OPEN UNIVERSITIES: THE NEXT PHASE OF INNOVATION?

Alan Tait, Emeritus Professor of Distance Education and Development, Open University UK
1969: A GREAT YEAR

Apollo 11: first man on moon

Open to people, places, methods and ideas
FIRST MOVER ADVANTAGE FROM 1970’S: INNOVATION

Vision and mission
Innovation in learning and teaching
Innovation in technologies for teaching
Innovation in educational logistics
Scale
Embedded innovation
EROSION OF FIRST MOVER ADVANTAGE

Established universities use blended learning

New entrants with online programmes

Innovation with MOOCs

Digital revolution has brought technology on to all campuses

Shared vision for mass Higher Education systems
OPEN UNIVERSITIES TODAY

More than 60, in 40 or more countries

4.4m learners in 27 Commonwealth open universities

?8m worldwide

Asia has most, then Europe

Some important exceptions: USA, Russia, Australia, France

Mega universities: More than 100,000 students
COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

14 Vice-chancellors, Rectors or Presidents

Structure:

Context

Strategic directions

Innovation and technology
COMPETITION AND OTHER CHALLENGES

Increased flexibility in part-time programmes from other universities

New entrants, especially online universities

Reputation and brand challenges

Low levels of student completions and qualification
MAJOR STRENGTH FOR SOME...

1970’s continued for minority!
Assured position by Government as national distance university
Other universities not interested in part-time, adult students or in online and distance learning
But will this last?
MANAGING THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

Transition from second generation Distance Education models into digital age
Learning Analytics: more promise than achievement
MOOCs: minority have produced MOOCs
OER’s: only one OU has major commitment to use of OER in course production
Some OU’s closing Regional Centres
Resistance to change by academic staff a problem in minority of OU’s
OTHER REFORMS AND INNOVATIONS

Restraint on course fee increase
More flexible course start times
Wider range of local centres
Assessment of prior learning
Programmes for refugees
Links to employers
More flexible advisors and e-tutors
Personalised learning
Careers guidance
Drop-out as priority mentioned by one OU only
OPEN UNIVERSITIES IN COMMONWEALTH

27 OU’s in Commonwealth
4.46m students
2.500 programmes
18.300 courses
Increased enrolments and programmes
‘reaching the unreached’
‘low output rates suggest many OU’s struggle with attrition’
‘lack of conscious efforts to relate missions to outcomes’
THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

SDG4

By 2030 ‘ensure equal access for women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university’

UNESCO 2016, Unpacking Sustainable Development Goal 4

Completing the move to mass higher education
ARE OPEN UNIVERSITIES CORE VEHICLES FOR EXPANSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION?

From 260m to 400m HE places in next 15 years

Priority areas of growth China, India, Africa and Latin America

SDG plan cannot be met by campus building alone
HOW TO REINVENT OPEN UNIVERSITIES?
INNOVATION SNAPSHOT: OPEN UNIVERSITIES

To showcase the innovation taking place at the world’s Open Universities, Contact North | Contact Nord is developing and hosting an innovation snapshot on teachonline.ca, a kind of “wikipedia” for innovation. The snapshot seeks to capture what is happening in Open Universities so all of us engaged in online and distance education have direct and immediate access to breakthrough innovations we can adopt, adapt and apply in our own institution (the three “As” of sharing innovations). We divide the snapshot in seven categories of innovation to highlight the focus of the process or initiative: course design, course delivery, assessment/credentialing/credit recognition, program evaluation, faculty development, organizational design and online learner support.
PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE: INNOVATION

Innovation: to reclaim status of the most innovative universities
Leadership development at international level
Leadership at all levels

Major Professional development themes:
* Environment scanning
* Defining, developing and defending Quality
* Embedding ICT and digital potential on a whole-institution basis
* Developing a curriculum for Sustainability
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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<td>Commitment to openness, flexibility and access</td>
<td>SDG commitment to major expansion of Higher Ed</td>
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<td>Gender friendly recruitment</td>
<td>Re-establish Quality concept in mass HE systems</td>
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<td>Commitment to Technology Enhanced Learning and scale</td>
<td>Pioneer curriculum for sustainability</td>
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<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<td>Completion and graduation rates</td>
<td>Government disenchantment with OU model</td>
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<td>Reputation and brand</td>
<td>Other university interest in digital learning e.g. MOOCs</td>
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<td>Innovation capacity: slow, with staff resistance</td>
<td>New blended offers for part-time from established universities</td>
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<td>New online universities</td>
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<td>Foreign entrants and open HE markets</td>
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