

**Knowledge Management Roundtable
The Commonwealth of Learning
Vancouver, 19-21 October 1999**

Roundtable Summary

Open and distance learning is being employed increasingly frequently at all levels and sectors of education and training throughout the world, and is generating a correspondingly great amount of data and information. It is also increasingly converging with conventional education, so that ODL is becoming progressively more embedded in all kinds of educational provision. The situation presents knowledge managers with a formidable task, which is exacerbated by the fact that financial resources are not being provided at a similar rate in support of their activities.

Against this background, the immediate stimulus for the Knowledge Management Roundtable was the Commonwealth of Learning's desire to review the current and future role of its Information Resource Centre and to investigate ways in which COL may be able to promote co-operative and collaborative networking in the Commonwealth. The Roundtable gathered together a group of experts in information and knowledge management to provide COL with a global context within which to plan the further development of the IRC so as to best serve the interests of the Commonwealth. A broader intended outcome of the Roundtable was the development of proposals for future actions by COL and for consideration by other agencies.

The topic under review in the Roundtable and in a preceding two-week computer conference was the management and development of information services aimed at a varied audience: open and distance learning practitioners present and future; planners and policy makers; national, regional and local governments; and all organisations and agencies with an interest in setting up or funding open and distance education programmes or projects. A continuous theme running through the group's deliberations was the particular needs of developing countries, particularly in relation to access. Following are five major features of the Roundtable:

- **Convergence.** Open and distance learning manifests itself in an enormous variety of different forms, at all levels of education and training, at all points on the technology spectrum, across the world. At the same time, the recent spectacular developments in information and communications technology are creating new opportunities for traditional librarians and knowledge managers alike to provide value-added services to users. The Roundtable brought together representatives with a variety of perspectives and experience in different organisations and institutions, and from a wide range of cultural and technological settings.
- **Continuation.** The Commonwealth Open Learning Interactive Network for Knowledge Sharing (COLINKS), whose proposed establishment has emerged from the Roundtable, will link existing resources in partner institutions and from other sources and will make them accessible to a wider audience, as well as providing the vehicle for future value-added services.
- **Conversation.** The groundwork for the Roundtable was laid in a two-week computer conference run by COL from September 22-October 6 1999, in which many of the most important issues for discussion were identified. The format for the Roundtable comprised a

series of presentations by knowledge manager participants, following which an agenda was devised which covered the mission, functions, strategies and action points necessary for setting up a Commonwealth Open Learning Interactive Network for Knowledge Sharing (COLINKS) supported by COL and its Information Resource Centre.

- **Concepts.** Several characteristics were identified, during the computer conference and in the course of face-to-face discussions, as being critical dimensions in the Roundtable debate and in any resultant network. These included quality, accessibility, and sustainability.
- **Commitment to Action.** The purpose of the Roundtable was to explore ways in which COL might develop its Information Resource Centre, and also in which it might promote international co-operation and collaboration in networking. Agreement was reached amongst the Roundtable participants on the need to develop a Commonwealth Open Learning Interactive Network for Knowledge Sharing (COLINKS) supported by COL through its IRC. Details of possible inputs to the network, together with indicative costs, will be provided to COL as soon as possible, and at all events before March 1 2000.

Key Principles

Among the important principles made and reinforced during the Roundtable were:

- **The importance of standards:** for facilitating mutual exchange of ODL information and to conform to international protocols
- **The use of new technology:** emphasis on the importance of a COL network making use of the latest available technology wherever appropriate
- **The use of other technologies:** as a corollary to the previous principle, that a COL network should make use of any of the full range of technologies in situations where this policy is appropriate
- **Access:** ensuring the best possible access to ODL information resources for all users across the Commonwealth
- **Sharing:** making partners' existing ODL information resources as widely accessible as possible
- **Special requirements:** taking continuous account of the special requirements of individual Commonwealth states, such as small island states
- **Adding value:** wherever possible, adding value to existing ODL information resources, and creating new added value resources as possible and appropriate
- **The importance of lifelong and lifewide learning:** the importance of lifelong and lifewide learning should be continuously borne in mind during the development of the network and of information resources which will become part of it.

Action Ideas

Roundtable participants developed a number of action ideas. Those proposed for early implementation included:

- COL to appoint at least one additional staff member to work full-time on tasks associated with establishing and maintaining the network
- An architectural plan, including a web plan, to be drawn up for the network
- Protocols to be developed for the transmission of information from partners to the network co-ordinator
- A list of partner obligations to be drawn up
- A list of services which can be provided, together with indicative costs, to be sent to COL by partners as soon as possible
- A plan for evaluating the work of the network to be drawn up.

--Prepared by Dr. Keith Harry and agreed to by participants, 13 December 1999

Roundtable Report

Participants



Knowledge Management Roundtable participants

Back row, left to right:

Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, COL staff

Mr. Brian Long, COL staff

Ms. Elizabeth F. Watson, Librarian, Learning Resource Centre, The University of the West Indies, Barbados

Dr. N.C. (Nick) Farnes, Director, International Centre for Distance Learning, The Open University, U.K.

Dr. (Mrs.) Neela Jagannathan, University Librarian and Information Officer, Indira Gandhi National Open University, India

Dr. Keith Harry, roundtable facilitator, U.K. (former Director, International Centre for Distance Learning)

Ms. Jenny Glennie, Director, South African Institute for Distance Education, South Africa

Ms. Ellen L. Bunker, Distance Education Specialist, Education and Technology Team, Human Development Network, The World Bank

Professor Olugbemiro J. Jegede, Director, Centre for Research in Distance and Adult Learning, The Open University of Hong Kong SAR, China

Dr. Rory McGreal, Director, TeleEducation NB, Department of Advanced Education and Labour, New Brunswick, Canada

Mrs. Angela Kwan, roundtable co-ordinator, COL staff

Front row, left to right:

Dr. Esther Williams, University Librarian, Laucala Campus, The University of the South Pacific, Fiji Islands

Mr. Ivor Lloyd, Head of Information Services, University of Abertay Dundee, Scotland, U.K.

Mr. Rod Tyrer, Senior Education Adviser, Education Division, Department for International Development, U.K.

Mr. Nick Gao, COL staff

Missing from photograph:

Mr. David Walker, COL staff

19 October 1999

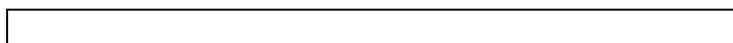
Following opening addresses by Raj Dhanarajan, President of COL, and Keith Harry, Roundtable Convenor, the first day comprised presentations by other invited participants: Ellen Bunker (World Bank, Washington, USA), Nick Farnes (International Centre for Distance Learning, UK Open University), Nic Gao (COL Information Resource Centre), Jenny Glennie (South African Institute for Distance Education), Neela Jagannathan (Indira Gandhi National Open University, India), Olugbemiro Jegede (Centre for Research in Distance and Adult Learning, Open University of Hong Kong), Ivor Lloyd (University of Abertay Dundee, Scotland), Rory McGreal (TeleCampus, New Brunswick, Canada), Elizabeth Watson (University of the West Indies), and Esther Williams (University of the South Pacific). COL staff participating in the Roundtable (whole- or part-time) or observing were Raj Dhanarajan, Angela Kwan (Roundtable Co-ordinator), Nic Gao, Brian Long, John Bartram, Krishna Alluri, David Walker, and Dave Wilson. Also present as an observer during the three days was Rod Tyrer of the UK Department for International Development.

20 October 1999

The issue of access to new forms of technology had been raised on more than one occasion during the preceding day, and appeared to underlie so many areas of the Roundtable's agenda that it was included as a definitive item in the agenda for the second day. The meeting concluded that although it was imperative that any network formed as a result of the Roundtable should take advantage of the latest technology, it was equally important that at the same time due consideration should be taken of the needs of institutions and organisations with limited technological resources.

The functions of the proposed network were then discussed. Based on the morning's discussions, Keith Harry prepared the following diagram showing the functions of the network co-ordinator in the COL Information Resource Centre (IRC), of the network partners, and of the network itself. The diagram was slightly revised following discussion.

Proposed Commonwealth network



Network functions Listserv (news, discussion) Current awareness Links to databases <i>plus other sources & resources</i>	
Network co-ordinator functions Worldwide monitoring Receiving and placing incoming information on network Maintaining & adding links in network Providing proactive guidance on standards	Partner functions Monitoring (news, publications, events, knowledge) Maintaining regional ODL resource collection Submitting selected information to network co-ordinator Distributing local <i>plus</i> network information within the region

The day concluded with an attempt to draft a mission statement for the proposed network.

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The day began with a discussion on Keith Harry's draft mission statement. A number of additions and amendments were proposed, and Olugbemi Jegede offered to draft a preamble and to redraft the mission statement. Two web sites, for the US-based Eduport and for the UK Marchmont project, were examined online with a view to the nature of the future design of the network site. The necessary work will be part of the responsibilities of the network co-ordinator.

The meeting continued with a detailed examination of the strategies for implementing the network functions identified on the previous day. It was concluded that the additional responsibilities attached to the post of network co-ordinator would necessitate the appointment by COL of at least one additional person in the IRC, whose activities would require technical support. While many of the network functions of partners in various parts of the world would involve an expansion of present activities rather than the development of new activities, there would also be significant resource implications for each partner institution. Specifically, additional resources would be required in partner institutions in support of travel, computer capacity and management, and staffing. Another very important factor was sustainability. In addition, it was anticipated that partners would operate at one of two levels; some partners would be able to undertake only the monitoring function, and not the remaining three. The assistance of national and regional associations of distance teaching institutions would be sought in connection with the distribution function.

The anticipated obligations of partners were discussed, and it was agreed that prospective partners should prove themselves capable of fulfilling the functions previously identified for partners. The issue of standards, which recurred throughout the Roundtable, was raised in connection with the types of resources which partners would be expected to collect and on which they would provide information to the network co-ordinator. These included books, journals and other published forms of resources, together with reports, conference papers and proceedings, and grey literature, and selective audiovisual materials. The formats which would be used for the submission of different types of information would be developed in accordance with advice from librarians.

Raj Dhanarajan, addressing the meeting at the beginning of the afternoon session, indicated that prospective partners comprising institutions represented in the Roundtable should provide COL by March 1 2000 with an indication of the level of services they could offer, together with details of indicative costs. The earliest starting date for the network is June 1

2000. It is hoped that a prototype can be produced for demonstration at the November 2000 Halifax, Nova Scotia, Commonwealth Ministers of Education Meeting.

Possible means of monitoring and managing the network were discussed. An international expert advisory group might be complemented by a technical management group and also a user group. The groups should operate primarily via electronic communications. Nick Farnes and Olugbemiro Jegede will work on a list of performance indicators to assist the monitoring process.

Finally, a series of action points were identified:

- COL should appoint at least one additional staff member to set the network under way
- an architectural plan, including a web site plan, should be constructed (as part of the responsibility of the network co-ordinator)
- protocols for the provision of information by partners to the network co-ordinator should be drawn up with advice from librarians
- a list of partner obligations should be finalised for the use of all partners present and future
- details of the level of services which can be provided, together with indicative costs, should be provided by prospective partners to assist COL's budget planning
- a plan for evaluating the work of the network should be developed (to be drafted by Nick Farnes and Olugbemiro Jegede).

--Prepared by Dr. Keith Harry and agreed to by participants, 13 December 1999

Proposal:

Commonwealth Open Learning Interactive Network for Knowledge Sharing (COLINKS)

Preamble

Taking cognisance of a number of distinct but inter-related current global developments, which include:

- the current global movement from an industrial-based economy to a knowledge-based society;
- the advancement in information and communications technology;
- the continual explosion of knowledge in all areas of human endeavour;
- the convergence of open and distance learning into mainstream education; and
- the new emphasis on lifelong and lifewide learning,

it is imperative that the Commonwealth recognises the impact of all these developments on the quality of life of its citizens and therefore put in place a mechanism to manage the various sources and variety of knowledge available in the Commonwealth.

The establishment of a Commonwealth Open Learning Interactive Network for Knowledge Sharing (COLINKS), in addition to meeting other emerging urgent needs within the Commonwealth, fits within the mission of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), especially its mandate to 'encourage the development and sharing of open learning/ distance education materials, expertise, technologies, and other resources'.

Knowledge management is the capturing, processing, storing and sharing of data, information and knowledge through reliable, fast access. It is increasingly being utilised in many areas of individual, organisational and national operations, including strategic planning, decision-making, training, control and effectiveness. Knowledge management can impact significantly on the need for mass education, access and equity, cost-effectiveness and efficient systems of delivery of instruction. This has tremendous potential for enhancing quality of education and training for all citizens of the Commonwealth.

Mission Statement

The Commonwealth Open Learning Interactive Network for Knowledge Sharing (COLINKS) is committed to taking forward the information/ knowledge provisions of COL's mission with a view to increasing the opportunities for rapid access to knowledge through the fostering of co-operative and collaborative alliances of knowledge management organisations (including libraries, database providers and specialist centres) using appropriate and emerging information communications technologies across the Commonwealth.

Objectives

The objectives of the Network are:

- to increase access to knowledge about open and distance learning through promoting and extending the use of ICT and other technologies in member countries
- to keep abreast with knowledge creation and with the full range of knowledge processes
- to operate a series of value-added services based on the continuous supply of information from regional partners throughout the Commonwealth
- to make a wide range of Commonwealth resources immediately accessible to member-country users.

Functions

The Network will seek to achieve the above objectives through the following means:

The network co-ordinator in the COL Information Resource Centre will:

- implement the plans for the network and for the network web site, and will enhance the system according to the requirements of the network
- receive and place incoming information provided by network partners through electronic and other means on the network
- continuously monitor international open and distance learning sources with a view to identifying information for inclusion on the network
- provide proactive advice and assistance to partners and prospective partners on standards applicable in the network
- set up and arrange for the moderation of electronic action learning groups tackling specific issues and sharing experience.

Network partners will:

- monitor news, publications, events and knowledge in their particular geographical location
- maintain collections of ODL resource materials from their country or region
- submit selected information to the network in appropriate pre-determined format
- distribute local and network information on a regular basis within their country or region
- keep up-to-date existing literature, courses and institution databases
- assist in setting up a good practice database and in capturing relevant experience and activities
- participate in action learning groups, and suggest relevant documents and examples demonstrating good practice.

Action

COL and the first group of network partners will sign an agreement of collaboration by June 1 2000.

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