Course content development models for Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

Introduction

Over the last thirty-seven (37) years, the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) has thrived to build up a strong image as one of the state universities providing high quality education. In contrast to other state universities, the OUSL has achieved its success through a challenging task of delivering programmes through Open and Distance Learning (ODL). One of the major strengths of this achievement is producing high quality course materials which are used not only by OUSL students but also by students and teachers of other higher educational universities / institutions across the country.

Course design and development is the **prime duty** of the academic staff of the OUSL. Assuring the quality of instructional material developed is equally important to ensure a high standard in teaching and learning (Senate Memo – VV/143/10). Hence, quality assurance is embedded in the course design and development process by getting feedback from relevant stakeholders such as students and teachers at various stages; prior for printing (developmental testing or pilot testing), at the end of the first cycle (materials evaluation/course evaluation) and continuously improving the programme/course throughout (programme/course evaluation).

Course Material Development Models

The OUSL has been predominantly following the "write from scratch" (self-instructional material) model where the learning materials are developed by a team of experts through course teams. The steps involved in the course design and development process of this model is given in Annexure 1.

However, over the years through research and development, various ODL institutions world over have adopted different types of models to develop course materials. Even at the OUSL some of the courses are now being offered unofficially using course materials that have been developed other than using the "write from scratch" model due to various reasons; including rapid change in existing subject content, emergence of new subject fields, need to develop course materials within a short period, etc. It is widely accepted that the traditional "write from scratch" model takes longer duration to develop quality course contents. Further, with the proliferation of Open Educational

Resources (OER), quality course contents are now freely available for most of the subject areas to reuse.

Taking all these aspects into consideration, the University Course Development Committee (UCDC) at its 35th meeting held on 3 March 2016, discussed different strategies to improve the quality of OUSL course materials and also look at the different models of course content development that is being practiced by ODL institutions world-over. It is envisaged that based on these models, the OUSL should take policy decisions on future course of action on course content development at the OUSL.

The purpose of this memo is to provide information on different types of course content development models practiced by ODL institutions in the world and for the OUSL to take reasoned decisions on the model/s it should adopt to develop course contents. Some of the models practiced by the ODL institutions are presented in Annexure 2.

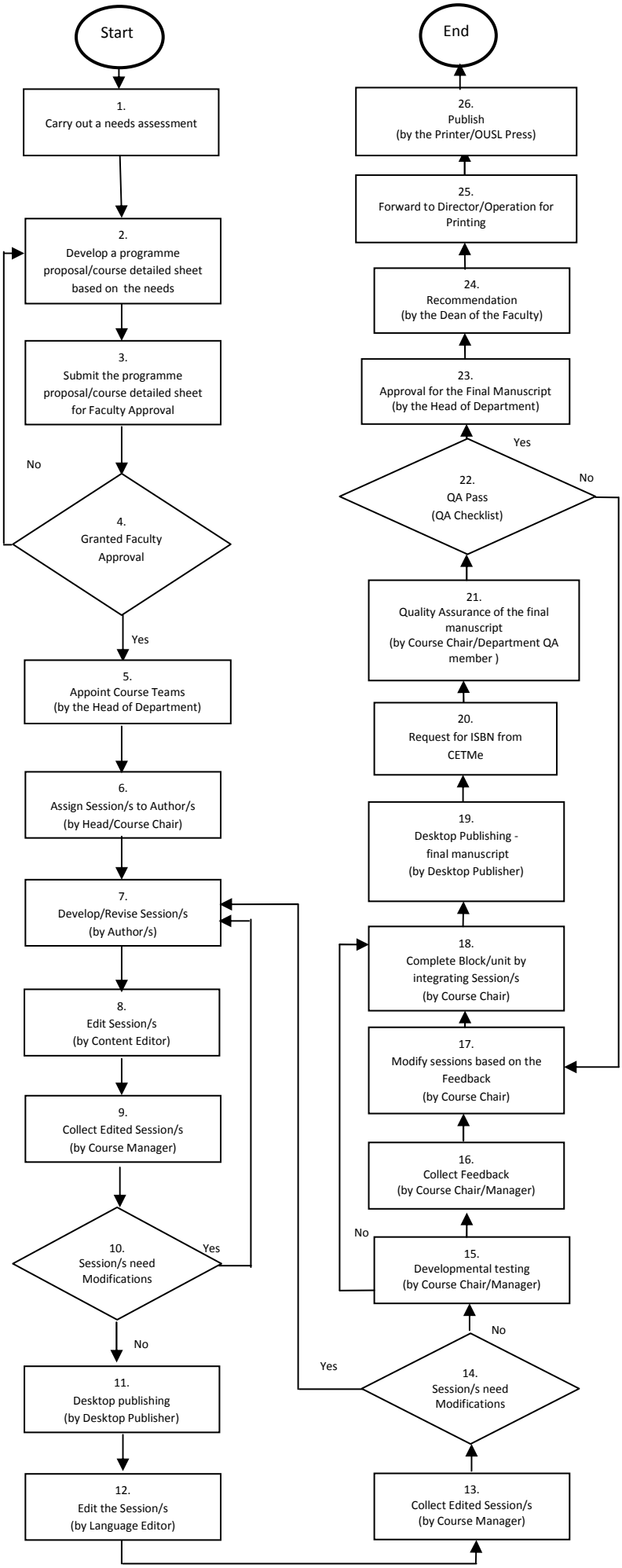
This memo is submitted to the Senate with the comments received by Faculties for further deliberation to take policy decisions on course content development at the OUSL.

Conclusion

The models presented in Annexure 2 are not intended as 'best practice' examples, but as illustrations of the range of options available to academic staff for the consideration and adaptation when deciding on how to provide content to their students.

The department/faculty can have the option of selecting the most appropriate course content development model/s depending on the discipline, learners, availability of the learning resources, expertise in the discipline etc. in order to provide effective education in an efficient manner. However, the processes and the QA mechanism need to be regularized and to comply with specified OUSL Quality Standards.

Annexure 1 – Steps in the course design development process (Print)



Annexure 2 - Types of Course Content Development Models practiced by ODL Institutions

The following section briefly highlights the important points of different models.

Model 1: Write from scratch (Self-instructional material) – (*Rowntree, 1990, 1992)*

- Basic Model (Print course material is linearly sequenced through course units)
- Developed Model (other media are integrated with core Print course materials) - *Lawless, C (1994).*

Components to be included

- Introduction to the Course (Advance Organizer for the course)
- Introduction to the unit (Advance Organizer for the unit)
- Session
    - Advance organizer for the session
    - Content of instruction
        - User friendly language with conversational style
    - Activities (SAQs/ITQ) with feedback
    - Summary
    - Learning outcomes
    - Recommended reading

Advantages

- Total ownership by the OUSL
- Complete control of the content by the OUSL
- Complete control of future use and adaptation
- Easily modify the content without any obligation
- Authentic material with local examples, case studies etc. to suit the OUSL learners
- Quality product through course team approach
- Can sell rights to the materials to other organizations

Disadvantages

- Development time 2-3 years
- Costly
- Needs the expertise in writing course materials

Requirements

- Need to obtain copyright clearance from the publishers when and if necessary (Figures, tables etc.)
- Avoid plagiarism when writing the materials.
- Need to adhere to the OUSL standards and the OUSL House Style.

Model 2: Adapt an existing ODL course (Rowntree, 1994)

Components to be included

- All the components are in-built as it is an existing ODL course
- Acknowledgements including copyright notices and credits for the original ODL course.

Advantages

- Can offer the course immediately (faster) if there are no modifications
- Less costly than writing own course materials from scratch
- local teachers have access to quality content which are not available locally

Disadvantages

- No control about the original materials
- No ownership
- Cannot deliver the course when the original materials is out of print or out of stock (if materials are taken directly without any customization)
- Need customizing when and if necessary

Requirements

- Have to get copyright clearance
- Have to customize the materials through selecting the appropriate materials, then make the necessary changes, carry out a pilot and revise accordingly.
- Obtain permission to make the changes to suit the OUSL learners
- When the original publishers modify the content then the original copyright clearance is no longer valid and has to be obtained again.

Model 3: Developing Study Guides

Produce a wrap-round guide to an existing non-ODL resource such as a textbook or any other learning resources - *Rowntree (1994)*

Study guides are written to guide learners through an existing resource such as a 'reader', or through a selection of resource materials - *Race (1995)*

Components to be included

Study advice on how to use the existing non-ODL material (textbook/s, AV, multimedia etc) with details

- Copyright Notices (clearance of the materials including figures and tables)
- Introduction to the course (Course Overview)
    - Course Learning Outcomes
    - Concept maps/other diagrams showing how the main topics and ideas are related
    - General course information
    - Course materials
        - Print Study Guide and/or Electronic Study Guide
        - Textbook or Readings (Course Reader)
        - Commentary (additional notes on Audio/videos/Interactive Multimedia - IMM)
        - Web resources (URLs)
    - Advise on accessing online components (if any online components)
    - Suggestions for how to be successful in this course
    - Course schedule (weekly basis, required readings, assignments)
    - Course requirements (exams, assignments, online discussions, participation grade etc.)
    - Evaluation and Grading criteria or policies
    - Instructions for practical work
    - About the Course Team including authors of the study guide
    - Tutors
    - Learning Activities
        - Assignments
        - Online components (discussions individual/group projects, practice quizzes etc.)
- Introduction to Units/Weeks
    - Introduction
    - Required Reading/s
        - Chapter of a Set book /Reader
        - Additional media elements such as an audio, video or interactive multimedia (IMM)
        - Links to local resources/local case studies
        - Web resources (URLs)

- Introduction to the main topics
    - Clear explanations or elaborations or contrasting viewpoints
    - Illustrations
    - Activities and self-tests
    - Feedback on such activities
    - Alternative examples (especially local)
    - Assessment material
    - Assignments for discussions with tutors and colleagues
    - Summary
    - Learning outcomes
    - Glossary (at the end of the first unit)
- Final Wrap-up at the end of the last unit/week
- References

Advantages

- Very fast
- Less expensive
- Can introduce new topics quickly and easily
- Easily updated with new editions of the original set books/readers

Disadvantages

- No control about the original materials
- No ownership
- May produce a clumsy learning package
- Difficult to offer the course when the original materials is out of print or out of stock
- Need to revise the study guide every time the original material is changed

Requirements

- Either OUSL provide the set textbook or request students to purchase the book/s of any texts
- Negotiate with the publisher of the copyright to let the OUSL use their material as part of the course
- When the original publishers modify the content then the original copyright clearance is no longer valid and has to be obtained again.
- Need to adhere to the OUSL standards and the OUSL House Style.

Model 4: Produce a wrap-round guide for OER

Components to be included

- Study advice on how to use OER (as text, audio, videos, animations, simulations etc.)
- Include all the necessary components referred in the Model 3.

Advantages

- Very fast
- Costs for production is zero
- No copyright clearance

Disadvantages

- Difficulty in finding relevant OER for all courses
- Need to select OER from reputed institutions
- Need to customize to suit the OUSL students
- Need to rely on OER with CC BY SA license
- May be relevant OER are not editable even with appropriate license.

Requirement

- Need to adhere to the OUSL standards and the OUSL House Style.

References

Race, P (1995). *The Open Learning Handbook*. Kogan Page: London.

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