

# Guidelines for Service Provider for the Online ODL Course Catalogue

by

Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible  
Learning in the Pacific (PODFLP) initiative

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## 1. Introduction and background

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the challenges faced by the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) to attain Sustainable Development Goal 4. Campus closures have resulted not only from the pandemic but also from a range of other causes including tropical storms, volcanic ash fall out, high and rising sea levels and drought, for example.

It is felt necessary therefore to explore ways to ensure continuity of learning which are not so completely dependent on face-to-face contact in bricks-and-mortar buildings.

The Partnership between the Commonwealth of Learning (COL – based in Canada) and the Pacific Centre for Open and Flexible Learning for Development (PACFOLD – hosted by the University of the South Pacific), with support from the Ministry of Financial Affairs and Trade (MFAT) in New Zealand, therefore seeks to promote and enable greater use of Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL).

As part of this initiative, a prototype ODL Course catalogue was developed and can be found here:

<https://www.ppodl.org>

The ODL course catalogue aims to provide a single space where teachers can find information about courses that will provide the training they need to use ODFL methods.

## 2. Consultancy process

Having developed a prototype, the Partnership instituted a series of consultancies to review the prototype to inform a Request for Proposals for a service provider to fully develop and host the course catalogue.

Four activities were undertaken:

- Feedback was solicited from staff from ten regional campuses of the University of South Pacific (USP) with 188 responses;
- Two outreach initiatives were undertaken to solicit feedback from teachers in the region outside of USP with 93 responses across all nine PICs; and
- A regional service provider was contracted to undertake a formal technical review of the prototype.

## 3. Key findings and related guidelines for the new service provider

### 3.1 Common challenges expressed by educators

- Having access to a safe, reliable, and robust internet connection
- Affordability of data
- Students interacting with each other
- Getting support from IT to assist with remote teaching
- Connection issues during synchronous sessions

- Students' receptiveness towards technology
- Keeping students motivated
- Coping up with the increased workload
- Stress working from home for educators
- Keeping track of 'students' progress
- Assessing student learning
- Need for teaching materials in the form of multimedia (images, animations, educational games) to engage 'students' motivation
- Balancing diverse learning needs
- Poor knowledge of learning management systems and appropriate use of appropriate social media
- Time management and organisation
- Lack of parental involvement.

#### Guidelines for service provider of overall functionality

- The course catalogue should be accessible and useable on a variety of devices, including mobile devices, and should be functional even in low bandwidth/high data cost environments.

### 3.2 Common professional development requirements by educators

- Cybersecurity Training for Teachers
- Effective Assessment Methods for Online Teaching
- Mobile Learning with multimedia
- Use of social media in teaching
- Access to webinars and workshops digital literacy
- Innovative teaching practices
- Application of open, flexible and distance learning methods (Pedagogical)
- Ability to find, revise, create and share OER
- Student and staff counselling
- Digital literacy
- Blended learning
- Virtual labs for science teaching

- Curriculum design/Developing and Teaching Online courses
- Language skills for remote and distance communication

### Guidelines for service provider on catalogue content

- The course catalogue must be continually updatable with information about courses which relate directly to the emerging learning needs of Pasifika teachers at all levels of the education system.
- Courses could range from webinars to free short courses of 3-4 weeks only to formal post-graduate qualifications as teachers' needs change.
- It should be possible for national administrators to update course offerings in their country, including courses offered across national borders.
- It should be possible for providers who work across national boundaries also to upload course information.
- There needs to be a process for vetting course information uploads and updates.

### 3.3 information design

Drawing on the principles of elaboration theory, where information is designed and presented in increasing order of complexity there are opportunities for improving the information design of the course catalogue. We recommend a three-tier approach varying the amount of detail and information displayed for different levels.

#### Guidelines for service provider on information design

3.3.1 A "simple" **first tier level**, functioning as a browse feature on the desktop display is missing. For instance, listing of course tiles with minimal information, which could be accessed when clicking on the high-level graphic icons for the "Educational Areas". Currently, the information is presented in the form of a large table with ten columns. The amount of category information presented in a "simple tile view" should be reduced to the absolute minimum information needed for a user to determine if they want to delve deeper into a "second level" tier with more information. With reference to the widescreen display, the following columns could be removed to replace the current listing with a simple concise tile format (similar to the one used on a mobile screen listing):

- a. Contact institution - not relevant if the user is not interested in the course
- b. Certificate of completion - not relevant if the user is not interested in the course
- c. Description - not relevant if the user is not interested in the course
- d. Duration in months - not overly useful in deciding level of interest in the first instance. Weekly workload should be sufficient for an initial tile view.

3.3.2 A **second tier level** which displays more information. The current table view would suffice for this second tier level. We recommend that the second tier is accessed when the user searches by filter. We recommend that the development team review whether all 10 columns are necessary for users

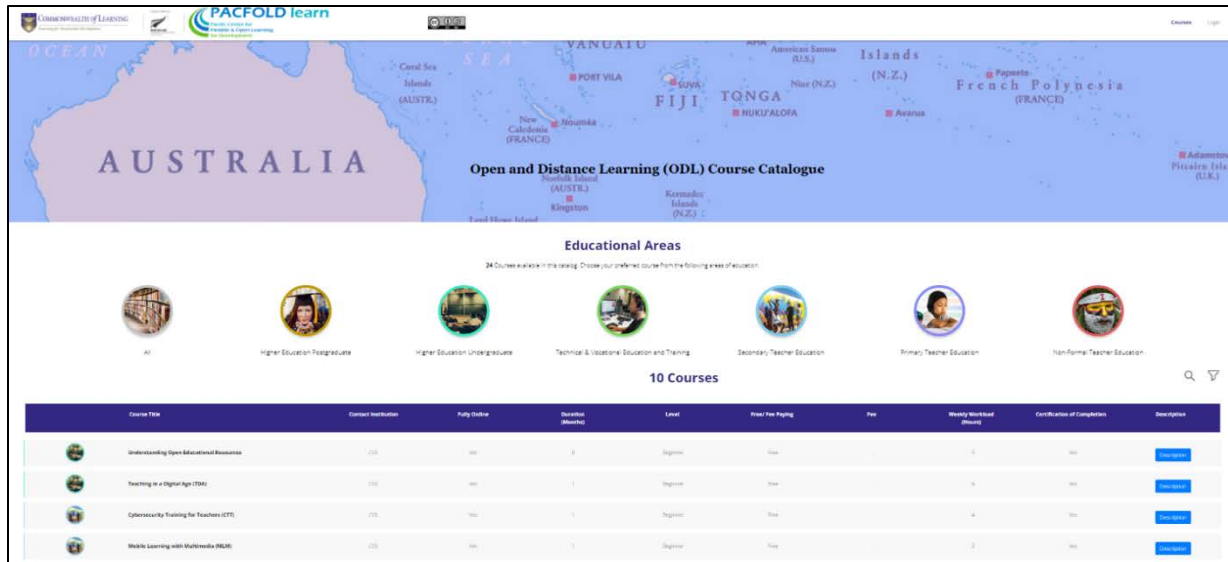
browsing this level, for example, reducing the number of columns to the number of search filters. Additional information can be moved to the third-tier view which provides more detail as proposed below.

3.3.3 A **third tier course description level** is needed to provide a high-level summary of the course listings. The current modal pop-up on mouse-over, does not provide adequate information for a user to decide whether they would like to participate in a course. Currently, the only way a user can access more relevant information to decide if the course is fit-for-purpose is to visit the contact institution link. In many cases, these links do not link to publicly accessible course information, which is only accessible after creating a user account on the respective site. Consider for example the course description information provided by OERu for [individual courses](#). The course catalogue should provide the minimum information required by a user to take an informed decision to engage in a course without the need to create an account on a 3rd party site before being able to access a summary of what the course is about. These course summary pages could be accessed via the “Description buttons” in the current prototype.

### 3.4 Current design of the ODL Course Catalogue

The Open and Distance Learning digital course catalogue is not for courses in general. This is for courses associated with open distance and learning provision.

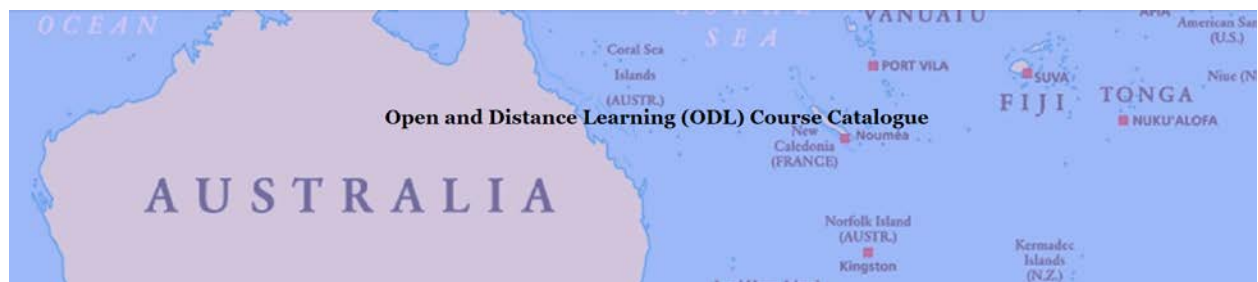
**Figure 1: The landing page for the ODL course catalogue is divided in four areas; (1) The banner (2) The educational areas (3) Filter and Search Options (4) Course information**



### Guidelines for service provider:

The CC-BY-SA license logo will be better placed in a footer region of the site following standard web practice where users expect to find copyright information, rather than the main header area above the fold. In addition: Page 2 of 8 a. The license logo should link through to the specific CC license deed for the International Version 4. This should be clear when linking through to the license deed. The website needs a categorical statement that the license does not necessarily extend to the course content listed on the site, i.e. the courses may be licensed under a different license or even all rights reserved.

### 3.4.1 The Banner



### Guidelines for service provider - Suggestions for improvements in the banner:

1. We recommend that the site title conveys the primary purpose of the catalogue, for example: Pacific Course Catalogue: For professional development in open and distance learning. (The suffix can be displayed using a smaller type face as a subheading.) The current title suggests that the catalogue provides a listing of “all” courses available in ODL format without referencing the Pacific region.

2. From the design perspective, the title at first glance, is not suitable due to the text-on-text effect. This is created because the background image also contains the text.

- a) To replace the map with a pacific image containing no text (e.g. an island).
- b) If map is to be used, then avoid text on the map background.

3. Using a moving variety of images from the pacific. This way, the images are not stagnant or still but constantly changing

4. Banner image on large screen desktop display: It's important that citizens of the Pacific can "see themselves" in their own community online spaces. While it is visually challenging to incorporate the vast geographical spread of the Pacific in a single banner image, this could potentially be achieved using a rotating banner so as not to exclude significant areas of the region. The South Pacific constitutes three distinct regions, namely Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. The current banner image map excludes: a. All of Micronesia (e.g Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Palau etc.) b. Significant parts of Melanesia (e.g. Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea). c. Some parts of Polynesia (e.g. Hawaii and New Zealand).

5. The choice of colour between the text (Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Course Catalogue and the banner image can be improved by using contrasting colours; not dark blue on light blue, but maybe a shade of orange/yellow over the blue image behind it would make it stand out better.

6. When visiting the ODL course catalogue page, a small idea in brief (one line or two) explaining what ODL actually means to the viewers and adding some of the aspects that can benefit educators.

7. There is a login tab at the top right hand corner for the administrators who will be responsible for adding and updating courses. However, the page viewers would not be aware that they do not require a login.

### 3.4.2 The Educational Areas



#### Guidelines for service provider - Suggestions for improvements in the educational areas:

1. Use of images that reflects the contexts of the Pacific. For example, having the image of the Pacific educators in the Higher Education tabs.
2. The cameo pictures need to be relevant, specific and more contextual to the Pacific Region.
3. The fonts of the various categories need to be bigger and in bold, or on the pictures themselves.
4. The word "level" would be more appropriate than "areas" of education.
5. The following areas can also be included:







- a) Physical Education
- b) Early Childhood Development



6. The categories should be inclusive of those with disabilities.
7. What is the appropriate level (from the six mentioned) for College of Foundation Studies?
8. People icons representing levels of education on large screen desktop display: The use of people in icon images can provide personality and identity to a web site, but they can also generate unintended consequences. We recommend that the service provider establish a representative group from the three main regions to discuss culturally appropriate graphic icons that don't necessarily use people images for this site application. The use of a culturally appropriate graphic image icon with corresponding text is potentially more generic. The challenge is less about what cultures are included, but rather who is excluded. Consider the following challenges:

- a. The Papua New Guinea man in tribal makeup is used to signify non-formal education. The man in the image could have a PhD, so the presumption that this image is representative of non-formal education is problematic. Moreover, expressing a value judgement that "formal" tribal attire is non-formal could be criticised as a contemporary example of colonisation.
- b. When the images are displayed at a lower resolution (image size) in the individual course listings on a full screen display or course listing on a mobile phone, some images are too small to distinguish what they are. (That said, the use of colour coding is a good way to differentiate between different level groupings.)
- c. The use of images containing people, even when they are openly licensed, may give rise to moral rights issues in the absence of media clearances from the individuals displayed in the images. We have not been able to verify if media clearances have been obtained from the individuals for the specific use context of these images. If these are openly licensed images, the site is missing image attributions.

### 3.4.3 Course Information

Course Title	Contact Institution	Fully Online	Duration (Months)	Level	Free/ Fee Paying	Fee	Weekly Workload (Hours)	Certification of Completion	Description
 Understanding Open Educational Resources	COL	Yes	0	Beginner	Free	-	3	Yes	<a href="#">Description</a>
 Teaching in a Digital Age (TDA)	COL	Yes	1	Beginner	Free	-	4	Yes	<a href="#">Description</a>
 Cybersecurity Training for Teachers (CTT)	COL	Yes	1	Beginner	Free	-	4	Yes	<a href="#">Description</a>
 Mobile Learning with Multimedia (MLM)	COL	Yes	1	Beginner	Free	-	2	Yes	<a href="#">Description</a>
 Teaching Mathematics with Technology (TMT)	COL	Yes	1	Beginner	Free	-	4	Yes	<a href="#">Description</a>
 OER for Online Learning (OER4OL)	COL	Yes	1	Beginner	Free	-	4	Yes	<a href="#">Description</a>

#### Guidelines for service provider - Suggestions for improvements in the course information:

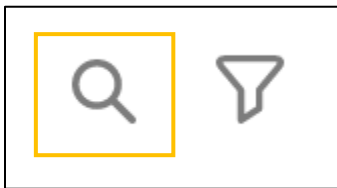
1. When hovering on the course description, it gives part of the course summary and the tab does not work when clicked to access the full summary.
2. The information that appears when hovering on the course description looks congested. The size and spacing should be considered in the pop up description of the course.
3. Consider including a hyperlink from the course name to the course content.
4. The following columns can also be considered:
  - a) course facilitator information
  - b) Email option that can be directed to the course facilitator.

- c) Email option that can be directed to share with other colleagues.
- d) Start and End date of the courses.

- 5. For learners planning to do multiple courses at once, there should be a cap in placed so learners are clear and do not find themselves overwhelmed with the demand.
- 6. The duration category is given in months and reads 0 if there is a course which is completed in less than a month. Therefore, the duration should be given in weeks and/or months to cater for short duration courses.
- 7. The course planning (weekly) for programmes that are offered should be provided.


### 3.4.4 Using the Search function (magnifying lens icon)

The prototype currently has only a few example courses. The full catalogue may have hundreds of courses. It is therefore necessary to have multiple ways of searching.

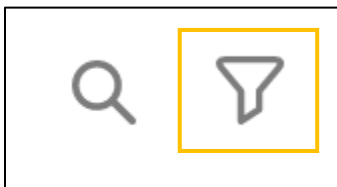


Guidelines for service provider - Suggestions for improvements in the use of the Search function.

- 1. When searching for courses, if there is only one course in that area then it should read ""1 course"" and not ""1 courses"".

1 Courses									
Course Title	Contact Institution	Fully Online	Duration (Months)	Level	Free/ Fee Paying	Fee	Weekly Workload (Hours)	Certification of Completion	Description
 Understanding Open Educational Resources	COL	Yes	0	Beginner	Free	-	3	Yes	<a href="#">Description</a>

### 3.4.5 Using the Filter function (funnel icon)



Guidelines for service provider - Suggestions for improvements in the use of Filter function.

- 1. A ""Go"" or ""Search"" tab should be included after selecting the options in the filter function.
- 2. List of courses in the filter should also be included.

3. The catalogue should include options which are not fully online. In the absence of a filter for city and country, listing courses that have a residency requirement will be of little use to prospective learners outside the specific country or a considerable distance from the host city. In the event that the catalogue will include courses with a face-to-face requirement, we recommend that a city and country sub-field is associated with these listings so that users can filter offerings that are within travelling distance.
4. The catalogue may incorporate forms of professional development that are not typically considered to be “courses”, for example online workshops, seminars and possibly webinars. If these alternate forms are to be included in the catalogue, a type filter with options for the categories that will be incorporated should be included.
5. The catalogue requires an “Availability” filter to distinguish between cohort-based offerings with fixed start and completion dates versus open registration offerings, that is available for independent self-study at any time.
6. We recommend incorporating a filter for the copyright license of the courses listed in the catalogue including all rights reserved plus the range of open license alternatives and any courses dedicated to the public domain. This will be valuable for any organisation searching for OER-enabled professional development courses they can reuse, adapt and modify for their own needs.
7. The keyword search and filter options do not behave as a typical user would expect. Technically, these are not “search” options, but rather an alternate way to sort the active list displayed in the browser:

- a) The keyword search and filters are only applied to the courses loaded in the “live” display list in the browser (which is not clearly communicated via the user interface.) The default view for a new visitor to the site displays 10 courses which appears to be the default maximum of courses listed without clicking on the “Load More” button, which is hidden from view. This is confusing for the user, because if a user activated the “Free” tag, they would expect to see a list of all the free courses in the database.
- b) While the interface allows users to specify multiple “tags”, for example “Free” plus “Intermediate” the display does not render a boolean-type result. Moreover, the behaviour is not consistent. Selecting “Free” then “Intermediate” renders a different result when compared to selecting “Intermediate” then “Free”. The platform should not provide the user with options to add additional filter tags, if they have no effect on the initial filter results.

8. Given that a course list can contain more than 10 items, in cases where there are more than 10 courses fitting a category, the dynamic display of “10 courses” should be amended to display, for example, “10 of 24 Courses” so that the user knows that the full list is not displayed and will need to click on the “Load more button.” Perhaps a “Display all” button is needed so that a user can apply the filters to the full list of courses in a given educational area?
9. The Certificate of Completion filter does not adequately convey the full range of options available for “Certification.” Additional options may include:

- a) Digital badges for participation
- b) Digital achievement badges (for assessed learning)
- c) Digital competency badges
- d) Certificates of competency

- e) Micro-credentials
- f) Formal academic credit for credit transfer.
- g) This potentially introduces a classification challenge, for example whether a separate filter is needed for Certification of Completion, plus an additional filter for instance, “Summative assessment” options. Nonetheless, providing information on certification options will add considerable value to the catalogue.

### 3.4.6 General guidelines

The ODL courses catalogue should be:

- 1 Technically scalable
- 2 Reliable
- 3 Secure
- 4 Easy to maintain
- 5 Possible for a regional institution to take over and maintain the course catalogue once the service provider’s contract comes to an end.
- 6 Currently the catalogue does not provide advanced data-base search capability, which is a material shortcoming of the prototype. In future iterations, it would add tremendous value to provide users with alternate pathways to search and access course listings in the catalogue including options to browse by educational area, search by pre-determined filters and keyword search functionality.
- 7 The “Courses” link on the homepage navigation is redundant, it simply refreshes the current page.
- 8 In subsequent iterations, the site would benefit from a rudimentary menu system providing better information. We recommend including an “About” section to provide more information with appropriate sub-menu items as may be required. Also consider including a “FAQ” section with relevant questions, for instance how to use the site, how to submit courses for inclusion etc.
- 9 In the landscape view on a mobile device, the column displays are running over each other. The site will need to implement an appropriate display solution for wide tables with many columns.
- 10 On a desktop display, the mouseover pop-up information repeating the “Course Title” is redundant and serves no purpose. We recommend that this be removed.
- 11 On a mobile device, there is no visual cue on how to collapse the pop-up modal replicating the behaviour of the mouse-over dialogues on a desktop screen display. We recommend, for example including an “X” icon to replicate the graphic signal of shutting a window.
- 12 Review the UX design and consider using a sticky header row. When the catalogue grows and displays a long list of courses, when scrolling down, the user loses context in the absence of seeing the header row.
- 13 Consider whether there is any value-add for users in making selected columns sortable.
- 14 Hyperlinks should link to the information conveyed in the link label. In the current prototype implementation, the “Contact institution” links to the course. Reading an institution link, the user would expect to link to the institution website. We recommend that the Course Title is used to link through to the individual course. In this scenario, the “Contact institution” could be moved to the 3rd tier description proposed above.
- 15 The links to specific course sites linked from the contact institution must be audited as we encountered a number of errors, for example:

- a. The free “Design Engineering” course submitted by USP does not link through to the actual course page. (There are other examples of USP free course listings that don’t link to the actual course page).
- b. A number of the USP free course listings, which we assume are USP global courses, link through to image files, rather than the actual course page.
- c. A number of COL course listings link through to the older <https://learnoer.col.org/> domain rather than the new site listings on <https://colcommons.org/>

- 16 In the current implementation, it is not possible for a user to share an absolute URL to a course listing in the catalogue they find interesting. This is a material limitation.
- 17 The description column displays a list of “Description” buttons, which is a redundant duplication of column heading in the cell content. Moreover, on a desktop, the buttons do not behave as linked buttons. Rather, they are mouse-over / hover pop-up modals which is an unusual implementation for a button, deviating from conventional web design.