two days and include discussions around MOOCs, social media open education policies and more.

Papers presented in the Parallel Sessions will be available on OAasis, COL’s institutional online repository, following PCF8. You can find OAasis by visiting col.org.
What’s ahead

- Keynote address by Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Nations Under Secretary-General & Executive Director, UN Women, on the sub-theme Access and Inclusion
- Country Showcase 2 featuring Lifelong learning for Prison Inmates
- Market Exchange, where delegates can share projects and achievements, exchange ideas and best practices, while also networking with potential partners and collaborators
- The Excellence in Distance Education Awards (EDEAs)

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