UNIT 5 ISSUES IN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous three units of this block dealt with the macro-management of distance education systems in the broad perspective of their evolution over a long period of time. We had a broad overview of the pattern and structure of distance education systems across the world in the previous units. While looking at the global situation, we have also noticed the presence of several organisational models. These are not peculiar to any one country or situation. We also looked at the essential components of a dynamic distance education system, its organisation and management, and what it takes to develop an effectively functioning system with relevant technology support. What this Unit tries to look at is the micro-management of a distance education institution. Most of you when you enter the profession are most likely to encounter the problems and issues concerned with an institution rather than the system as a whole. What it takes to set up an institution, where does one begin and where does one go from there? These are the issues that we shall try to deal with in this unit.

From the previous discussions, you will have noticed that there is no simple or single answer to the question of what institutional models and structures can be adopted or adapted for a distance education institution in the future. There is no doubt that conventional universities will continue to adapt and integrate open and distance learning initiatives in their programme profiles,

possibly at all levels, and also in all sectors. This is not to suggest that there will be no room for other institutional types; open universities and open schools, distance teaching networks and virtual universities are all bound to come up, and perhaps at a faster rate. What is more, new technologies and new markets will impose changes on these institutional models as well, and who knows how many new types of institutions and services will also get established to meet the needs of society in more effective ways than most of them do today. May be, existing institutions will need to develop and establish new types of partnerships and alliances. The wealth of experience and competence that distance education institutions have created over the last four decades or so needs to be capitalised in developing new alliances and structures. This is a challenge not just to institutional leadership but also to political leadership, policy development and institution building.

It is this experience of the last three or four decades that has contributed to a vast body of literature both on the theoretical framework of distance education pedagogy and the good practices adopted by different institutions in different environments. It is a brief summary of these principles and practices that we have presented in the previous units. In designing the presentation in this Block, we have proceeded on the assumption that most theories are a structured view of practices and that management science is all about good practices.

Having studied the general principles and practices followed in the management of distance education systems, we shall now turn to certain specific issues in the planning and management of distance education institutions.

5.2   OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the critical issues to be addressed while planning the establishment of a distance education institution, relative to its environment;

- examine the strategic options available to the management, assess their relative merits and demerits, and help make choices;

- design the systems, including the structures and processes, for development of programmes and delivery of services;

- analyse the nature of the staff development issues and problems of a new distance education institution; and

- establish systems and procedures for the evaluation of the performance of an institution.

5.3   THE INSTITUTION AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

Education is an area that generally falls within the domain of governments. In most countries, governments decide educational policies and priorities, allocate resources, establish institutions and maintain them. Where there is a significant private sector in education, governments regulate their functioning, set the standards and norms, and where appropriate, also provide financial support.

Besides government, there are several sectors in society that have either stakes in, or at least have influence over, educational provision. The academics working in the system, various professions and their organisations, parents and of course the students have all a major say in the nature and quality of the educational provision available to them.

In many countries, especially in the less developed and the developing ones, there are acute shortages in the provision for education, particularly at the higher levels. In some cases, there is shortage in resources for investment in education, in some others, even if some resources are available, there is lack of qualified personnel for teaching and management, while in other cases, all the needs of specialisation cannot be met from within the countries. There are also instances where the number of students seeking higher education is too small to set up specialised facilities in several disciplines (many of the island nations, for example), or their number is too large to cope with the demand for setting up facilities of an acceptable quality (several countries in sub-Saharan Africa, for example).

5.3.1   Why a Distance Education Institution/Facility?

We asked the question "why distance education" at the beginning of this Block and gave the answers in terms of the broad purposes distance education can serve. For example, we noted that distance education can widen access, augment educational provision, respond to the needs of mature learners who may or may not be working, meet specific employer needs of training in special skills and promote globalisation of education. We need not go in to any further discussion of these issues here. But, in the context of planning the establishment of a distance education institution, we need to examine whether any of these issues justify the creation of an institution or facility in particular environments, in some detail. We propose to do that now.

First, who are the potential learners? The planning exercise for setting up a new distance education facility has to begin with asking who its beneficiaries are likely to be, in the first place. To examine this issue, planners must have data relating to the current demand and supply, that is, the number of admission seekers and the number of places available. If the number of places available is far less than the number seeking admission, there is an unmet demand that gets accumulated over a period of time. With the lapse of time, this group will turn adults either working or looking for work. They may have also become ineligible for entry in to colleges or universities because of their age. The existing employment data should indicate the extent of unqualified or under qualified people in the workforce (we have noted that there are sizable proportions of such people among teachers in many developing countries). If the numbers are sizable, there would be a case for creating some facilities for their education and training outside the formal institutional structures.

The current workforce is a major constituency that would be looking for opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills through continuing education for professional development. Many of them would not be able to take time off from work; many among them would not also like to be away from their families. If opportunities are available to them to pursue their professional development programmes at their workplaces or homes, they can look forward to improve their career prospects, if necessary, even by switching jobs. Similar is the case with unemployed youth who have had no formal education or are drop-outs from schools. If facilities are available for

technical and vocational training through short programmes, it could help them earn their livelihood. Distance education offers them a solution; but the planners have to satisfy that this constituency can provide the numbers.

Women constitute a significant client group for distance education. Many of them would like to acquire knowledge and skills that would empower them to become productive members of the society and earning members of their families. Those who are engaged in the planning of distance education facilities could count on women as a potential and stable constituency.

What do the employers want? From the employers' point of view, distance education methods offer several advantages. Participation in distance education does not require employees to be absent from their workplace; it reduces the cost both to the employers and their employees; the employer does not have to bear the cost of sending workers away for training (travel to, and residence at, the place of training); distance education can help get over the reluctance of employees in joining training programmes; and employers can train more employees, more quickly and with fewer trainers. More importantly, as technologies change, newer skill sets are needed for their applications. Employers would certainly prefer someone from outside taking this responsibility of training their workforce to investing their own time and effort in on-the-job training. Distance education methods can achieve this objective.

What do Governments think? For governments, distance education offers several advantages. It enables educationists and trainers to meet a variety of needs most of which cannot be met, fully or even partially, by the traditional methods of education and training. Another attraction for governments is the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the distance education system. It can meet the growing demand for higher education; with the expansion of the school system, there will be growing pressure for entry into colleges and universities; establishment of more of the traditional institutions is no longer an economic option; and it gives them the means to serve the needs of people living in the rural and remote areas in many countries.

5.3.2   Other Strategic Issues

As we had mentioned elsewhere in this Block, distance education has had a mixed reception in terms of both legitimacy and acceptability. In the best of cases, it was considered the second best, and never the best form of educational provision. What gives them legitimacy? We have said earlier that in most countries it is the governments that play the key role in education. They direct, regulate and develop their own education systems through the instruments of policy, legislation and resource support. To create an environment supportive of distance education, Governments have to play a crucial part; they have to accept distance education as an integral part of their national education system through appropriate provisions in their national policies; make laws where necessary and allocate adequate resources to establish and develop institutions and systems to sustain distance education provision.

Policy pronouncements by governments would support the planning work in many ways. They will provide the argument in support of distance education, the groups it will serve and its relationship with the formal system as well as address the issues concerning the recognition of the qualifications awarded by institutions offering distance education programmes. They will also help answer questions like the scale of

operations, the institutional structures that need to be put in place and a realistic assessment of the resource needs as well as the role of the traditional system and its academics in supporting and strengthening distance education.

In most developing countries, support of the political system, especially from the top levels of government, would be a major source of strength. We have seen how in an advanced country like the UK, the Prime Minister and his ministerial colleague, Jennie Lee, successfully piloted the UKOU project. If political backing was decisive in the UK, it was even more so in India. We shall have occasion to come back to this later. It was this support that set the planning machinery in motion. The Planning committee for the UKOU and the Project Committee for IGNOU were both set up by the respective governments who also set the terms of reference for these Committees. Surely, these were big confidence building measures for the planners and the general public, and government underwriting ensured the successful launch of the projects in both cases.

There are several factors that planners have to take into account at this stage. These are:

- What should the institution do? or what should its mission be?

- What should be its specific objectives?

- What types of needs it will meet?

- What programmes and curricula it will develop and how?

- What strategies it will follow in making the teaching-learning transaction effective?

- What would be its personnel policy?

- What resources would be available and can be mobilised?

- What monitoring and evaluation system should be in place?

We shall take up each of these issues for more detailed discussion in this unit.

5.3.3   Management of the Institution

We have noted from the preceding discussions that the many distinctive features of distance education management require managerial styles and practices that are very different from those associated with the management of traditional institutions of higher education, especially universities. Many universities across the world were established and are maintained in the liberal traditions of self-governing institutions, appropriately 'buffered' from direct control and intervention from the governments that legislated for their establishment. Their styles of management are collegial and participatory. Distance education institutions, on the other hand, combine in themselves, besides the traditional functions of universities, those assembly line processes associated with a modern industrial enterprise. Large scale production and distribution of learning materials both in print and the electronic form, organising and running broadcast/telecast programmes for diffusion of media packages, and coordinating and managing a widely distributed network of learning centres are some of the tasks that traditional universities are not called upon to perform. The management styles of distance teaching institutions therefore require an approach that is more techno-managerial than the collegial-liberal traditions of the conventional

university. There would be greater emphasis on productivity and efficiency in a distance education system than in a traditional university.

Efficiency indeed is the key to the management of a distance education system. The separation of its students from the institution demands application of modern technologies and practices to build bridges, the assembly line operations have to be closely watched and monitored to ensure execution in a sequence with no breaks, and in nearly all cases, it has to be ensured that the turn-around time is reduced to the minimum. The institution has therefore of necessity to adopt and implement modern management practices and methods to improve efficiency, ensure the quality of products and services, and also keep up the morale of the students and employees.

If such an orientation has to be given to the management of a distance education institution, it has to be reflected in the instrument that created the institution, the structures envisaged for the performance of its functions and the rules and regulations that govern its processes and methods of operations.

In many countries, at least in most developing countries, it is the Government that takes the initiative in setting up new universities and other institutions of higher education. The instrument by which this is done is legislation, or executive decisions. In either case, there would be a set of provisions that postulate the functions and powers and the composition of various bodies that comprise the institution.

Planners and decision-makers associated with the establishment of new distance education institutions will have to address the following issues:

- *The pattern of governance:* Conventional universities function through bodies like the Senate and the Executive Council. Senates are generally large bodies comprising nearly all the academics (or a large number of their representatives if the strength of academics is indeed very high) and representative of other employees. Although they make for participatory management, often they tend to be caught up in endless debates leading to delays in decisions and inefficiencies in performance. The Executive Councils, on the other hand, are smaller and compact bodies, comprising members drawn mostly from within the university. Though functionally they appear to be effective, constituted as they are with mostly internal members, decisions tend to get influenced by purely internal compulsions, and in any case, tend to be inadequate in depth and range in dealing with issues different from purely academic. The provisions relating to the powers, functions and composition of the governing bodies of a distance education institution are thus crucial to its efficiency and effectiveness.

- *Constitution of Management Bodies:* Traditional universities have always resisted any external influence on their academic policy-making and implementation processes. While it is important to protect and preserve the autonomy of educational institutions in deciding their academic policies and programmes, it is equally important that they do not suffer isolation from their environment. For a distance education institution, constant interaction with the environment is very essential not just to remove isolation, but more importantly, to inform their policy-making and programme-deciding processes. Provision of adequate

representation for a variety of interests on the decision-making bodies of a distance education institution will be very useful. Planners will have to consider and decide what balance should be maintained between internal and external members on these bodies, keeping in view the institutional structures currently existing in the environment, and the support and strength that can be secured from external sources.

* *The needs of cooperation and collaboration:* It is necessary for distance education institutions to function in close cooperation and collaboration with a wide variety of institutions and also drawing upon their physical facilities and personnel. While the constitution of various bodies, in some measure, can reflect this concern, it will be useful to secure the involvement of a cross section of stakeholders in the working of the institution itself. This could be done through appropriate consultative mechanisms, both formal and informal, as collaboration and networking are integral to the successful functioning of a distance education system.

* *Working with legacy systems:* You will recall that we mentioned in Unit 2 that open learning and distance education systems are a strategic option for expanding educational opportunities and that they need to be introduced with due consideration of the impact they can make on what already exists. In other words, planners should have a comprehensive understanding of the system that is currently functioning, its strengths and weaknesses and also the opportunities it offers not just to expand the existing educational provision but to bring about improvements in the existing system itself for its enrichment.

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.

Which are the three major perspectives that influence the planning stage of a distance education institution? (Answer in about 40 words).

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5.4   PLANNING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Planning is at the core of management functions. It enables an institution to survive and adapt itself to the changing environment. Forward planning does not seem to have captured the imagination of educational administrators in the conventional system as it has an assured market and is under no serious threat from competitors. Distance education system, on the other hand, has to create a market, gain credibility and attract public support. Its processes are much more complex, combining as they do several operations that have elements of business processes, production and distribution, for example, built in to them. Unlike teaching and research which are seemingly leisurely pursuits on most campuses, distance education processes require a greater degree of efficiency and a sense of urgency in organising and scheduling various operations and meeting deadlines. Planning is the established management tool to achieve this purpose.

Planning is essentially the preparation of a blueprint for action for achieving a mission. A plan sets out systematically a series of activities to be undertaken, the resources needed for each, the outcomes expected and the timelines within which the objectives are to be achieved. In distance education, the planning stage also helps evolve the system since at this point itself, considerable thought will have gone into articulating the various components that constitute the system as well as the tasks associated with each of those components (we have listed these components in the previous unit).

5.4.1   The Institutional Objectives

As we discussed earlier, national policy documents or other appropriate instruments like legislation will have set out the mission of a distance education system in very broad and general terms. But when an institution is established, the planners will have to indicate what goals it will achieve to fulfil its mission. Again, these goals may appear to be general statements reflecting the philosophy of the institution, and its approach to fulfilling its own goals. Within this approach, care has to be taken to specify, in clear and explicit terms, what these goals are and how they are proposed to be achieved.

In practical terms, these are stated as the objectives of the institution. In formulating these objectives, care has to be taken to ensure that they are:

- Consistent with the goal/mission of the system;

- Explicitly stated and clearly defined;

- Expressed in measurable terms;

- Sufficiently flexible to make reviews and modifications possible depending upon changes in the environment.

Distance education institutions produce not just graduates alone; it also produces course material involving financial, operational and personnel implications. These functions demand a more explicit statement of the academic objectives and their inferences in quantitative terms. Explicit statements of specific objectives are crucial at an early stage; otherwise it

may be difficult to cut back on plans once course development work has begun. The extent of specificity of objectives or precise goal setting is very useful when there are severe resource and time constraints, or within a relatively stable environment; whereas broader, directional goal setting is more appropriate in the formative years of an institution, in conditions of uncertainty or when there is no consensus among stakeholders.

The framing of objectives depends on two factors:

- Agreed goals of the institution; and

- Assessment of the resources available.

The resource needs which concern planners include fixed assets (land, buildings and equipment), personnel (academic, professional, managerial and administrative), funds and time.

5.4.2 Programmes and Curricula

The statement of objectives, even in general terms, will give you an idea of the specific needs that the new institution will endeavour to meet. These could be, as we have mentioned earlier in this unit, providing educational opportunities to different learner groups (adult learners, working people, housewives, disadvantaged groups), or to meet specific education and training needs like training of teachers, developing skills for technology upgrading, or provision of more technical and vocational education and training. In whatever terms the objectives are formulated, the next task will be to identify what programmes should be developed to fulfil the stated objectives and what curricula should be designed and developed for the purpose.

Curriculum planning and development are essentially the task of the academics. To begin with, an idea has to be concretised. It may originate from an individual academic, a discipline group or a faculty/school of the institution (we are assuming here that the staff have been recruited and are in position; we shall discuss this later in this unit). This idea or concept of a programme or course is then accepted in principle by the relevant bodies of the university. Thereafter, the major tasks are to:

- Formulate the course specifications – these may include the aims and objectives of the course, its nature (professional, vocational, technical, awareness), levels (certificate, diploma, degree),

- Specify the content and structure,

- Determine the mix of learning packages (print, electronic media),

- Settle the instructional design (support systems required, tutorials and counselling, recruitment of tutors and counsellors, student assignments and their evaluation),

- Select the course writers and editors,

- Prepare texts for production.

All these tasks will have to be performed if the institution has to start its operations with learning packages produced in-house well before admissions are announced. However, as we had mentioned in the previous

unit, it is always open to a new institution to acquire the learning packages from any other institution and start with those materials in the early stages. This will save time (it will take a lead time of at least two to three years for in-house development of course materials), and will help gain valuable first-hand experience and insight in the delivery of distance education programmes and testing the adequacy and appropriateness of available delivery technologies.

In the initial phase, the issues involved in planning new programmes are:

• Search for material that are available and can be used for the purposes of the institution;

• The ways in which available materials can be used, for example, straight adoption, adaptation by making minor modifications or translation into local language;

• Writing of materials if the institution wants to use only in-house materials;

• Conducting development testing where necessary;

• Finalising the production arrangements.

5.4.3   Staffing

The most important asset of an organisation is its people. The principles and values of the organisation are evolved around them. They determine the work culture; their levels of commitment and concern inspire public confidence in the institution.

Personnel policy of a distance education institution is critical to its success. Although education generally is a labour-intensive enterprise, distance education can reduce this intensity. There is generally an established ratio between teachers and students in the conventional system; you have to increase the number of teachers as enrolment rises. This is primarily because a teacher can effectively interact with only a certain number of students; and depending upon the subjects taught and their levels, this interaction demands different levels of intensity. These criteria determine the class size in the conventional system.

In distance education, the situation is very different. Students depend largely on self-instructional learning packages for home-based study. Face-to-face contacts take place to a limited extent, but at different places and at different times. These flexibilities permit a distance education institution to develop personnel policies that are very different from those of traditional institutions. Distance education institutions have therefore an unusual mix of personnel; a relatively small core of permanent full-time staff consisting of academic, professional, technical and administrative personnel, supplemented by a much larger number of part-time staff engaged at different locations for specified periods and specific tasks.

The categories of personnel required for a distance education institution and the nature of tasks to be performed by them are indicated in the following Table:

Categories of Personnel	Tasks
Academic Staff: • Subject specialists • Media Experts • Instructional Designers	• Curriculum planning • Preparation of learning packages and their production • Specifying the instructional System • Tutoring/counselling students
Professional staff • Tutors/Counsellors • Printing technologists • Copy Editors • Graphic Designers • Media Producers • Cameramen • Technicians • Computer professionals • Engineers	• Production of learning packages • Preparation of charts, illustrations and Graphics • Production of audio and video tapes • Desktop publishing • Technology applications • Maintenance of equipment and production studios
Administrative staff • Managers • Administrators • Financial staff • Office staff • Warehousing staff	Operations management • Monitoring • Personnel administration • Financial management and accounting • Office management and maintenance • Storekeeping

The categories of personnel and the tasks mentioned in the Table above are by no means exhaustive, but only indicative.

The mix of staff according to the terms of their engagement (full-time, part-time, short-term, permanent, etc.) has to be settled depending upon the workload for every activity and the frequency at which every task has to be performed. For example, many of the tasks associated with the material development function (course writing and editing, preparation of graphics, video production, etc.) need to be performed only once. When once they are prepared, all that needs to be done is to ensure that they are revised and updated at appropriate intervals, where necessary. Most of the tasks associated with the initial preparation of materials can, therefore, be done by persons engaged on short-term basis or on short-term contract. Distance education institutions can therefore function effectively with a small core of full-time academic staff who could be assigned the responsibilities for course coordination, maintenance, revision, etc.

A similar approach could be followed in the recruitment of staff associated with the delivery of various services to students. For example, tutorials and academic counselling for distance learners are nearly always the functions of part-time staff; so is the case with the managerial and administrative staff at the local study centres. Appointment of full-time staff for the performance of these functions can be extremely costly. Much of the cost-efficiency of the distance education system depends on its ability to contain staff costs by pursuing a flexible personnel policy.

Check Your Progress 2

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 care has to be taken while formulating institutional objectives for DEIs and why such care is needed? (Answer in about 40 words).

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ii) Identify the following statements as 'True' of 'False'

a) Framing for objectives does not depend on goals of the institution and availability of resources.   (   )

b) Search for materials already available is not necessary in the initial phase of programme planning.   (   )

c) Flexible personnel policy is one of the factors for cost-efficiency of the system.   (   )

5.4.4   Staff Development and Training

Staff development and training is just as important to a new distance education institution as its personnel policy. As the teaching-learning methodologies are different and the competence required is highly specialised, it is necessary to consider recruitment and training of personnel at all levels at the initial stage itself.

The core competencies that are essential for distance educators are:

- Programme design and development

- Instructional system design

- Needs analysis and assessment

- Identification of job-related training

- Understanding of learning styles and preferences of adult learners

- Determination of appropriate training methods

- Management of programmes

- Communication technology and media

- Evaluation

- Planning and research

- Computer skills

We mentioned in the previous unit that most of the functions to be performed by the distance education system, ranging from course development to evaluation, require the involvement of several people working together as teams. Michael Moore (1993) describes open and distance learning environments as settings in which "instruction is no longer is an individual's work, but is the work of teams of specialists – media specialists, knowledge specialists, instructional design specialists, and learning specialists". If such a team approach has to be fostered among the staff of a distance education institution, it is essential that the staff is put through appropriate programmes of training and orientation after

recruitment. The focus of these programmes should be to develop in each specialist category the skills and competence that can contribute to the creation of the distance learning environment in the institution. An illustrative list of the areas for training and orientation is given below:

Categories of Personnel	Areas in which Skills and Competencies have to be developed
Academics	Instructional system design including: • Education theories • Distance learning styles and practices • Adult education theories • Teaching strategies • Communication skills • Presentation techniques
	• Self-instructional material development • Instructional design for interactive learning • Writing skills • Editing skills
Professionals/Technologists	Information and communication technology and management skills including: • Knowledge of technology and hardware • Knowledge of multi-media • Software and its applications • Computer networking • Knowledge of accessing technologies • Knowledge of interactive technology • Educational software development
Organisational and Management personnel	• Organising and controlling • Management Information System • Team Management • Collaboration and networking • Negotiating skills • Public Relations • Group Working • Strategic planning skills • Project management skills
Administrative and Financial Services	• Personnel administration • Knowledge of support systems • Policy making skills • Budget making skills • Cost analysis and activity costing skills

In the initial stages, planners and managers of any new institution will have to look for facilities to get their staff trained in these skills to begin the operations. Such training can be arranged by deputing groups of staff in different categories to well known institutions within the country or abroad,

or by getting experts from those institutions as advisors or consultants for short periods to set up the systems and orienting the staff to start the operations of the institution. The initial start-up period is very critical as it will set the environment in which the work culture will be evolved during the formative stages of the institution.

5.4.5 Designing the Delivery System

Delivery of learning materials and the provision of services that support the learners in getting through their programmes of study are critical elements in distance learning provision. Unlike in the conventional system, distance learners are physically separated from their teachers/institution and, therefore, there should be adequate arrangements in place to reach out to them. Most distance education systems, as we have seen in the previous unit, establish a network of local centres that remain the contact points for the learners. Such centres are located wherever there is a concentration of learners to ensure that they have easy access to advice, tuition, materials and information. The number of such centres will depend upon the vastness of the area to be covered, the size of the enrolment in each area (district, county, town or city). The major considerations in setting up the study centres should be:

- The centre should be capable of providing a learning environment;

- It should be accessible to learners within a reasonable time and distance;

- Tutors/counsellors should be available to help learners at the centre or its neighbourhood;

- It should have facilities to support a sufficiently large number of learners outside the normal working hours of the host institution where the centre is located;

- The host institution should be able to provide preferably its own staff on a part-time basis for managing the centre, helping students and maintaining their records;

- The compensation packages for providing these services should be drawn up either on a normative basis or through negotiations;

- Arrangements should be made to orient the staff about their roles and responsibilities.

These study centres may have to be provided with some resource inputs depending upon the instructional system to be developed. For instance, if the instructional system requires the use of electronic media, the centre should have the facilities to access those media. If video technology is part of the delivery system, the study centre should have the hardware (VCR and monitor) and the software (video cassettes). Today, Television sets, DVD players and DVD are ubiquitous and are extensively in use. In several cases, designated study centres may also have video conferencing facilities. These will include reception facilities for satellite transmission and talk-back systems for two-way audio. Similarly, if the support system involves face-to-face interaction, arrangements should be in place for a group of learners to interact with tutors/counsellors according to predetermined schedules.

There could be programmes that require different kinds of support services. If programmes of science education are on offer, learners should need access to laboratories to do their experiments. Similarly, for computer education

and training, hands-on experience is essential and the centre should have an adequate number of computers. Today, with computers becoming widely used at homes and workplaces, Internet-based learning has become very common and the emphasis gradually moving away from designated study centres to home-based study. However, these benefits are not yet universally available; the digital divide is so sharp that many developing countries do not still have easy access to these technologies.

As the institution grows, so does the enrolment, and with it, the network. There could be large numbers of study centres, and that would demand arrangements for coordination, supervision and monitoring of their work. An intermediate level mechanism would become necessary, and in many cases, these functions are performed by Regional Centres set up by the institution itself. The UKOU and IGNOU have set up large numbers of Regional Centres. Once the Regional Centres are set up, they would also be able to undertake resource mapping of the area under their jurisdiction for any possible expansion of the study centre network in the future.

If the early planning stage itself visualises a large institution covering a very large geographical area, and also high enrolments, a different approach to the establishment of the study centre network could be attempted. In such cases, it would be useful to set up the Regional Centres in the first place, which could then begin the process of resource mapping, selection of study centres, negotiations with existing institutions and finalisation of the terms of contract for hiring accommodation, personnel including tutors and counsellors and other facilities. The Regional Centres could also function as the focal points for organising training and orientation programmes for the study centre staff as well as tutors and counsellors. This approach would also help quicker expansion of the network and more effective response to rising enrolment.

A major function of the study centre network is the management of the logistics involved in delivering all the support services required by the learners. The specific responsibilities are:

- Providing a local face to an institution that is remote for most students;

- Offering personalised and often localised services to the learners attached to the centre;

- Significantly reducing the response time for information, material and assignment feedback;

- Serve as a forum where a group of learners could interact among themselves and reduce their feeling of isolation;

Establishment and development of such networks could also raise several issues for the management. More often, they tend to be resource-driven; the scale of resource inputs and personnel compensation packages will determine their behavioural responses and willingness to help students with whom they have no formal relationship. The levels of enrolment may not always match the investment made in a study centre; and, in the performance of certain functions like the distribution of materials, for example, it can only add one more layer between the institution and the student that may impact on efficiency.

In planning the student support network, planners will need to take the functionality of the system into account, For example, they will have to

consider whether it would be possible and desirable to structure the network as a centralised system, or whether it would be worthwhile to organise it as a decentralised structure. While a wholly centralised structure will not work, it would be more convenient and expeditious if the study centres are allowed a degree of freedom in organising its day-to-day work. For example, scheduling the tutorials at the study centre need not be done centrally; but, teleconferencing schedules cannot be operated on a decentralised basis.

It would be useful if the following concerns are addressed while deciding the structure of the student support service network:

- Define the roles, responsibilities and jurisdiction of the central office and the Regional Centres and Study Centres very clearly;

- Establish well defined reporting lines;

- Specify the areas in which the regional staff will have flexibility in decision-making in operational matters;

- Establish systems that help field staff participate in decision-making and execution through two-way feedback and monitoring mechanisms.

What we have detailed above reflects the practices followed by most institutions in the latter half of the 20th century. The 21st century distance education institutions will need to adjust to the realities of the contemporary world. The new order involves greater complexities in the provision of programmes and support to students. It would be worthwhile to look at some key trends and influences that would shape student support services in the 21st century:

- Widening participation and growing diversity of the student body will influence the range and nature of the support services;

- The digital divide that restricts access to modern technologies and the inability of students to use them, if made available, will require bridges to be built to meet needs and overcome skill deficiencies;

- Changing learner expectations about the provision and delivery of student services in an increasingly customer-focused and learner-centric system will make demands on the cost and quality as well as high levels of service;

- High levels of enthusiasm for new technologies that could override an understanding about what students want or require;

- Increasing costs.

5.4.6 Resources and Costs

As we have noted in the previous unit, governments play a major role in education all over the world. They determine the national policies, and these policies influence decisions on the allocation of resources for education. While governments could be the largest single source of educational finances in most countries, there could be a substantial private sector as well that provides for education and functions within the regulatory framework set by the governments.

Irrespective of the source that finances an educational institution, at the level of micro-management, planners will have to address the following issues:

- The extent of initial investment available at least for a period of the first five years;

- The broad break-up of the expenditure on capital and recurrent items;

- Preparation of a time frame with time-bound activities and their costs during the initial phase.

The main components of the capital items (fixed costs) are:

- Land and buildings;

- Furniture, office equipment and fittings;

- Computer hardware and software;

- Audio and video production equipment and facilities;

- Media transmission equipment and facilities;

- Vehicles.

The major components of the recurrent items of expenditure are:

- Salary of staff (full-time and part-time);

- Costs of preparation and production of learning packages (these will include paper, printing, audio and video tapes and their production costs);

- Cost of warehousing and distribution of materials;

- Expenditure on delivery of services at the study centres;

- Office supplies, communication, travel, etc.;

- Advertisements;

- General administration costs.

It is important to remember that an institution can hope to collect its revenue only after the first batch of students is admitted. Admissions are possible only after the learning packages are produced. It might take a lead time of at least two years or more to get learning packages prepared and stocked. It follows that the revenue-earning phase may start only after a gap of two or three years from the start of an institution. It is also likely that the size of the first few batches may not be as large as can generate a large volume of revenue. Evidently, a new institution should be well prepared to sustain itself on the funding support from its sponsors at least during the first five years of its operations.

As the operations go in full swing, it should be the endeavour of the management to analyse the costs of every activity continuously and establish the unit costs for each activity and output. This exercise will enable the institution to prepare its budget on a more realistic basis for all incremental additions to its activities, and more importantly, monitor and control expenditure to improve productivity and efficiency.

It would be useful at this stage to identify the major factors that would drive the costs of a distance education institution. While these factors could be easily identified, the ways in which they interact with one another, and impact costs, are often very complex. Let us list some of these:

- Media and technology choice: Technologies always interact with human beings, and the real understanding of the costs of any technology depends on an understanding of the socio-technical context in which it

operates. Choices have to be made keeping the prevailing and/or developing technology-friendly environment in which sustained use of chosen technologies can be assured, to avoid costly and expensive experiments.

• Evolving work practices and organisational structures: There is no denying the fact that the work practices and structures of distance education are rapidly changing. As we entered the 21st century, we saw significant changes through the growing influence of technologies in transforming the structures. For example, computer conferencing and the Internet have changed the format of courses necessitating changes in their design and the roles and skills required of those who produce them.

• The programme mix is an important variable that drives the costs. For instance, a large number of programmes, each of which needs independent courses, would be far more costly than those that can draw upon and utilise at least some of the generic courses that are already on offer.

• Similarly, a large number of programmes, each with small numbers of students, could prove to be too costly to maintain than a small number of large-enrolment programmes that can reap economies of scale.

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 main considerations for setting up of local/study centres? (Answer in about 40 words).

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5.5   MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The flow of accurate and reliable information at all stages of decision-making processes is essential for effective management. In fact, reliable information is a critical input for realistic planning. As we noted elsewhere, a system is the aggregate of several independent, but inter-connected components, each of which impacts the performance of the others. Often, the output from one of these component units is the input for another and the chain moves on in assembly line processes. Any slippage at any point will led to dislocation leading to enterprise wise delays and disruptions in schedules. Those managing each operation need therefore to keep others informed so that resources for each operation are made available in time and in adequate measure.

It is not uncommon in many organisations that information is not routinely shared with all areas that might be reasonably expected to get the relevant information. In a distance education institution in which many operations

are critically dependent on each other, non-availability of information, or its inadequacy or inaccuracy, can lead to severe problems for the management. The tendency to control information, and the reluctance to share it with all concerned, can often be counterproductive in any organisation, and more so in a distance education organisation.

The introduction of modern technologies can be a potent force in changing established attitudes to information collection and use. For instance, if the institution were to implement a multi-user computer system, on which all information on programmes, courses, student records, etc. are held on a single relational database, everyone in the institution can access the relevant information quickly and easily. There could be restrictions on accessing specific types of information, for example, confidential personnel information, or on users modifying or manipulating data. In this system, each operating unit has the responsibility for entering the data relating to their areas of responsibility, working to a data entry schedule set by the organisation, and keeping them current all the time. Each area then becomes accountable for the accuracy and timeliness of its own data, and its performance in achieving the goal set for it will also become open to general scrutiny.

5.5.1 Management Information System

Organising and controlling are major functions of management. The management of a distance education institution should give constant attention to details if it has to control changes in basic input-output flows through the institutional operations. In particular, the following operations need continuous monitoring:

- Processes associated with admission of students (including re-registration)and linking them to those relating to the provision of materials and services;

- Control over various operations including those relating to the production of materials and their distribution, timeliness of delivery of materials and services, ensuring their quality and reliability and engagement of operational staff and their efficient utilisation;

- Control over procurement processes and availability of material (paper, computer stationery, audio and video tapes/cassettes);

- Control over costs (capital and recurrent) and income.

In order to control all these operations, and in order to ensure that they are efficiently managed, institutions generally put in place what is called Management Information System (MIS). In putting such a system in place, the following areas have to be taken into account:

- Programme planning and scheduling;

- Programme development monitoring;

- Progress of print production;

- Progress of audio/visual production;

- Assignment development and preparation;

- Admission schedule;

- Admission data processing schedule;

- Material despatch schedule;

- Staff recruitment and training schedule;
- Equipment purchase schedule;
- Examination schedule.

Since all these are recurring activities, it would be useful to prepare an institution wide calendar for all these activities which should then form the basis of monitoring actual performance vis-a-vis the schedules. In preparing the schedule, care will have to be taken to match the input- output flows so that all interdependencies are taken into account at the MIS design stage itself.

Preparing the schedules and notifying them are not enough. There has to be constant monitoring of performance as well. Each operational area should, at agreed intervals, provide all the relevant activities performed and results achieved till the reporting date, including also the slippages, if any, as well as the reasons for the delays. This would help the Unit in charge of MIS to prepare an institution-wide report on performance on the basis of which the management would be able to take corrective action where necessary.

5.5.2 Maintenance of Database

The discussion in the previous section highlighted the significance of collection and maintenance of data relating to various operations. These data will help the institution to evaluate its internal efficiency. There are, however, several new dimensions to assessing the performance of a distance education institution and the availability of data is just one critical element for that assessment.

A distance education institution exists to serve its actual and potential students. It is important to know who the students are and how the institution responded to their expectations. A quantification of these aspects is possible if data on the following aspects are collected and maintained:

- The number of courses produced;
- Who were they aimed at?
- The number enrolled against set targets;
- The number of students on each course and programme;
- The number of students who withdraw or drop out;
- Student pass rates;
- Persistence rates (students who stay on a course till its completion);
- Demographic profile of students (age, gender, employment, income groups, rural, urban, etc.).

Among the major outputs of a distance education institution are the learning materials produced by it. We have mentioned earlier that while developing materials, institutions also undertake development testing. It is important that the feedback obtained from such testing is systematically documented and maintained. This database would be an invaluable learning resource for the institution and its people.

It would be useful to undertake regular surveys on various aspects of the functioning of the institution and the services provided by it. For example, access to study centre, frequency of use of study centres, access to media and the pattern of its use, promptness in the supply of materials or assignment

feedback, etc., could be the areas for such surveys. Most of these also are concerned with the evaluation of the institution and its performance to which we now turn.

5.5.3 Evaluation Theories and Approaches

Evaluation is a very important management tool. Stakeholders would be interested to know and satisfy themselves how the institution they have helped create and nurtured is performing and whether or not it is meeting their expectations and living up to its commitments. As distance education institutions multiply across the world, and often they are challenged to establish their credentials and parity of esteem with their conventional counterparts, their performance review and evaluation have assumed great significance. With education progressively becoming a mass activity, and the participation ratios growing continuously, the costs are also going up leading to greater stakeholder interests in its performance. In the last few years a variety of tools have been created to assess the performance levels of educational institutions; these include at the system level, quality assurance mechanisms and institutional accreditation. At the institutional level, there are programme reviews, evaluation of student services, institutional capability reviews and accountability audits. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the last few years a vast body of literature has emerged on the theories and practices in evaluation of educational systems and institutions.

It is not our intention to undertake a comprehensive survey and study of all these theories and practices here. What we need to know, from the distance education management perspective, the significance of these evaluation studies and the broad features of some of them.

From its inception, the UKOU has been prolific in its research and analysis of open learning, distance education, its methods and practices. While the broader issues of quality standards and accreditation in distance education will receive in-depth treatment elsewhere in this programme, we shall confine here to the institutional evaluation theories and practices. The following four elements have been chosen from an essay on "Managing for Performance: Quality, Accreditation and Assessment in Distance Education" by Stephen Murgatroyd in "International Handbook of Distance Education" (2008).

Programme Review: Distance education is often treated as a teaching option within the educational process. The assumption here is that there is no significant difference in learning experience and outcome between students taught through distance learning and those taught in classrooms. The focus of programme review is the programme, its students, and the strengths and weaknesses of the approach to learning and student performance. Very often, these reviews go beyond the content and its relevance and include a critical examination of the outcomes as well, that is, the competencies acquired from the studies.

The elements that generally go in to an institutional programme review are:

- A self-study by the concerned academic group that describes its contribution to the institution, the curricula, student profile and performance, faculty, facilities and resources, comparison with other programmes and the group's plans for the future;

- The future plan would suggest the ways to build on the strengths and remedy the weaknesses, the additional resource needs and ways to

mobilise them, and the plans for changes, if any, inthe strategies for technology applications or student support services;

- A review of the self-study report by an institutional committee that consists of representatives of senior academic administration to finalise the report and for selection of a team of reviewers that consists mostly of external experts;

- The review team provides a report that is the basis for the future action plan.

Student Services: Education is not about courses and programmes only. It is also about enabling students to explore career choices, improve their learning skills and competencies, deal with financial concerns and overcome anxieties, distress or feelings of isolation. The specific issues for evaluation that are relevant to distance education include the following:

- The provision of academic and peer support service available to distance learners for learning and problem-solving;

- The programmes structure, its academic design and sequencing that allow timely completion of requirements;

- The parity in qualifications of the academic faculty engaged in distance teaching with those of the regular faculty teaching comparable programmes on campus;

- Provisions for clear understanding of learner responsibilities and expectations of student participation and learning;

- Provision for appropriate and flexible interaction between teachers and students and among students;

- Selection of appropriate technologies for specific distance learning opportunity for the intended learning outcomes, content, nature of learning and the learner and student costs;

- Provision for verification of learners' work.

Institutional Capability Review: Self-study, peer and programme review offer some indication of whether the institution or programme is meeting the expectations and living up to its commitments. Progressively, form relatively "soft" measures of programme reviews, distance education institutions are moving towards more rigorous and often demanding commitment reviews that evaluate the institution's capability to achieve the measurable goals to which they are committed. Such reviews also examine the extent to which the institution is capable of achieving the goals it has set for itself. The common approaches to such capability reviews are:

Focus on understanding the goals and objectives for which capacities are being developed;

A review of the organisational will, resources and managerial capacity for change;

A systematic analysis of the priorities, and the performance of the institution against these priorities;

- An examination of remedial action taken in cases where performance does not match expectations.

Accountability Audit: There are several layers of accountability for institutional effectiveness. These include course objectives, general educational outcomes, programme learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness. The ways in which programmes, learning objectives and institutional capability connect help us to understand the system of accountability and the interrelationship between each level of that system. In more simple terms, accountability is about how an institution holds itself responsible and answerable to its stakeholders. We shall briefly look at the ways in which institutions are held accountable:

• Governments and funding agencies often require periodic reviews of institutional performance and outcomes. In several countries, Governments have established quality assessment frameworks and created mechanisms defining the roles of different agencies in the assessment of quality;

• In Australia, for example, the National Government assesses research plans and capabilities and undertakes "value for money" audit of the system; State Governments accredit institution based on national protocols; Universities are responsible for academic standards and capabilities; and the Australia Qualifications Framework has the role for national qualification registers and guidelines.

• The basic questions Governments ask are:

   – Can our students be assured that they are receiving good quality education?

   – Are they assured that they are securing a good social return on their investments?

   – What are the long-term implications of the Government's decisions for the performance of the education system?

Generally, the purpose of evaluation is to measure the success or failure with reference to the objectives set out, or for comparison of performance with other programmes, or of other institutions, or to correct any deficiency or weakness that may have crept into the management of a programme, or the functioning of an institution.

The complexity of the nature of distance education makes measuring its success more difficult. Even such simple indicators as pass rates and dropout rates are difficult to assess as in distance education, learners have a range of choices to decide the pace of their studies, the number and combinations of courses they wish to do, flexibilities in entry and exit, and accumulation of credits for what they have done and to carry them forward on re-entry. There is, in addition, a multiplicity of objectives in joining a distance education programme: not all learners may be interested in the end-qualifications, and some may be interested only in the materials. Still, some indicators like sustainability of student interest, acceptability of graduates in the job market through tracer studies, popularity of materials among non-student users, etc., can help to establish the measure of success of a distance education institution.

Comparison of performance of distance education programmes and institutions with those of the conventional education can be a useful marketing strategy. Distance education is widely perceived to be cost-effective because it can reap the benefits of economies of scale. To establish

this cost-efficiency, it is necessary to analyse costs continuously and compare them with those of other institutions offering both conventional and distance education programmes. It has, however, to be noted that classical notions about unit costs can sometimes be misleading as the unit cost per graduate in distance education would be relatively high due to the notoriously low percentages compared to institutions of formal education. Unit cost per enrolled student might be more relevant for comparison though standardisation of units (student, course, programme) might present some problems.

Corrective evaluation is essential for all organisations. Distance education institutions are no exception. On the other hand, they tend to be more easily influenced by changes in the environment It would, therefore, be more useful to assess the impact of environmental changes on the institution. For example, changes in the demographic profile of people in a society can have an impact on the learning needs and styles of learning. Providers of distance education may have to reconsider their provisions depending upon the increase or decrease in the adult population looking for educational opportunities, just as they will have to review their programme profiles to incorporate training for the development of new skill sets following induction of new technologies that could change the job content. It is also likely that institutions might drift away from their original objectives due to internal or external pressures. Periodical reviews of performance can be a useful tool for correcting such directional change or departures.

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.

Which major areas of DEI require constant attention and monitoring for effective management of the institution? (Answer in about 40 words).

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5.6 LET US SUM UP

In the previous unit, our effort was to take you through the larger issues associated with the management of the distance education system and its major sub-systems. In this unit, we turned our attention away from the totality of the system and examined in details the concerns involved in the management of a distance education institution. Because of this shift in focus, the nature and quality of the issues discussed in this unit are different from those considered in the previous unit. We hope that you would have found the more practical aspects of setting up a distance education institution which include setting out the objectives and methodology, and the choices available for making decisions as well as the planning, recruitment and training of staff, and setting up the delivery system useful and interesting. We have also looked at the budgeting and costing exercise and the assessment of the performance of the institution.

5.7   CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

The choice in setting up a distance education institution depends on several variables. To begin with, there is a large demand for education with those looking for educational opportunities constantly increasing. They come from diverse groups – from those who missed out early education to those who are working, from the professionals to the housewives, from job seekers to those who want to change jobs. The rapidly changing technological environment demands continuous updating of skills of large numbers of working people. Employers cannot afford to withdraw them from work for training; they would prefer combining work with learning. Finally, the governments which finance education is generally in favour of more effective and cost efficient methods of expanding educational facilities. Distance education can respond to all these situations forcing its choice on planners.

Check Your Progress 2

i)   Institutional objectives have to be carefully formulated to ensure that they are consistent with the mission of the distance education system which has been launched in a given environment. An institution has to define its goals explicitly and clearly; they should be expressed in measureable terms and should be flexible enough to adapt to changes in the environment. In the absence of such clarity of purpose, reviews and modifications become difficult, leading to drifts in objectives which it might turn out to be difficult to correct.

ii)   a) False,   b) False,   c) True

Check Your Progress 3

The Centres should be accessible to students, and are capable of providing a suitable learning environment. They should have academic and managerial staff to maintain the centre. The major functions of these centres are to provide face-to-face interaction and personalized attention to learners who feel isolated from the institution.

Check Your Progress 4

Admission of students including re-registration, schedule of course development, production and delivery of materials on time, and storage of large scale consumable items, tutorials and counselling assignment, evaluation and feedback and income and expenditure are areas where continuous monitoring and supervision and control are needed.

5.8   GLOSSARY

Structure	:	Formal and established pattern of relationship in an organization. The relationship includes people, tasks and activities.
Environment	:	The business environment of a firm comprise economic, social, political, cultural, legal and geographic factors which critically affect the working of an organisation.

Centralisation	:	The concentration of power and authority at one place. This may be concentrated in a person or a group of persons in the organisation.
Delegation	:	The sharing or handing over of authority and responsibility to a subordinate.
Organisation Chart	:	The depiction of specific positions in an organisation, their status within the organisation and the reporting relationship between a subordinate and his superior.
Geographical Structure:		The organisational structure in which activities and tasks are grouped together on the basis of their location in a geographical zone or territory.
Network Strucutre	:	A Structure in which one organisation acts as the 'lead' organisation and creates a network of many other external organisations whose services the lead organisation utilises in fulfilment of its objectives.

5.9   REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

(Given below are the titles of a few books/journals which have been used to prepare this Block. it is NOT suggested that you should go looking for these books to study them in original. If you can manage, you may look for a few titles, but they are not obligatory for completing the course successfully.)

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STAFF TRAINING AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Dear Student,

While studying the units of this block, you may have found certain portions of the text difficult to comprehend. We wish to know your difficulties and suggestions, in order to improve the course. Therefore, we request you to fill up and send us the following questionnaire, which pertains to this block. If you find the space provided insufficient, kindly use a separate sheet.

Please mail to:
Course Coordinator (MDE-414)
STRIDE, IGNOU, Maidan Garhi
New Delhi-110 068, India

Questionnaire

Enrolment No.

1. How many hours did you spend for studying the units?

Unit no.	1	2	3	4
No. of hours				

2. Please give your reactions (by '√ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Items	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Poor	Give specific examples if poor
Presentation Quality					
Language and Style					
Illustrations Used (Diagram, tables etc.)					
Conceptual Clarity					
Check Your Progress Questions					
Feedback to CYP Questions					

4) Any other comments: