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CHAPTER 9 • CONCLUSION

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The chapters in this book provide an overview of the different aspects involved in offering Open and Distance Learning. The book was designed to offer interested readers with little or no experience with ODL a general introduction but also to make it clear that starting with ODL is not a simple matter. ODL leaves little or no room for improvisation. Every aspect of it - from decisions on content and form, to marketing, to legal issues related to copyright and authorship - needs to be carefully thought through and alternatives must be explored and considered for even seemingly straightforward details.

A general introduction, however meaningful and even useful, is not sufficient to get you up and running. It is a start, but nothing more than that. To help prospective providers of ODL to take the next step towards starting their first ODL courses, the partnership involved in writing this book has set up a website: www.ODLexpert.net.

This book and the training handbook that accompanies it are used in a series of courses offered throughout Europe. The website lists these courses and describes their content.

Furthermore, the site is the point of entry to a database containing descriptions of ODL products (e.g. software) and initiatives (e.g. examples of good practice), which includes a search engine to locate information that is relevant to one's own situation.

Based on research and experience, a list of keywords and variables is used to describe ODL products and initiatives. The keywords and variables include items such as mission statement, type of provider, return on investment, learning outcome, synchronous and asynchronous courses, evaluation, and learning trajectories. At this time, the database contains about 250 keywords and variables and the list is still growing.

Each of the terms in the database is defined and its importance in the context of starting with ODL is explained. A mission statement, for example, is important because it ensures a clear understanding as well as the full cooperation of everyone involved in the project. The type of evaluation you are looking for will depend on whether you are providing formal education or not: formal education requires much higher safeguarding against fraud. The list of suggestions is too long to include in this book, so please take a look at the site for more information.

You can use the terminology in the database to explore in great detail the many different aspects of offering ODL. Next, you can use the web tool to build an inventory of your own needs and wishes with regard to ODL: we are this type of provider, we are targeting this specific audience, we expect to enrol this many students in our language courses, we have some experience with ODL but we do not have a full time technical department, and so on. Beyond explaining the importance

of these different elements, the inventory or description you entered allows you to search the database for products, expertise or just examples of good practice that match some or all of the characteristics of your specific situation that could be worth looking at.

Finally the website also offers references to relevant material selected by the partners of the I AM L3 project. The information on ODL is too overwhelming for a novice in the field to digest, let alone for a prospective provider with little or no experience to follow up. The site presents a sensible selection of valuable and above all useful information.

We hope this book convinced you that ODL offers valuable additions to more traditional forms of teaching and learning. It is not an easy road to travel, but definitely an interesting and exciting one. Moving on to the information on the project's website will help you to translate a perhaps not yet totally focussed interest into more specific plans. If you are successful, please let us know. Who knows: one day your story may end up in our database as an example of good practice!

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHORS

Hana Danihelková is an expert in adult education who studied at the University of Olomouc. She has participated in the EU educational programme Socrates, coordinating 3 projects of which one received an award from the Evens Foundation in Belgium. Hana is a member of Grundtvig Working Group in Brussels and as a promoter of the Grundtvig action in the Czech Republic she actively supports the development of adult education in this country.

Koen DePryck received his Masters Degree in philosophy from the University of Gent (Belgium) and his PhD from the University of Texas at Dallas. After a career as a researcher for the Fund for Scientific Research-Flanders and as lecturer in philosophy, epistemology, systems analysis, databases and programming he was appointed Principal and CEO of the Centre for Adult Education Antwerpen-Zuid. He heads the Institute of Knowledge Management in Brussels. He has authored or co-authored several books and articles and lectures worldwide on the evolutionary aspect of learning and learning difficulties, the design, and management of learning environments and the implementation of ODL. He also designs and programs educational software and tools for learning organisations.

Kerttu Lõhmus is an e-learning consultant and member of the board of Ärireklaam Ltd (www.eprojekt.ee). She has a background in information studies and experience in adult education since 1996 and in the field of e-learning since 2000, with the main focus on instructional methods and content design. Her day-to-day work includes creating (together with subject matter experts) instructionally sound study materials to aid maximum learning effect.

Rosa Maria Miranda graduated from the Technical University of Lisbon in metallurgical engineering and has a PhD in mining engineering. She is a professor in the sciences education department of Universidade Aberta and a researcher at the Centre for Studies in Education and Innovation (CEEI - Universidade Aberta). She has been involved in the development of quality system for assessing quality in distance UCE courses since 2000 and has participated in accreditation activities of university degree courses from 1998 to 2004. She was responsible to the ANB at ISQ accredited by the EWF and IIW according to ISO 9000. She is author or co-author of more than 60 scientific publications, including five textbooks.

Alda Maria Pereira is a graduate of Coimbra University in physics and chemistry, has a Masters Degree in education from Lisbon University and a PhD in Education from Universidade Aberta. She is Head of the sciences education department, a professor in the same unit and a researcher at the Centre for Studies in Education and Innovation (CEEI - Universidade Aberta). Her research is in the fields of visual semiotics in educational communication, the pedagogy of distance and online education, and models and methods of teaching, particularly in respect of science teaching.

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