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# Draft National Open Science Policy: opportunities for education



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The progressive conversation on the South African National Open Science Policy contributes to the international project of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>1</sup>.

Achieving SDG4 Quality Education (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all)<sup>2</sup> is becoming increasingly inseparable from Open Science initiatives. One of these initiatives is the UNESCO's Global Education Coalition

(GEC) which was established in March 2020 to ensure that education continues after the unprecedented disruption by COVID-19<sup>3</sup>. Although the GEC was primarily established to respond to school teaching and learning, the responses and solutions are applicable to different levels of education including higher education<sup>4</sup>.

The discussion on development and implementation of the National Open Science Policy occurs at a time where higher education institutions are navigating the hybrid teaching and learning environment. Critical to the support of hybrid teaching and learning model is a need to develop and make use of Open Educational Resources (OER) for teaching and learning purposes. Several opportunities for education were discussed in the Open Science Stakeholder workshop on the South African Open Science Policy. The first of the six desired outcomes of Open Science in South Africa addresses OERs<sup>5</sup>, a much-needed Open Science practice in support of the increased demand for hybrid

models in higher education.

The open science conversation is complex and requires representation of all stakeholders for an unbiased engagement and good governance practice. Representation of stakeholder communities can ensure a balanced discussion and provide an enabling context for clear articulation and monitoring of policies without compromising good governance. Owing to characteristics of good governance such as participation, consensus, equity, inclusiveness, accountability<sup>6</sup>; representation of all stakeholders should be encouraged. In the governance section of the National Policy document, it is stated that this should not be limited to the implementation phase but should be consistent through to the evaluation of desired outcomes.

South Africa as a developing country could greatly benefit from the implementation of the National Open Science Policy which would feed into other documents of action such as the National Development Plan. In addition to this, the

country stands a good chance to progressively address socio-economic issues such as free access to quality education<sup>7</sup> and being well positioned within global trends.

As the 17 SDGs are integrated, education is one of the most viable goals through which sustainable development can be achieved. For this reason, the advancement of education through the National Open Science Policy is of great importance to the benefit of the desired society.

1. Department of Science and Innovation. *Draft National Open Science Policy*, p6.
2. United Nations. Sustainable Development Goal 4. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>
3. UNESCO (2021). Global Education Coalition <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition>
4. UNESCO (2021). *Distance learning solutions*. UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/solutions>
5. Department of Science and Innovation. *Draft National Open Science Policy*, p10
6. United Nations. *What is Good Governance?* <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/good-governance.pdf>
7. Department of Science and Innovation. *Draft National Open Science Policy*, p7-8.

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## Information Services in a Changed Teaching and Learning Space

The last two years (2020-2021) witnessed library and information services' professionals change tack in terms of information service work.

The national COVID crisis, and the way that it manifested itself, was both a shock and a "call to arms". It completely turned the ship around and steered it in a different direction. At once, the normal became abnormal, the business as usual was now business unusual.

How did Information Search Librarians deal with this changed time-space? The lessons learnt at the inception, during the course of, and in the waning phase of the crisis are important and will guide LIS professionals in charting a

new work ethic and work process going forward. Already, various higher education institutions have either changed their Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) Models, or re-purposed them to incorporate a smart, remote work service.

New and insightful ways of working were tested. Not all instances of distance work can be regarded as smooth or easy-going. Although the prospect of working from home may appear inviting, there are certain misgivings about its flaws. Fundamental among these is the isolation from colleagues, not having the privilege of face-to-face interaction with colleagues, distraction in the home working

space, inadequate data and related matters. However, in all of this, a few phenomena have emerged that merit consideration.

Firstly, there are certain types of information work that can be done completely in an ODeL space. With discovery tools and databases accessible over secure Internet platforms, staff can serve students from almost anywhere. Secondly, with the high-fidelity electronic devices available, information work can be done effectively and efficiently. Thirdly, with tools such as Microsoft Teams, colleagues and work teams can be highly productive if managed carefully. All these instances require a certain dedication, commitment to stated

work goals, and most of all, time management.

ODeL-based information services demand a high level of integrity and dedication, particularly in instances where databases or electronic resources are not immediately accessible. The seasoned LIS professional has to school herself in Open Educational Resources to utilize when subscription databases are offline, to be resourceful and industrious in making sure that students are supported with the information that they require.

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