



THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING



Institutional  
Collaboration in  
Distance Education  
Development and  
Delivery

KNOWLEDGE SERIES

A TOPICAL, START-UP GUIDE TO DISTANCE EDUCATION PRACTICE AND DELIVERY

Institutional collaboration is sharing resources of any type with one or more partner institutions.

Successful collaborations are always the outcome of a successful negotiation process in which terms are set out clearly and agreed upon by all... In a global education climate increasingly divided between the “haves” and “have nots,” collaboration is needed to foster universally beneficial development.



## introduction

### INTRODUCTION

Education institutions worldwide are experiencing funding cuts, even as global demand for training in new skills and for professional upgrading increases. Providing courses and programmes at a distance is one of the proven ways institutions meet higher learning and training demands, yet coming up with the funding and resources for both traditional as well as distance education (DE) services remains a concern. In response to this challenge, many education institutions are sharing their financial, administrative and infrastructure burden with others on a local, national, regional and global level.

This document offers some guidelines for institutional collaboration, particularly for developing and delivering DE.

## defining

### DEFINING INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION

Institutional collaboration is sharing resources of any type with one or more partner institutions. In DE, collaboration may be between institutions in the same neighbourhood or state, within the same country or region, and anywhere in the world. Institutions do not have to have similar interests or a similar level of expertise to collaborate, but they do need to have resources that other institutions would like to share. In collaboration, institutions share:

- Knowledge and expertise, for example joint research projects, designing and delivering curriculum and course material
- Infrastructure, for example information and communications technology (ICT) facilities such as video, audio conferencing equipment and computer rooms
- Human resources, for example formal arrangements for external examination or peer review
- Services, such as libraries, bookstores, student counselling
- Costs of starting or maintaining educational programmes
- Institutional culture and perspective, for example through student or faculty exchange programmes.

Collaboration is possible in almost any area, including:

- Administration
- Advertising
- Certification

- Curriculum design
- Curriculum development, including choice of media i.e. print, audio, video, Internet
- End-term evaluation
- Library support
- Mid-term evaluation
- Network support
- Student admission/selection
- Student support/academic counselling.

## benefits

### BENEFITS OF INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION

A culture conducive to collaboration exists in many DE environments, as faculty and staff are trained to work with diverse people and situations. In DE, institutions collaborate primarily to share the financial burden of developing, providing and maintaining educational resources. Institutions that will benefit most from collaboration are those from small or developing nations that lack the individual expertise or funds to develop course material, or to maintain a wide range of services.

#### RESOURCE SHARING AND FLEXIBILITY

Institutions can develop and offer a wide range of quality human, academic or technology resources through collaboration for a relatively low cost. For example, many institutions cannot afford to offer a programme or course if its enrollment numbers are low. However, a low-enrollment programme may still be made available to students through an arrangement with another institution at which the programme is in high demand.

#### GROWTH OF INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

Collaboration helps institutions implement new, and often progressive, ideas. For example, an institution wanting to update its DE curriculum to take advantage of ICT may only have in-house experience with print-based curriculum design. Instead of independently contracting an outside agency at a potentially high cost to develop the new curriculum, the institution could share development costs through collaborating with other institutions facing a similar situation, or with another institution that has expertise in developing multimedia educational applications.

Inter-institutional collaboration often means working with people that have a different culture, value system or religion. Institutions benefit intellectually from an infusion of global culture, instead of relying solely on a campus-based culture where the “local” viewpoint predominates.

## RAISING QUALITY OF PROGRAMMING

Institutions in a collaboration benefit from sharing "quality-building" processes and techniques, such as admissions, course design and learner support. For example, the UNESCO-initiated "World Declaration on Education for All" international conventions in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, helped nations share and develop tools for assessing their educational activities, with the goal of achieving a higher quality of primary education worldwide. Collaborating locally, nationally or regionally on an institutional level achieves a similar result.

Collaboration also helps institutions make "education for all" once more a primary objective. Although most DE mission statements specify a commitment to advancing education globally, many institutions have focussed on turning a profit as sources of funding have dried up. Through collaboration, quality expertise and resources can be developed or shared at relatively low cost and effort, making it once more possible for financially disadvantaged institutions to focus on providing quality services.

## HOW TO FORM A COLLABORATION

- Have a concrete reason for sharing resources, for example to provide DE through ICT, or to provide expanded library services to your institution's distance learners
- Identify and approach other institutions that may make suitable partners, for example other institutions in the region who may have similar needs to yours, or an institution in another region or country with the expertise, infrastructure or knowledge you are looking for
- Create a co-ordination committee involving all stakeholders that will be in charge of negotiating and managing the collaboration
- Set obtainable objectives and areas for collaboration, for example set a trial period for limited delivery of joint library services before attempting to offer a full suite of services
- Decide what permanent personnel you will need to manage the collaboration, if any additional personnel are needed, and what kind of training they should have
- Identify and provide for one-time and ongoing expenditures, such as a one-time infrastructure upgrade or ongoing hiring and training of new staff
- Identify potential funding sources for additional expenses, such as government grants or through implementing student and faculty user fees
- Draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with input from all partner institutions, including a mission statement that clearly outlines the area(s) for collaboration, the role and jurisdiction of each partner, and the collaboration's objectives
- Include provision for periodic review and updating of the collaboration's policies and responsibilities, to reflect changed circumstances – for example, if the DE programme at one of the collaborating institutions is expanded to include more or different courses. This may mean that the services shared by that institution need revision or upgrading.

# consortium

## COLLABORATION THROUGH CONSORTIUM

An education consortium is an association of several institutions on a joint education venture that is funded, governed and staffed by partner members and other stakeholders. A consortium provides an effective framework and support system for inter-institutional sharing and collaboration, and helps institutions develop co-operative internal and external institutional DE policy. Consortia can be formed regionally, nationally or internationally. To work, a consortium must have:

- A clear mission statement that reflects the interest of all partners. To be inclusive and fair, the consortium's mission statement must also not be similar to, nor contradict, the existing mission statement of any partner member
- A shared, ongoing governance structure with clearly defined roles for each member institution
- The firm support of all partners
- A funding policy agreed upon by all partners
- Short term as well as long term benefits to all partners.

The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), formed in 1987, is a working example of the consortia approach. EADTU members are education institutions in the European Union (EU). All differ widely in terms of their entry qualifications, courses offered and the media and technology in use at each institution. In spite of these differences, EADTU has promoted effective collaboration and cooperation in faculty exchange, curriculum design and development and research. The consortium employs more than 4,000 academic staff across Europe. Courses are delivered through study centres at various universities, as well as designated Euro Study Centres.

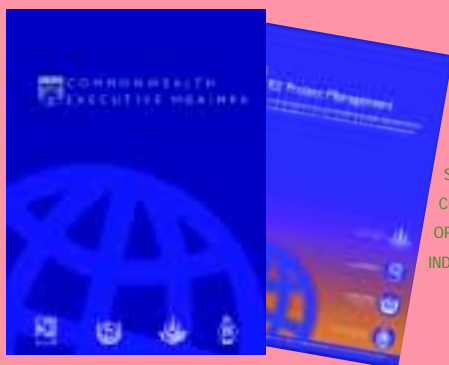
Similarly, The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was created in 1988 by Commonwealth Heads of Government to coordinate and share distance education activities among Commonwealth nations, especially in the area of resources and technologies. COL staff is from educational institutions throughout the Commonwealth, and the organisation has been instrumental both in identifying key areas of need, as well as in pooling resources to help groups and countries achieve educational objectives.

In India, the Distance Education Council (DEC) at IGNOU promotes, maintains and co-ordinates open and distance education between regional institutions within the country; the Universidad Virtual del Sistema Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico co-ordinates education initiatives between universities in Mexico and other universities abroad. Other non-education specific collaborative agencies, such as the World Bank, also provide access to useful education resources and information. Examples of national consortia in the United States include The American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC), the National Learning Infrastructure Initiative (NLII) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

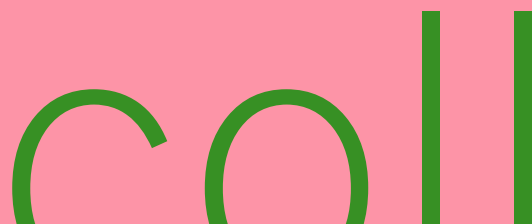
## GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESS

### CONFIRM INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT

A precondition of any collaboration is a formalised, written understanding and firm commitment to it, such as an MOU, signed by all participating institutions. This guides the collaboration over the long term. It is crucial that the wording of any mission statement or MOU express the collaboration's goals and procedures, and that it should be clearly understood by all partners. The document should also identify sources of funding for the collaboration.



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INDIA, PAKISTAN AND SRI LANKA.





No partnership can work without the support of the heads of its participating institutions. An institution's chief executive and senior decision-making staff should be involved in the collaboration from the start. The collaboration's co-ordination committee should also have a senior staff member from each partner institution on it.

### ACKNOWLEDGE AND REWARD STAKEHOLDERS

All those involved, from learners to staff to administrators, should be credited and compensated for their contribution. For example, the rights to any material delivered or created through collaboration with another institution still belong to the originating institution or to the individual/organisation that developed the material, unless otherwise specified. Due acknowledgement and share of profit, if agreed upon, must be honestly distributed according to current copyright and intellectual property laws. Such provisions should be made clear in any MOU or contract signed between the partner institutions or between the institutions and a contracted agency.

### ADAPT MATERIALS FOR LOCAL USE

Courses are designed and developed for target groups of learners. Course difficulty is pitched to the group's educational level, and examples or exercises are selected from the learner's environment. When courses are shared with another institution, their content and treatment may not match the partner institution's learner demographic. Most material obtained through collaboration must be adapted to be effective. An example is the Post-Graduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE), offered by IGNOU and developed in 1987 primarily with Indian learners in mind through an agreement between COL and the Government of India. The PGDDE has been offered to students in developing Commonwealth African countries since 1995, and after a recent survey of overseas students, IGNOU revised the programme in 2001 to reflect its new international context.

Shared programmes and services are most effective for a partner institution if they are delivered in the local language of the region. Although the basic content of shared teaching and learning materials stays the same, the examples, arguments or explanations used must be adapted to reflect the culture of the partner institution. A course or programme revision team of stakeholders must review shared resources, determine what changes are needed and supervise adapting the resources to the needs of local learner groups.

Although English is used globally and is often the language of educational instruction, it is not the native or cultural language in many nations. In India, course development teams at IGNOU develop programmes in English for use at regional State Open Universities (SOUs) throughout the country. These programmes are translated into local languages by the collaborating institutions, before being made available to students within the area.

Before an institution offers a programme or course to another institution, both partners must also be sure that the proposed material is relevant and useful to the target learner group. Material will also have to be rewritten or adapted if the mode of delivery at the partner institution will be different, for example if a print-based course is going to be delivered by another institution through radio instruction.

### CREATE A QUALITY CONTROL AGENCY

Developing economies especially can be the target of organisations or institutions that profit from marketing educational programmes abroad, without regard for their quality or suitability for the target learner group.

Form a "watchdog" agency with other local institutions or with the government to help ensure that courses offered in collaboration by overseas institutions are relevant to the learner or to the country's needs, and to keep tabs on other institutions that offer sub-standard courses while charging high fees. For example, the government of Hong Kong enacted a *Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance* in 1997, making it mandatory for all overseas education providers to get approval from a Non-local Courses Registry before enrolling local students.

### STREAMLINE COURSE MATERIAL AND PROCEDURE

During a proposed collaboration's planning stage, find ways to streamline differences in key areas between partner institutions. For example, several institutions may be collaborating on the delivery of a suite of DE courses. Meanwhile, their entrance requirements and course evaluation criteria differ. The solution is to implement a common evaluation procedure, approved by all partners. Establish further common ground by streamlining other shared procedures; for example if several institutions are sharing courses, they should also jointly share the administration and academic calendars for those courses.

### ENSURE PROGRAMME CONTENT IS CURRENT

Course content and delivery methods need to be revised and updated periodically, to keep up with changes in the course subject field, pedagogical techniques and with technological advances in DE course delivery. Institutions must avoid sharing an outdated course or should collaborate on updating its content, as the partner institutions may not have the in-house expertise or the financial resources to independently outsource course content revision.

### KEEP ADMINISTRATION IN-HOUSE

The collaboration's main co-ordinators should be selected from key, decision-making staff positions in the partner institutions themselves. The collaboration's main educational purpose can be undermined if its co-ordinators do not have the interests of education and of the distance learners as the primary goal. For example if institutions collaborate on delivering online library services, the main administrators for the service should be from the partner institutions, not from the company that provides the software and computer systems. This way, the collaborating institutions can ensure their long term as well as day-to-day educational goals are being met by the service.

### CONDUCT JOINT MARKETING STRATEGIES

The point of inter-institutional collaboration is to give all stakeholders an opportunity to benefit from it, including the area of marketing and advertising of programmes and services. The collaboration's terms must specifically ensure this, as in most cases not every partner institution has the revenue and resources set aside, or left over, to market its services. Collaborating institutions lacking individual ability to market or advertise their educational product should conduct joint marketing or advertising drives for courses that include programme, service and course offerings from all institutions in the partnership.

# aboration



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### SOME USEFUL WEB SITES

- The American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC).  
[www.adece.edu](http://www.adece.edu)
- Asian Association of Open Universities.  
[www.ouhk.edu.hk/-AAOUNet](http://www.ouhk.edu.hk/-AAOUNet)
- The Commonwealth of Learning.  
[www.col.org](http://www.col.org)
- Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) Collaboration Framework – Addressing Community Capacity.  
[crs.uvm.edu/ncco/collab/framework.html](http://crs.uvm.edu/ncco/collab/framework.html)
- Distance Education Council, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).  
[www.ignou.ac.in](http://www.ignou.ac.in)
- The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities.  
[www.eadtu.nl](http://www.eadtu.nl)
- National Learning Infrastructure Initiative (NLII).  
[www.educause.edu/ir/library/html/nlii0018.html](http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/html/nlii0018.html)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).  
[www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)
- Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).  
[www.wiche.edu](http://www.wiche.edu)
- World Declaration on Education for All.  
[www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed\\_for\\_all/background/jomtien\\_declaration.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/background/jomtien_declaration.shtml)
- World Bank Education.  
[www.worldbank.org/education](http://www.worldbank.org/education)
- University of Wisconsin Distance Education Clearinghouse.  
[www.uwex.edu/disted](http://www.uwex.edu/disted)
- Universidad Virtual del Sistema Tecnológico de Monterrey.  
[www.ruv.itesm.mx](http://www.ruv.itesm.mx)

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