

Maximizing the cost-effectiveness, cost-efficiency and sustainability of educational systems

Open schools are not just concerned with increasing access to secondary schooling, but also with equalising educational opportunities for citizens regardless of their geographic location or socio-economic background. Through a well-articulated policy, broad consensus on the most appropriate direction for the future development of open schooling can be achieved at a national level, while eliminating duplication and overlap. A policy can also facilitate the planning for joint initiatives that maximise the value obtained from limited state funding.



HOW IS COL HELPING?



Encouraging the growth of open schooling is one of the eight key initiatives outlined in the Commonwealth of Learning's Three-Year Plan for 2009–2012 (*Learning for Development*).

Recognising the importance of partnerships in meeting the need for a dramatic expansion in access to all levels of schooling and vocational education, COL initiated the establishment of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA). It is a dynamic community of institutions/organisations dedicated to the development of open schooling as a means of providing educational opportunities for all. It supports the view that open schooling has the capacity to expand access, to promote equity, to deliver high-quality and effective services and to reduce the unit costs of education at all levels.

Building on the flexibility that is a primary strength of open schooling, COL, with the generous support of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has invested in the development of open educational resources (OERs), bringing new technologies and collaborative tools to teachers in developing countries to address the challenges they are facing in providing good quality education and effective integration of technology in the classroom. The development of OERs will not only address the issue of access, it will also help in enhancing the quality of education in both the conventional and open schooling systems.

For more information:

Commonwealth of Learning
1055 West Hastings Street, Suite 1200
Vancouver, BC V6E 2E9 CANADA

Tel: +1 604 775 8200

Fax: +1 604 775 8210

Email: info@col.org

Frances Ferreira
Education Specialist, Open Schooling

Web: www.col.org/OpenSchooling



Open Schooling

Why Open Schools are Re-emerging as a New Model



COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING
learning for development

Open Schooling

WHY ARE OPEN SCHOOLS RE-EMERGING AS A NEW MODEL?

Open Schools are urgently needed to provide access to education for millions of children who currently have no access to any formal schooling. While the world average for secondary school enrolment is 66%, the Gross Enrolment Rate in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is 34%.

(EFA Global Monitoring report 2010: Reaching the marginalized, UNESCO, p.80-89)

Access remains inequitable, especially in rural areas with girls being particularly disadvantaged. As governments stretch their resources to make progress towards the Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education by 2015, it is unlikely that the expansion of conventional secondary schooling will be a priority. And even if one new secondary school were to be built every month for the next ten years, the increased demand will not be met.



Open schooling, as defined by the Commonwealth of Learning involves “the physical separation of the school-level learner from the teacher, and the use of unconventional teaching methodologies, and information and communications technologies (ICTs), to bridge the separation and provide the education and training”.

We call it open schooling rather than open and distance schooling because openness and flexibility are more important features than physical separation.

Open schools can be either complementary or an alternative to the conventional school system. Some open schools aim to enrich the classroom experience rather than create a substitute for it, but flexibility with and complementing the conventional system are both important features of open schooling.

- **As an alternative**, open schools can reach new markets through an expanded curriculum. They can provide a different, more adult-relevant learning experience for older students, who never had a chance to attend or complete their formal education at school level, or a more vocational-oriented programme for out-of-school youth.
- **As a complementary system**, open schools offer the same curriculum for children and youth who, for a variety of reasons, have not been a part of the formal, classroom-based school system.

Open schooling can be adopted for a range of purposes and it can use a variety of technologies and approaches ... and it can be applied very differently from one jurisdiction to another. It seems clear that open schools work better if they are given a degree of autonomy and not run as branches of government.

(Sir John Daniel, Preface, Open Schooling in the 21st Century, Commonwealth of Learning, 2009; p.vi)

WHAT CAN OPEN SCHOOLING DO TO HELP MEET THE CHALLENGE?

Increasing the breadth and equality of access

Where traditional schools cannot respond to the high demand for education, open schools can be a key strategy for increasing volume of access and can do so moderately, significantly or dramatically. Cognisant of the fact that secondary school students require more support than university-level distance learners, open schools rely on an extensive network of study centres where learners are supported on a regular basis through contact sessions.

Open schools, through cross-enrolment (that is, simultaneous enrolment in conventional schooling and open schooling) will alleviate the burden on conventional schools and allow them to better respond to demand.

Ensuring that the curriculum provided to secondary school learners is relevant to the needs of their various constituencies

Given the huge number of out-of-school children at the secondary level, we are conscious that expanding access through increased enrolment solves only part of the problem. Accommodating significantly larger numbers of secondary school learners also results in increased pressure on governments to redefine the way in which secondary education can address societal needs through diversification of the curriculum. Developing and implementing such a strategy will ensure that the needs both of the target groups and of national development are met.

Critical to achieving these goals is the availability of not only academic but also technical and vocational programming. Open schools show that they are both achieving significant accomplishments in this regard, and that they also have tremendous potential.

(Abrioux & Ferreira, Conclusion, Perspective Series on Distance Education Open Schooling in the 21st Century, p.196)

Improving the quality of teaching and learning

Since quality assurance is a major concern for policy makers, it should be reassuring that open schools can offer the same or better quality than their conventional schooling counterparts. Solid open schooling policy is required, however, to help define minimum standards of service delivery and assure that open schools adhere to them.