



DE Hub Response to Dr Don Olcott's Report:

Preliminary Assessment and Commentary

For DE Hub Innovation in Distance Education
Project

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Introduction

The views expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the views of participants nor the University. They are a true reflection of the consultant as recorded and interpreted by him and are presented without edit. Dr. Don Olcott, Jr, Chief Executive of the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) was engaged by DE Hub to explore strategic directions and research activities DE Hub could pursue. Dr Olcott visited UNE and the DE Hub offices from 27 July to 31 July and met with various groups of staff and students during this time. Dr Olcott has since provided DE Hub with an 'Assessment and Commentary' report (appearing below). The DE Hub team welcomes Dr Olcott's assessment and suggestions, aimed at increasing the success of our activities. We extend our thanks to all UNE staff and students who assisted Dr Olcott, providing viewpoints and opinions based on first hand experiences during consultations. We valued your input and thank you again for your time.

The key points to emerge from this report include:

- The need to conceptualise a long term vision of DE Hub.
- The importance of establishing and maintaining a clear, well defined focus.
- Continued awareness that DE Hub is a multi-institutional initiative that serves the entire Australian HE sector.
- The benefits of increasing the value UNE faculty place on Distance Education Research.
- The organisation and management of the distance education research repository.
- That the DE Hub research agenda requires further refinement.
- Consideration of DE Hub sustainability options.
- Options for the DE Hub Colloquium and Conference.

The DE Hub team would like to take this opportunity to address these key points.

The need to conceptualise a long term vision of DE Hub.

Dr. Olcott suggested that, as DE Hub was in the early stages of the project, we needed to dedicate more time to conceptualising a long term vision. DE Hub staff responded by initiating a more thorough planning stage where we developed a project implementation document (PID) and ran a series of planning days where the DE Hub team contemplated the future vision of DE Hub and how external stakeholders will view DE Hub in 2012. With a long term vision and mission established (see following point), we are now working more clearly toward achieving our goals and objectives.

The importance of establishing and maintaining a clear, well defined focus.

In addition to conceptualising a long-term vision, the DE Hub team has dedicated several days to planning and scoping the project's boundaries and mission. The definition of the following vision, mission statement and goals will enable DE Hub to maintain focus and meet objectives to a high standard.

Vision:

- Accessible quality higher education anytime, anywhere, anyhow.

Mission:

- To lead research, development and practice in distance education.

Goals:

- Build the capacity of learners, educators and researchers (LERs) in higher education.
- To support the development of open education resources (OERs).
- To promote cooperative and collaborative research activities with government, education and private sector stakeholders.
- To conduct and disseminate high quality research and provide examples of leading evidence-based practices across the sector.
- To provide leadership in developing and implementing models for distance education.
- To advise and contribute to government and private sector policy and decision making.

Continued awareness that DE Hub is a multi-institutional initiative that serves the entire Australian HE sector.

The DE Hub team appreciates the need to articulate and communicate to UNE senior management the potential danger of being diverted by UNE needs. The Steering Committee membership includes representatives from each of the partner universities; this committee meets monthly and will assist in keeping the project focussed across the entire HE sector.

The benefits of increasing the value UNE faculty place on Distance Education Research.

Dr Olcott's comments on the value of UNE having a strong DE Research presence resound with the DE Hub team. The validity and importance of DE Research is already recognised by DE Hub staff— we hope that our project will increase the profile of DE Research and advance its reputation among UNE and HE sector staff. DE Hub is, and will continue to be, actively involved in collaborative research projects in distance education, engaging UNE staff, staff at partner institutions and international institutions. These projects will raise the visibility of DE Research.

DE Hub embraced Dr Olcott's concept of a DE Hub Annual Teaching and Rewards Programme. It is envisaged that this will assist in promoting DE Research.

The organisation and management of the distance education research repository .

WikiEducator (www.wikieducator.org/DEHub) will become DE Hub's primary research repository. WikiEducator is a relatively new, but rapidly expanding Wiki network for the creation and sharing of Open Education Resources (OER). The Commonwealth of Learning is the major sponsor of this project . DE Hub will be using WikiEducator as a dissemination tool for resources and community building.

DE Hub has just begun creating a presence in this new arena. Resources and content will be continually expanded and, as the community builds, modified and improved. Further information about our resources and community will be distributed in the coming weeks. All DE Hub content will be accessible via our website and the WikiEducator. This is an exciting movement in the education sector. We will be holding information sessions and focus groups surrounding this in the near future. As suggested in the report, we will be seeking feedback from the community as we pilot this method of dissemination.

Our website (www.dehub.edu.au) will contain numerous other research papers, findings and documentation during phase 2 and 3 of the project. The team accepts the issues raised in the report about process and procedures for the management of this repository and is currently working internally on structured guidelines.

That the research agenda requires further definition.

Extensive work has been undertaken by DE Hub staff to finalise the DE Hub research agenda. The team has compiled a list of 15 research questions across the three DE Hub themes, identifying priorities within each theme. An analysis of the recent paper 'Research areas in Distance Education: A Delphi Study', ^[1] formed the basis for a focus group inquiry

structured around the three key themes of Research and Development, Community and Open Learning and Teaching and Learning. Fifty university distance education practitioners produced recommendations and further questions. The findings were refined and expanded through a two day research planning process with distance education specialists, including two international visitors to the DE Hub. An extensive set of research possibilities were further refined and distilled into 15 research areas. Seven research areas were then prioritised for action in 2010. The remaining eight areas will develop and evolve as further research and analysis is undertaken.

Currently our researchers are developing position papers on our three key themes: Distance Education Teaching and Learning, Distance Education Community and Open Learning and Distance Education Research and Development. These position papers will form the basis of the colloquium to be held next year.

Consideration of DE Hub sustainability options.

We are currently still in the establishment stage of the DE Hub project, but sustainability beyond our three years of funding is a prominent team discussion point. Many options for the continuation of DE Hub are being floated by staff and management. Some of the options suggested in the report such as consultancies, membership and professional development will start to appear towards the end of Phase 2 of the project. We have recently appointed Dr Rosalind James to the DE Hub team as our Communications and Funding officer. One of her major tasks will be to assess research options for the future and develop a sustainability plan.

Options for the Colloquium and Conference.

The original plans for an international conference in late 2010 or early 2011 are under consideration. We acknowledge Dr Olcott's observation regarding the limited time we have to establish an international reputation. DE Hub's intention to bring together 20 international experts in the distance education field at a colloquium to collaborate on the three position papers remains. Holding a function to facilitate access to these renowned international guests and promote further collaborations within the DE Research community would seem pertinent. The reality of how this will be accomplished is still being confirmed. If the International conference does proceed, Dr Olcott's suggestions regarding location and duration will be incorporated and specialist advice will be obtained.

Dr. Don Olcott, Jr., EdD., FRSA

Dr. Don Olcott, Jr. is Chief Executive of The Observatory of Borderless Higher Education <<http://www.obhe.ac.uk/>> (OBHE). Dr. Olcott is immediate past Chairman of the Board of Directors of the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) and served as USDLA president from 2006-07. He serves on the Executive Committee of the UK's Council of Validating Universities (CVU), advisory committee of the U of London's Distance Education Centre, and as a member of the external Strategy Group of the Open University. Dr. Olcott is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts (FRSA).

Dr. Olcott previously held senior leadership posts at Western Oregon University, VCampus Corporation, the University of Arizona and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). He also held administrative and faculty posts with Oregon State University, the University of Missouri-Columbia, and Western Washington University.

Dr. Olcott is a member of the editorial boards of the American Journal of Distance Education, Open Learning, the Journal of Continuing Higher Education, India's Open U. e-Learning Journal, and the European Journal of Open and Distance Learning. He has published extensively in the areas of leadership, faculty development for distance education, organizational change, and higher education policy. Dr. Olcott has received numerous national and international awards for leadership, research and publications in higher education and distance learning.

Dr. Olcott is an internationally known speaker and he has over 20 years of consultancy experience to colleges, universities, and corporations across the United States, Europe, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. He was a 1993 graduate of Harvard University's Institute for the Management of Lifelong Education and a 2005 graduate of UCEA's Executive Leadership Academy at New York University. He received his bachelors and masters' degrees from Western Washington University and his doctorate in higher education leadership from Oregon State University. His personal interests include history, music, languages, travel, and golf.