

# Towards a Framework for Open Schooling



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As noted, I currently lead COL's Open Schooling initiative. I was asked to talk about a framework for open schooling provision.

## Key Questions

In working towards a framework for open schooling provision there are certain key questions we need to ask: who, why, what and how?

Who are the target learners and why is an open schooling needed for these learners?

What model/s of open schooling will be best suited for these learners?

How can establish such a model – who needs to be involved and what needs to be considered?

## Needs Analysis

Any new open schooling initiative should be informed by a needs analysis.

UNISA wishes to start at Grades 10 and 11 level.

If the target audience is out-of-school children of this age group, then we probably need to offer the approved school curriculum.

However, if we anticipate a significant number of older young people, not in employment nor in education and training, then we probably need to include approved subjects which have a more vocational or occupational lens which could prepare these learners for employment or self-employment.

We also need to think about what special provisions might be needed for learners from marginalised groups – such as girls, people with disabilities, learners from poor or rural contexts.

## World Bank

As the World bank has noted, there are many reasons why children do not access or drop out of schooling. It is not enough to establish an open school and expect these learners will all come back into schooling.

There is need to address the underlying causes of non-access or drop-outs. This suggests the need for awareness raising and outreach not just to the n but also their parents and their communities.

There is need to provide careful guidance pre-registration and careful induction on registration on a case-by-case basis.

We need to think about the learning pathways for reconnecting e.g. RPL for learners who dropped out before Grade 10, RPL for learners who just need one or two subjects, allowance to register for and complete one subject at a time ... trying to replicated the school system of registering for 10 subjects and then writing exams a year or two later will likely result in high drop-out and failure rates.

Learner support needs to be an integral part of the design – this will include peer support, institutional support and tutor support.

Cost is often a reason for drop out. Even in free public schools – there are often other costs, for example, transport, uniforms, textbooks and so on. We need to make open schooling as affordable as possible.

Peer mentoring and coaching can be an important way of improving retention and ensuring access turns into success.

Different learners may need to access open schooling in different ways. For example, print-based and contact support, digital and contact supported, blended or fully online.

### **COL OS Model**

COL's OS model is based on a theory of change indicating which inputs are needed to achieve what outputs, short-term outcomes, long-term outcomes and eventual impacts, It might take three or four years to get there. Year one to develop the content, year two to recruit learners, year three to produce graduates. There needs to be an M&E strategy to check what is and is not working, to adjust and to improve.

### **Core**

Open Schooling uses open and distance learning methods.

At the core of such approaches is the integration of content, support and assessment.

With respect to content, we need to use OER and open access resources as much as possible to reduce costs for learners. They should not need to buy additional textbooks. Text and graphics will still form the core of the content as these can be accessed in print and digitally offline.

However, we might also supplement with broadcasts whether in partnership with the South African Broadcasting Corporation or through web-based approaches.

For learners with both devices and internet access, we can build in online interactivity and forums uses software such as h5p and big blue button.

Assessment should then be used to support learning formatively rather than being a separate summative process. We need to think about building in quizzes, portfolios, and rubrics to support self-assessment and peer assessment and include badges for key milestones to motivate the learners. Learners should be able to get micro-credential recognition for significant learning achievements less than the full matric qualification but then we need to think about use of blockchain technology to ensure the credibility of these badges and micro-credentials.

Integrated throughout the process from pre-registration to registration to learning and assessment there should be appropriate support mediated in various ways.

## **SWAYAM MOOC**

India has the largest open schooling system catering for around 500,000 learners per year through the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and its twenty affiliated state open schools. NIOS uses the government sponsored SWAYAM MOOC platform and, as noted, course offerings have four key components: eTutorials, eContent, self-assessment and discussion forums.

### **An Integrated Schooling Sub-system**

The interface between virtual open schooling provision and face-to-face schooling allows for hybrid or blended learning provision for those who need more or less support or where physical schools cannot offer all the subjects students need.

### **OS System**

As noted, a central open schooling online system can also support extended blended or hybrid learning opportunities with hub schools in urban areas supporting cluster schools in rural areas.

### **Framework**

It is suggested that there are four key sub-systems for effective provision of open schooling: the materials and learner support sub-systems which characterise ODL provision, the regulatory sub-system to ensure that what we offer is accredited and the logistical sub-system to ensure we have the staff and other resources we need.

These map to suggested quality criteria as illustrated:

- Policy and planning (Regulatory Sub-System)
- Learners (Learner Sub-System)
- Programme development (Materials Sub-System)
- Course design (Materials Sub-System)
- Course materials (Materials Sub-System)
- Assessment (Learner Sub-System)
- Learner support (Learner Sub-System)
- Human resource strategy (Logistical Sub-System)
- Management and administration (Regulatory Sub-System)
- Collaborative relationships (Logistical Sub-System)

- Quality assurance (Regulatory Sub-System) & M&E
- Advocacy and information dissemination (Regulatory Sub-System)
- Results – cohort analysis (Regulatory Sub-System) (COL, 2010).

### **What Technology?**

Obviously, we are going to use technology. Tony Bates offers a useful rubric for making informed choices as does the Pedagogy Wheel developed by Alan Carrington.

### **Key Questions**

So, now we can nuance our key questions as follows. I have already started a discussion with Prof Mkhize on these questions:

1. Who is our primary target audience in the first instance?
2. What will we offer them? And how will we ensure both quality and accreditation?
3. How will we recruit / motivate them (their parents/communities) to sign up?
4. How will they register and with whom?
5. Will there be fees to be paid? If so, how and how much?
6. How will we support them to ensure we have high rates of retention, success and progression – and how will we track cohorts in this regard and intervene with just-in time support?
7. What special support arrangements will we make for marginalised people e.g. girls, poor, rural, people with disabilities etc.?
8. How will successful candidates be certificated?
9. Who will need to do what by when (including partners other than COL e.g. Ministry, Umalusi, SAQA, SACAI, other support partners)?

### **Links to Useful COL OS Resources**

Information about COL's Open Schooling initiative can be accessed here:

<https://www.col.org/education/open-schooling/>

Key COL open schooling publications can be accessed here:

C:\Users\tmays\OneDrive - Commonwealth of Learning\Document\Comosa

And you can engage with the wider open schooling community through the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA) here:

<https://www.col.org/projects/commonwealth-open-schooling-association-comosa/>

Thank you.