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LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Crisis of credibility or infinite possibility?

ODL in the Commonwealth

As research universities and campus institutions adopt blended learning and massive open online courses (MOOCs), open and distance learning (ODL) faces increasing competition and a rising focus on its quality and credibility. The significance that the Incheon Declaration places on information and communication technologies (ICTs) for lifelong learning adds a further layer of timeliness. Today, leaders in ODL are well positioned to encourage a fundamental focus on quality and play a leadership role in harnessing the potential of MOOCs and open educational resources.

In response to these challenges and opportunities, COL brought open university vice chancellors and heads of ODL institutions together this past March to discuss opportunities and methods for strengthening ODL in terms of both quality and credibility, as well as to share best practices. The round table was co-hosted in Kuala Lumpur by Asia e University and the Commonwealth of Learning and saw participants from 19 countries in attendance, including ODL thought leaders and distinguished scholars. Participants generated a range of

recommendations to take back to their home institutions, as well as those on which they can work together.

As COL's CEO and President Professor Asha Kanwar said in her address, "We know distance and eLearning have opened up access and promoted equity by offering more affordable opportunities for quality education." We can take advantage of these developments through ODL, as well as by supporting policy makers in addressing the challenge of quality, all with a view to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.

One of the recommendations in the Framework for Action for achieving SDG 4 by 2030 is to "develop policies and programmes for the provision of quality distance learning in tertiary education, with appropriate financing and use of technology, including the Internet, massive open online courses and other modalities that meet accepted quality standards to improve access." The role of ODL will become more important than ever before as Member States strive to achieve quality education and lifelong learning for all.

“Distance education is growing at a phenomenal pace in the developing Commonwealth, providing access for quality education and training to hundreds of thousands who would otherwise not have the opportunity.”



www.col.org/tvsd

Becoming a FaB institution

The Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) in Trinidad and Tobago is the latest Caribbean organisation to embark on the integration of a model for flexible and blended (FaB) technical and vocational education and training. YTEPP, which targets unemployed youth, retrenched employees and displaced citizens, started working with COL this year, and their management team are leading the way with cross-organisation consultations and the development of a roadmap for FaB implementation.

The flexible and blended model is intended to make best use of a limited number of trainers relative to demand and expand the number of training places they are currently able to offer. They plan to start with a “flipped classroom” approach and then develop full blended learning.

Following the planning and training sessions in April, 80 YTEPP instructors, managers and support staff are now collaborating in a COL-facilitated online course to discuss the change management issues involved in a more flexible approach. Their Moodle learning management system is being enhanced, and 12 online courses are under development for launch in October.



Building capacity for institutional OER policies

Institutional open educational resources policy was the topic of focus at a recent workshop organised by COL, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) and Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) in Kolkata, India. The three-day workshop ran from 1 to 3 June 2016 and included 30 participants from nine state open universities and the Central University of Himachal Pradesh.

The workshop looked at institutional OER policy, from framing to the implementation stage, and participants developed a draft OER policy and two-year strategic plan for their respective institutions with feedback from the facilitators, Professor Mohan B. Menon and Dr Manas R. Panigrahi, Education Programme Officer with CEMCA.



COL and UNESCO launch *Making Sense of MOOCs*

COL and UNESCO officially launched their latest publication, *Making Sense of MOOCs: A Guide for Policy Makers in Developing Countries*, on 16 June 2016 in Paris, France. The event was introduced by Professor Asha Kanwar, President and CEO of COL, and Dr Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO. Editors Dr Venkataraman Balaji, COL Director of Technology and Knowledge Management (pictured above right), and Ms Mariana Patru, Programme Specialist - Teacher Policy and Development, UNESCO (pictured above left), were also in attendance. Learn more about the guide on page 15.



COL and UNESCO sign joint work plan

COL President and CEO Asha Kanwar (right) poses with Dr Qian Tang, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Education, following the launch of the joint publication *Making Sense of MOOCs* and the signing of a COL-UNESCO joint work plan to guide the organisations' mutual efforts over the next three years.



Ghana High Commissioner to Canada visits COL

Dr Sulley Gariba, Ghana's High Commissioner to Canada, visited COL headquarters in March 2016. Dr Gariba, who took office in late 2014, is a recognised expert in rural development. Prior to assuming his current position, he served as a policy advisor to the President of Ghana. Dr Gariba spoke about the importance of fostering champions in Commonwealth Member States who could advocate for learning for sustainable development.



COL welcomes new Cyprus High Commissioner

COL headquarters welcomed Cyprus High Commissioner to Canada Pavlos Anastasiades in May 2016. Cyprus's Canadian High Commission was established in December of 2015. Previously, the government of Cyprus had a consulate general in Toronto. Mr Anastasiades was ambassador to the United States between 2010 and 2013.

High Commissioners' luncheon

COL President and CEO Asha Kanwar spoke at the monthly luncheon of Commonwealth High Commissioners in Ottawa on 26 May 2016. She provided an overview of COL's work as well as details of COL's efforts in the countries whose representatives were present at the meeting.



UNISWA embraces OER, developing BSc in Nursing

A recent Open Educational Resources (OER) policy workshop was the latest in COL's work with the University of Swaziland (UNISWA) to build OER capacity in both management and faculty members. The workshop, which took place in March 2016, was offered as part of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth.

Professor Cisco Magagula, Vice Chancellor of UNISWA, is a strong advocate of OER. In Swaziland, training of healthcare professionals isn't keeping pace with the region's needs. However, the cost of learning materials can make training nurses prohibitively expensive. UNISWA is looking to OER to advance the delivery of health education by increasing the availability of relevant learning materials, reducing the cost of accessing educational materials, and stimulating the active engagement of teaching staff and students in creating good-quality learning materials. They are currently in the process of developing a BSc in Nursing using OER.

COL and UNISWA have been working together in OER-related activities since 2015.



COL welcomes new Commonwealth Secretary-General

COL is delighted to welcome the Right Honourable Patricia Scotland QC, who took office as the new Commonwealth Secretary-General on 1 April 2016. Nominated by Dominica, she is the first woman to hold the post. "Baroness Scotland brings a great distinction and a wealth of experience as the new Secretary-General of the Commonwealth," says Professor Asha Kanwar. Baroness Scotland has a number of key priorities that resonate closely with COL's own work, including a focus on youth, climate change and combatting violence against women and girls.



INVESTing in skills training in Africa

INVEST Africa brings together 90 technical and vocational education and training (TVET) partner institutions and ministry and agency officials in seven countries who aim to increase access to good-quality skills training through the integration of a flexible TVET model. Teacher capacity building is a key component, and COL has facilitated a range of online and workshop capacity-building activities to support teachers in creating e-portfolios with evidence of their new competencies.

Cascade training is key as COL-trained people cascade their knowledge and skills to their colleagues. At a recent five-day workshop in Nakuru, Kenya, six INVEST Africa Master Champions worked in collaboration with COL Open Education Resources Adviser Dr Ishan Abeywardena to train 36 new Champions in the flexible and blended (FaB) TVET model as well as open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) institutional policy. The new Champions are now engaged in the online course Flexible Skills Development in Kenya, a COL OER course being facilitated by a Kenyan Champion.

At the College of Technology Education (COLTEK) in Ghana, 20 TVET educators participated in a Blended Online Teaching Strategies workshop and joined 60 Nigerian colleagues in the online course Flexible Skills Development in West Africa. They are now preparing to offer online training for TVET teacher training.

Successful integration of a new teaching and learning model requires both a top-down and bottom-up approach. This means

that the involvement and leadership of national TVET agencies and ministry officials is key. COL has focused on capacity building for this group, and currently 63 policy advisers are building their skills and knowledge in flexible TVET approaches. National Champions have been appointed in Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia, and they are in the process of developing plans and strategies to support FaB TVET integration in their countries.

In Zambia, a team of ODFL stakeholders have recently completed their draft National TVET ODL Policy Guidelines, and another team from Zambia's training authority (TEVETA) have developed guidelines for TVET flexible course development. This will set the structure for continued capacity building in the flexible TVET model in Zambia.

People working in the informal economy face many barriers to skills training, and collectively they are a target group for many INVEST Africa partners, including the Yaba College of Technology (YCT) in Nigeria. Thanks to a collaboration between YCT and COL's initiatives in technical and vocational skills development and OER for skills development, 26 new non-formal courses aimed at increasing sustainable livelihoods will be available as OER and will be shared with partners in INVEST Africa and beyond.

Last year, more than 8,000 learners across the seven countries benefited from flexible skills training programmes.

“In the past year, more than 700 teachers have started building their skills in the flexible TVET approach. The online community of practice, the Community Learning Network, has more than 1,700 members.”



JL4D seeks contributors

Contributions are invited for the *Journal of Learning for Development*, which focuses on innovation in learning – in particular, but not exclusively, open and distance learning and its role in development. Your contributions can take the form of research articles, case studies, commentaries and reports from the field. Please visit the journal site for more details and to submit your work:

<http://www.jl4d.org>



Integrating ICT for teacher educators

Teacher educators from 11 countries participated in a five-day training workshop on information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning at the Singapore National Institute of Education (NIE) from 16 to 20 May 2016. The workshop was the result of a collaboration between NIE, COL and the Technical Cooperation Directorate of Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The workshop covered a wide range of topics, from the opportunities and challenges associated with ICT in education to frameworks for integration and best practices. The main focus of the training was on supporting teacher educators in integrating ICT into their programmes as a key strategy to improve quality in education.

A total of 31 teacher educators from the following countries participated in the workshop: Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania and Uganda. The training was conducted by Dr Shu Shing Lee, Dr Elizabeth Koh and Ms Helen Hong, all from the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, NIE, with facilitation support from Dr Jessica Aguti, COL Education Specialist for Teacher Education.

eLearning at the University of the South Pacific

Participants from the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tuvalu joined COL and the University of the South Pacific (USP) for a week-long workshop on eLearning pedagogies and materials development using open and distance learning and open educational resources at USP from 23 to 27 May 2016. The workshop was facilitated by John Lesperance, COL Education Specialist for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, and Dr Shikha Raturi, USP Lecturer in the School of Education.



TOP 5

PROMOTING USE AND ADAPTATION OF OER

Teachers in India have positive attitudes towards open educational resources (OER), but adaptation of OER remains very limited amongst them, according to a recent study conducted by COL's regional centre in New Delhi with the support of Canada's International Development Research Centre, through the University of Cape Town, South Africa. The study looked at Indian teachers' perspectives on OER, specifically their attitudes, motivations, perceptions of quality and barriers to use.

Teachers lack knowledge of and skills in OER, and the absence of related policies in institutions is a concern for those wishing to boost the use of OER. "Non-contributors are more concerned about OER quality. Teachers are concerned about quality in terms of resources' fitness for purpose and the reputation of the source," says Sanjaya Mishra, the study's principal investigator.

The study's recommendations will be useful in many other contexts as well:

- 1 Support Advocacy and Awareness**
Make advocacy for and awareness of OER a top priority, with a particular focus on teachers and senior administrators.
- 2 Adopt Policies**
Develop and implement institutional OER policies to foster and facilitate OER use and projects by teachers.
- 3 Provide Incentives and Release Time**
Provide teachers with incentives for engaging in OER work, in the form of awards and/or recognition that count towards promotion; in doing so, give OER work the same weight as research papers. Provide release time to teachers engaged in OER work.
- 4 Create QA Mechanisms**
Create mechanisms for assuring OER quality by adapting the available quality assurance frameworks.
- 5 Support Continuous Professional Development**
Provide teachers with continuous professional development opportunities by regularly organising workshops and training sessions to enhance their ICT and OER skills.



Photo credit: Abir Abdullah/Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha

Floating schools bring education to students' doorsteps

Every year, one third of Bangladesh experiences the floods of monsoon season. For families living in flood-prone areas, this can prevent children from accessing education. The Commonwealth of Learning has partnered with Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha (SSS) to combat this problem with something that uses the situation to its advantage: boats.

SSS uses fleets of solar-powered library and training boats to bring education to girls and young women and raise awareness about their right to education, their choices and opportunities, domestic violence, disaster preparedness, and preventing child, early and forced marriage. The boats are equipped with books, Internet-linked laptops, multimedia equipment and educational

presentations. While docked at villages, the boats are also used as a medium for evening shows to raise awareness about girls' rights and other human rights issues.

COL's work with SSS is part of the GIRLS Inspire initiative, which mobilises the power of open and distance learning to provide schooling and skills development training to women and girls who are prevented from attending schools by barriers such as early marriage, cultural norms, distance from schools, or environmental factors such as monsoons. GIRLS Inspire receives funding from Global Affairs Canada and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Open University confers honorary degree on Asha Kanwar

In a special convocation held at the Barbican Centre in London, The Open University conferred an honorary Doctor of the University degree on Professor Asha Kanwar this past April. The degree was presented by Dr Peter Horrocks, Vice Chancellor of The Open University. Reading from the citation, Professor Belinda Tynan, Pro Vice Chancellor, said that The Open University recognised "her exceptional contribution to global education, social justice and human development."



Upcoming Events

2016 ICDE Presidents' Summit

The 2016 ICDE Presidents' Summit will be held from 20 to 23 November 2016 in Sydney, Australia. The event is being hosted by Charles Sturt University and is titled "A New Era of Leadership and Quality: The Business of Open and Distance Learning 2020."

<http://iimagine.edu.au/icde/>

PCF8 Online Forums

Leading up to PCF8, the organising committee is holding online forums around the main conference themes. The last forum is on the topic of "Technology and Innovation" and will be held from 15 August to 15 September 2016.

<http://pcf8forum.col.org/>
<http://pcf8.oum.edu.my/>

30th Annual Conference of the AAOU

The 30th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities will be held from 26 to 29 October 2016 in Manila, Philippines. This year's theme is "Open Education in Asia: Changing Perspectives."

<http://aaouconference.com/2016/index.php>



SINU to offer the VUSSC Bachelor in Business and Entrepreneurship

Solomon Islands National University (SINU) will soon offer a Bachelor in Business and Entrepreneurship (BBE), one of the most popular programmes developed by the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). The programme, which offers flexibility to students through the option of leaving at the certificate, diploma or degree level, is registered on the VUSSC Transnational Qualifications Framework.

SINU's Faculty of Business in conjunction with the Distance and Flexible Learning unit decided to offer the BBE to two cohorts: one through distance learning (for those who cannot come to campus) and another using conventional face-to-face teaching. An intensive week-long workshop on eLearning pedagogies and materials development using open and distance learning (ODL) and open educational resources was held in May 2016 to build capacity.

SINU already has 40 students enrolled in the ODL programme, and full-time students began registering in July. The programme will be offered starting August 2016.



Asha Kanwar gives keynote at AIOU

Professor Asha Kanwar, COL's President and CEO, gave a keynote speech at an international seminar to develop Pakistan's first ever National Policy for Open and Distance Learning, on 13 May 2016. The two-day seminar was held at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in Islamabad and was hosted by AIOU and the Higher Education Commission. Open and distance learning (ODL) stakeholders from across Pakistan were joined by international speakers at the event.

Attendees deliberated on the ODL policy's focus areas, covering a wide range of topics, from instructional design and curriculum development to student support systems and quality assurance. Group discussions resulted in concrete suggestions for the ODL policy.



Jamaica's RADA signs gender policy

With support from COL's Gender and Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiatives, the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) in Jamaica developed a six-page Gender Equality Policy statement that was signed into effect in March 2016.

The policy will guide RADA in its efforts to mainstream gender in policies, research, extension activities, monitoring and evaluation. The policy development process was preceded by six gender-mainstreaming sensitisation sessions held in June and September 2015. The workshops focused on creating a basic understanding for staff on gender issues related to RADA's work.



THEME:

Open, Online and Flexible Learning:
The Key to Sustainable Development

SUB-THEMES:

1. Quality and Equity in Learning
2. Access and Inclusion
3. Efficiency and Effectiveness
4. Technology and Innovation



Information and Registration:

<http://pcf8.oum.edu.my>

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Asa Briggs Lecture

Sir John Daniel, OC
Former President and CEO of
Commonwealth of Learning

Quality and Equity in Learning

Professor Emeritus Anwar Ali
Former President and Vice-Chancellor
of Open University Malaysia

Technology and Innovation

Mr Martin G. Bean, CBE
Vice-Chancellor and President, RMIT,
Australia

Access and Inclusion

Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
United Nations Under-Secretary-
General and Executive Director of
UN Women

Efficiency and Effectiveness

Dr David A. Wiley
Chief Academic Officer,
Lumen Learning



FOCUS

REMEMBERING

Asa Briggs, Lord Briggs of Lewes, passed away on 15 March 2016 at the age of 94. Lord Briggs worked passionately to transform and widen access to education. His 1987 report Towards a Commonwealth of Learning informed the creation of COL and shortly after he became its first Chair, serving in the role from 1988 to 1993. In August 2002, COL conferred upon Lord Briggs a COL Honorary Fellowship at the Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF) on Open Learning in Durban, South Africa. He will always be remembered at COL.

Hilary Perraton

Asa Briggs was born in Yorkshire and attended Cambridge University to study history at the age of 16. There is a story that as he was reading an essay to his supervisor, he banged the sofa in excitement so hard it released clouds of century-old academic dust. He retained that enthusiasm for ideas and that power to banish inert dust for the rest of his life. From Cambridge he was recruited to Bletchley Park, the codebreaking base, and ended the war improbably as a 24-year-old regimental sergeant major. Characteristically he did not talk about the portentous significance of that work but remembered how privileged he felt, when others were being shot at, to be in a country house surrounded by pretty girls. He returned to his career as a historian and later joined the new University of Sussex as a founding professor, dedicated to drawing new maps of learning.

As a renowned academic, committed to adult education and to educational change, with a particular interest in communications, Asa Briggs was for me, and happily for the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the obvious person to chair a group to “report on the potential for Commonwealth co-operation in distance education.” Asa’s starting point was that we were living in “a time of convergence between the

world-wide need to extend and develop educational opportunities and the world-wide expansion of communication channels through which such needs could be met.” He demonstrated his well-honed skills in drawing out ideas from a diverse international group, his mastery as a writer, and his willingness to take on too much: he was at the same time also writing the history of the BBC and heading an Oxford college. As a result, the Briggs report is uneven, with visible joins between his good bits and the more pedestrian parts drafted in the office. He later served as the first chair of COL’s board, when the staff were encouraged each time he flew in, still with energy and enthusiasm, literally and metaphorically loosening his tie and rolling up his sleeves to get on with the job.

Well over 80, Asa once told me, “Never retire, Hilary. I’ve never retired.” He didn’t; having started his university career in his teens, he published three volumes of reminiscences in his nineties. The Commonwealth of Learning is not a memorial to Asa Briggs, but it is a richer institution for his vision and inspiration.

Hilary Perraton is an historian and an Honorary Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning. He worked with Asa Briggs as a member of the Commonwealth Secretariat in the 1980s and 1990s.

Gajaraj Dhanarajan

I first met the late Lord Asa Briggs around 1989–1990, when I was at the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong, later renamed the Open University Hong Kong. At that time, Lord Briggs was a mentor and advisor to a group of University of Hong Kong alumni who had set up the University of East Asia, in Macau, and its affiliated Open College. Conversations with Lord Briggs were always as stimulating as they were helpful; his insights reflected a deep understanding of those denied the experience of education generally and higher education particularly, and he possessed

“The Commonwealth of Learning is not a memorial to Asa Briggs, but it is a richer institution for his vision and inspiration.”

LORD ASA BRIGGS

an extraordinary curiosity on a range of subjects. Above all, I was most attracted to the ease with which he related to all those he met and his genuine interest in them. My association with this remarkable and kind man was very brief; I only wish it had been a much longer experience.

Gajaraj Dhanarajan is a former President and CEO of COL, current professor emeritus of Wawasan Open University, Malaysia, and a COL Honorary Fellow.

Ros Morpeth

The history of the National Extension College is well documented, but less well known is its relationship with a much longer established organisation called the University Correspondence College (UCC), which was set up in Cambridge, UK, in 1887 by a Victorian entrepreneur named William Briggs (no relation).

In 2000, the National Extension College commissioned a member of staff to write a history of the UCC. When the first draft of the manuscript was ready, it was sent to Asa Briggs to review, as an historian of the period. Asa's reply was fascinating and gives an insight into his academic abilities and his commitment to his friends. Here is an extract:

"I actually did some marking of scripts for the UCC when I was a very young new Cambridge graduate in 1941. I was not only a Cambridge graduate in history, but a London University graduate in economics. Taking advantage of the wartime presence of the London School of Economics in Cambridge, I took the two degrees in parallel, the London one called 'external'. I did not dare tell my Cambridge supervisor in Sidney Sussex College what I was doing or I would have been forbidden to do it.

"I took the London degree not solely because of the conviction that I held then that I should learn economics. A school friend of mine, who did not go to university, decided to take an external London degree immediately after he left school in 1938, and

in a comradely spirit, I decided to share the experience with him. He turned to the UCC for courses and in talking to him about his studies, I had the benefit of sharing them without paying for them. When I told this three years later to an able and enterprising man working for the UCC, Dr Frenchman, who asked me to mark scripts and pass on guidance to the UCC students, he considered sensibly that this was a great advantage."

Ros Morpeth is Chief Executive of the National Extension College, United Kingdom, and a COL Honorary Fellow.

Janet Jenkins

It was an inspired move to appoint Lord Asa Briggs to chair the Expert Group that shaped the idea of COL. He chaired the work of the Group with enthusiasm, determination and commitment to the idea. I was involved with preparing and analysing a dossier of reports from each region and cross-cutting papers on key sectors of open and distance learning to inform the Group. To satisfy the specifications, he insisted upon much reshaping and clarification, always to tight deadlines. The demands were heavy, yet Lord Briggs not only was persuasive but had the rare ability to make people feel good about attempting to satisfy those demands.

His clear-sightedness, together with charm and lightness of touch, were immensely important in shaping the plan for the institution. The outcome was that COL came into being in 1988, only three years after the Heads of Government had asked the Commonwealth Secretariat to look into the potential for such an institution. Its mandate has proven durable to this day. Would this have happened without Lord Briggs? In my view, his contribution in those early years, as well as in COL's first years of operation, was crucial.

Ms Janet Jenkins is an expert in open and distance learning for development, a former senior staff member of COL and a COL Honorary Fellow.



Ian MacDonald, former Chair of COL's Board of Governors, presenting Lord Asa Briggs with a COL Honorary Fellowship in 2002.

OUR COMMONWEALTH



Open University of Sri Lanka

Exploring new horizons to meet the educational aspirations of the unreached

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), set up through an act of Parliament, began its academic activities on 22 July 1980. It is the only state-owned open and distance learning (ODL) university in Sri Lanka, coming under the purview of the University Grants Commission.

The OUSL is unique within the Sri Lankan university system because of its significant feature of offering programmes of study from certificate to doctoral level in the ODL mode and in a wide range of subject areas, including engineering, natural sciences, health sciences, agriculture, education, law, social sciences, management and languages.

Today, the university serves the educational aspirations of more than 40,000 students, which represents 30 per cent of the total university student population in state universities, through its network of 27 regional and study centres spread across the country. The university currently offers 67 different programmes at certificate, diploma, degree and post-graduate levels, with a strength of nearly 320 full-time academic staff at the main campus in Colombo and the regional and study centres.

In the recent past, the university has embarked on a number of new initiatives to enhance its academic activities and learner support mechanisms. One such initiative is the launching of the university's Learner Management System, through which the OUSL plans to provide online support for all the courses by the year 2018. For a university which has traditionally depended on print-based course materials, this is a significant paradigm shift. The university formulated its open educational resources (OER) policy last year and is currently in the process of formalising mechanisms to include course material development using OER and other formats, in contrast to the hitherto followed "write from scratch" model of developing learning materials.

With the establishment of the International Relations Unit at the university, a number of new projects have been undertaken. After successful completion of the first set of Distinguished Lecture Series in 2015, where eight subject specialists from various parts of the world delivered talks at the university which were webcast live to international audiences, the second series of lectures are now underway. The university has also established links with a number of overseas institutes and has finalised plans to offer its first programme overseas in the Republic of Maldives.

The OUSL has a number of partnerships with COL, apart from the long-standing partnership in offering the CEMBA/CEMPA programme over the last 15 years. Developing information and communication technology (ICT) skills courses with five other partner universities, revising course materials for the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education and capacity building of export agriculture officers in the use of ICT are some of the current collaborations that are being pursued with COL.

The OUSL had the privilege of awarding Professor Asha Kanwar, President and CEO of COL, a Doctorate of Letters (Honoris Causa) at the 28th General Convocation, held on 17 May 2016. Professor Kanwar also delivered the convocation address.

The OUSL in all its endeavours strives to enhance access to high-quality, affordable and relevant education through the ODL mode in order to address the educational challenges of societies in Sri Lanka and overseas, especially in developing countries. To achieve this vision, it is prepared to partner with like-minded institutes and organisations and thereby fulfil its global responsibilities.



<http://www.ou.ac.lk/>

CEMBA graduate finds success

The Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration (CEMBA) and Executive Public Administration (CEMPA) programme was established in 2002 by a consortium of higher education institutions. Through open and distance learning (ODL), the programme is designed to provide access to higher education in business and public administration for learners who cannot attend classes via conventional programmes, whether for economic, geographic or other reasons.

Since 2002, the programme has enrolled over 28,000 learners and graduated over 11,000. One such graduate is Raymond Loh from Malaysia. COL Education Specialist Dr Godson Gatsha asked him about why he chose the programme and what he has accomplished since.

Godson: Why did you choose to read for your MBA at such an advanced age?

Raymond: It was December 2008. I was turning 50 the following year and had just come off a failed business venture – failed because it did not bear the return on investment as expected. Going back to employment again was out of the question at that age, and relaunching myself by starting another business of my own seemed too big, too burdensome and too energy-sapping. If I were to relaunch myself into business, I knew that I would need a well-rounded business education to help me not only build another successful business but to rightfully own, manage and control it this time.

Godson: So you went shopping for an MBA and finally signed up for the CEMBA programme with Wawasan Open University (WOU). What were your reasons for such a decision?

Raymond: Although the WOU CEMBA had a pre-fixed “e” for “Executive,” I soon found out that it is an earned post-graduate

degree, requiring submissions of assignments, a researched thesis and written examinations every semester. Also, the Commonwealth tag or recognition would greatly increase my employment mobility, as the MBA is well recognised in Commonwealth countries. The tipping point was the ODL mode of learning, which provided me with flexibility and face-to-face support.

Godson: And what were the key impacts or benefits from your CEMBA program following your graduation?

Raymond: I am proud to say that even before the final CEMBA semester, I was hired as the branch manager of a global relocation company with offices in more than 60 countries, and two years later, I was headhunted to be the country manager of a Singapore-based moving company. At the end of 2015, I decided to break out on my own and set up Raven Man Relo Services, offering full-service moving and relocation services to clients in over 40 countries. Everything had to be set up, from the brand name to the mission and vision, the logo, company registration, adherence to legal requirements and industry compliances, etc. Unreservedly I have to say that my CEMBA education helped to thrust me onto my own again and onto the global platform, too.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

“The tipping point was the ODL mode of learning, which provided me with flexibility and face-to-face support.”



Expert consultation on quality assurance for MOOCs

COL organised a meeting of experts and stakeholders on MOOCs to finalise guidelines for quality assurance and accreditation, from 2 to 3 May 2016 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Invited experts from Australia, Canada, India, Malaysia and the United Kingdom participated in the consultation meeting. Participants also included representatives from platform developers such as the UK’s FutureLearn and Australia’s OpenLearning. Participants discussed the draft guidelines developed through online consultations and refined these guidelines by sharing their experiences. The workshop was facilitated by Professor Allison Littlejohn of The Open University and Dr Sanjaya Mishra of COL.





Empowerment leads to profit

One of the key objectives of the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programme is to empower marginalised communities, particularly women. Using a three-dimensional index, a study in Uganda established that learning in the context of human, social and financial capitals is capable of narrowing the gap in empowerment between men and women.

A further study on L3F, conducted by Alexis Carr, Tenzin Yindok, Rosemary Atieno, James Onyango and K. Balasubramanian, showed that empowerment can lead to greater profits for microenterprises. A comparative analysis of backyard poultry enterprises managed mostly by poorer women in Kenya found that empowerment is a statistically significant determinant of profit from poultry farming. A one per cent increase in the

empowerment index is estimated to increase annual profit from poultry farming by 2.3 per cent. Participation in the L3F programme significantly boosted the enterprises' profit efficiency.

The Kenya AIDS Intervention/Prevention Project Group, a partner facilitating L3F in Kenya, has pointed out that these results have attracted government agencies such as the County Government of Kakamega, Kenya, to actively participate in L3F activities.

The results of this study were presented by K. Balasubramanian at the 7th Africa Agricultural Science Week of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, held in Kigali during June 2016. Find the studies at <http://www.jl4d.org/index.php/ejl4d/article/view/124> and <http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/2353>.



www.col.org/l3f



New TEL policy at SNDT Women's University

Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey (SNDT) Women's University, in Mumbai, India, recently developed a technology-enabled learning (TEL) policy, following a workshop facilitated by COL's eLearning Education Specialist, Sanjaya Mishra.

The workshop, which was held from 25 to 26 April 2016, included university faculty members and discussed policy issues with a view to formulating the TEL policy. Professor Vasudha Kamat (pictured), Vice-Chancellor of SNDT Women's University, indicated that while SNDT has been implementing TEL for the last five years, a policy would institutionalise the process and give continuity to the activities that are in progress.

The policy developed in the workshop was approved by SNDT's Academic Council on 5 May 2016 and subsequently ratified by the Management Committee on 6 May 2016. The policy's vision is to enable the university to commit and put in place appropriate technologies and resources to assist students and teachers in creating an environment of excellence in learning and teaching. With this policy, SNDT Women's University has also committed to sharing teaching and learning resources using the CC BY-SA licence through an institutional repository.



Online gender equality course launched for COL staff

COL launched an online, interactive, gender equality course for its staff in April 2016. The course explores the common behaviours and attitudes towards gender differences, how gendered identities are formed, and gender roles and relationships. It also presents global gender gaps and trends, while introducing participants to the key international instruments and commitments that aim to address gender equality concerns.

Including self-paced and self-learning modules, the course examines the relationship between gender equality, sustainable development and learning opportunities, as well as gender issues in open and distance learning. It is intended to build participants' knowledge and skills in gender mainstreaming in policies, plans, programmes and monitoring/evaluation processes.

COL Board meets in Vancouver

The Commonwealth of Learning welcomed new and returning Board members at its annual Board of Governors meeting on 10 June 2016. The meeting was chaired by Dr Linda Sissons, CNZM, former Chief Executive Officer of the Wellington Institute of Technology, and held in Metro Vancouver, Canada. The COL Board of Governors has representatives from six major voluntary contributors – currently Canada, India, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom – as well as representatives from four regions of the Commonwealth: Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.



PEOPLE



MS SPARROW MCGOWAN

Ms Sparrow McGowan joined COL as the Communications Manager in May 2016. Ms McGowan has a wide range of experience in communications and journalism and has worked with NGOs and non-profits for over a decade in Canada as well as internationally. Prior to joining COL, she was working with Simon Fraser University as Communications Coordinator, Sustainability Office.



DR ELIZABETH MITCHELL

Dr Elizabeth (Betty) Mitchell became Learning and Business Development Manager on 1 April 2016. She has over 30 years of experience in distance education/open learning as well as international programmes and projects. This includes serving on the board of the Canadian Association for Distance Education and a term as its President. Prior to joining COL, she worked in director and manager positions at the Open Learning Agency, Athabasca University, Simon Fraser University and Douglas College.



MR JAMES ONYANGO

COL welcomes Mr James Onyango, Education Specialist on Agriculture and Livelihoods. He has vast experience in international development, working on programs that utilise open, distance and technology-mediated learning to improve health and food security, expand income, and create employment and wealth for marginalised farming communities, particularly women. He is a distinguished thought-leader in the field of 'Learning for Sustainable Development' having worked in this area since 2004 as project director, implementer and consultant for dozens of international development agencies.



DR SHAHID RASOOL

Dr Shahid Rasool became the new Director of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre (CEMCA) for Asia as of 1 June 2016. A former US Fulbright Fellow in Communication Technology, he has over 24 years of experience in teaching and research as well as the production and direction of educational films and the development of e-content. He was the director of the Educational Multimedia Research Centre at the University of Kashmir before joining CEMCA.

FAIR COMMENT



Maxim Jean-Louis
President –
Chief Executive Officer
Contact North |
Contact Nord, Canada

We need to rethink quality assurance

Quality in higher education is an essential requirement for effective learning. Quality must be evident in all aspects of a student's learning experience – how learning is enabled, how the institution supports learning, how student services are managed and delivered, how financial services and supports are delivered. Quality must be everywhere, all of the time.

Yet we approach the practice of quality assurance and assessment in a very traditional way. The focus is on plans, intentions, processes and outcomes. We pay too little attention to the student experience. Our concerns are traditionally around the following:

1. Quality of students admitted
2. Qualifications of faculty
3. Design of the programme and its “equivalence” to other similar programmes already operating
4. Management of processes within a programme – assessment rubrics, appeals, academic integrity and academic governance
5. Rigour of marking
6. Checking that course outputs match the intended course outcomes

“More specifically, we need to start looking at the skills, competencies and capabilities developed as a result of learning.”

We need to begin the process of rethinking of how we look at quality and start to make much more use of:

- Measures of student engagement and satisfaction
- Data analytics that track student activity and achievement – attendance, assignment behaviour, library behaviour, knowledge searching behaviour and so on
- Reflective assessments by students, focused on the efficacy of their learning

- Measures of student–instructor and student–student interactivity and related activities
- Measures of knowledge, skills, capabilities and competencies as a result of learning
- Assessments for learning, showing the rate and nature of the learning gains a student makes over the course of their studies
- Measures of faculty satisfaction with their conditions of practice
- Indicators of faculty engagement in academic decision making

These kinds of data are sometimes seen by assessors as part of the quality review process but rarely are seen as central to this work. Yet these are the essential features of what learning programmes, colleges and universities do, and they tell us much more about the quality of learning *as experienced* than many of the artefacts normally reviewed during quality assessments. These measures should become a central part of the quality assurance process in addition to those already used.

More specifically, we need to start looking at the skills, competencies and capabilities developed as a result of learning. Do they match what the programme designers and faculty members said they would do? Do they match the expectations that students, faculty members and employers have for the programme? Do they stand up against similar programmes? Now that more and more institutions are shifting to competency and capability assessment, this work becomes more manageable.

Finally, we need to look at the long-term impacts of learning. Do the knowledge, skills and capabilities serve the interests of the successful student five, 10 and 15 years after graduation? What social and community impact is a programme having?

As you see, these questions require a much more demanding, student-outcome-centred approach to quality. We are beginning to see elements of these components appearing in quality assurance processes, but it is time for a significant “sea change” in how we understand this work.

NEW RESOURCES



Open Educational Resources: Policy, Costs and Transformation

Edited by Fengchun Miao, Sanjaya Mishra and Rory McGreal, this book is part of COL's Perspectives Series and is a joint publication with UNESCO. It presents 15 case studies contributed by 29 OER researchers and policy makers from 15 countries across six continents.

Authors examine the implementation of the OER Paris Declaration 2012 through the thematic lenses of policy, costs and transformation. The book illuminates the impacts of OER on the costs of producing, distributing and providing access to learning materials, and shows how OER can transform the teaching and learning methodology mindset. Recommendations on key actions to be taken by policy makers, practitioners, OER developers and users are also outlined, particularly within the context of Education 2030.

<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2306>



Technology-Enabled Learning Implementation Handbook

This handbook has been developed to assist educational institutions to adopt appropriate policy, strengthen technology infrastructure, build the capacities of teachers to offer TEL courses, facilitate learners to take advantage of available technology and open educational resources for

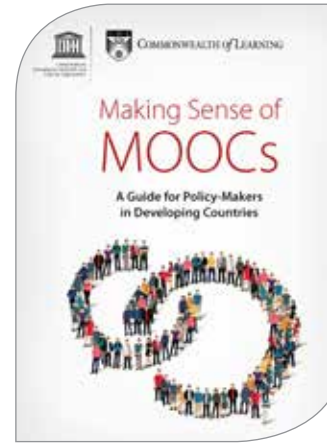
learning, and undertake a scholarly approach to the assessment and evaluation of TEL implementation. The objective is to provide a systematic methodology as well as evidence of learning in a TEL environment.

<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2363>

Making Sense of MOOCs: A Guide for Policy Makers in Developing Countries

This UNESCO–COL guide is designed to raise general awareness amongst policy makers in developing countries as to how massive open online courses might address their concerns and priorities, particularly in terms of access to affordable quality higher education and preparation of secondary school leavers for academic as well as vocational education and training.

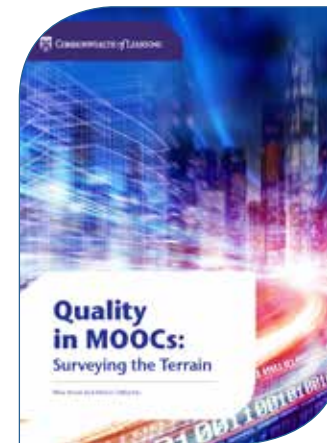
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Quality in MOOCs: Surveying the Terrain

Prepared by Nina Hood and Allison Littlejohn, this review of literature on the quality of MOOCs identifies quality measures and highlights some of the tensions surrounding notions of quality, as well as the need for new ways of thinking about and approaching quality in MOOCs. The review draws upon Biggs's (1993) 3P model – presage, process and product variables – to explore notions and dimensions of quality in relation to MOOCs.

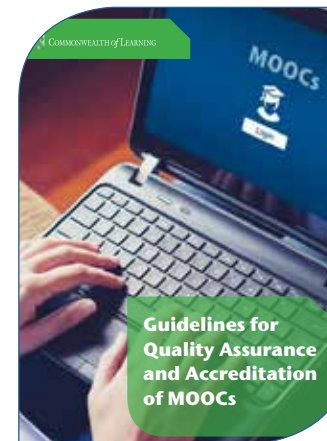
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Guidelines for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of MOOCs

These guidelines help the four stakeholder groups – governments, MOOC providers, learners and accreditation agencies – view MOOCs from their own perspective and identify the range of quality issues to be addressed to offer quality MOOCs. The issues were identified through a consultative process to assist various stakeholders in adopting quality practices. The guidelines are not prescriptive but instead provide the means for stakeholders to develop their own quality measures after gaining a clear understanding of MOOCs.

<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2362>



#TECHTRENDS

Blockchain: Is decentralised certification the future?

Online learning is gaining popularity in almost all parts of the world. A consequence is that learning takes place in many contexts, including the virtual classroom. Interactions in online forums, discussions on social networks such as Facebook or Twitter, and access to open educational resources and open access repositories also contribute to learning.

“Blockchain technology is viewed as a potentially powerful way to decentralise the Web.”

Tracking accomplishments and recording the evidence for them requires contextual and international recognition. E-portfolios and Open Badges are available options but are often not considered adequate. This has led leaders in technology-enabled learning, such as The Open University (UK) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to explore the use of an open-source platform for certification that is global in scope and accessible. It would be more like an infrastructure for online certification. The core technology here is called the blockchain.

A blockchain is an open, digital ledger. As a distributed ledger, it enables many stakeholders to post and maintain entries. Transactions can be grouped and identified with a particular signature. This is called a block. A new block identifies the signature on a previous block and links to it. Thus, a chain of blocks can be formed. A block in this chain necessarily refers to its previous block. The core technology in blockchain enables changes in the chain at various nodes to be recorded (almost simultaneously). This is built on the collaborative, peer-to-peer network of user computers that work on this distributed digital ledger. No intermediary agency is required to maintain the process.

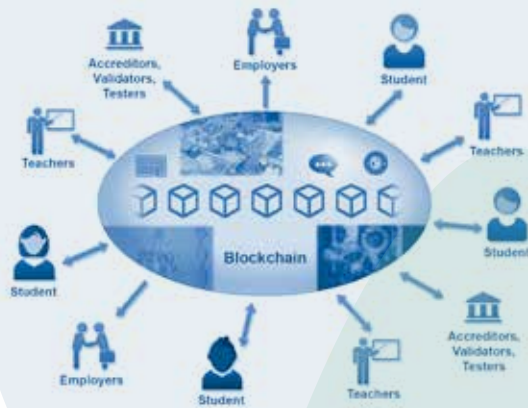
In higher education, it is possible for a learner and an institution to work together to create specific blocks. Such blocks will contain records of the learner's online

transactions, in the (virtual) classroom or in social spaces and elsewhere, with peers and mentors as well as with resources. The institution can sign the block with its cryptographic key. Once signed off, the institution has no role in furnishing the records. A learner can furnish a key to a potential employer, who can analyse the transactions to assess the suitability of the learner for employment. The records are not editable, preventing potentially fraudulent claims. Some academics do caution that wider availability of the unalterable records of a young person's online activities could limit the individual's work and career options at a future date.

A widely known use of blockchain is what are called cryptocurrencies, the most famous example of which is BitCoin. This is a currency that has no sovereign body or bank owning or controlling it yet is used in commercial transactions. (Some universities now accept fees in BitCoin.) The finance industry is keenly promoting blockchains as a way to reduce transaction costs.

More importantly, blockchain technology is viewed as a potentially powerful way to decentralise the Web. Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the Web protocol, has frequently expressed his concern that the Web is dominated by a small number of mega-actors. He, along with pioneers of today's Internet, advocates decentralisation to retain the unfragmented and open character of the Web. A recent article in *The Economist* (18 June 2016) points out that the technology for open, collaboratively maintained databases such as the blockchain can only get better, opening new opportunities for affordable and authentic certification in the world of online learning.

Diagram courtesy of Jon Linney and John Domingue, Knowledge Media Institute, The Open University, UK, <http://blockchain.open.ac.uk/>



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COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING
4710 Kingsway, Suite 2500
Burnaby, BC V5H 4M2 Canada
Tel: +1.604.775.8200 | Fax: +1.604.775.8210
E-mail: info@col.org | Web: www.col.org

Editor: Sparrow McGowan
Designer: Alex Hennig

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Chair: Dr. Linda Sissons, CNZM
President & CEO: Professor Asha S. Kanwar

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