

2.1.1 Newfoundland and Labrador

Geographically speaking, Canada's most easterly province — Newfoundland and Labrador — is composed of two landmasses: the island of Newfoundland and the mainland portion of Labrador. The province has a total area of just over 400,000 km², two thirds of which is the Labrador portion. As of the 2009 population estimates, the population of the province was 508,990, with approximately 30,000 of those living in the Labrador region (Statistics Canada, 2009). The capital of the province is St. John's, located on the Avalon Peninsula (in the southeastern corner of the province), with a population of approximately 125,000. However, approximately 60% of the entire population of the province resides on the Avalon Peninsula.

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	
Other online programmes	No	
Provincial-level policy	No	

Online Programmes

The Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI) came into existence in 2000 based on the recommendation of a ministerial panel (Sparkes & Williams, 2000). The CDLI began its curricular offerings 2001-02, with 10 courses field-tested in 10 districts (i.e., one course per district) and a total of 200 student enrolments from 76 different rural schools. After the initial field test, the CDLI expanded its course offerings so that students from all over the province could access any course. Over the past seven years, the CDLI has increased its offerings to the point where there are approximately 1,500 student enrolments each year from approximately 100 different schools in the approximately 40 online courses it has developed.

The CDLI utilises a combination of synchronous and asynchronous instruction for each of their online courses. For the synchronous instruction, the CDLI has teachers that provide, depending on the subject area, anywhere from 30% to 80% of the students' scheduled time (which is 10-one hour periods over a fourteen day cycle) in synchronous instruction using *Elluminate*®. Participating schools must align their schedule with the specific CDLI schedule for their region to ensure that students class time in their brick-and-mortar schools matches with the CDLI's synchronous class times.

The asynchronous instruction is conducted using a course management system (formerly *WebCT*®, now *Desire2Learn*®). The asynchronous course content is divided up into the units called for in the provincially mandated curriculum guide, further divided into sections which are akin to themes that may flow in each of the units, and finally into lessons which are designed as the items of actual asynchronous instruction that can be completed in usually one to three hours of student time. Each lesson is broken down into five component parts — the objectives; a list of knowledge and skills students are expected to have mastered prior to the lesson; the content of the lesson; a list of additional readings, resources and activities the student is expected to complete to master the

lesson content; and a self-assessment. The asynchronous course content contains material for all of the course outcomes, and in theory students could complete the course entirely asynchronously by following this course content.¹

Provincial Policies

At this time there is no language in the *Education Act* related to K-12 distance education. There are also no policies or regulation specifically related to K-12 distance education within the Ministry of Education, although work is currently being done in this area.

Funding

The CDLI receives a block grant from the provincial Government that funds the administration, overhead and course development activities of the online programme. One of the items included in the CDLI overhead is the placement and maintenance of computers and other support equipment that the CDLI provides to all of the schools that participate in its programme. The CDLI also receives a direct allocation of teaching units from the provincial Government to hire teachers for their online courses.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

At present, the CDLI is not a separate school or entity. Rather it operates within the Planning and Educational Programmes Branch of the Ministry of Education.

While there are no specific governance or accountability measure from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry does track the method of delivery that students complete their studies. This allows for comparisons of student performance between the students who take their courses via distance education and those enrolled in the face-to-face environment. Data related to distance education enrolment are available through the *K-12 School Profile System*, while data on student performance are available from the Ministry upon request.

Recent published studies using this data have indicated that there are no differences in the performance of students in these two delivery models (Barbour & Mulcahy, 2008, 2009; Crocker, 2009), although some have expressed concern that the sample distance education students is composed of a higher ability student and/or that some students are electing to enrol in a basic-level curriculum to avoid taking courses online (Mulcahy, Dibbon & Norberg, 2008).

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

The CDLI hires full-time teachers based on the allocation it receives from the provincial Government. In recent years this allocation has been in the range of 16-20 teaching units. In most instances, the CDLI has chosen to second teachers from their positions with one of the province's five school districts. However, there is nothing preventing the CDLI from directly hiring teachers. One of the advantages of seconded teachers from existing positions is that many of these teachers remain in their brick-and-mortar schools. This gives the CDLI a human presence outside of their main offices in the capital city.

1 Barbour (2007) provides an extensive description of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and its rural nature, along with a history of the development distance education, and a detailed description of the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation and its delivery model.

CDLI courses are developed in several stages. First, a request for proposals is issued for individuals (most often teachers) to respond with a basic overview of the structure for the required online course. The winning individual is tasked with creating the course content within the CDLI's own developer's template. The use of a standard template provides a common look and feel, along with navigation for all CDLI courses. After the content has been created, a second individual (again often a teacher) is responsible for providing a thorough review of the content, sequencing, and other pedagogical and design issues. The original course content creator must then revise the content based upon the reviewer's report. The content is then edited and uploaded. Multimedia and other interactive items are often added separately, and the course is generally pilot tested with a smaller group of students before being deployed.

Beyond the CDLI's own systems for quality assurance, the evolution of K-12 distance education programmes in Newfoundland and Labrador are the most studied of any series of initiatives in Canada. For example, Memorial University of Newfoundland has recently established the Killick Centre as a part of a federal grant that "aims to foster innovative research, training and new knowledge in the area of e-learning in the field of education." To date, one of the main partners in this research has been the CDLI.