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# UNIT 4 MANAGEMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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We have looked at the distance education systems at the higher level and their organisation and structures in some detail. Unit 1 in this block has taken you through the growth and development of open and distance education systems across the world focusing on concepts, methods and practices with a view to deepen your understanding of the system. In Unit 2, while further elaborating the methods, we have also looked at the distinguishing features in the organisational structure of distance education institutions in several parts of the world to provide you with an overview of different models and a synoptic view of their management styles and practices as well as the general issues associated with the problems of their management. We have carried this discussion further into Unit 3 to look at the typology of institutions as well as their organisational structures.

In this Unit, we turn our attention to a more detailed look at the ways in which distance education systems are structured, their specific components,

and the ways in which they can be planned, designed and organised. Generally, the initiative for introducing distance education within the existing educational system in a country is taken by its national government. Political power is thus not merely an external variable in the management of distance education; it is the key determinant of the environment in which the system succeeds or fails. Government policies directly influence the ways in which distance education can function in the national context; the funding pattern settled by the government will ordain the sustainability of the system. Decisions on the national objectives of education, the strategies for achieving those objectives, concerns about access and equity, regulation of technology induction, broadcasting/telecasting policies as well as the status and recognition of distance education degrees are all influenced by ideological and political positions taken by the governments in power.

We will discuss these larger issues and their influence on shaping and conditioning the distance education system in greater detail in the context of the establishment of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in India in Block 4. We shall confine ourselves in this Unit to a discussion of the broader issues and problems in the management of distance education as a system (as distinct from an institution) with special reference to its styles and practices. Our attention will thus be narrowed down to the issues involved in the management of distance education programmes, their delivery systems and the integration of distance education with the existing educational provision. This discussion, in some ways, will also prepare you to appreciate critically the problems involved in the management of large distance education systems.

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## 4.2 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this Unit, you would be able to:

- identify the major issues and concerns involved in the management of distance education systems;
- discuss the roles and functions of the management in the selection of programmes as well as their development and delivery;
- critically assess the various strategic options available to the management in the selection of media, technology and resource networking; and
- evaluate the economic aspects of the system in terms of costs, benefits, efficiency and effectiveness.

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## 4.3 DISTANCE EDUCATION AND ITS MANAGEMENT

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Distance education is a rapidly growing area today. Developments in information and communication technologies have accelerated the pace of its growth in recent times. Freedom from the constraints of time and space has provided the added advantage to people, vastly heterogeneous in character and attitudes, to pursue different programmes of their choice to meet a variety of needs.

The last few years have witnessed certain major trends in the provision of education and training across the world. These include significant reforms in

educational theory and practice, diversification of the resource base for education including privatisation, progressive globalisation of education leading to increasing collaboration and networking, and above all, the emergence of distance learning as an instrument for meeting the aspirations of large numbers of people in a knowledge-driven economy.

The management of a dynamic distance education system has to grapple with a wide variety of issues and concerns. These include the mission and purpose of the system in the context in which it operates, the programmes and their curricula, the strategies for teaching and learning, in organising the infrastructure for communication and interaction with students, the choice of technology, policies regarding staff and students, preparation, production and distribution of learning materials, funding and the establishment of the credibility of the system itself. We shall address some of these issues in the following sections of this Unit.

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## 4.4 THE MANAGEMENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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The study of the previous three units will have given you an idea of the variety and styles of the systems functioning in different parts of the world. They vary in their purpose, size, technologies used and patterns of management. They also vary in structure and organisation. The managers of distance education systems have to grapple with the implementation of several integral components of a complex system. The ways in which decisions are taken and implemented in any one of these components have a direct impact on all other components. For instance, the choice of programmes will affect the systems of their delivery and student assessment procedures; the enrolment size will depend upon the management's assessment of the market needs that influenced the choice of programmes; the recruitment of staff and allocation of other resources will have to be consistent with the objectives, structures and levels of each programme; the choice of media and technology support will have to be relevant both to the environment and the needs of the programme; and reliable and efficient support systems will have to be in place for the implementation of all programmes.

But first, let us look at the major objectives that a system seeks to achieve and how those objectives impact the issues of its organisation and management.

### 4.4.1 Varying Learner Needs

During the last half century, education has become a mass enterprise. The numbers seeking higher education and training are constantly growing. Most developed countries have reached at enrolment ratios of 50% or more of the relevant age groups. But the pressure on the system is not just from school leavers only. Large numbers of adult and mature learners are also looking for opportunities for education and training. Why?

Knowledge is the key to all enterprises in the world of today. At the rate knowledge is expanding today, human beings are finding it impossible to cope with its assimilation even in selected fields that are of immediate concern to them. The traditional approach to education as a onetime effort early in life can no longer equip people to meet the challenges of work and life in today's world. Continuing lifelong education is the only answer. But most people would not find it easy and affordable to take time away from their family or work to join institutions of education and training to update

their knowledge or skills. They need to learn at their workplace or at their homes, free from the constraints of time and space. Continuing education through the distance mode effectively responds to this need.

The motivation for learning is increasingly becoming diverse. The traditional forms and methods of work are changing. Applications of technology have changed the ways in which most jobs are performed today. People are left with no choice but to acquire the relevant skills and competence even for survival, not to speak of growth and development in their own professions. Employers would also want their workers trained in newer technologies that are being inducted for improving productivity and efficiency. Many working people would like to be trained in new technologies or would be keen to acquire special skills and knowledge in new areas for improving their career prospects at their own workplaces or to change jobs or organisations. These motivational variations determine the size and quality of the potential clients for distance education as well as their heterogeneity. We need to remind ourselves that no more do students want to learn for the sake of learning; they are students because they want qualifications that would get them jobs.

There are in addition groups suffering from several disadvantages or disabilities: very vast indeed is the constituency of the disadvantaged groups, economically, educationally, geographically and socially, in most developing societies. Add to that the large number of women who had little or no education and are, therefore, in no position to join the workforce. There are then those who are differently abled and require special education and training to overcome their disabilities. That all of them need opportunities for education and training to live fuller lives needs no emphasis.

Distance education can also be used to support vocational education and training. A major contribution made by distance education for many years in most developing countries is the training of unqualified or under qualified teachers in their schools. Some forty countries all over the world had established teacher education programmes through the distance mode by the 1980s. And the shortage of trained teachers continues to be a major area of concern for most developing countries in attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. International development agencies attach the highest importance to the training of as large a number of teachers as possible in the shortest possible time in their efforts to support the pursuit of these goals. Most recent reports suggest that the attainment of the objective of Education for All (EFA) is still too distant a goal.

In-company training is an area in which distance education systems have made a useful contribution. You will have noticed from Unit 2 that the National Technological University in the USA exists primarily because large companies in the USA buy their programmes that include graduate engineering courses contributed by 29 US universities, and services delivered by satellite broadcasts/telecasts, to train their personnel at their workplaces.

It is this multiplicity of learner needs and learner groups that constitute the potential market for distance education. Most distance education systems would naturally aim at serving these needs.

#### **4.4.2 Responding to Emerging Needs**

After having identified the wide range of needs that can be met by the distance education system, the management has to find ways by which these

needs can be converted in to demands. After all, it is demand that creates markets, and a market is created only when there are products (goods and services) that can be bought by people to satisfy their needs.

We have looked at the diversity of the learner groups and the variations in their motivations to pursue programmes of education and training. If educational providers have to respond meaningfully to these variations in motivation, a certain degree of customising the education and training programmes becomes inevitable. This would mean segmenting the market (client groups) into broad categories to provide for programmes in the same field at different levels (certificate, diploma and degree); learner groups by the differences in the level of their previous educational attainments (literate, school drop-out, secondary, post-secondary); working people by their professional fields; and so on.

A distance education system is not dynamic if it is not flexible. This flexibility is as much a function of its structure as its methods. You would already be familiar with the evolution of the distance education through different stages or generations, beginning with printed learning materials to begin with (first generation) and now running into the fifth generation of flexible learning systems. We shall look at the organisational aspects of this flexibility when we discuss the issues in system development later in this Unit.

Varying learner demands can be met substantially by providing flexibility to the structure of the programmes. For instance, acquiring a degree might require completion of a programme that takes four years or more. Those who are seeking this degree might come with different backgrounds; some might already have a degree in one field and would require only to add specialised knowledge in a specific area to convert that degree into his/her chosen field; another might have studied for some time and dropped out; yet another might not have gone beyond school. If a programme is structured into modules, each module comprising a combination of courses that together offer a certain number of credits, and acquisition of a prescribed number of credits qualifies for obtaining a specified qualification, those belonging to each of the groups mentioned above have a choice, and will need only to pursue those modules they need. This flexibility also implies that the system offers credits for the prior learning in one way or another.

### Check Your Progress 1

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

ii) Check your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

Identify whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False':

- i) The motivational variations determine the size and quality, as well as the heterogeneity of the learner groups of distance education system. ( )
- ii) Continuing and life long education is 'NOT' the answer to the challenges of life and work in today's world. ( )
- iii) A distance education system can be dynamic if it is flexible. ( )

### 4.4.3 The Student Profile and Size

Distance education managers need to have a clear perception about who their students are, and what their special characteristics and needs would be. They could be a large number of employees of a single firm, for example, or a large number of students scattered over vast distances. This is important as many vital decisions on the delivery of services will depend upon this crucial knowledge input. For example, the kind of learner support system to be established, the kind of technologies to be used, the fees to be charged, etc. will depend upon the special characteristics of the learner groups to whom particular programmes are addressed.

It is clearly not feasible to design and develop a programme, launch it and enrol students, and then look at their profiles to develop a delivery system. The distance education management has to anticipate the broad characteristics of different learner groups and design and develop the delivery and support systems that will match their needs. For example, a programme addressed to the needs of a group that had no previous educational attainment has to have a greater face-to-face component in the delivery system to provide interactive guided learning while a graduate professional education programme could be offered through satellite delivered communication packages with no face-to-face component at all.

That also brings us to the choice of technology. The critical factor in the selection of technology is its accessibility. An expensive technology medium will not make for an effective delivery mechanism if large number of learners cannot easily access it at an affordable cost. To the distance education managers, learner locations and their environment are important considerations in designing the delivery systems. For example, for widely dispersed learner groups, many of whom are in remote locations and rural areas, video cassettes played on TV sets would be a low-cost, but effective, technology medium compared to satellite-delivered synchronised teleconferencing models using one-way video and two-way audio communication systems.

The size of the student group is an important factor. A unique feature of the distance education system is its ability to reap the benefits of economies of scale. The learning packages once produced can be used for limitless number of students, and for reasonably long periods of time. For every additional student enrolled, the marginal cost is only the additional production and distribution cost of the material. In other words, the initial investments made in the development and preparation of the learning materials get spread over a larger number of students and over long periods of time, thus offering substantial gains through economies of scale. If, on the other hand, the number of students is too low, there will be no economy of scale, and the unit cost will be very high. It is important that the management is alive to the issue of the size of the learner groups before making any significant investments in new programmes.

### 4.4.4 Media Choice: Reaching the Students

We have noted earlier that new technologies have transformed distance education in the last four decades; in fact, technology has emerged as a defining feature of education. In Unit 3, we discussed four organisational models of distance education institutions identified by Otto Peters, based mainly on the technological innovations in their organisation. In the discourse on distance education, generally five generations have been

identified, each of which corresponding to a stage (generation) of technology application. Taylor (1999) identifies them as (i) correspondence education, (ii) integration of multiple, one-way media such as print and broadcasting or recorded media such as video-cassettes, (iii) two-way synchronous tele-learning using audio- or video-conferencing, (iv) flexible learning based on asynchronous online learning combined with online interactive media and (v) intelligent flexible learning that adds a high degree of automation and student control to asynchronous online learning and interactive multimedia. This progression of technology application from the early stages of development to the present has come about with the continuing advances in technology. It did not happen all of a sudden; nor did it come about universally at the same time. While technologies advanced, each environment adopted them according to its needs and capacity.

We had occasion to refer to the media choices in distance education programmes in a limited context in the previous Unit. In this Section, we look at the wide range of options that distance education management has to choose from. It is not our intention here to discuss the detailed technical arguments in determining the choice of any one media over another, but we wish only to draw your attention to the broad considerations that should influence the choice of any medium.

It would be useful to define the two concepts, namely, media and technology before we move on to discuss how they are chosen in particular environments. Media are means of communication that involve a source of information, a means of transmitting that information and a receiver who is interested in, has access to, and knows how to interpret the communication. Technologies on the other hand are physical things that do not, by themselves, communicate. These include books, radio sets, transmitters, cables, satellites, television monitors, computers, and so on. While media will always use some technology as a means of transmission and communication, it is not necessary that media may be related to any specific technology. For example, a television programme can use different kinds of technologies such as digital or analogue equipment, terrestrial broadcast, cable or satellite transmission, video cassettes, or digital video discs. Similarly, computer signals can be sent by telephone lines, wireless, co-axial or fibre optic cable, satellite or any combination of these. Everyday use of the term 'media' usually includes the whole organisation of a communication industry, such as television, newspapers, publishing, and the Internet, encompassing far more than just technology (Tony Bates, 2008).

This understanding of the terms media and technology will help us discuss the media choices in distance education in the right perspective. Distance education is essentially a form of mediated teaching and learning in which teachers and learners are physically separated. Over a period of time, this system began to harness such technologies as were becoming available like radio and TV in the early stages, and audio and video recordings later. With the emergence of new technologies, distance learning environments are evolving into virtual classrooms where instruction is delivered from a host site to distant sites using a combination of live, two-way audio and video communication systems. Computer-based interaction through Local Area Network (LAN) and Wide Area Network (WAN) as well as the Internet have added a new dimension to the currently available distance education technologies.

In this process of evolution, there were several stages of intermediate technologies; the choice of a particular technology was based on considerations of easy availability, accessibility, affordability and the responsiveness of the environment to its use. Thus, while satellite-delivered communication technologies and computer-based communication networks characterise the delivery of distance education programmes in the developed countries, distance education delivery in the developing countries rely heavily on printed materials supplemented with, on a limited scale, radio and television broadcasts and audio and video recordings.

This is not, however, to suggest that the divide is not being bridged or that the developing nations are for ever going to live with the technology deficits that once were the order of the day. In the last decade or so, most modern communication technologies like mobile phones, Internet and Internet-based social networks have deeply penetrated even the remotest areas of most developing countries. For example, in India, the national television network has now 24-hour education channels beaming programmes across the country through a dedicated education satellite. What is important to note is that with these developments, the technology choices before distance education planners and managers have vastly improved.

The major considerations for distance education managers while choosing the media are:

- Use only those media that learners can access. It is not the availability of a particular medium that is important, but the chosen medium should be one that is or likely to be most used by learners;
- The affordability of access to a particular medium both for the provider and the learners. For instance, it might be possible in many cases to obtain the equipment and meet the other hardware needs through imports, but the competence to produce the software may not be locally available. Also, the priorities of television channel owners or distributors may not match the priorities of the educational providers.
- Even as the Internet is making deep inroads, issues of connectivity are assuming great significance. Government policies and tariff systems play a crucial role in making access to Internet-based communication systems accessible and affordable to many in the developing countries;
- The pedagogical significance of particular media is a relevant factor. It is not essential that all learning should be technology-mediated. In most cases, printed texts may serve the purpose. Where teaching needs demonstration, video tapes that could be replayed at will could be a better substitute for face-to-face interaction than video programmes delivered through the broadcast mode.
- In the developing countries, education providers are mainly the governments; most of them also have national television networks. Distance education programmes generally use television for delivery, but it can prove to be a costly experiment where those who access television and use it for education are limited.

The choice of media should ultimately come from the judgement of the management about its suitability and appropriateness in specific situations.

#### 4.4.5 Technology and Efficiency

Distance education systems can be of varying sizes. There are close to 50 open universities in the world, some of which have come to be called Mega Universities, each with an enrolment of over 100,000 students; some of them have even touched the three-million mark. There are also very small systems catering to the needs of a few students, often a hundred or even less. Whatever its size, distance education enables a small number of teachers to reach a very large number of learners. It is possible mainly because in distance education, the media and the materials substitute the efforts of the teacher in the classroom. For the distance education management, the trade-off is between the labour-intensive conventional classroom teaching and the media-driven diffusion of materials through which economies of scale can be achieved. The investments made on the materials, as we have noted earlier, get spread across long periods and large numbers of learners offering economies of scale. It is the cost-effectiveness of distance education that makes it an attractive option for education policy makers and planners.

It is not the diffusion technologies alone that makes for the efficiency of distance education. It employs a variety of technologies in its administration and management as well. Most distance education institutions that rely on printed materials use Desk Top Publishing techniques for their course development and production; depending upon the enrolment, it can use the just-in-time production methods for low enrolment programmes and bulk production, storage and distribution systems for high enrolment programmes. Electronic transfer of materials, production of CD-ROMS, online access to information and materials, walk-in admissions, on-demand examinations, online student assessment and grading, and so on are making integral parts of the management culture of distance education systems that make them both efficient and effective.

#### 4.4.6 Choice of Institutional Models

In the previous Unit, we discussed four broad categories of distance education institutions, namely, dual mode institutions, single mode (multiple mass media) institutions, network-based institutions and virtual distance teaching universities. While there could be some variations to this broad typology in specific country contexts, it is essential for planners engaged in setting up distance education systems to choose a model that is appropriate to their context. What are the factors that weigh in this choice? We shall now turn to this issue.

The first consideration, of course, is whether or not there is a clear need to go for distance education. We discussed the needs and demands earlier in this Unit. Policy makers and planners will have to satisfy themselves that there is a sustainable demand for more and better provision of educational facilities in their jurisdiction. In today's world, provision for educational opportunities can never be too high. The demand for life long and continuing professional education programmes can seldom be met fully. If the assessment is that a sizable proportion of a country's population is outside the reach of current provision, and needs a wide range of programmes to meet their demands, it would be unrealistic to assume that any existing institution can easily multiply its programmes and facilities to respond to this demand. As we have seen, there are already more than fifty open universities in the world that have enrolments ranging from 100,000 to 3,000,000 in different parts of the world.

If, in the assessment of the planners in most high-population developing countries, there is a large accumulation of unmet demand for education from its young population, there is sufficient and strong justification for setting up a dedicated open university as was done in countries like India, Bangladesh or Tanzania. If, on the other hand, the assessment leads to the conclusion that the additional demands can effectively be met by existing institutional providers by equipping them with the necessary facilities and infrastructure to launch distance education programmes, there would be no justification to set up separate single mode universities. In fact, most countries now prefer dual mode institutions to open universities. The fact that during the last decade, only three single mode open universities were established, confirms this view.

This view is further strengthened by the argument among educators and policy makers that the distinction between face-to-face and distance education is progressively blurring as all educational institutions are now adopting some form of technology-enhanced provision even in their formal programmes. The discourse on education now sets out that all educational provision is a continuum that ranges from exclusive face-to-face teaching at one end of the spectrum to exclusive distance learning at the other. In reality, there is no more exclusiveness for either form and that all systems are a mix of both forms in varying degrees. This convergence has brought distance education centre stage as it finds greater acceptability and relevance everywhere.

Another major consideration in the choice of a model is the specific purpose(s) for which the system is about to be launched. If the objective is the development of a purpose-built specialised system, say, providing for the continuous upgrading of teacher competence at the school level, all the models can be regarded as appropriate. A dedicated distance teaching institution for teacher training will be a useful instrument for this purpose. A Teacher Training institution or a Department of Education engaged in traditional mode of teacher training could also be an effective proposition. Similarly, a group of teacher training institutions can be brought together with each assigned a specific responsibility on the basis of an agreed division of labour among them. And clearly, a virtual distance teaching institution could offer good teacher education programmes as well.

The final choice will depend upon the judgement of the decision-makers on the basis of their understanding of the suitability and efficiency of each model. It should however be noted that the specific mandate of the existing institutions is also a relevant factor as they may not be able to offer programmes beyond the levels of their mandate. For example, a Junior Basic Training Institute for primary school teachers may not be able to offer programmes at the degree level for the training of secondary school teachers.

Availability of resources is another important consideration. The extent of physical and financial resources as well as the competence and quality of human resources are also significant factors as well. Small countries with only one or two institutions of higher education will find it extremely difficult to assemble all the physical and intellectual resources needed to establish and maintain a dedicated open university. If the size of the population is small, and consequently, the number of potential learners is limited, there could be serious constraints in establishing and running distance education institutions and programmes. On the other hand, these very factors may force the choice on distance education in collaboration with

an institution from another country, with the local effort limited only to providing specified services. We mentioned the initiative taken by the Commonwealth of Learning to establish a virtual university for the smaller states of the Commonwealth in the previous Unit. This initiative was apparently a response to the request from several small countries (The Gambia, Seychelles, Fiji, and so on) that found establishment of their own distance education systems unsustainable.

It is generally assumed, and sometimes even strongly advocated, that dual mode institutions are much more efficient and effective in running distance education programmes. This argument is based on the assumption that all the resources and expertise available with institutions offering traditional programmes can also be deployed for distance education programmes with relatively low additional inputs. This argument is valid as an economic proposition. However, it can work only if within the institutional values and culture, distance education has parity of esteem with the regular programmes. If the experience of several universities in India is any indication, distance education programmes always get a lower priority in the allocation of resources and even in the care and attention from the faculty and management. It is for this reason that Distance Education Directorates of most Indian Universities are asking for structural reforms in their organisation to provide greater autonomy and independent resource allocation patterns. This aspect of the matter also needs to be taken into account while deciding the choice of the model.

**Check Your Progress 2**

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

ii) Check your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

i) What are the main considerations that distance educators have to keep in view while choosing the media? (Answer in about 40 words).

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ii) Which are the important factors to be kept in mind while choosing the model of a DE institution? (Answer in about 30 words).

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## 4.5 STRATEGIC PLANNING

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Planning entered the scheme of education management only recently. The constantly increasing demand for educational provision, rising enrolments, increasing costs and the dwindling resources demanded that education systems manage their affairs within the means available with them. What began as fiscal and resource planning in the 1970s soon led to more comprehensive planning as a managerial initiative to define the short- and long-term objectives, the ways to achieve those objectives, needs assessment, the choice of programmes, informed decision-making, and such other market-driven approaches to managing institutions. The processes involved in planning include anticipating the future developments, the changes likely to take place in the environment, controlling the impact of the turn of future events with informed decisions, determining actions, resources and the best alternatives in advance and so on.

It has now become a norm for higher education institutions to revisit their mission and vision at regular intervals and redefine their goals. Having defined their goals, institutions need to identify and elaborate the ways they propose to get there. It is this exercise that has come to be known as strategic planning. Strategic planning is the elaboration of the grand design for accomplishing any mission. It is a major management tool that helps organisations achieve their goals. In other words, strategies outline how given objectives are translated into specific plans of action.

### 4.5.1 Strategic Planning in Distance Education

Typically, when a distance education system is set up by the government, by a university, or even by a private provider, there is usually a mission statement, often in very general and broad terms. This statement would, for example, define the mission of the system in such terms as augmenting educational provision, widening access, providing second chance to those who missed out on relevant education, continuing professional development of people at work, reaching out to those who are economically, educationally and socially disadvantaged sections of the community, and so on.

In order to meet these objectives, it is necessary for the management of the system to draw up a plan of action which would spell out, in some detail, what should be done, how it should be done, with what results and at what cost. This detailed exercise can be done as a long-term plan covering a period of five to ten years, or as a short-term plan for a period of two or three years. From the management's perspective, these will be that are set in the context of the environment in which the system has to operate. It is important that the planners take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the environment as well as the opportunities it provides while setting the goals. These may include the support or indifference of the government, significant unmet demand for education, critical gaps in the availability of educational provision, availability of, and access to, new technologies, the pace of induction of new technologies in to the economic life of the society requiring the training or retraining of personnel and so on. This process is intended to identify the key factors that would contribute to the success of the initiative and provide the management of the system with several options to choose from while going ahead.

A critical appraisal of these factors would yield information about the type and nature of the academic offerings to be developed, their levels and

duration, size of the potential learner groups, the technologies that would be available for delivering the programmes and also the resource support that can be expected through sponsorship, collaborative efforts and other networking arrangements.

On the basis of the strategic plan so determined, a financial plan is then developed to indicate the investments that need to be made on course development and preparation, infrastructure including staff, the revenues that can be expected, the resource gaps, if any, and the sources for funding them. The processes of strategic planning are such that would help the management at regular intervals to review the plans already prepared, make necessary changes in them depending upon the environmental changes, and also, more importantly, review the actual achievements against the goals set to ensure that efficiency is not impaired.

#### **4.5.2 Some Examples of Strategic Thinking in Distance Education**

We mentioned elsewhere in this Block that the University of South Africa (UNISA) is the oldest distance teaching university in the world. From a predominantly correspondence education institution for several decades, UNISA has emerged as a strong and powerful distance education institution after the merger of Technikon Southern Africa and the distance education centre of Vista University with UNISA in 2004. UNISA has developed a comprehensive Strategic Plan 2015 that elaborates its strategy. Some excerpts from its strategies for quality distance education would be very relevant.

##### **Objective:**

6.2 Position UNISA as a leading provider of quality distance education programmes through an academic product range that expands on its comprehensive character.

##### **Strategies:**

- Establish a common understanding of the nature and role of UNISA as a comprehensive open and distance education university; internally, among all staff; and externally, among our students, market and stakeholders.
- Strive to make distance education a method of choice for South African and African students and position UNISA as a university of first choice....
- Develop an appropriate and relevant programme and qualification mix (PQM) aligned with the comprehensive nature of the institution, its vision to become “the African University in the service of humanity....
- Ensure the relevance of UNISA’s PQM and research by regularly conducting needs analyses of our markets, our students and our stakeholders.....
- Manage access by providing students with the necessary competencies
- Maintain and improve UNISA’s position as a quality provider of distance education through committing to continuous quality improvement in internal systems, liaison with professional bodies, liaison and partnerships with business, industry and public services, and peer institutions.

- Ensure that the curriculum for each module is up-to-date and well-researched, with aims and learning outcomes appropriate for the level of study, and with teaching, learning and assessment methods that are consistent with those aims and objectives.
- Increase headcount enrolments in line with national parameters to a plateau of 250,000 students by 2015. (Panda. S., 2008)

We shall have occasion to look into some detail at UNISA's transformation efforts in Block 4.

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## **4.6 MANAGEMENT OF THE PROGRAMMES**

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All through this Unit and elsewhere in this course, we have been talking about distance education as a system. By definition, a system is the aggregation of several inter-related components, each of which impacts on the performance of the other. What are these components and how are they organised and managed? We shall look at this issue in this section.

A great deal of preparatory work needs to be done before any distance education programme can really get organised. Normally, this responsibility is assigned to a Planning Group which advises the management on the designing and detailing of all the components that constitute the system. Depending mainly on the strategies already settled, this Group elaborates each major function along with the tasks and sub-tasks involved in the performance of that function so that a proper operating system is in place while launching the programme. We have discussed at some length earlier in this Unit the processes involved in deciding the programmes to be offered and the potential learner groups for specific programmes. Important though this component is, we are not repeating here the manner in which it should get organised and made functional.

We shall, therefore, proceed to look at those tasks involved in the development of learning packages, their delivery and the management of the infrastructure for operating the system. These functions could broadly be classified into four groups:

- Material design and development
- Material production and distribution;
- Student support system; and
- Technology management.

We shall, in the following sub-sections, take a close look at the ways in which these groups of functions (also called sub-systems) get organised, and the more detailed components of each of these groups of functions.

### **4.6.1 Material Design and Development**

Once the academic programmes are identified, the next stage is the development of courses for those programmes. This is essentially the job of the academic staff recruited for their subject-matter specialisation. The tasks include curriculum planning, finalisation of the instructional design and materials development. Often, an integrated approach is taken in the execution of these jobs.

Course development and preparation of materials is substantially a team effort (we have briefly outlined the processes followed by the UKOU in the

previous unit). Typically, a course team will consist of discipline specialists, instructional designers, media personnel, graphic designers and editors. Once the curricular content is settled, the process of material development begins. Material is prepared in the self-instructional format by building the teacher into the text. What is a good instructional design? It is about understanding, improving and applying methods of instruction to enhance the learning outcomes.

This is not the place to discuss different instructional theories and models. Suffice it to say that the academic team will have addressed this issue and settled on the approaches to instruction in respect of each course before the development phase begins. It is during the development phase that the professional expertise of the instructional designer becomes significant and several management issues are likely to surface. While determining the performance objectives (learning outcomes), it would also be necessary to specify the learning strategies and embed them in the development of the learning materials. These strategies might include self-study, guided interactive learning, tutorials, group activities, learning at work, and so on.

When the materials are developed, they are tested for their effectiveness and feedback. This phase is known as formative evaluation. A representative group of potential users will assess the materials in a variety of patterns and formats to test their suitability. On the basis of the results so obtained, the materials will be revised before their production begins.

A major issue that will arise at this stage is the question of media mix of the learning packages. We have briefly discussed the print material development processes followed by the UKOU in Unit 3. We shall therefore focus attention here on the development of non-print media like audio, video, radio, television, interactive television, videoconferencing, Internet-based and networked learning, etc. The selection and use of one or more of these components is one of the major decisions to be taken at this stage. As we have said earlier, there are several factors that will influence this choice. The important among them are:

- Accessibility;
- Appropriateness of the technology to the environment and the needs of the programme;
- Pedagogic utility and sustainability of the medium in enhancing the learning process;
- User-friendliness of the technology; and
- Costs

We shall come back to the management aspects of technology induction later in this unit.

Management of the design processes for material development, both print and non-print, can be a complex issue. It is unlikely that all the members of the team are in-house staff. Many of them could be part-timers, or casual associates performing a specified function, namely, attending meetings, giving advice, writing a lesson, preparing charts and graphs, or editing the content, format or language. Coordinating the work of such a group with different levels of commitment to the task at hand can be a daunting responsibility. Not the least is the tension that can surface from the differing perceptions of the academics and the professionals about the effectiveness of the product. What the academics feel pedagogically effective might not

appeal to the media professional who would be more concerned with the technology rather than learning.

It needs to be noted here that it is not always necessary that all new distance education systems have to go through this process and get its own learning materials prepared. One of the options that the Planning Groups could consider is to go for acquisition of materials from other distance teaching institutions. There are several institutions across the world that would be prepared to sell ready-to-use materials that any new system can acquire and use by adoption, adaptation and/or translation. Materials so acquired from two or more institutions could be mixed to make tailor-made programmes relevant to the needs of the new institution till it can start developing its own materials.

The Open Learning Institute (now Open University) of Hong Kong started with learning packages acquired from UK and Canada. The Open Learning Agency in British Columbia, Canada had course sharing arrangements with Laurentian University and Athabasca University (OLA is now part of the newly created Thomson Rivers University). Australian Universities (Deakin and South Australia, for example) have jointly produced distance education programmes at the post-graduate level. In India, the learning packages of the Indira Gandhi National Open University is acquired and used by a number of state universities in the country; some of these packages are adopted, some are adapted to suit local needs and some are translated into one or another regional language(s).

There are several advantages that flow from these collaborative arrangements. Some of these are;

- No single institution can meet all the varying needs of distance learners in today's world. More and more of them will be looking to a number of institutions to satisfy their specific needs;
- A networked and collaborative system can respond effectively to these needs and learners will have the freedom to choose from a wide range of courses and programmes;
- The programme development costs can be shared by a number of institutions;
- Institutions that do not have the resources, especially those in the developing countries, can acquire the learning packages and use them by adoption/adaptation/translation.

The roles devolving on the academics in a distance education system have significant management content. Traditionally, teaching is an individual effort, but it is not so in distance education. Adaptation to the new role of managing a team or working as one of its members requires a new orientation; good interpersonal relationship, commitment to shared responsibility, openness, flexibility, willingness to submit oneself to the discipline of start and finish deadlines are the major qualities of academic life in a distance education system.

#### **4.6.2 Production and Distribution**

Distance education systems will have to deal with production and distribution of learning packages on a massive scale. Remember that we are talking about hundreds of thousands of students enrolled in a single institution, each of whom should be supplied with the relevant learning

packages, ad in time. Remember also that the promptness and efficiency in the supply of the learning packages is the first experience of a student after enrolment in a distance education institution. No institution can afford to lose the goodwill of its students.

How does a distance education institution build this sub-system? The basic needs are professional support and adequate infrastructure. The personnel component of this sub-system consists of qualified professionals in the areas of printing, audio-visual programme production, broadcasts and telecasts and computer-assisted learning. Technological advances have made it possible to combine the development efforts with the production function. For example, Desk top Publishing helps integration of texts and illustrations and formatting them in a single page as it appears in print. Nevertheless, the management will have to take several aspects of these processes in to consideration before putting in place a workable sub-system. These are:

- *Matching Production with Demand:* Large distance education systems will require bulk production of several items, each tailored to the specific needs of particular courses. Production runs will therefore be very large even as a single item produced can serve the needs over a period of time. Each item has to be identified and specifications settled much in advance, the numbers required will have to be estimated with reasonable accuracy and production schedules drawn up depending upon the production capacity at the disposal of the management. In case there is no in-house printing facility with sufficient capacity, print orders can be placed with private presses. In practice, this is a complex area in which adherence to time lines and schedules are of utmost importance. Remember that course writing is a creative work that often tends to run out of rigid timeframes; even if the manuscripts are ready, there could be unforeseen interruptions that could upset the schedules. There are other factors like shortage of printing paper, industrial unrest in the printing industry, transportation problems, all of which could dislocate the most meticulously prepared plans.
- Production of electronic media packages requires not just the professional staff, but the necessary infrastructure as well. These packages for most distance teaching programmes in the developing countries still rely heavily on audio/video cassettes and CD-ROMs. The production facilities consist of studios for shooting and recording images and sound, editing suits, multiplication facilities fully equipped with all instruments and personnel. Here again, outsourcing can help overcome the initial constraints due to lack of in-house production facilities. Once the contents are settled, external production houses can be entrusted with the task of producing the packages and making multiple copies.
- Settling the transmission medium is another issue. While audio/video tapes and cassettes can be distributed or played at study centres equipped with playback facilities, arrangements for broadcast will require involvement of radio and television broadcasting organisations. Usually, the public radio and television broadcasters (in most cases, they are under the government control) could be persuaded to incorporate educational programmes also in their transmission schedules. Network-based systems require high technologies that comprise reliable connectivity, webcasting, and such other modern technology applications and facilities.
- *Fluctuations in Demand:* Production runs of materials are determined on the basis of the number of students expected to enrol in each course on

offer. These forecasts may or may not turn out to be true. If there is a substantial shortfall in enrolment, the management will be saddled with the responsibility of overstocked warehouses; if, on the other hand, the enrolment far exceeds expectations, the management has to resort to emergency production of more materials. Both the situations can impact the production and distribution schedules and cause embarrassment to management.

- *Management of Distribution:* One of the first tasks that has to be performed by a distance education institution soon after the enrolment process is completed, is to distribute the learning packages to each student for the courses in which he/she has enrolled. Any delay in getting the materials across to the students will lead to serious consequences; it could shatter student confidence; the management might lose credibility; and the system itself might fall in to disrepute. It is therefore absolutely essential to settle all matters relating to the logistics associated with distribution much in advance of the enrolment. These include:
  - o Appropriate and adequate warehousing of the materials;
  - o The pattern of distribution. If the postal system is efficient, the materials could be mailed to each student at his/her address (residence or workplace), alternately, students could be asked to collect their materials from the nearest study centre during specified periods; despatch of materials by courier service, or a combination of any of these methods.
  - o Ensuring the appropriateness of the contents of the packets. We have noted earlier that distance learners often choose courses and programmes according to their own perceptions of their needs. This means that the packets despatched to every student contain the materials for the courses of his/her choice and other relevant materials like assignments, etc. It means that the personnel involved in the preparation of packets for despatch should have the skills required for matching the materials with each student choice.

### 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 is the role of distance teacher as coordinator of a course/programme in a course team and what qualities are required in him/her to perform this role? (Answer in about 40 words).

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### 4.6.3 Student Support Services

Students are the primary concern of any educational institution. In distance education, with little or no personal contact between the institution and its students, the management has to ensure that their needs are adequately met. Meeting student needs involves the performance of a whole range of functions: registration as students; enrolment in courses and programmes of their choice; assignment to the chosen/nearest study centre or counsellor; acquainting them with what is expected of them during their stay as a student (payment of fees, adherence to regulations), and what they can expect from the institution (provision of study materials, arrangements for counselling and tutorials, holding examinations), etc. Organising these support systems is crucial to the effectiveness of distance education.

In the formal system, almost everyone knows how to get there. In the face of stiff competition, even traditional institutions have to do a bit of marketing; to attract better students. A distance education institution must necessarily do a lot of pre-admission publicity, including counselling that might include;

- Informing the public about what it offers, its courses and programmes, their levels, duration, prior requirements for admission, educational qualification required, etc.
- Advice on career opportunities, further education;
- Methods of study and the regulations concerning them, for instance, flexibilities provided for choice of courses, pacing of studies, determining the course loads, allocation of time for studies, arrangements for tutorials, practical work and assignments;
- Advice on how to study and advice on the methods and practices of the system and generally helping students get through them.

There is no single method for organising an effective student support system for distance education. Managers have a wide range of alternatives to choose from. The final choice of the design will depend upon a number of factors:

- The dispersal of students. If the geographical limits within which a system operates is relatively small, and most of the students have access to the institution or its teachers, it will be easier to design a support system that provides more face-to-face interaction during evenings or weekends. However, large systems catering to hundreds of thousands of students in large countries like China and India, for example, have to design more complex systems of interaction using multiple avenues of communication;
- The range of services to be delivered. Distance learners will require a wide range of services to help them through the system. This will include specialist support to grapple with the subject matter of the courses on the one hand, and availability of reliable and authentic information about when and how to submit assignments or where and when to sit for the examination, on the other. While much of the routine information needs can be met by a process of preparing standardised materials like handbooks on student assignment and assessment or newsletters incorporating schedules of events, etc., arrangements for specialist support will require more careful and well-planned initiatives.
- Large systems with substantial enrolments will require effectively decentralised student support services. It will not be possible to

supervise the work of hundreds of thousands of students from a single location. Depending on the size of an institution, a number of centres will have to be established at suitable locations and systems established to help students access information, materials and other facilities as well as for any other business to be transacted with the institution. If there are a significant number of such centres, normally known as study centres, then arrangements will be needed for coordination and supervision of their work as well. Large institutions like IGNOU and the UKOU do this through a number of Regional Centres.

#### 4.6.4 Technology Applications Management

Technology has a major impact on distance education systems and their organisation. As we have seen, every new development in information and communication technologies has had a significant role in taking distance education to a new level (they call it generation). Thus, from the first generation correspondence education (printing technology) to the most recent virtual university (interactive multimedia based online teaching), technologies have helped establish new models of organisation of distance education during the last four decades. And, we have still not seen the last of it.

This is not to suggest that distance education is all about the latest technologies. Though the trend is towards more online courses, the digital divide is a major hurdle to cross before online education becomes the universal norm. For students in the developing countries with poor access to the Internet, print- and broadcast-based programmes will continue to remain important. According to Bates (2005), print and broadcast based distance education accounted for about 5 million students in 2002-03 while fully online programmes had only about 600,000 students.

Distance teaching public universities that have moved rapidly in to online learning or e-learning are grappling with problems of quality, access and sustainability (OECD, 2005). On the other hand, several private distance education organisations have managed to ensure quality, increased access and sustainability from the use of technology for teaching. The lesson to be learnt is that technology is not the end; it is only the means to reach out, and more modest and affordable technologies will continue to dominate the distance education horizon for a while longer.

Meanwhile, distance education systems are progressively becoming collaborative and networking arrangements in several countries. These arrangements vary in scope and purpose. At a very simple level, they could involve the sharing and exchange of information; they could then extend to areas like engagement in staff development, sharing of materials, joint development of programmes and finally the creation of an open learning system involving a number of institutions.

Networking in the technological sense is not just about cooperation and sharing. It is about the number of applications requiring high-speed data networking that need higher data transmission rates. Interconnections for telecommunication networks take many forms: telephone lines, Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), coaxial cable, fibre optics, microwave links, VSAT (very small aperture terminal) links, Broadband Integrated Services Digital Network (BISDN), Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM) and so on. Another service application that is emerging is Internet Protocol (IP)-based videoconferencing.

The choice really is how to put it all together. Before implementation of any telecommunication plan, distance education planners and managers would be well advised to:

- Undertake an environmental scan to determine which telecommunication plan is right for the institution
- Make an assessment of the types of programmes that fit the institution's mission, resources and goals
- Develop an understanding of learner attributes and needs; and
- Ensure the development of instructional design processes that integrate the attributes of the technology with those of the institution and its needs as well as those of its learners.

We had mentioned in unit 1 that among the lessons to be learnt from the explosive use of ICTs in education around the world is one of expensive failures. Technologies have to remain tools; they cannot take precedence over the basic needs of teaching and learning.

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## **4.7 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

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Distance education systems in most countries were initiated at the instance of their governments, or at least with their support. Education almost universally is a continuing concern for governments who provide funds for this sector. Exceptions to this practice are the establishment of educational institutions by private agencies (schools, colleges and universities, for example) or the arrangements for education and training made by employers for the benefit of their personnel. This does not mean that there is no private sector in education. In fact, in countries like the USA, for example, there is a strong private sector in education that establishes and runs universities and colleges. In Europe and nearly all the developing countries in the world, it is the Governments that lay down the education policy, provide the funding for education and generally oversee that policies are implemented and regulations are followed.

Government policies generally provide for the structure and pattern of education, resource allocations for the education sector and the broad guidelines or regulations within which institutions and their managements function. These regulations may specify the types and levels of institutions that private agencies can establish, the programmes they can offer, the fees that can be levied and the extent of facilities that each type of institution must provide. In several cases, the guidelines may also include the provisions to be made for reservation of seats for the socially and economically weaker sections (affirmative action) and related issues. In short, government policies and regulations are very crucial to the organisation and management of education in most countries.

Provision of educational opportunities through the system of distance education as part of government policies has several advantages. It ensures legitimacy for the system, validation of the qualifications awarded by institutions on completion of studies through the distance mode and not the least, a share in government funding earmarked for education. In this section, we shall focus our attention on the management of resources in distance education systems.

### 4.7.1 Institutions by Source of Funding

There are broadly three types of distance education institutions according to sources of their funding:

- Institutions fully funded by the governments;
- Institutions sponsored by the government on the understanding that they become self-supporting within a specified period;
- Private institutions not dependent on governments for funding.

The high costs involved in the creation of the infrastructure and also in the development of learning materials make it necessary that large distance education systems are funded by governments. Depending upon the media chosen, the technology support structure would also involve moderate to heavy investments. Besides, course development processes are always time-consuming, and it will take quite some time for the revenues to flow in. In the initial stages, a distance education system will require large outlays to set itself up with no returns on the investment till students are enrolled and begin to pay their fees.

As and when the operations begin, the situation could change significantly. Unlike in the traditional system, the recurrent expenditure does not vary proportionately with the student number. In distance education, the marginal cost with the addition of every student is less than the average per student cost. This happens because of economies of scale. This is because, as we noted earlier, the fixed costs on course development get spread over large numbers and also over long periods of time. In the traditional system, the strength of the faculty is determined by the number of students, as the requirements of quality in teaching demands a specified teacher-student ratio. In distance education, the permanent faculty at the institution has no direct relationship with the student body; it is this lower variable cost that makes distance education relatively cost-efficient.

Though the initial investments are high, the prospect of continued high returns makes distance education a viable economic proposition for private providers. This has led to the emergence of a strong commercial sector in distance education, but it confines itself to a few areas in which there is a known market that can pay the price that meets the cost. The emerging areas of studies in business, media and computer based design and other applications find many private providers willing to make the investments. But in several areas like teaching and other socially useful programmes of education and training aimed at the rural population, for example, private investments would never be adequate, or forthcoming.

### 4.7.2 Budgeting

Every institution needs to prepare its budget and control its expenditure. The budget provides a realistic estimate of what an institution intends to achieve within a given environment; it is a target or goal that people believe in and try to achieve. It is also a useful standard against which performance can be assessed. The attributes of credibility, motivation and realism make budget a dynamic instrument for the organisation and its people. The budget is dynamic because at any time it can be reviewed and revised, depending upon market conditions and also the new opportunities and challenges that those conditions might offer.

Preparing the budget is normally an exercise taken up annually well before the commencement of the financial year. In order to prepare the budget, the management would need to have comprehensive data on all new programmes and activities to be launched during the year for which the budget is being prepared, the targets to be achieved, past performance, etc., besides the current levels of revenue and expenses.

The sources of revenue of a distance education institution are generally:

- Government grants – this could generally be a fixed annual grant suitably adjusted to neutralise inflation, or determined on the basis of enrolment every year. To determine the actual quantum of grants, the average per student cost for each programme is settled in advance and all enrolments are converted into full-time equivalents. This formula could be very complex for distance education institutions.
- Tuition fees – these are prescribed by the institutions themselves after taking into account a number of complex and often incompatible factors that include the prevailing government policies, institutional objectives, economic conditions in society, the need to recover costs and the comparability with fees charged by other institutions for similar programmes;
- Other factors – distance education institutions are also large publishing houses that bring out a large volume of authentic learning materials. These include textbooks, reading materials, audio tapes, video programmes, CD-ROMs, and so on. These materials have a vast market; students and teachers in the formal system find them very useful. These can generate substantial revenues if they are properly marketed. Similarly, the institution can hire its audio/video production facilities to other institutions/agencies and can take up consultancy assignments for external organisations and charge them fees.
- Interests on investments, donations, etc.

Full fees are received from students at the time of their enrolment. Education is one area in which the per student cost is recovered even before any expenditure is incurred on him/her. Expenditure on students gets staggered on students throughout their stay with the institution. This expenditure is a firm commitment made by the institution that can run over long periods. A judicious policy of investing part of the fee income would ensure that future liabilities are adequately taken care of. Donations, endowments, etc., could also be significant sources of income though they cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty.

Expenditure is always predicated by levels of income. If income goes up, so does the expenditure. Conversely, if there is a fall in income, expenditure will also come down often leading to putting off new initiatives or acquisition of new facilities.

Budgeting exercise generally follows the pattern of organisation of activities. The major components of the distance education system, as we have seen earlier, are course design and development, material production and distribution, student support services, technology applications and institutional management. Each of these sub-systems will have to prepare its own estimates of expenditure keeping the existing level of activities, and the proposed additions during the year, in view. It would be useful for preparing these estimates if costs are standardised through a system of activity costing to which we shall return later in this unit.

Expenditure on course development is independent of the current enrolment. This is a fixed expenditure and is the capital of the institution on which it earns its revenue. Much of an institution's reputation will depend on the quality of these materials. Therefore, they need to be produced with great care, and will require constant review and revision to ensure currency of its content. The single largest component of the expenditure on this account is the salary of the faculty and the ancillary staff

The production and distribution budget would largely depend on the forecasts of enrolment on each course and programme, current costs of production of materials, the salaries of staff engaged on these operations and the mode of distribution and its costs.

Similarly, the budget for the student support services will depend upon the methods of delivery of various services, study centre costs, tutor costs, assignment evaluation costs, examination costs and the like.

The costs of technology applications are determined by the types and nature of technologies used, the ways in which technologies are applied and the costs of equipment and its maintenance.

Institutional management costs consist of the salary of staff associated with general administration, finance and accounts, estate management and maintenance, supplies and stationery, and all other common services.

Most institutions will also have a capital budget that makes provision for additions to infrastructure (building, equipment, furniture and other durable assets).

### Check Your Progress 5

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

ii) Check your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

Identify whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False':

- i) Unlike in the conventional system, the recurrent expenditure does not vary proportionately with the student number in DE. ( )
- ii) The prospect of continued high returns makes DE a viable economic proposition for private providers. ( )
- iii) The attributes namely, credibility, motivation and realism do not make the budget a dynamic instrument for the organisation. ( )

### 4.7.3 Activity Costing

As you have noticed, the preparation of the budget is a process that involves several steps. It is not enough to identify the items of expenditure (there will be too many for each activity), but it is just as important to know what each activity costs. The management will have to establish systems that will continuously monitor the expenditure and analyse it to establish realistic unit costs for each activity and each product and service. In order to work out reliable costs, it is necessary, in the first place, to standardise each product and service. For example, the print cost of materials will have to be standardised in terms of a volume of output (cost per page or for a volume of specified number of pages), or an audio tape or video cassette of a specified length of time (say, 30 minutes), etc. Each of these outputs will have a

standard cost that can then be broken down into various components, namely, salary of staff, cost of materials, cost of reviewing and editing and other overheads.

Similar efforts need to be made to analyse the costs involved in the delivery of various services to students. These will include the costs of pre-admission processes (advertisements, printing forms and programme guides), admission processing, etc. The cost of distribution of material will depend upon the volume of material despatched to each student. Counselling and tutorial costs will vary according to the instructional design of each course as does the cost of assignment and evaluation. At any rate, by a careful analysis of the past expenditure, historical costs of each of these components can be worked out fairly accurately, and these could be used as a guide for the future. This analysis will help identify the programme-specific costs for each programme separately. It will also assist in determining the levels of fees to be charged for each programme.

Having discussed the significance of cost analysis, it will be useful at this stage to look at some of the concepts associated with it:

- Direct costs are those associated with a particular product or service and are specific to it. Cost of materials used for a particular product and the salary of employees working on its production fall in this category;
- Indirect costs are those that cannot be identified exclusively with a particular product or service and are shared with other products and services;
- Overhead costs are those aggregate indirect costs of a cost centre or cost unit. Examples of this category are the costs of a central computing system or an internal telephone exchange;
- Apportionment of costs is the process of assigning the total costs to different products and services on the basis of their share in the aggregate cost;
- Fixed costs are those which do not vary with the volume of output. Buildings, equipment and most of the development costs fall in this category;
- Variable costs are those which vary with the volumes of output;
- Marginal costs are the additional costs incurred for increasing the output by one unit;
- Cost efficiency denotes the ratio of input to output. An institution is said to be more cost-efficient than another if it can produce more output with the same level of input or the same output with less input;
- Cost-effectiveness signifies the quality of the output relative to the demands that institution seeks to meet, the quality of the graduates, for example. It also involves the values and principles that an institution stands for, which contribute to the satisfaction of students and the public as well as the morale and loyalty of its staff.

#### 4.7.4 Managing the Resources

The most important assets of educational institutions are their intellectual and physical resources. The intellectual output in the form of course materials, in print and electronic form, are a potential source of significant revenue. The same is the case with their premises and electronic media production facilities. Often, institutions themselves engage in projects, consultancies and other professional activities that can add substantially to their revenue from student fees. Imaginative management of these resources can free most institutions from financial dependence.

Traditionally, educational institutions have shied away from the concepts and practices associated with the management of finances in handling their funding. Most of their income came from government sources and fees constituted only a minor fraction of their total income. In this context, the major responsibility of the management is confined to ensuing accountability in the use of public funds. Thus managements are more concerned with judicious utilisation of available funds, monitoring expenditure and ensuring that the funds are indeed used for the purposes for which they were provided. This approach means that the major concern of the Finance Departments of educational institutions is keeping accounts and auditing expenditure, and not on managing the finances through increase in productivity, performance monitoring, controlling costs or mobilising new resources.

In the recent decades, the traditional approach to educational finance has been changing noticeably. With the increasing emphasis on market in all economic activity and, the view that provision of services like health and education should also be guided by the market, there is increasing pressure on educational institutions to recover the cost of the services they provide. However, the view that education is a major investment in people, and the governments should not shy away from this responsibility, if only to develop and sustain economic competitiveness among nations, is also gaining currency across the world. Though there is no finality in this debate, the trend is that higher education institutions, in general, are getting more concerned about ensuring their financial health.

What is evident, however, is that government funding of higher education institutions is progressively declining. Most traditional universities are looking for alternate sources of funding. In this quest, many have found that distance education programmes, addressed to non-traditional learner groups who are willing to pay more, can generate significant additional revenue with no major capital investment. In the process, many universities also found that there is a big market for their programmes across borders, leading eventually to globalisation of education.

A meaningful system of financial control will have the following elements:

- Periodic reviews of strategic plans to make adjustments in the size and level of activities to match the expected levels of funding;
- Reliable systems to forecast the enrolment size to make realistic assumptions about income;
- Preparation of separate budgets for each cost centre and assessment of the performance of each centre to determine its productivity and efficiency levels;

- Regular and even flow of activities to ensure that outputs match funding and that there are no accumulated shortages in outcomes that might need additional funding later;
- Evaluation of every proposal for delivery of any service in terms of possible alternatives, identifying the benefits relative to the costs proposed;
- Enforcement of the principle of value for money for every proposal to incur expenses;
- Ensuring that all activities contribute to the fulfilment of the objectives of the institution.

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## **4.8 SYSTEM EVALUATION**

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Research and evaluation play a key role in the management of the distance education system. Typically, the main functions associated with the management of distance education system are planning, deciding, leading, implementing and evaluating. The performance of these tasks requires information that helps to take the best decisions possible, and developing good practices that make implementation of decisions effective.

Evaluation research in distance education can be designed and undertaken at the system level and also at the level of courses and programmes.

### **4.8.1 System Level Evaluation**

System level evaluation involves:

- Basic measures of activity – collection and compilation of such basic management information as the programmes and courses on offer, the number of students enrolled on each course and programme, revenue earned by each course and programme, unit costs, etc.,
- Efficiency parameters – completion ratios indicating the number of students successfully completing every programme relative to the enrolment numbers, drop-out levels, average time taken to complete a programme, student loads in terms of course options and preferences, etc.;
- Outcomes – Student performance (examination results), sale proceeds from materials, extent of use of materials by non-students (materials market size);
- Realising programme objectives – provision of opportunities, widening access, enhancing equity and responding to the needs of the market by analysing the student profiles;
- Policy and practices – market surveys for needs assessment, acceptability of graduates in the market, diversification of approaches to delivery of services, impact of costs on students as well as the system;
- Organisational performance – structure of the organisation and its performance, personnel policy, work ethos, financial management.

## 4.8.2 Course and Programme Evaluation

Generally, there are two types of evaluations done for assessing the objectives of a course or programme. These are:

- Formative Evaluation – Assessment of the materials by trying them out on students to obtain feedback and also for securing views, comments and suggestions from internal as well as external experts before they are finalised;
- This process is also known as developmental testing (more on this in MDE-412);
- Summative evaluation – obtaining information about the end-use of a course or programme through feedback from past students, evaluation of the teaching-learning strategies followed and their impact on outcomes; styles of presentation, currency of content, etc.

### Check Your Progress 6

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

ii) Check your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

- i) What changes have taken place in educational financing in the recent decades? (Answer in about 50 words).

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- ii) Define direct and indirect costs. (Answer in about 30 words).

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## 4.9 LET US SUM UP

From models and types, and methods and styles that we considered in the previous unit, we have taken a close look in this unit at the bread and butter issues that managers of distance education systems have to grapple with. In discussing these issues, our attempt has been to explore the ways in which managers address them and find solutions, rather than merely analysing situations and identifying issues.

We hope that this treatment would have given you a deeper understanding of the ways in which the management of a distance education system goes about articulating its goals, setting its strategies, designing its structure, organising its activities, managing its finances and finally assessing whether or not the purpose for which it all started has been served.

We believe that as a potential distance education manager, you will have found this unit exciting.

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## 4.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) True, ii) False, iii) True

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The main considerations while choosing the media are: accessibility, affordability of the medium both for the provider and the student; pedagogical significance, appropriateness of the medium in relation to the environment and costs.
- ii) Established needs for education and training (number of programme and size of learners), the specific purpose (s) for which institution is to be launched, and availability of resources – physical and financial as well as competent personnel are the important factors which ultimately determine the model of the DE institution to be set up.

### Check Your Progress 3

A course/programme coordinator plays the role of an academic manager, coordinating the work of the course team consisting of subject experts, producers, editors and instructional designers at the development stage and ensuring the preparation of assignments and their evaluation as well as the provision of tutorial support at the delivery stage. In order to be successful in this role a distance teacher should develop skills in interpersonal relationship, should be open and flexible, and willing to learn and change oneself where necessary.

### Check Your Progress 4

The factors which will influence the organisational design of support services are: (a) the spread of students across the country; (b) the range of services/components to be delivered to students; (c) number of students to be catered to by the institution; (d) nature of programmes – like practical based courses or only theory based etc.; (e) extent of application of technology in support services by the institution and (f) assessment and examination system.

### Check Your Progress 5

- i) True, ii) True, iii) False

### Check Your Progress 6

- i) In recent decades, government funding for education has gradually declined which made universities look for alternate sources of funding and to concentrate on financial management with emphasis on better productivity, greater resource mobilisation, cost control etc. This is a radical change from the traditional approach of finance branches of educational institutions which was largely concerned with accounting and auditing only.
- ii) Direct costs are those associated with a particular product or service and which are specific to it. Indirect costs are those which cannot be identified exclusively with a product or service, but are shared with other products and services.