



United Nations
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COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION (CI) SECTOR

UNESCO/COL GUIDELINES ON OER IN HIGHER EDUCATION



The 2009 World Conference on Higher Education: The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research For Societal Change and Development (UNESCO, Paris, 5–8 July 2009) noted that open and distance learning (ODL) approaches and information and communication technologies (ICT) present opportunities to widen access to quality education, particularly when Open Educational Resources (OER) can be readily shared by many countries and higher education institutions (Communiqué, 8 July 2009).

At the 35th Session of the UNESCO General Conference (October 2009), the United States of America put forth a Draft Resolution 35C/DR.40 making a call for the strengthening of national capacities and ICT enhanced-learning content and materials such as open educational resources¹

In 2010 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) launched the initiative: *Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity* to expand understanding of OER² by educational decision makers and quality assurance experts so as to promote their wider use. This is an intersectoral activity undertaken by the Education and Communication and Information Sectors.

The focus of 2011 activities in this initiative has been the development of 'UNESCO/COL Guidelines on OER in Higher Education'. These Guidelines aim to provide policy recommendations of best practice for key higher education stakeholders (governments, higher education institutions, teaching staff, students and student bodies, quality assurance bodies and accreditation bodies as well as academic recognition bodies).

These Guidelines have been developed through an intensive inter-regional consultation process involving representatives of the different stakeholder groups and held in conjunction with a series of major higher education meetings.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

These guidelines outline key issues and suggestions for integrating OER into higher education³. Their purpose is to encourage educational stakeholders to invest in the production, adaptation, and use of OER, while bringing them into the mainstream of higher education, to improve the quality of curricula and teaching and to reduce costs. These guidelines are a Secretariat Document, and aim to provide policy advice on how the potential of OER can be harnessed to support quality teaching and learning.

¹ 35C/DR.40 available at : <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001839/183947e.pdf>

² Open educational resources (OER) are materials used to support education that may be freely accessed, reused, modified, and shared by anyone.

³ OER is not synonymous with online learning or e-learning. Many open resources being produced currently –while shareable in a digital format – are also printable. Given the bandwidth and connectivity challenges common in some developing countries, a high percentage of resources will be shared as printable resources, rather than being designed solely for use in e-learning.