Flexible Skills Development

How to use the Community Learning Network

The purpose of the Flexible Skills development Community Learning Network (CLN) is to provide an online space for TVET institutions to collaborate and learn more about introducing flexible and blended approaches into TVET. The Community Learning Network is about you – the members of the community. So the success of the community will be up to you. And the value that you get out of being a member will depend entirely on what you put into the community.

Please remember that if you have any questions or need help Don’t Panic!! We are here to help you and we work together as a community – hence the name. If you need help please contact Robert Aucoin at flexibleskills@col.org.

Overview – The Community Learning Network is an online space where we can discuss issues related to the use of technology to deliver skills training more flexibly. We will use the site to learn from each other in a social and friendly way. You will find the CLN is a safe and friendly environment where you can explore ideas as a group and, thus, build a learning community. You can also find information and links to resources about the use of ICT in TVET institutions. Each member can have their own page and participate in discussions. FSD currently has 10 key institutions and each one of these has a group on this site which documents their journey towards more flexible skills development. Please feel free to explore the site, click on anything and everything and experiment. You cannot hurt the site and the best way to learn is by doing.

For the purposes of these instructions (and if you ever need assistance from technical support) we will always begin with the main CLN page which is shown in Figure 1 below. Please note that because the content of the CLN can change daily it might not look exactly as shown but the basic structure will remain the same.

In Figure 1 you will see that the main page has a Green Banner on top, with Menus below that. For now the menus are Main, Planning & Policy etc... These menus are also called Tabs.

Below the menus is the actual content of the front page and you will see that it is divided into 3 columns – left, middle and right.
**Left Column** - contains the COL Logo and below that is a small text box with an email address should you ever have difficulties or questions. This email address does go to a real person and is typically checked at least once per day.

**Middle Column** – contains the main/daily content of the site. The top part of this column contains a welcome message. The box below the welcome message is a discussion board where you may start or respond to discussions on a variety of topics. Topics in this section are usually more general and deal with issues that might affect the majority of the community. General questions about issues related to introducing flexible learning for example would be appropriate here. At the bottom of the middle column there is a list of events. We will keep this updated with events of interest to everyone. If there is an event you would like to bring to the attention of the Community, please send the details to flexibleskills@col.org.

**Right Column** – contains your “Quick Box”. You can use this box to perform common functions quickly. This includes things like signing out of the network (highly recommended if you are sharing a computer), accessing your CLN email Inbox, seeing who you are friends with on the CLN, inviting new friends and changing your settings. We highly recommend you explore the items in the Quick Box. The Quick Box also contains a drop down menu where you can perform other functions….quickly. Please feel free to try them out at your leisure. Below your Quick Box is another news box that only the administrators have access to and below that is a photo box which will usually display a slideshow of the pictures the community members have posted.
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Figure 1

Green Banner

Menus or Tabs

Left Column

Middle Column

Right Column
Here are some simple instructions on how you can make the CLN a success for all its members and help it to grow:

**Your photo** – The first thing you should do after becoming a member of the CLN is to post a photo of yourself. This need not be a formal (studio) photo. In fact it is sometimes better to have informal shots showing things you like to do outside of work like spending time with your family or fishing.

Posting a photo of yourself might seem silly and some people are embarrassed but it is very important to post photos as it helps to strengthen our community.

To upload a photo of yourself, click on the “settings” link in your “Quick Box”. You should see a screen that looks like the picture to your right.

Next click on the “Browse” button near the top of the main window.

Find the photo on your computer and click “ok”.

This will return you to the screen on the right.

You should take this opportunity to fill in all the fields on this page including your country and institution.

When you are finished click “Save” button at the bottom of the screen.
Groups – We have created a group for each institution represented on the CLN. So far there are 10 but this will grow quickly. To access your group click on the Menu/Tab entitled “groups”.

You will be able to read materials from all the groups but you will only be able to post to your own group.

To join a group simply click on that group and then click on Join “Group Name” just under the Tab Menu as in the picture to the right.

Please note that these groups are moderated and, for the moment, you should only join the group for your institution.

The group discussions are similar to those in the main discussion board on the main page of the CLN except they are more focussed on issues within your own institution. So you might use this space to upload and discuss documents specific to your institution’s technology plans for example.

For example, if one wanted to discuss the draft of a policy document specific to Mobasa TTI, then this would be best discussed within the Mombasa TTI group. This is both because the document may not be ready to be circulated among the general public and also because folks outside Mombasa TTI
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may not be interested in their policies.

There are two groups in the CLN that are not associated with a particular institution. These are: The Policy Makers group and The Champions Group. These 2 groups are by invitation only and are meant to give members a private space to discuss higher level issues associated either with policy specifically (the Policy Group) or Flexible Skills Development at the regional, national or international levels (Champions Group).

Post a photo – This could be a photo of skills training in your institution for example. Please make sure you have the rights to post a picture before posting it – this means getting agreement from the people in the photo. How do I post a photo?

1. On the Right Column, click the “Quick Add” drop down menu and choose “Photos”.
2. You should see “upload” fields as in the figure to your right. Click browse, choose the picture you want to upload from your computer and click OK.
3. Then click the “Add Photos” box at the bottom of the white screen.
Resources – The resources pages are located throughout the CLN and can be found by clicking on the various Menus. At the time of writing these are: Planning & Policy, Organisational Development, Teaching, M & E (which stands for Monitoring and Evaluation) and Technology. Clicking on these menus will bring you to new pages with even more information.

To the right is a picture of what the Planning and Policy page looks like as I write this document. As with the entire site this might change as content changes.
**Blogs** – We have also provided you with your own personal Blog. “Blog” is short for “Web_Log” and can be used in any way you would like – keeping in mind that anyone on the CLN will be able to read what you write. So you can use this as a personal journal to track your thoughts or progress on a particular task. It might equally be a way to track the weather. A colleague of mine uses his blog to journal his dissertation progress and it is interesting to see his progress.

To access your blog, simply click “Blog” in the menu. You can choose to view other people’s blogs (and politely comment on their postings) or you can create your own blog posting. See the picture to the right.
Attachments – Like your email program you can attach files to various postings you make to the CLN. This includes attaching a file to a discussion, blog, group discussion etc…. Attaching files is very handy when you want to convey a particularly large amount of information all at once or, the information you want to convey contains pictures, graphs or tables. And like email, when posting an attachment, you can still include a message in addition to the attachment.

In this example, I have created a new discussion on the CLN main page, wrote a very short message and then attached a cartoon to the message. See the Figures to the right:
1. Click “browse” and find the file which you would like to attach on your computer.
2. Click “Open”
3. Click Add Discussion
Friends:

Over time the CLN will become quite large. Within a year we expect there could be hundreds of members and it is not likely that you will all know each other personally. The CLN has a feature called friends which is designed to allow more personal communications with those people you either know or want to know – like colleagues at your institution for example. To become friends with someone on the CLN you must ask someone to be friends and that person must accept your friendship. To do this try the following:

1. Click on the Members tab on the CLN
2. Choose the member/person you would like to befriend
3. In the left hand column of the member’s page, click on the link “Add as Friend”
4. You will see a small note saying: “Person” will have to accept your friendship. And there will be a link below that to either add a personal message or send the request. Click send and wait until the person (hopefully) accepts you as a friend.

Please note that if someone sends you a friend request you should try to accept it. The reason is that it helps build community and makes communication within the community easier. As friends, you are able to send each other emails from within the CLN for example. It is unlikely that the person requesting friendship is someone unknown to the community because COL vets people before they can join the CLN. If you experience difficulty with this or have questions please contact us at flexibleskills@col.org
Types of communications:

There are many forums/places for us to add content and discuss things on the CLN. The challenge is to choose the right place for the right kind of communication or topic. There are no hard and fast rules for what is appropriate in the same way that there are often no hard and fast rules for what is appropriate in face to face meetings. However, as with face to face meetings, there are some guidelines that we would like to suggest. In most of the cases (blog, discussion, group) you will have a choice between starting a new discussion or commenting on an already existing discussion. Please choose between the 2 carefully. Discussions are meant to be clear and easy to follow so adding an unrelated comment into an already existing discussion (while probably innocent and will result in no real problems) can be confusing to users and make it difficult to respond to your comment if you do indeed want a response.

So if you have a new idea then please start a new discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Best Venue</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A private message between you and another individual (or2) that you do not wish others to see.</td>
<td>Email or the CLN email function</td>
<td>You can use the CLN mail function by clicking on your name and then clicking on Inbox. This will open an email page that works like other email programs. You can also click on an individual’s name which will take you to their page and then you can click “Send a Message” which you will find on the left side of the screen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please note that you must be "friends" with the person in order to use this feature. See the above section on **friends**.

| A message between you and another individual that can be made public, but, you don’t expect much discussion. An example of this might be when congratulating someone or commenting on a recent event. | Post a comment to an individual’s page on the network. You do this by clicking on the person’s name and leaving a comment for him/her on his or her page. You will see the field for leaving a comment in the middle of the page. |
| A message to the entire CLN group that you hope will generate further (and wide ranging) discussion | Discussion board on the front page |
| A message to the members of your institution that you hope will generate further (and wide ranging) discussion | Group discussion board |
| A more personal message that you would like the entire CLN to read but you don’t | Your blog |

This could include perhaps some
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think will generate much discussion beyond perhaps some comments interesting articles you came upon

| Something interesting that has happened regarding FSD in your institutions that you want to share with the Community | Send to Alison Mead Richardson on fsd.amr@gmail.com for inclusion in FSD NEWS on the main page |
| Institution documents regarding FSD (new draft policies and plans, course outlines, etc) that you would like the COL FSD Team to give feedback on. | Upload as an attachment to your group discussion forum |