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# UNIT 3 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF HIGHER DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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## **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous units, we took a close look at the variety and diversity of the distance education systems functioning across the world. A critical analysis of this survey will have provided you with a deep insight in to the evolution of distance education systems in different environments and in meeting a variety of objectives and goals. The presentation would have also helped you to understand the typology of organisational models in terms of their organisation and structure.

The emergence of distance education was a global phenomenon. Education systems across the world experimented with new innovations and experiments. What innovations were tried, and how new systems evolved, depended substantially on the environments in which these experiments were conducted. It is therefore time that we now turn to take a close look, from the management perspective, at the organisational designs and structures of distance education systems and institutions, on a more general theoretical framework. The descriptive treatment of the evolution of distance education systems and institutions in the previous unit, we hope, will have provided you with the perspective to understand and assimilate the more theoretical models of management dealt with in this Unit.

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## **3.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- analyse and identify the critical factors that influence the organisational designs of distance education institutions in different environments;
- design and develop appropriate organisational structures for distance education systems, both existing as well as new, that can deliver specific objectives and purposes;

- relate the design of the organisation to the existing as well as emerging environment in which the organisation has to function; and
- build innovative models of organisation that can effectively deliver distance education programmes keeping the environmental and resource-related constraints in view.

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### 3.3 DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: THE TYPOLOGY

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The discussions so far focused on two fundamental issues: (i) the nature and type of distance education as a system and (ii) the models of organisation that deliver distance education. As we have noticed, distance education as a system has evolved through several stages, each with a distinct feature. If we were to identify each of these features as a type, we find the following systemic models emerging:

- Learning for sitting in examinations and obtaining qualifications;
- Learning with the help of postal or correspondence tuition;
- Group learning through distance education delivered at identified learning centres (Central Radio and Television University of China :CRTVU);
- Distance education by harnessing multiple mass media (the post-UKOU distance education systems).

As we have seen, within each of these major systems, there are several organisational types, each of which with a distinct typology. Depending upon their primary focus and thrusts, the organisational types vary. Nevertheless, they can be identified with the scope, nature and range of the functions they perform. As the functions of distance education institutions are far more comprehensive than those of conventional institutions, their organisational patterns and structures as well as operations tend to be very complex. At the same time, it is also true that there can never be an absolutely right way, or just one single way, to organise effective distance education systems. All these systems, however, have similar goals and share two common features:

- They are designed primarily to meet the needs of adult or mature learners who are unable to attend campus-based programmes;
- Because they are not campus-based, the teaching-learning processes need to be mediated by a variety of means.

As we noted earlier, in distance education, it is the institution, and not the teacher, that teaches. It is this feature of distance education that lends itself to a variety of organisational designs and innovations, depending upon the ways in which its teaching functions are organised in different environments. It is important to keep this factor in mind while attempting to examine the organisational models of distance education systems.

There have been a number of attempts to identify the typologies of distance education institutions, especially those offering higher education. The number of variables that characterise these institutions, and the rapidity of

change that a particular type of system undergoes within a short period of time, are the two major factors that make it difficult to classify them into any fixed organisational type. During the past half a century or so, developments in distance education systems have been diverse and revolutionary in more ways than one. However, a broad classification of these in to four broad types remains manifestly dominant, as it is supported by both descriptive as well as analytical literature on distance education. We have another reason for our preference for this classification; it is the institutional status that defines the main criterion. As we discuss the management of distance education, in which the institution plays the lead role, we find it important to consider the institutional models.

Broadly, there are four distinct types of distance education institutions. They are:

- Traditional institutions engaged in campus-based education also delivering their programmes at a distance. These are known as dual mode institutions;
  - Multiple mass media models also known as single mode or dedicated institutions;
  - Network-based distance education systems; and
  - Virtual distance teaching universities.
- We shall now look at each of these models in some detail.

### 3.3.1 Dual Mode Institutions

As we have seen, the practice of distance education evolved from the attempts of traditional institutions to reach out to students who are not on their campuses. In some ways, therefore, the credit for pioneering distance education methods in delivering traditional programmes of education to non-campus students must go to traditional universities. The University of London and the University of South Africa played this pioneering role. Many other universities followed their example in the 1960s and 1970s, and today, the number of traditional universities engaged in distance education is indeed very large. For most of these institutions, in the early stages, distance education programmes were a means to widen access, and enlarge educational opportunities for larger numbers. In more recent times, with technologies playing a critical part in delivering educational programmes, distance education practices have entered campus-based education as well. This emerging trend of convergence of different modes of delivery somewhat obfuscates the distinction between the traditional and distance modes of education. But the reality is that distance education as an effective mode of education delivery is gaining acceptability, credibility and recognition.

A dual mode institution is one that caters to student needs using both the modes-conventional face-to-face teaching and distance teaching with or without student support. It needs to be noted that the majority of distance learners across the world are enrolled in dual mode institutions. Historically, in most countries, these institutions are not only older but also much larger in numbers and, therefore, it is much easier for them to deploy their considerable physical and intellectual resources in the design, development and delivery of distance education offerings.

What we have said so far is not enough to understand the variety of dual mode distance education institutions. It is not within the scope of this unit to talk about each and every variety. However, we shall try to give some depth to the understanding of this type of institutions by focussing our discussion on three distinct examples of dual mode institutions.

*The Indian Example:* In India, the University of Delhi was the first to introduce correspondence education in 1962 through the mechanism of what came to be known as the School of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education (SOCCE). Established in 1922, the University of Delhi is one of the largest universities in India, Today, it has some 70+ Departments, 80 colleges and over 220,000 students on rolls in regular full-time education. The SOCCE, started with some 900 students in 1962, has grown steadily and had reached an enrolment level of over 150,000 by the end of the century. Around this time, the university started thinking about reorganising the SOCCE and improving the delivery of its services. Almost four decades after it started its correspondence education programmes, the university has completely restructured its distance education wing. The University has now a Campus of Open Learning as an umbrella structure that oversees and coordinates all its open learning and distance education initiatives. The SOCCE, now known as the School of Open Learning (SOL) offers undergraduate and post graduate programmes in the humanities and social sciences and has an enrolment of over 200,000 students.

To meet the increasing demand for higher education, the Government of India, as a matter of policy, decided in 1967 to support and encourage universities in the country to offer facilities for part-time and correspondence education. Several Universities seized this opportunity and initiated correspondence education. Over 200 universities today offer correspondence education. During the last two decades, most of these universities have restructured and modernised their correspondence education offerings into good quality distance education programmes. Most of these universities are also in the process of establishing effective learner support systems using modern technologies.

It does not follow that all is well with this experiment, at least in India. The traditional universities are preoccupied with their mainstream face-to-face programmes. Most of them set up separate Directorates (Institutes, in some cases) to run their correspondence programmes. These Units of organisation have no autonomy; the academic programmes, course content, assessment procedures, and all other operational matters are handled by the decision-making bodies of the parent university. Preparation of course materials, in most cases, is a part-time responsibility of the regular faculty; often, these materials are indifferently produced. Most universities generate large revenues (some of them in fact took this initiative only to augment their income) from their correspondence offerings (the demand for university degrees from the adult population is indeed very high); the resource allocation pattern does not reflect this reality. In several cases, the Correspondence (Distance) Education Directorates do not have independent academic staff; if they do, they are mostly on secondment from their parent Departments. If any staff is recruited exclusively for these programmes, they are mainly to perform the administrative functions (University of Delhi was an exception to this rule and had its own academic and administrative staff).

There are signs of change in the last decade or so. As we noted, the University of Delhi has made significant changes in its approach to, and

organisation of, its distance education programmes. Several other universities are moving in similar directions. There is now a greater awareness among universities that they can ill-afford to ignore their distance education programmes and leave them as a peripheral concern.

*The Malaysian Example:* A major distance education provider in Malaysia is the University Sains Malaysia (USM) that is the University of Science (in English). Established in 1969, the USM offers courses in Engineering, Science, Technology, Management, the Arts, the Humanities and Social Sciences. It started its distance education operations under the auspices of its Centre for Off-Campus Education that got reorganised into a School of Distance Education. The School has its own academic and administrative staff, and is not very different from the Indian model from the organisational and structural points of view.

What makes the Malaysian pattern different, and perhaps unique, is its approach to university education. The USM believes that participation in the community life of the university is a mandatory requirement for all its graduates. Accordingly, its distance learners were obliged to spend one year on campus to qualify for the degree. While regular students study full-time on campus throughout the duration of their programmes, distance education students did so only in the last year and studied the remaining parts at a distance. The insistence on full-time campus-based study for one year at a stretch robbed the programme of its usefulness to working people. Apparently to remedy this situation, the university has now done away with the requirement of full-time one-year residency for distance learners. Instead, it has now made provision for a 2-3 week annual residential course supported by an e-learning portal, live video conferencing/web conferencing and CD-based video lectures. Surely, distance learners are not comfortable with mandatory full-time attendance of long durations.

*The Australian Example:* The Deakin University experiment, evolved over a period of time, typifies the Australian pattern of distance education. Till 1982, Deakin University had a separate administrative unit to take care of its off-campus students. Later, this unit was abolished and its activities were integrated with those of the main university campus. The strength of this pattern is the use of the same academic staff to serve both on-campus and off-campus students. In other words, the significant feature of the Australian pattern is that both on-campus students as well as distance learners have the same faculty teaching the same course to the same standard.

We are not suggesting that these patterns are the authentic types of distance education organisation in these three countries. We have used these examples only for the sake of convenience. As, for example, what we have termed the Indian pattern is very much in evidence at the University of Queensland in Australia, and the earlier Deakin model is hardly different from what is followed at the University of New England or New South Wales in Australia or the University of Zambia in Africa. What is important, however, is to note that the pattern of organisation and the structures associated with the distance education systems run by the dual mode institutions reflect wide variations in details depending upon several factors like the academic strength of the universities, the strength or weakness of the client groups for distance education, the availability of adequate technology infrastructure, and more importantly, the ease with which the distance learners can access the available technologies.

For quite some time, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, distance education experts and scholars have strongly held the view that the dual mode systems could not do full justice to the distance education system. It was not surprising. Most universities considered and continued to think that distance education cannot assume or substitute the role of face-to-face education in fostering scholarship and understanding or deepening the intellectual curiosity in young minds as constant interaction with teachers with established scholarship and equally strong peer groups do. These fundamental differences in views have influenced the general perception about distance education and its parity of esteem. It was generally considered to be a poor cousin of mainstream formal education. Prejudiced though this perception was, there were significant issues of organisation and structure that critical scholarship often raised in discussing the effectiveness of distance education. For example, in most dual mode institutions, distance education has to be content with less than adequate attention and it always suffered from inadequacies in resource allocation, lack of autonomy in governance, general unwillingness on the part of authorities to innovate and experiment, and not the least, less than challenging demands from learner groups.

This pessimism was further reinforced by the phenomenal success of the single mode open universities during that period. We shall come to this issue a little later. For over two decades, the open universities seemed to have offered the answer, making comparisons of relative merits of the two types of institutional frameworks leading to a judgement more in favour of the open universities.

Professional development of distance educators is often mentioned as a serious deficiency. The poor quality of distance education teachers has been a source of great concern. Teachers engaged in classroom teaching are not adequately equipped to meet the demands of distance learners. A major academic function in distance teaching is preparation of self-instructional materials and multimedia packages that require specialised professional competence; there were no programmes of training to develop the required skills in this area.

It was not as though these inadequacies and shortcomings are not addressed. Most developing distance education systems continuously endeavour to evaluate their performance, identify their strengths and weaknesses and make efforts to improve their performance, enhance the quality of their programmes and services and generally improve their effectiveness. In the last two decades or so, several dual mode institutions have taken a series of measures to convert correspondence education programmes into mainstream distance education offerings. They have reviewed and redefined their programme development strategies, enhanced their learner support systems, harnessed the available technologies to strengthen their delivery systems, and have made conscious efforts to adopt distance education methods and practices to widen access and extend educational opportunities. As we have noted earlier, the increasing acceptance of convergence of campus-based and distance education systems have provided a further phillip to the efforts of traditional institutions engaging in distance education initiatives in a big way.

It has to be remembered that much of the success of distance education is due to its ability to reap the benefits of economies of scale. Together with its ability in cutting costs by drawing on existing resources rather than

establishing its own infrastructure, a distance education system tends to be more efficient and cost-effective. In order to sustain this success, a system also needs a constantly increasing client base. Since all countries in the world cannot afford to sustain traditional institutions as well as dedicated open universities, there is a strong view now that it would be preferable to support dual mode institutions rather than creating dedicated distance education institutions in environments that cannot support both. The improvements that we noted earlier which are constantly taking place in such countries as Australia, India, and those in Africa hold great promise. We shall return to this issue later.

It would be appropriate at this stage to mention some examples of what dual mode institutions can do to enhance the quality and credibility of their distance education offerings if their freedom of governance, recruitment of staff and autonomy in operations to design and develop study materials and organise the delivery systems are assured. The Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages at Hyderabad in India is a good case to show what a dual mode institution can do. Such dual mode institutions are also operating in the USA and other countries. Wherever they are, they are part of mainstream universities, enjoy considerable autonomy in preparing courses and materials, recruiting qualified staff and training them and getting their programmes accredited by nationally recognised accrediting agencies. Quite naturally, they enjoy high levels of credibility

Let us now turn to a critical analysis of the dual mode system on the basis of the issues and concerns so far discussed. There is no denying the fact that the richness of experiences and traditions of a university would endow its endeavours with great values and acceptability. It should be expected that, in general, universities would not risk their reputation and credibility by involving themselves in half-hearted measures, and would endow all initiatives they take with their most serious attention and consideration. They take distance education seriously, and do everything in their power to ensure that the quality and standards of their distance education programmes are as good as their regular offerings. Examples of New England, Deakin and other Australian universities reinforce this view. They bring to bear on their distance education programmes the authenticity, credibility and value that their regular programmes have by involving the same faculty, applying the same standards of teaching and learning and the same rigours of assessment. There are additional advantages too; these universities can use their infrastructure and save substantial investment costs, reduce the recurring costs by using the existing services and facilities with marginal additions, and operate at optimum efficiency.

On the other hand, there have been cases, as in India, for example, where the traditional universities have not always been too enthusiastic about taking the trouble of enriching their distance education initiatives with the richness of their resources and experience. Consequently, several distance education programmes of dual mode universities in the 1970s and 1980s were of poor quality leading to considerable scepticism about their usefulness. Research studies conducted in early 1990s have established this perception. In the last decade and a half, however, there have been efforts at remedying the situation and many dual mode universities in India and elsewhere have consolidated their distance education initiatives. The creation of a national level mechanism for the promotion and coordinated development of the distance education offerings of conventional universities has gone a long way in strengthening their distance education offerings. We shall look at

these efforts in greater detail later in this Block. In conclusion, it could be said that conventional models of academic practices cannot be wholly imposed on the distance mode of education and that conversely, an innovative system like distance education cannot thrive under the traditional mode. Having said this, we must admit that, in the ultimate analysis, a lot depends upon the dedication and the commitment of the people who run the dual mode institutions as well as the institution's own philosophy and approach as clearly evidenced by the examples of New England and Deakin.

Let us now turn to the second category of institutions that we called the multimedia model of distance education run by the single mode open universities.

### Check Your Progress 1

**Note:** i) Space is given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

What is the major difference between the Indian and Malaysian models of the dual mode systems? (Answer in about 30 words).

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### 3.3.2 Single Mode Institutions

This model evolved with the establishment of the British Open University in 1969. In many ways, this event marked a decisive movement forward in the evolution of distance education that was soon emulated across the world. Otto Peters (2003) calls it the "multiple mass media model" as it was the British Open University that led the movement for open learning systems in a big way. The core of this model is basically a combination of the earlier two models, namely, "independent self-study" and "correspondence education" supplemented with the use of radio and television and the provision of learner support at the study centres. Though radio and television were pressed into service for expanding education much before the British Open University was established (in China, for example, as we have seen in a previous unit), it was the British Open University that developed the multiple mass media model of distance education as an enduring innovation. In developing this model, the university recruited not just the faculty for subject specialisations, but many specialists too in instructional design, mediapedagogy and testing. Further, it designed its institutional structures to support student learning across the country (regional academic centres) and secured close cooperation and collaboration of BBC for preparation and broadcast of radio and television programmes on a sustained basis. It was not surprising then that this model became worthy of emulation and within three or four decades, more than 40 open universities across the world came to be influenced by the British Open University model. We shall return to this model and take a closer look at it later in this unit.

But first, we also need to appreciate the environment in which the British Open University was launched. The second half of the twentieth century

witnessed a significant change in the approach to, and provision for, higher education. The highly selective approach of the past for entry into higher education came under serious scrutiny. Economic development, changing needs of a technology - dominated world and the emergence of new nation states committed to democracy and development, saw the social demand for higher education grow exponentially. The single digit enrolment ratio of the relevant age group in higher education (17-23) was found to be totally inadequate to meet the increasing demand. Denial of entry to universities for aspiring new social groups turned out to be a major political issue. Democratisation and mass higher education became the catchwords.

Almost at the same time, questions also began to be raised about the content of university education and its relevance. The traditional notions about liberal education emphasised study for the sake of study; this attitude inhibited the development of vocational courses almost everywhere. The focus of higher education was the school leavers, and the places available in the universities were never adequate to respond to all those who sought opportunities for education. The many who were denied entry remained outside with no opportunity to return to education and improve their lives and work. Do they remain deprived for ever? Do they come to universities just for the sake of study? How to give them opportunities to study what they want to study? There was no way the conventional universities were going to accept this responsibility. Then, who will do so? Existing universities were not equipped to respond to this situation. Rigidities in academic practices strenuously built over centuries of restrictive practices were not easy to break away from. Nor were enough resources available for establishment of large numbers of new universities. The new Labour government that came to power in 1964 gave expression to the idea of a University of the Air to absorb a large part of the increasing social demand for higher education. We shall come back to the founding of the UKOU shortly.

Exclusive distance teaching institutions are referred to as the single mode or dedicated distance education institutions. Unlike the distance teaching Departments/units in the mixed/dual mode universities, the single mode institutions have complete freedom in determining what to teach, how to teach and whom. Their academics, administrators and production personnel, all work for distance education. Also, unlike the consortium model of distance education institutions, the open/distance mode models of institutions do not have to accommodate differing educational philosophies, different organisational patterns and differing ideologies about using the media and their uses, or the indifference of certain departments or schools within one or more institutions. In other words, this model is relatively free from the constraints of the other two models that have to depend on existing structures and processes as well as established institutional cultures and traditions.

On pragmatic considerations too, a system of education that operates on a quasi-industrial model, has its learners separated from teachers, peer groups and the institution itself, as well as one that uses electronic media to compensate for the lack of inter-personal interaction, and a system that on the whole differs from all crucial operational aspects of the conventional system, cannot and should not be subjected to the conventional constraints in terms of administrative procedures and academic practices. Quite obviously, conventional management systems and administrative practices have to give way to more innovative and imaginative organisational and

managerial systems and processes. Only a dedicated institutional structure can do justice to these demands. The success of the UKOU was its ability in developing structures and processes that responded adequately to the needs of remotely located students. It would be worthwhile to look at the ways in which UKOU managed its operations. We would like to present to you a brief account of the functional aspects of UKOU.

### **UKOU: A Study**

We mentioned a little while ago that UKOU emerged as a model for a very large number of open universities that came up across the world in the 1970s and later. It would be interesting to study this model in some detail to appreciate the finer aspects of organisation and management of an effective distance learning system. We do not claim that this presentation is an exhaustive case study of the UKOU as it evolved during the last four decades; it is just a brief survey of where it started and what made it reach where it is today.

### **Origins of the UKOU**

In 1963, the Robbins Report on Higher Education in the UK stated that there was an untapped pool of adults in the United Kingdom who were in need of university education but had 'missed out' the opportunity earlier in their lives for various reasons. In the same year Harold Wilson, then the leader of the opposition, who, after a visit to the then Soviet Union, was impressed by the use of "media technology" there in the field of education and floated the idea of a 'University of the Air'. When the Labour Party came to power in 1964, Harold Wilson, the new Prime Minister entrusted Jennie Lee, a junior minister in the Department of Education and Science, with the special responsibility for the University of the Air project. Subsequently a white paper was brought out and a Planning Committee was established to work out a comprehensive plan for an Open University, as outlined in the white paper and to prepare a draft charter and statutes. After the Planning Committee report was published in 1969, Royal Charter was granted in June the same year, establishing the Open University as an independent and autonomous institution authorised to offer its own courses and confer its own degrees. Walter Perry was appointed the first Vice-Chancellor of the British Open University. Over the years, the British Open University has emerged as one of the most celebrated distance teaching institutions of the world. One of the key factors that contributed to the success of the UKOU was the organisation and management of the various functions of the university.

### **Organisational Structure**

Organisationally, the British Open University is structured on the principle of division of labour: it has its Academic Schools (Faculties) and Centres that identify, design and develop programmes and courses; it has its own Media Preparation and Production Centres for developing and producing electronic media materials, the Regional Academic Services that provide learning support to its distributed student body; and specialised structures engaged in the operations of Course Production and Distribution. And all these areas of operations are effectively coordinated and administered by a General Administration wing. Detailed structure of UKOU is depicted in Fig.3.1.

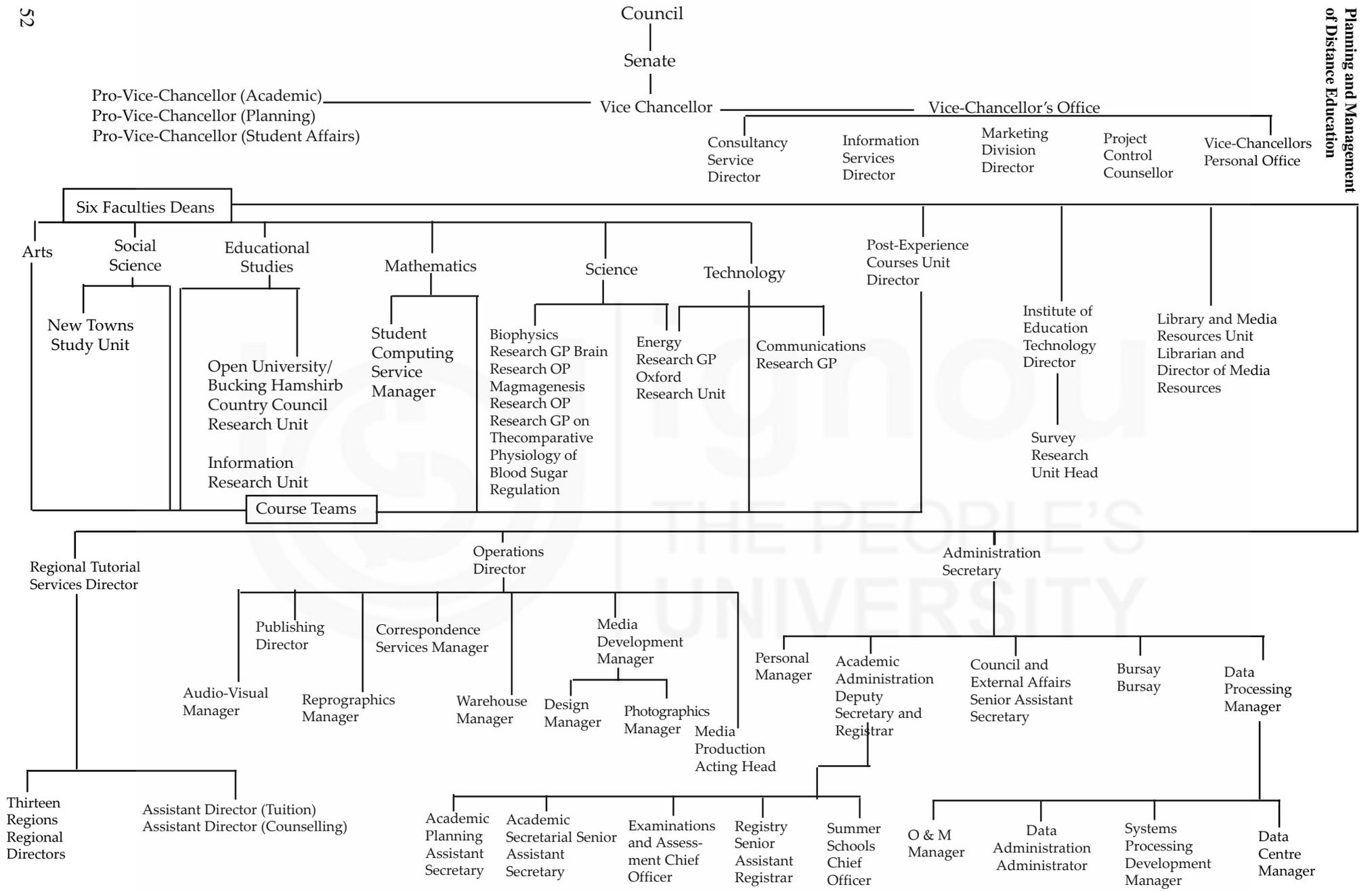


Fig. 3.1: Organisational Chart: UKOU, London

The executive head of the university is the Vice-Chancellor. There are Pro-Vice-Chancellors with individual responsibilities for specific policy areas. The bi-cameral governance structure of the university consists of two power-sharing bodies, the Senate and the Council. The senate comprises all members of the academic staff, the elected representatives of non-academic staff, part-time tutorial staff and some students and is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor (it has a large membership, over 800). The Senate determines the academic policies. The Council is the executive governing body, a more compact body of about 40 members, a majority of whom are drawn from outside the university and is chaired by the Pro-Chancellor. Besides, there are three bodies, (i) the Academic Board, (ii) the Student Affairs and Awards Board and (iii) the Planning Board. The first two report to the Senate and the third reports both to the Senate and the Council.

Let us now take a look at some of the critical areas of the OU's organisation to understand how a single mode *open university* performs its functions.

### How Does The Open University Function?

**The Instructional System:** The British Open University runs teaching programmes for undergraduates, post graduates and associate students. In addition, the university has a research programme, an institutional research and development programme, a programme of international activities and a programme related to the marketing of the university's teaching materials.

Offering a wide range of academic programmes at the undergraduate level has been the major activity of the British Open University. Perhaps, its biggest contribution is the promotion of the open university principle. Students who want to register for undergraduate programmes need not have any formal academic qualifications, but must be 21 years of age. The OU students get their degrees by gaining credits, 6 for a B.A degree and 8 for a B.A. Honours degree. A full credit course is based on 32 weekly units of work. Each unit requires 12-15 hours of study of print materials, and the programmes broadcast through the Radio and the Television (course material broadcast by BBC stopped from 2005 and the University now provides DVDs for watching programmes). With the popularity of personal computers and Internet, most Open University programmes can now be pursued through web-based education. The minimum period of study is 3 years for B.A. and 4 years for a B.A (Hons). The students sit for a 3-hour final examination after completing assignments and summer school requirements where necessary for some programmes, summer schools or residential requirements are compulsory). The Associate Student Programmes (ASP) offer courses in the areas of community education, in-service teacher training, health and social welfare, technological updating, management, history, politics, culture etc. Teachers, professionals, housewives, technical personnel and clerical and office staff etc. register for these courses. Students who complete the course work and pass a final examination and get a course certificate. Those who complete just the course and do not sit for or do not pass the examination receive a letter of course completion. Although the British Open University has adopted the multi-media approach to its instructional methods, the main component of the OU teaching materials has been the printed text. Most OU courses are now available on DVDs and through the Internet. Science students get, in addition to the materials in print and electronic media, the home kits to conduct scientific experiments: Students are required to buy certain books (called set books) for further study. The set books are low-priced books printed by private publishers under agreement with the Open

University. Planning and management of the numerous operations related to the above mentioned tasks require specialised skills and resources.

**Course design or course creation:** The Faculty Board or what we call "Expert Committee" initiates proposals for starting new courses or programmes. The proposal must get the approval of the course-committee 24-36 months (i.e. 2-3 years) before the year of presentation of the course. The OU insists on this lead-time for completion of all preparations for the launch of the courses. Courses are written by course teams. The number of members on each course team may vary but it must have (a) the academics, (b) the educational technologists, and (c) multimedia production staff. The course team will have a chairman who is an academic experienced in developing distance-teaching materials. The academics who write the courses are mostly from the internal staff; sometimes, outside writers are also appointed on contract as consultants. The multimedia producers who are themselves highly qualified academics in the disciplines concerned interact with academics/course writers throughout the creation of the courses. However, the producers are responsible for the quality and production schedule of the programmes.

Library facilities are arranged for the course writers before they start writing the units or courses. A member of the course team works on the first draft and the draft is circulated among the other members of the team for their criticism, comments and suggestions. In the cases of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities a course usually goes in the name of one member of the team and the science course go in the names of the respective teams. Where differences of opinion or ideological disputes are involved, a consensus is sought to finalise the draft and send the manuscript is then sent for printing.

Though deadlines are usually met, they are not insisted upon if the academics have genuine problems in getting the courses written. As Perry puts it: "There is no sanction that can be applied to creativity. You cannot make academics write good courses, you can only provide encouragement and facilities and an ambience in which they can indulge their creative impulses" (Perry, 1987). The standard and the quality of the course materials are, however strictly to be adhered to by academics. Questions related to academic freedom of the team or the individuals are some of the toughest areas to be tackled by the management and usually it takes recourse to striking a balance between the contenders disputing various issues. However, it is accepted that an academic working in an open university will not enjoy the same degree of individual freedom in choosing the contents and teaching them as is enjoyed by academics in conventional universities. The very act of asking a team of individuals with differing perceptions and ideological persuasions to work together rules out absolute individual freedom that may be possible in the case of an academic in a traditional university. Nevertheless, academics have the freedom to express all shades of opinion on global issues, though the university as an institution does not take any position on these issues.

**Course production and distribution:** Once the final draft of a course is sent by the course team to the faculty editor; he/she makes the necessary editorial corrections and sends it to the printer. The OU uses private printers to print the course materials, and it uses its own press to print supplementary reading materials. The printed materials are stored in the OU Warehouse and periodically mailed to the students. The OU graphic unit takes care of illustrations to be printed in texts and the copyright office sorts out the copyright issues.

The production of electronic media packages is now done by the professional staff appointed by the university who are also highly qualified academics in various disciplines. They are part of the course team and work together with the academics (in the initial stages, the BBC was doing the media preparation and production and had stationed a unit on the OU campus; this arrangement has been terminated recently).

### Check Your Progress 2

**Note:** i) Space is given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

Describe briefly how the UKOU courses are created? (Answer in about 50 words).

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**Management of Student Support Services:** Management of student support services poses perhaps the most challenging problems to an Open University. Much of the success of the university would depend on how carefully the services are planned and how efficiently and effectively they are managed and implemented. The UKOU's student support services could provide a useful model for any open university in planning and managing its student affairs. Of course there will be variations in focus and priorities regarding the kinds of services that are to be given to students of a given distance teaching institution. But the systematic approach to the student support services as seen at the OU could help any open university. The basic issues that have enormous significance for the success of the support services are the commitment of the institution towards its students and its correct assessment of their needs. The UKOU has generally succeeded in both. From its inception, the academic bodies of the OU have been anxious to evolve an effective student support system. The salient features of the management of student support services at the OU are:

- Establishment and maintenance of an effective network of Regional Academic Centres and Study centres
- Coordination and supervision of tutorial services (summer schools included)
- Counselling services at different stages and provision for effective feedback; and
- Management of admissions, evaluation and examinations.

**Management of Regional Academic Services and Study Centres:** The UK is divided into 13 regions, and each Regional Centre is staffed with Academic supervisors, tutrial and counselling staff, admissions officers and supporting staff. Staff tutors organise day schools, field trips and other activities for students including supervision of tutorials at study centres. A group of Regional Academic staff (senior counsellors) supervise the progress of students (usually one senior counsellor for every 50 students). The study centres bring the university in to the heart of the local community and assure

students that a member of its staff is always available for personal and academic guidance. These centres are indeed the face of the university for a large distributed and remote student body; all student transactions from admission, fee payment, accessing learning materials, assignments and practicals, academic counselling and tutorial support to the final examinations, the Regional Centres and study centres perform them all.

Personal contact between tutor-counsellors and students is maintained throughout the period students remain active. Attendance at the tutorial sessions is optional, but submission of assignments is compulsory for all students. Most undergraduate and many associate students have to do two types of assignments: tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and computer marked assignments (CMAs). The performance of students on these assignments is made available to them through a well-equipped feedback system. Summer schools are part of the support services offered for the MA students with a view to giving them an opportunity to have the feeling of face-to-face students. Intensive work and a happy mood work best on such occasions. Arrangements are made with various educational institutions to provide accommodation, and laboratory facilities to students who attend summer schools.

While the conventional universities almost universally looked down upon distance education and conventional academics nearly always had a negative attitude to distance teaching and learning, the British Open University took on board this challenge right from the start, in setting about to prove that its teaching was second to none in higher education, and its degrees as good as that of any other. The Open University went on to establish several milestones; ranked among the top few in quality of education and research. An enviable record indeed!

What then is the future of open universities? During the two decades after the establishment of the first Open University (1969 to 1989), the world witnessed the creation of some 33 open universities. Of these, China accounted for 13 and India 5. In the next decade (1990 to 2000), there were 13 more (of which 4 were in India). Since 2000, the number has come down drastically, just three. Does this indicate a trend? Perhaps, yes. For one, dual mode institutions promise quality and cost-effectiveness if they can widen access. For another, the emergence of convergence of face-to-face and distance education tends to shed the bias against distance education decisively. And not the least, single mode universities need numbers that all environments cannot promise all the time. Not all countries in the world have the kind of population that most countries that have established open universities have. Do all these set any trends?

We shall now turn to the third category of our models list, namely, network-based distance education model.

### Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Space is given below for your answer.  
ii) Check your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

What are the major components of the system of student support services in the UKOU? (Answer in about 30 words).

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### 3.3.3 Consortium or Networked Systems

This model is essentially a consequence of the digital transformation of our world. A combination and integration of several advanced information and communication technologies, the most important among them being computer technology, multimedia technology, network technology and telecommunication technologies, made it possible to work in a 'digitised learning environment'. Students work offline or online; use DVDs or CD-ROMs with distance education courses in hypertext form, data-file courses or just databases, and take part in virtual seminars, workshops, tutorial and counselling meetings, tuition or project groups, and chat with their fellow students (Otto Peters, 2003). According to Peters, the greatest pedagogical advantage of this model is that students are challenged to develop new forms of learning by 'searching for, finding, acquiring, evaluating, judging, changing, storing, managing and retrieving information' when needed. They have the chance to learn by discovery and to be introduced to learning by doing research and becoming autonomous and self-regulated learners. Learning models of this kind have already been established by the UK Open University, Maryland University, SUNY Empire State College, Fern Universitat and the University of Oberta de Catalunya (Spain) (Peters, *ibid*).

The consortium approach is essentially an inter-institutional cooperative effort aimed at resolving financial, operational and academic-service related difficulties. Consortia are of different types and new types are being established increasingly, so there does not seem to be any sense in classifying them. However, it would be interesting to see how this model developed over time.

To begin with, the basis of a consortium was a resource pooling arrangement, which, by itself or through an agency, developed and produced study materials and made them available to the participating agencies/institutions for use by their students. For example, the Università a Distanza of Italy had a course/programme development and materials production mechanism, which received funds from various sources- private and public, including conventional universities, for developing materials. Students who used these study materials were enrolled by conventional universities, which conducted examinations and awarded degrees and diplomas. Tutorial and other support services are provided at local study centres, which are funded mainly by local bodies like municipalities. Another example of a similar arrangement is the Flexi Study system of the UK. It raises its funds by selling the material it produces, grants and donations from various private as well as public bodies. The pivot of this collaborative effort is the National Extension College (NEC). It enters into agreements with various colleges, which provide some courses with the help of materials developed and produced by NEC. The NEC enrolls its own students too, and uses materials available with them. This system is more open as it allows students to work entirely on their own, use correspondence or telephone tuition or face-to-face tuition.

An interesting example of academic collaboration and economical operation is the consortium involving Massey University along with a few other universities of New Zealand and the University of the South Pacific with headquarters at Fiji. In this case, Massey University is the central material developing and producing agency. The university itself is a dual mode institution which admits and teaches both on-campus and off-campus students with the help of its study centers spread across the country. The other universities of New Zealand also admit on-campus and off-campus

students, but they teach only the on-campus students. The off-campus students of these universities remain the responsibility of Massey University. Wherever there are Massey university arrangements for off campus instruction, students of other universities are to register for and attend Massey courses complete them according to Massey norms, and sit and clear Massey examinations. Grades obtained in such courses are transferred in the name of the student concerned to his/her home university. The same way, students of the South Pacific University can register for and gain credits on off-campus courses of Massey University to be counted toward their South Pacific degrees. One of the major reasons for the stability and success of this consortium is the central funding policy outlined and enforced by the Universities Grants Committee of New Zealand. What is of interest to us, as students of distance education, is the success of this operation.

An altogether different kind of consortium is exemplified by the Norsk Fernundervisning (NFU) of Norway. It is an institution with very small full-time staff of its own, and which neither develops any study materials nor admits/teaches any students. It has funds for promoting distance education in Norway. At the operational level, it initiates, approves, coordinates and enables efforts made by various collaborating institutions, like the Norwegian State Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board (Statens Filmsentral) which publishes and commissions private film and video producers to produce study materials. The distribution of materials is effected through market mechanisms such as booksellers and public mechanisms such as public libraries (for print materials) and the National Film Board (for audio and video materials). Registered with correspondence institutes, students are provided with support services at local centres, arranged by these correspondence institutes or other non-governmental organizations.

It was not unusual for these early models of consortia and networks to collapse, in spite of the realisation that, given the global economic situation, networks are beneficial for all the participating institutions. The basic cause, again is the rigidity, which has shackled the conventional institutions as well as the psyche of the academics involved. Different institutes claim to have differing philosophical bases, and they remain keen to perpetuate their character, as it is manifest in their educational processes as well as the content of their course. The levels of commitment to distance education differ from institute to institute, and within a single institute from department to department, and within departments from one academic to another; different organisational structures and operational models; different levels of technological development and ability to use technology; differing objectives with which the participants may enter a collaborative project; differences on technical issues like copyright, jurisdiction, sharing of the cost of collaboration, distribution of roles and inhibiting bureaucracies; and finally, among the academics involved, the pride in creativity coupled in many cases with a superiority complex.

The newer technology network models that we briefly discussed in unit 1 are certainly an improvement on these early models. The National Technological University of the USA and such other networks that bring together resource-rich institutions on a common platform in sharing their courses and programmes with a larger number of institutions and their students are here to stay.

### Check Your Progress 4

**Note:** i) Space is given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

Bring out the characteristic differences between the three models/systems of distance education discussed above. (Answer in about 30 words).

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### 3.3.4 Virtual Distance Teaching Universities

Information and communication technologies have made it possible to combine digital learning and teaching techniques with one another, and to integrate them. As we noted in the previous section, this combination and integration provide students with the opportunities to engage in a variety of forms of learning in a digital environment. They use interactive multimedia distance teaching courses on CD-ROMs, DVDs, on the Internet, chat with fellow students and participate in virtual seminars and practical courses through teleconferencing or videoconferencing; they benefit also from the facilities offered by universities on real campuses.

As we entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are seeing more and more hybrid distance learning environments that combine in one virtual classroom the elements of all the distance learning technologies that we have described so far, including the Internet, and the World Wide Web. They include digital TV, multitasking systems, software, TV network collaboration, multimedia CBT/CD-Rom/laser disc, the Internet, www and online video. Till recently, high technology distance education programmes relied mainly on point-to-point and limited-point videoconferencing. As the world moved towards evolving standards for video over the Internet, distance education systems began webcasting (simultaneously broadcasting a videoconference locally and over the Internet). Although PCs were not designed to be a broadcast medium, advances in communication software, high-speed modems, and global transmission networks are providing the framework that allows Internet to function more like interactive television in tomorrow's virtual classroom (Paul,1998).

According to Peters (2003), the virtual distance teaching university would probably become the most flexible institution of higher learning ever seen in the history of education. This would be true not just for administrative and academic structures alone, but to pedagogical structures as well. Innovative forms of teaching that combines and integrates several activities in the teaching spaces, namely, the virtual space for collaboration, exploration, documentation, multimedia, digitised wordprocessing, simulation and virtual reality would transform learning into a completely new experience through easy and rapid access to information, teaching programmes with diverse origins, simple and easy access to joint talks and group discussions.

African Virtual University (AVU) was one of the early examples of a virtual distance teaching institution. It was a World Bank project aimed at delivering advanced professional and technical education programmes of American

universities in Africa. The experiment was not a success mainly because there was little or no local involvement in the project, and eventually, the World Bank transferred the project to Africa. Now located in Nairobi, the AVU is making significant progress. Another instance of a virtual distance teaching university is the COL project for a Virtual University for Small States in the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

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## 3.4 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF OPEN UNIVERSITIES

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As we have noted earlier, universities are generally autonomous, self-governing institutions. This fundamental feature is common to all universities, both conventional and open. However, there are several features that are unique to open and distance education universities that are not the case with the conventional universities. In our attempt to understand the organisational nature of distance teaching universities, we tend to turn to the structure of familiar conventional universities. It is not unusual to find that the organisational nature of autonomous distance education institutions is quite similar to that of conventional universities but different from that of the dual-mode or networked systems of distance education. What makes a critical difference in the organisational pattern are the instrumentalities for bridging the distance between the teachers and the learners. When we looked at the structure of the British Open University, we noted the more important among the distinguishing structural features. But first, the more common among both.

### 3.4.1 Decision-making Bodies

The organisational structure of distance teaching universities sometimes tends to be more hierarchical than that of conventional universities. Nevertheless, with varying nomenclatures, the following bodies are found in almost all the distance teaching universities.

#### Planning Board

A group of planners for the university is constituted at the very beginning to provide the necessary guidance to various operations of the university. This Board plays a key role both in academic, developmental and monitoring activities. The Board consists of outstanding academics and educational administrators. The chief function of this Board is to take a holistic view of the University as a system and plan for its effective functioning and proper development. Such Boards exist in the open universities of UK, Pakistan, Japan and India.

#### Executive Council

The Executive Council is the principal governing body of the university. It consists of people of eminence from different disciplines, such as education, industry, science, technology and other sectors. Sometimes government representatives are also the members of the Executive Council. Generally, the Council has representatives of the media as it is an important component of distance education systems.

#### Academic Council

It is the principal academic body exercising general supervision over academic policies. It consists of outstanding academics from both inside and outside the university. It monitors and regulates the academic standards and the quality of course development mechanisms.

## Finance Committee

This committee looks after various financial matters such as resource mobilisation and utilization, grants from the Government, expenditure control, fee structure, loans, grants etc.

These decision-making organs are present in nearly all universities though their names and composition might vary from country to country.

## Structures Unique to Open Universities

The organisational design borrowed from their conventional counterparts cannot meet the unique demands made on open universities, which have to plan, produce and deliver the academic material to students; audio-video components also need to be planned, produced and made available to students through telecast or study centres. Hence there is the requirement of coordinating the production and distribution of material, arrangements of counselling and audio-video sessions for a large population of learners who are spread over a large area. For performing these functions, new structures, which are not part of the conventional universities, are included in the organisational design of distance education universities. For example, in the University of Air, Japan Divisions of Academic Production and General Affairs have been included in the organisational network to look after specific functions of the university. In the organisational chart of STOU, Thailand, besides Schools, we can see Educational Services, Academic Affairs, Registration, Records and Evaluation, Documentation and Information, and the University Press. In spite of the seemingly more corporate nature of the organisational structure, the work culture of Open Universities is more relaxed. The open education system nurtures a high degree of creativity because formal rules, impersonal, narrowly defined jobs and relationships of clear authority are not characteristic of Open Universities as they are in conventional education systems.

### 3.4.2 Regional Network

As the open (distance education) universities normally cover vast areas, sometimes the whole country and beyond, there is a need for establishing regional and local centres to provide strong support to students.

Most of the world's open universities have developed regional networks to support their students enrolled in various academic programmes. Regional offices are established to provide local, personalised services, represent local presence and help to instill a stronger sense of identity in students and part-time counsellors. These Regional Centres also try to coordinate between central bodies' and study centres. This decentralized pattern of administration helps the institution in recruitment of tutors and counsellors and in the admission of students, maintenance of records, maintenance of liaison with local educational bodies and in monitoring the progress of work. Regional centres also keep close and constant supervision over the implementation of various operations. For example, UKOU has 13 Regional offices to provide information and such services as counselling, on-site seminars and summer schools. These centres have extensive networks of tutors and tutor- counsellors for academic support, advice and counselling in almost every region of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In India, the National Open University has 62 Regional Centres. Athabasca university of Canada has three major Regional Offices which offer almost all the services in the local community- information, counselling on time, admission and registrations, course material stock, examination supervision, seminars and teleconferencing.

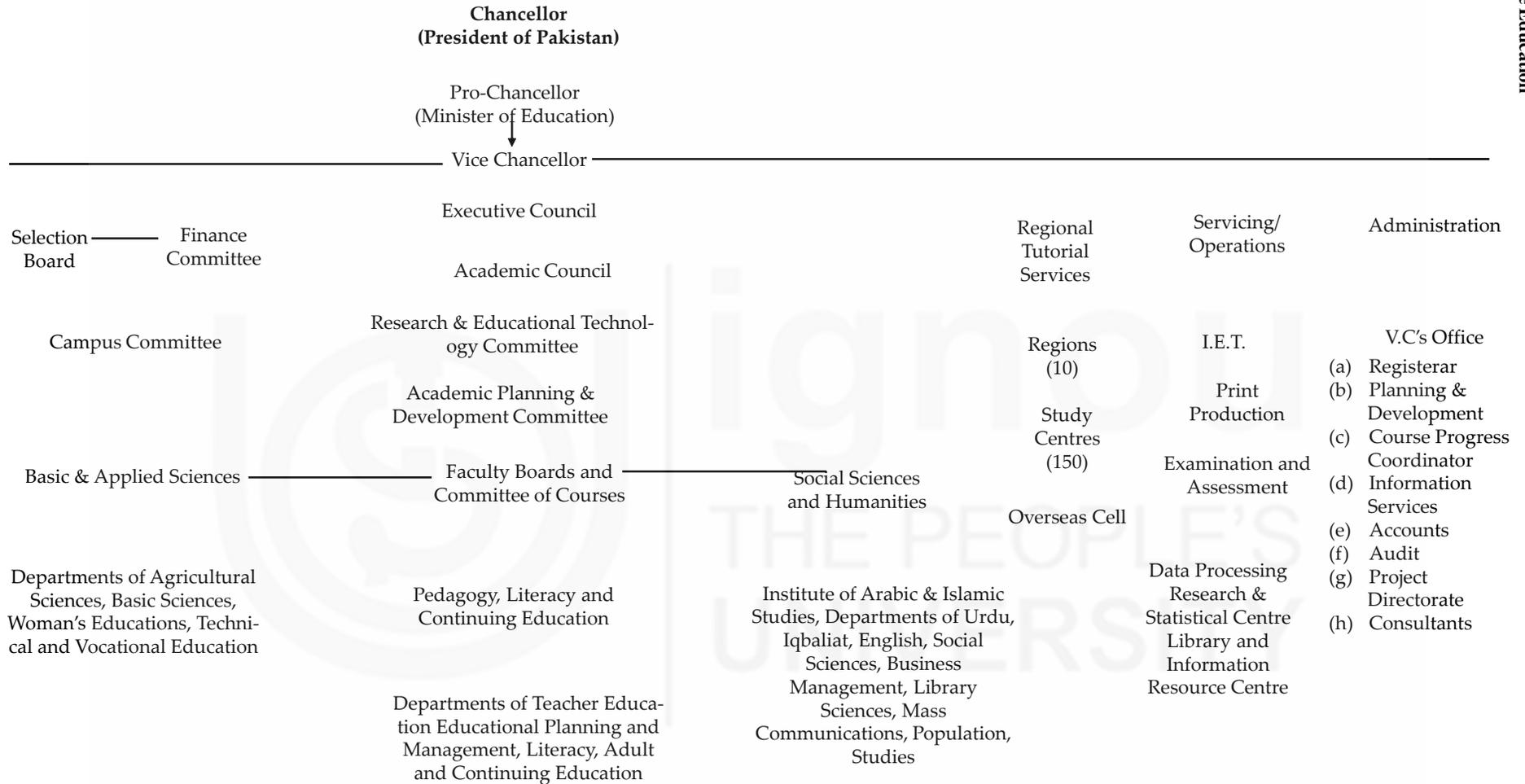


Fig. 3.2: Organisational Chart: AIOU, Islamabad

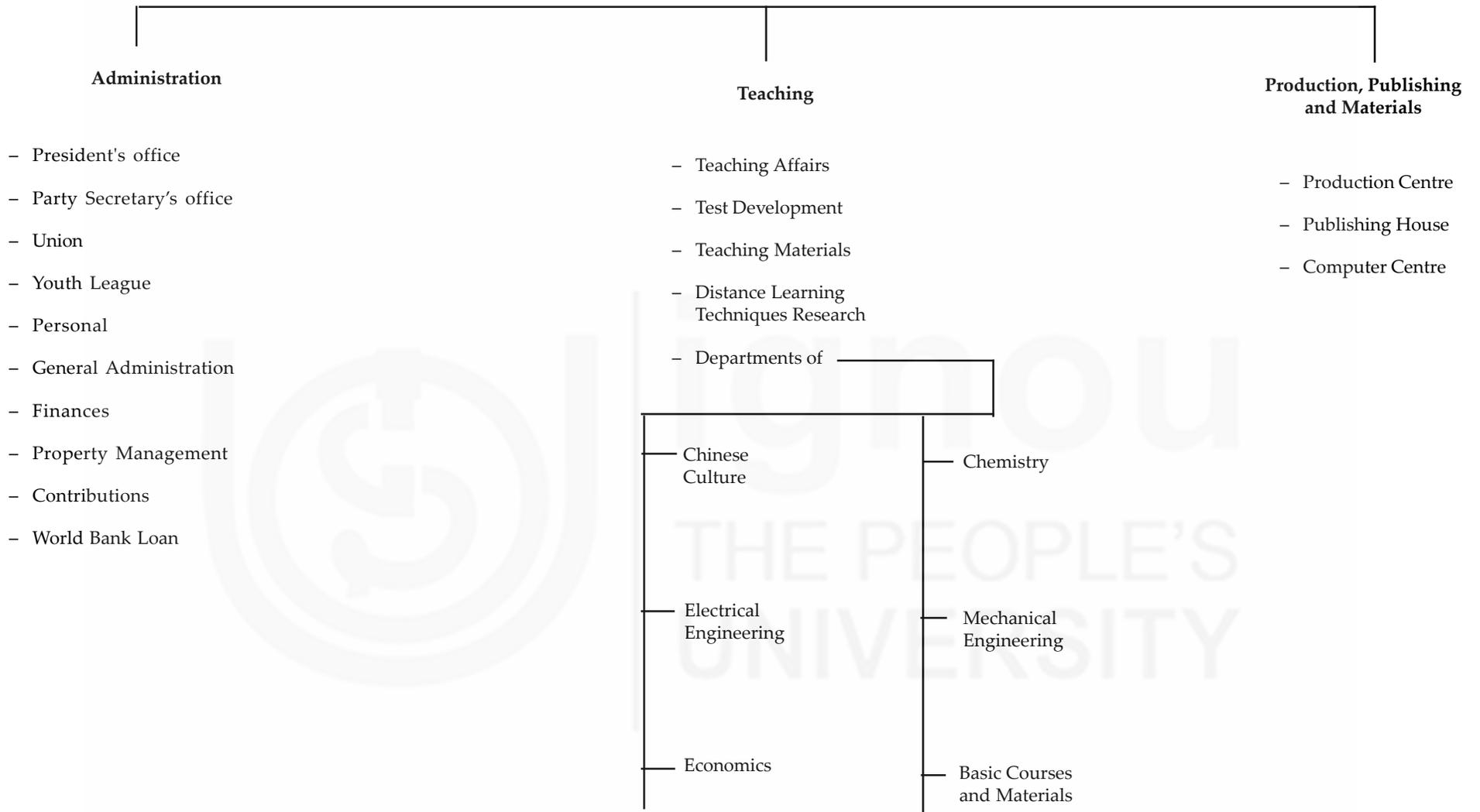


Fig. 3.3: Organisational Chart: CRTVU, China

Provision for study centres is an important feature of the distance education system. There are more than 3100 study centres in India to provide counselling and tutorial services to the students' of IGNOU. Library and Laboratory facilities are also available here. As the study centres are generally established in the existing academic institutions their academic and infrastructural resources are put to use maximally.

In an attempt to further consolidate the facts presented in this unit, we have incorporated the organisational structures of single mode institutions i.e., AIOU in Fig. 3.2 and CRTU, China in Fig.3.3 to give you a global perspective.

### **3.4.3 The Organisation and its People: Division of Work**

#### **The Head of the Institution**

The Head of an open university is generally an eminent person exercising certain formal powers. He/she can be (i) the head of state ex-officio as in the case of IGNOU, India and AIOU, Pakistan, or (ii) elected as in UK Open University, or (iii) appointed by the Head of State as in Thailand. In India, the President of India is the head, called "Visitor", of IGNOU. The President of Pakistan is the "Chancellor" and the Minister of Education is the 'Pro-Chancellor', of AIOU. They are titular heads of institutions and lend the prestige and credibility of the offices they hold or their personal standing in society to enhance the institution's image and acceptability. They do not exercise any executive responsibility though they do function in an appellate capacity in cases of disputes within the institution, between two bodies or between members and the institution. Their advice and counsel guide the institutions in their performance and their quest for excellence.

#### **Executive Head**

The nomenclature of the executive head or of the Chief Executive of the distance teaching universities conforms to the existing pattern in the conventional universities. The academic and administrative head of the university is called the Vice-Chancellor, the Rector or the President. The Chief Executive's role in a distance teaching university demands more than the traditional administrative functions of his /her counterparts. Due to its complex nature, broad area of jurisdiction, scattered administrative units, multiple systems, it becomes necessary for the chief of the institution to play an effective role in coordination and a vital role in decision making. The Head of an open university should ideally combine academic standing with strong managerial competence.

#### **Pro-Vice Chancellors**

The Executive Head of an open distance teaching university is assisted by, depending upon its size and scale of operations, one or more Pro Vice-Chancellors. Each Pro- Vice-Chancellor looks after a major sub-system of the university or a set of activities i.e., student services, course development, evaluation, planning and development etc.

#### **Directors**

Then there are divisions to provide services or schools to take up academic activities. The heads of these divisions and schools are called Deans or Directors. They have considerable room to exercise their executive powers unlike those of the heads of faculty or Departments in conventional universities.

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## 3.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we have tried to take you through the wide range and variety of forms in which distance education systems have evolved during the last four decades and the impact of ICTs on their structures and processes as well as the ways in which they are organised across the world. While looking at these systems, we also tried to generalise their features into 'types' so that our understanding of organisational models can be deepened. It is important to remember that our purpose is not to sit in judgement over the good-and-bad of any particular model; our concern is to discuss objectively the strengths and weaknesses that have been identified through critical study and analysis over a long period of time.

From organisational modeling, we moved in this unit to the more practical aspects of designing and structuring distance education institutions. In this discussion, we have freely drawn upon the experience of successful institutions like the-UKOU to focus on issues that are crucial to the planning and management of distance education. We hope that this presentation would have sharpened your understanding of the system and its complexities.

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## 3.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

Spending some stipulated time on campus by a distance learner is an essential component of the Malaysian model of dual mode distance education system. This feature is not found in the Indian one. This feature introduces a certain rigour into the operational aspects of the programmes.

### Check Your Progress 2

The UKOU courses are written by Course Teams which comprise academics, educational technologists, and radio and TV producers. The academics write the course while the educational technologists and the media production staff develop the instructional system and produce the media packages in consultation with the academics. The processes of creating the courses go through several stages of review and revision.

### Check Your Progress 3

The major elements that constitute the student support services system in the UKOU are: management of regional centres, management of study centres, coordination and supervision of tutorial and counselling services, provision of feedback and management of admissions, examinations and student assessment.

### Check Your Progress 4

The dual mode system can be placed at the earlier stages of evolution of the open university system. At its best, the former is characterized by the distribution of the academic and other resources between on-campus and distance learners. Its weaknesses are limited scope for innovation, lack of status for personnel and inadequate finances etc. The single mode system is more committed to distance teaching and learning; it has demonstrated initiative and enterprise in innovations and experiments; and it has successfully adopted modern management methods and styles in its operations for improving efficiency and cost effectiveness.