UNIT 4 PLANNING AND COORDINATION
AT IGNOU

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4.0 INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to Unit-3, we had noted that planning consists of deciding what to do (setting out the objectives), how to do (elaborating the strategies for achieving those objectives), ensuring that the directions set for achieving the goals are indeed followed (coordination and monitoring) and assessing the outcome of the efforts in relation to the objectives set out initially (evaluation of performance). This process of planning and coordination is relevant to all organised activities, irrespective of their scale and complexity. In this unit, we shall discuss how this process operates in IGNOU, and how the university goes about fulfilling its objectives.

Although the process of planning is associated with the determination and execution of every task, in this unit we shall limit the scope to discussing the macro-level institutional planning in IGNOU. This discussion will take us through the role and functions of the Planning and Development Division, the processes involved in deciding the programmes and activities of the university, how various activities within the university are coordinated and monitored, what mechanisms are in place for this purpose and how the efficiency and effectiveness of IGNOU are perceived and evaluated.
These questions are taken up for study in this and the following unit by highlighting the operational aspects of IGNOU, a particular though unique institution, as an illustrative case. As was the case with earlier units, the discursive tone of this unit is deceptive. We intend in this unit, to underline and reiterate the managerial processes of planning and coordination (already outlined in Unit-4: Block-3) with reference to a specific institution belonging to the open university system. IGNOU’s multiple roles are used here to draw your attention to the complex mechanics of planning and the elements of control and coordination required to make such a huge operation function flawlessly.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After studying through this unit, you will be able to

- describe and discuss the role and significance of strategic planning in the development of IGNOU,
- explain the processes associated with planning and management at IGNOU, especially in the formulation of programmes and their implementation,
- examine the strategic options available to a new open university in its formative stages in organising programmes and activities,
- analyse the critical role of planning, coordinating and monitoring in the management of an open university,
- explain the significance of management information systems in the operations of open universities, and
- indicate the instrumentalities being developed for assessment of the performance of IGNOU.

4.2 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

We have dealt with the broad objectives of IGNOU as a national open university in Unit-2. We have also looked at the structure of the organisation and management of the University in Unit-3. In this context, we have mentioned that the University has a Planning and Development Division which is concerned with perspective and strategic plans, and is also involved in the determination of programmes and activities and the monitoring of the progress of the university.

Text books on planning and management of distance education would suggest that from the planners’ perspective, it would be essential to elaborate the purpose of the institution in terms of the needs to be satisfied, the learner groups to be addressed, the learning needs to be met, and the type and nature of programmes to be organised, etc. The university therefore commissioned a survey in 1986 to make a quick assessment of the society’s expectations from
the university. The survey conducted by a professional agency which covered both organisations and households revealed some very interesting findings. The perceptions about learner groups and learning needs were wide ranging; the nature and type of programmes suggested covered a wide spectrum of professional, technical, vocational and general education at different levels, and both employers and employees felt that education and training of working people should get priority. While the importance of needs assessment as a planning tool is recognised, this survey also established the limitations of such exercises unless they are carried out in a highly focused framework built for the purpose.

4.2.1 Strategic planning

The Project Report had suggested that the university should organise academic programmes leading to the award of Bachelor's and Master's degrees, continuing and extension education programmes as well as research. The undergraduate and post graduate programmes, it was proposed, should aim at greater flexibility and diversity in structure and content, and should ensure good quality. The continuing education programmes should address the needs of various categories of employees in the public, private and self-employment sectors to improve their managerial and technical skills as well as their competence. The research programmes of the university should concentrate on the technology of distance education as well as its methodologies.

To fulfil these aspirations, the university adopted two strategies. First, to immediately initiate select continuing education programmes, and second, to follow them with programmes leading to the Bachelor's degree. It was felt that since there was no significant experience yet available in the running of distance education programmes through self-instructional material in multimedia packages, it would be more fruitful to run a couple of programmes on a pilot basis. Not only would it yield more empirical results, but would also help in testing the effectiveness of a delivery system covering the entire country before programmes on a large scale could be introduced.

As the pilot programmes were being prepared, the Planning Board of the university held a series of meetings. The major strategic decisions taken by the Planning Board in the initial stages were:

- the university should endeavour to design its programmes in modules; this modular structure should permit potential students to enrol at different levels of a programme, namely the certificate, diploma or degree level, according to their preference;
- it would be necessary to seek sponsorship for programmes, especially from the employing sectors, for the education and training of serving personnel;
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• initiative should be taken to design and develop special programmes for the improvement of professional knowledge and skills, to enable both employed and unemployed people to enhance their opportunities in the job market;

• programmes addressed to the needs of people living in the rural areas and of women should have high priority;

• the Bachelor’s degree programme of the university should be designed on a flexible model that would permit combinations of various courses in different disciplines with specified foundations courses as well as application oriented ones;

• the courses should be designed on the basis of credits which indicate the extent of study time required for their completion. This structure was also necessary to promote credit transfer and student mobility.

Type of Programmes

The initial programme profile of the university reflected these strategic options. The Management Programmes of the university have been developed in several modules, each leading to a diploma, and several of them constituting the MBA. The Distance Education diplomas and degree programmes contributed to the human resource development needs of the system. The university was successful in securing sponsorship for certain programmes for the training of people working in such areas as rural development and the upgradation of their competence. Programmes at different levels were developed in Food and Nutrition, Child Care, Education and Creative Writing. The University also launched a Bachelor’s Degree Programme in Library and Information Science as a professional programme.

The Bachelor’s Degree Programme in Arts, Commerce and Science developed by the university was a major innovation. It comprised certain foundation courses that provided a significant knowledge base to the graduates, constituting about 25% of the total degree programme, in-depth study of chosen disciplines constituting about 50% of the content and application-oriented courses relevant to the main disciplinary area constituting the rest. The IGNOU’s Bachelor’s degree programme was almost immediately noticed in the academic world.

In 1989, the university prepared its first development place for the planning cycle 1990-95. The plan envisaged several new initiatives and approaches.

The significant directional changes suggested in the new development plan were:
If the IGNOU has to fulfil its mandate of reaching out to large numbers of people, especially those belonging to the disadvantaged sections of society, it should seriously consider developing a stream programmes and courses that are work-oriented, and job-related.

It would no longer be enough if the university developed and delivered the traditional academic programmes, mainly addressed to the needs of school leavers. A vast majority of adult learners would be interested in pursuing functionally useful and economically relevant programmes of education and training.

The new programme development strategy should take into account the wide variations in learner groups and the still greater diversity of their needs.

The programmes in the future should be so structured that it is possible for a large number of adult learners to enter at the lower end of the education and training spectrum and work their way up, in accordance with their needs, to higher levels of learning.

The university should involve employers, professional organisations and practitioners in the field in the design and development of work-oriented and employment related programmes. Such an approach is essential if the curriculum is to be one that is informed about the needs of the employment market.

IGNOU should simultaneously proceed with the development of traditional academic programmes leading to the award of degrees at the Bachelor's and Master's level. However, these programmes should also be in technical and professional areas and should reflect the needs of the employment sectors.

It is necessary to develop an integrated approach to course development and delivery. It should be IGNOU's endeavour to secure the involvement of a wide spectrum of employers in the delivery of programmes, especially in imparting education and training at the workplace.

An important element of this strategy could be the development of programmes of training and retraining of people at work in collaboration with their employers.

These programme development strategies and approaches were pursued with significant success during the 1992-97 planning cycle. A large number of new programmes were designed and launched during this period. These included:

i) MA in Distance Education
ii) Master's Degree in Library and Information Sciences
iii) Master's Degree in Computer Applications
iv) Bachelor's Degree in Computer Applications
v) Bachelor's Degree in Nursing
vi) Bachelor's Degree in Tourism Studies
vii) PG Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication
viii) Advanced Diploma in Construction Management
ix) Advanced Diploma in Water Resources Engineering

Along with these programmes at the higher levels, there were a large number of certificate and diploma programmes as well, especially in areas like computing, education, nutrition and health education, tourism studies and so on.

These strategies apparently paid off. The annual enrolment level which was about 50,000 in 1990 went up to 150,000 by 1995. During this period, the university was also able to secure sponsorship for new programmes from several agencies. The university’s willingness and initiative in launching sub-university level programmes addressed to the learning needs of large sections of society, captured the imagination of the government departments as well as of the industry. Some of these new initiatives are:

- Education and Training of elected members of Village Panchayats;
- A programme for the upgradation of the vocational competence of workers in the leather industry;
- A joint project for the training of construction workers.

There are other projects which the university has taken up for the training of women and youth. The important point is that the IGNOU has, as a major strategic initiative, taken up such programmes even though they do not formally qualify to be counted as university level programmes. Through these efforts, IGNOU is seeking to establish the principle that empowerment of the people is an important objective of educational provision and that distance education is an efficient and effective instrument in achieving this objective.

Check Your Progress 1

You have just studied the role of strategic planning in the evolution of the programme profile of IGNOU. How did these strategies help IGNOU achieve its objectives? Answer in about 50 words.

Note: i) Space is given below for your answer.
   ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.
4.2.2 The planning framework

We have discussed at some length the role of strategic planning in IGNOU, and its significance in setting the directions for programmes and activities that seek to fulfil the university’s goals. We shall now turn to the organisational framework which facilitates strategic planning in IGNOU.

While discussing the organisational structure of IGNOU in Unit 3, you will recall that we have considered the role and functions of the Planning Board which is one of the university authorities. Its primary responsibility is the formulation of the university’s programmes and activities. How does it go about performing this function?

Planning is essentially a function of management. It involves taking decisions on what to do, for whom, and how. At the core, these are decisions that any enterprise will be called upon to take, and these days when the market dominates all entrepreneurial decisions, it is no surprise that the market metaphor finds frequent expressions in the discourse on educational endeavours as well. This is increasingly so in the case of distance education which, it is claimed, is a market-driven enterprise. Without getting too involved in these semantics, let us make a few simple propositions here:

- It is necessary to have some ideas about the needs to be satisfied, before the programmes are drawn up. The traditional student groups coming out of schools are a known quantity, but the learner groups for distance education come from the entire social spectrum, and could be working adults, unemployed youth, housewives, the self-employed, those who wish to change jobs, those who are keen to obtain additional or higher qualifications, or those who are only seeking knowledge. To the extent that different learner groups are driven by different motivations, it is important, from the planner’s perspective, to have a clearer perception about the needs to be satisfied in order to assess the viability and sustainability of any new initiative.

- Some clarity about the nature and type of programmes to be organised is an important dimension of the planning effort. For instance, it is necessary to identify the programme level (certificate, diploma, degree) and its nature (vocational, technical, professional, extension, etc) at the stage when the proposal gets crystallized.

- Other major inputs required at this stage would be the choice of media, the delivery system, the student assessment procedures, etc. which have implications for resource allocation and determination of priorities.

Having identified these major parameters we now turn to the organisational structures in IGNOU which concern themselves with the planning processes.
i) The Planning and Development Division: The initial organisational structure of the university recognised planning as an important functional area and provided for a Planning Division to deal with the planning of new programmes, expansion of activities, and resource planning. It was also responsible for the management information system necessary for monitoring current activities and planning future ones. The Planning Division also dealt with functions relating to the administration of academic personnel. In practice, however, during the early stages, in the context of the need to evolve personnel policies for the development of the faculty, more attention was focused on that aspect than on planning. It was only in 1995, while restructuring the organisation of IGNOU, that a full-fledged Planning and Development Division was created which was also to assume the responsibilities for quality assurance, programme evaluation, costing, and project control. All these are critical areas for the effective functioning of the university and when these activities get properly organised the university will have developed an adequate planning structure.

ii) The Schools of Studies: The major concern of the university’s programmes is its academic offerings. These have to be designed and developed by the Schools of studies. The Planning and Development Division works in cooperation with the Schools in providing them with relevant information, and assisting them in developing their proposals as specific projects for consideration at various levels. We shall discuss the processes involved in preparing the plans in the next section.

iii) The Project Control Unit: A reference was made to project control as part of the Planning and Development Division’s responsibility earlier in this section. The major concern of this unit is to put together the relevant information about the flow of various activities to identify bottlenecks and alert the management for taking corrective action where necessary. The Unit works in cooperation with all the Schools of Studies and all the operational areas on a regular basis to ensure the smooth flow of information across all Schools and Divisions and also up to the senior management.

iv) Coordination Committee: The Coordination Committee is a mechanism set up in 1995 under the auspices of the Planning and Development Division to consider new initiatives affecting university policy and also the effective implementation of existing policies and programmes. The Committee functions as an informal mechanism, and consists of the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellors and selected Directors of Schools/Divisions. The main objective of the Committee is to secure the involvement and commitment of all concerned in evolving policies and implementing them.
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The Planning and Development Division takes a lead role in evolving policies and providing a broad perspective for framing programmes and activities. These processes involve extensive consultation with all those who are associated with the specific issues and concerns in the university as well as experts invited from outside. When the broad contours of the new policies and perspectives are settled, they are placed before the concerned bodies of the university, namely the Planning Board, the Academic Council and the Board of Management for securing their approval before they are implemented.

4.2.3 The planning processes

IGNOU has to look up to the Government of India for all its development funding. Therefore it has to follow the planning cycle that the government has set, that is, the Five Year Plans.

At least two years before the Government frames a new Five Year Plan, all the central agencies responsible for the development of various sectors are asked to frame their development proposals giving a brief review of the current stage of development, the new activities to be taken up, the targets to be achieved, their contributions to development, the investments to be made and the returns to society from those investments, etc. IGNOU prepares its development proposals on the basis of these parameters. This process involves extensive consultations with all the Schools of Studies and the members of their faculty. The proposals developed by the faculty are put through a preliminary scrutiny to establish their viability and feasibility. The proposals will outline the areas, levels and numbers of programmes, the expected additional enrolment in the plan period, the learning packages to be produced and distributed, the nature and extent of services to be provided to the students, the new infrastructure to be created and the administrative support systems to be established. These, together with the broad indications of the outlays required, would constitute the development proposals submitted to the government. On the basis of these proposals, the government determines the development support to be provided during a Five Year Plan period, and within the ceiling so determined, budgetary allocations are made annually for the University.

With the completion of this macro-level exercise, and with definite information about the development support over a five-year period, a detailed exercise at the micro-level is initiated. The purpose of this exercise is determination of relative priorities among programmes to be launched, allocation of resources and the provision of infrastructure for them. It also involves gearing up the system for assuming the additional responsibilities and performing new tasks that new programmes and expanded activities require.

The approval of individual programmes now goes through a four-stage process. Every school, and every discipline within the school has to initiate these
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processes after the overall plan is finalised. The first stage is to prepare a concept paper for the new programme. At this stage the discipline concerned provides a brief outline of the new programme, indicating its objectives, the target groups to whom it is addressed, how it meets the university's objectives, at what level it will be pitched and other such strategic issues. This concept paper is first considered by the Coordination Committee, and if it meets with its approval, it is placed before the Planning Board for its consideration. The second stage follows the Planning Board's clearance. This stage involves the preparation of a design paper which goes into the broad structure of the programme, the specific needs it will address, the estimated size of the target group, the anticipated enrolment over a period of five years, the media choice, the delivery strategies, collaborative arrangements, and so on. This design paper is again considered by the Planning Board. If the preparatory work is done within the schools in advance, both these stages are combined, and approval of the Planning Board is obtained for both the stages together.

This is followed by the commencement of the development work. The development stage includes meetings of expert committees and course writers, the detailed structuring of the curriculum and syllabi, the determination of the learning packages, elaboration of the systems and methods of delivery, the student assessment procedures, and related issues. When all these issues are settled, a detailed project report incorporating all the details of the programme (objectives, justification, target groups and their size, content and structure, learning packages and their media (print, audio, video), the delivery strategies, the assessment procedures, etc.) is prepared and placed before the Academic Council for final approval of the programme.

Alongside these processes, efforts are initiated to organise the delivery system for every programme. These efforts include the establishment of study centres, the setting up of work places/work centres depending upon the needs of the programmes, the selection and appointment of counsellors and their training, the production of learning packages and their despatch, the preparation of programme brochures, guides, application forms, and student assignments, etc. Most of these preparatory efforts is made by the concerned operational area in consultation with the Schools. Since the launch of the programme depends critically on the efficiency with which these systems function, a final clearance for the launch of the programme has been incorporated in the processes. This clearance is given by the Coordination Committee after it is satisfied that all the logistics are settled.

Check Your Progress 2

Please describe the Planning processes in IGNOU relating to launching of new programmes. Answer in about 50 words.
4.2.4 Programme development and delivery

While discussing the organisational structure of IGNOU in the previous unit, we referred to four major sub-systems that constitute the university’s structure. From the point of view of planning and management, we shall now look at the more important among the sub-systems and consider how they function in the implementation of the university’s programmes and activities.

a) Course Design and Development: The development of instructional material in IGNOU is a dynamic process. The university has been constantly endeavouring to adopt innovative methods in the development of its learning packages. As a consequence, several models of course design and development are presently followed by different Schools. These models can be broadly classified as follows:

- Some courses are developed entirely within the Schools. In these cases, the course materials are conceived, planned and written by the university teachers. The external input in this effort is limited to editing the content.
- There are several courses for which the textual material is almost fully contributed by the external experts. The role of the core faculty in such cases is to transform text into self-instructional format.
- For certain programmes, course development and preparation tasks are assigned to specialist institutions on a project basis. Such collaborative efforts at development of study materials involve the faculty of the concerned schools coordinating the work with project centres in preparing the texts according to the structure and format settled by the university.
- Other methods attempted by the university include the development of material in workshops and the appointment of a chief editor from outside the university who will directly coordinate the work of a number of course writers and prepare the final text.

The Project Report, 1985, had cautioned that the course team which prepares the course material must be drawn with caution and care. It proposed three
types of experts that should be involved in a course team. The first category consists of subject-matter experts, whose job is to choose the contents and write the course units. The second category consists of educational technologists whose job is to ensure that the subject-matter is properly organized, keeping in view the nature, complexion and requirements of the distance learners. The last category forming a course team would include the media experts, who advise the team about the format of the course material from the point of view of TV/Radio production. Although like the British Open University, the course team at IGNOU also consists of a number of subject experts, an educational technologist, and the media person, the main difference is in the role of the editor. The practice at IGNOU involves a writer-editor team. The editor is responsible for the maintenance of the academic quality of study materials, and is appointed on the basis of his/her expertise in the particular subject/discipline. The editor may either be chosen from the course writers, or may be a senior faculty member of the university, one of the experts from the group, or anybody else considered competent for the purpose.

Here is a diagrammatic representation of the IGNOU approach to course preparation/creation (Fig.1).

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<tr>
<th>Course Formulation</th>
<th>Course Designing</th>
<th>Audio-Video Production</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Need Assessment</td>
<td>- Identifying Media Components</td>
<td>- Preparing Academic Note</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Defining Target Group</td>
<td>- Integrating Media components</td>
<td>- Developing Academic Script</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Course Identification</td>
<td>- Finalising Unit-wise Course Outline</td>
<td>- Developing Production Script</td>
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<td>- Course Outline Formulation</td>
<td>- Deciding Themes for Audio-Video Programmes</td>
<td>- Programme Production</td>
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<td>- Post-Production Activities</td>
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<td>Field Testing</td>
<td>Development Testing</td>
<td>Preview</td>
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<td>Print Material Development</td>
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<td>- Unit-Writing</td>
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Fig.1: Course Development Process at IGNOU
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Multi-Media Policy

Although the university adopted the policy of using any communication technology to disseminate knowledge, it still has to take a final view of the integration of the electronic media with the printed text in its instructional package.

The Project Report of the IGNOU, 1985, had suggested that the National Open University should adopt an ‘integrated’ media approach in its instructional design, i.e., the print material, broadcasting and audio-visual aids supported by the tutorial system, contact classes, summer schools and other similar methods should all constitute its teaching-learning transaction. Choosing a particular instructional medium, however, was to be based on the requirements of the learners and the suitability and availability of the media in each of the disciplines to be taught. Thus, considering the stage at which the development of communication technology is in the country, and the problems of access to such technologies, it was felt that print was the most important, and perhaps the only medium that could be used most advantageously in the initial stages. In fact, the printed text continues to constitute the main instructional component of the IGNOU even today. Nevertheless, the planners had also taken into account the emergence of communication technology development in India and went ahead with the development and production of audio and video tapes to supplement the printed text. That is, although all the textual information required is provided in print, making it complete in itself, audios and videos were used for further explanations, examples, and for easier comprehension of the uninitiated learners. In order to ensure easy access to these media packages, the university also set up listening and viewing facilities at all the study centres where students could use them. But as the use of the electronic media was optional, it was developed in such a fashion that missing any of these media materials was not a disadvantage to any student. It does not follow that the policy relating to the use of multi-media packages will not change. Depending on the growth of communication technology applications in the country, and more importantly, its accessibility to larger numbers of people and in all parts of the country, the university will gradually move towards the greater integration of electronic media in its instructional packages. Very recently, some programmes, especially in the area of computer applications, have been developed for delivery through the Internet. Extensive use of E-mail for use of electronic transfer of course materials, preparation of CDs etc. is envisaged in the near future.

b) Student Services

In the discussion of organisational structure, we had reflected on the functions that constitute student services at some length. From its inception, the university’s strategy has been that its functions should determine its structure
and not vice-versa. This strategy paid off and structures are still evolving as the university gains experience and functions are being diversified.

In the initial phase, the University established a countrywide network of Study Centres. Their number has gone up to 600. The development of this network was resource-driven. The university had to make substantial investments in infrastructure and also meet the recurring cost of the maintenance of these centres. These commitments were not linked with student enrolment. Several study centres became economically non-viable due to low enrolment, and the university could not force their closure as it would have amounted to the withdrawal of a facility.

It became inevitable that alternative approaches began to be considered. Some of these new approaches include partnerships with various institutions and appointment of distance learning facilitators. Partnership arrangements envisage a stake for the partner institutions which provide their facilities without any contribution from IGNOU, and they share the fee income with IGNOU on a pre-determined proportion. The Distance Learning Facilitator is a kind of volunteer who functions as a single-person study centre, helping a number of students enrolled on different programmes with information, material and access to academic counselling and tutorials. They are also paid a share of the fees collected from the students attached to them. These experiments have just been launched and their performance has to be watched over a period of time to establish their viability.

In the previous section, we considered the role of electronic media in the instructional packages of the University. In the initial stages, these packages were diffused through study centres where playback facilities for audio and video tapes were made available. The use of this technology was relatively inexpensive from the University’s point of view. However, a student has to travel all the way to his/her nearest study centre to avail of this facility. This limited access was a disincentive to many students in their use of the electronic media.

The University has been endeavouring, from its inception, to secure appropriate time-slots in the national radio and television networks for the diffusion of its learning packages. The limitation of resources available with these media, and the pressure of competing demands did not permit these national agencies to share their facilities with IGNOU initially. However, by 1991, the University had produced a large number of video tapes and Doordarshan, the national television network, agreed to telecast them three days a week between 6.30 and 7.00 in the morning. By 1997, the telecast of IGNOU programmes was extended to five days a week, Monday through Friday. Although the national television network now covers the entire country, the feedback studies suggest that the proportion of students who regularly watch these telecasts is no more
than 25-30% of the students enrolled. The unsuitability of the timing is reported to be the major reason for the low rate of effective use of this medium.

Radio broadcasts of IGNOU tapes are done on a regional basis. There are no central radio transmission of IGNOU lessons. Several radio stations in the country transmit the university's audio tapes at specified hours during several days of the week. One radio station at Bhopal recently launched a phone-in interactive radio lesson as part of the university's programmes.

The University recognises that interactive programmes are an essential pedagogic tool in its instructional system. Diagrammatic representation of instructional system followed at IGNOU is given at Fig.2. Considering the vastness of the country and the massiveness of student numbers on the one hand, and the diversity of programmes on the other, the University has been endeavouring to reach out to as large a number of students as possible. With the development of satellite communication in the country, the University has been exploring the possibility of using it for its distance education programme. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has responded enthusiastically to this initiative, and set up on the campus of the University, a one-way video and two-way audio communication facility using the Indian National Satellites to reach out to students all over the country. Presently, all the Regional Centres of the University and the State Open Universities which are using IGNOU's learning packages are linked with this network. This network is being used to provide academic counselling through the tele-conferencing mode as well as to disseminate essential information on programmes and courses. The partner institutions of IGNOU have been given the option to hook up with the network and access the facilities and services for the students enrolled with them. The effectiveness of this experiment is being watched, and depending upon the availability of resources, and the easy accessibility of other tools to promote interactivity (telephone, fax, e-mail etc) the spread of the network is proposed to be expanded.

Check Your Progress 3

IGNOU has adopted a flexible approach to course development and preparation as well as to the delivery of services to students. What are these flexibilities and how are they significant to the open learning system? Answer in about 50 words.

Note: i) Space is given below for your answer
   ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.
4.2.5 Infrastructure development

The most important constituent of the infrastructure of the University is its land and buildings. The University acquired, with the support of the government, over 60 hectares of land in Maidan Garhi in New Delhi in the first year of its inception. However, the development of this land, and construction on it, turned out to be a task that did not get started for a long time. The construction project got so entangled in a maze of municipal and construction laws and procedures, that there did not seem to be any headway made, for some time. The University which was functioning from 8 different hired locations in the city decided to put up some temporary structures on its land to meet its immediate needs, and more importantly, to ensure better coordination and efficient functioning on the one hand, and to save on rent and transport on the other. During the last 10 years (1989-98), the University has been functioning from these structures, and, in retrospect, the decision turned out to be extremely wise and far-sighted. These structures could continue to serve the University for several more years.

Meanwhile, the University was able in 1995 to get all the municipal problems sorted out, and land development and construction began soon thereafter. In about three years, several items of work were completed.
As an organisation grows, its operations begin to get more and more complex. In the case of a distance education institution, the growth profile generally involves:

- more programmes, more courses, and with them more specialised services to students,
- expansion brings more students and with it larger production and distribution systems, more assignments, more counselling staff who need training and orientation, arrangements of local facilities for practicals and experiments, and so on.

Organisations generally attempt to meet these complexities through increased professionalism and specific efficiency improvement measures. In distance education, several operations have to be performed in a sequence, for example, the distribution of materials has to follow the finalisation of admissions and examinations have to be held after the course completion time is over. There are several other operations that proceed simultaneously. For example, course materials can be packed and kept ready for dispatch as soon as the mailing labels are available on completion of admissions, or the preparation of assignments for various programmes need not wait for the finalisation of admissions. Admittedly, a distance education institution has to schedule all its operations and constantly coordinate them to ensure overall efficiency in its functioning.

Functional specialisation and division of labour are established theories and practices in organisations. A major responsibility of the management of organisations is to bring about greater cohesiveness in the activities of the operational areas so that together they can contribute to the achievement of organisational goals. Most organisations set up mechanisms for making this coordinated effort smooth and efficient, and the instrument they use for this purpose is known as the Management Information System (MIS).

### 4.3.1 Coordination mechanisms in IGNOU

While discussing the organisational framework for planning and development, we had briefly mentioned the role of three structures, namely the Planning and Development Division, the Coordination Committee and the Project Control Unit. Within IGNOU, these mechanisms, functioning under the aegis of the Planning and Development Division, provide organisational support to the university's efforts at coordination.

In operational terms, it is the Project Control Unit which puts together all the data, provides analytical insights into the input-output flows across the system,
identifies actual and potential slippages and bottlenecks, and generally alerts the management to take corrective action at the right time so that the possible collapse of any significant activity is avoided. The Coordination Committee holds special meetings as and when necessary to review the performance of different operational areas on the basis of these analytical reports and decides on corrective action, including, where necessary, the re-scheduling of specific operations.

4.3.2 The Management information system

The day-to-day management of IGNOU’s operations requires constant attention to detail, with the objective of adjusting to the changes in the basic input-output flows in the system. As we have seen in the previous sections, the output of one activity becomes the input for another, and the output from the latter becomes the input for yet another function or activity. It is this conveyor-belt like sequencing of several functions and activities that makes the day-to-day operations a complex process.

The existence of appropriate control systems, to use a business metaphor, is a pre-requisite for the efficient and effective management of IGNOU. Although the distance learning system carries out several operations analogous to the industrial and business systems, the production and distribution functions for example, the fact that they have to be organised in an academic environment, and with the involvement of academics, lends to these operations a sensitivity that industrial or business systems are unfamiliar with. This is a very significant dimension that managers of distance learning systems have to take into account.

Keeping all these in view, IGNOU attempted to develop a Management Information system for its operational areas which include Student Registration, Distribution, Regional Services, and Student Evaluation. The Schools of Studies, to the extent that they are associated with day-to-day operations are also a part of this MIS design. The approach to the development of this system was:

• All functions consist of a number of activities, and each activity has an outcome.
• All activities, all over the university, are either parallel or sequential, and sequential activities mostly depend on the outcome of a preceding activity.
• Each activity must have been completed by a specified date on the University calendar, and a system should be in place to monitor them, so that all activities adhere to the deadlines.
The system should not overload the top management with too much information. It should give attention only to those details which are important.

The architecture of the system should be such that at the levels of units and functionaries, similar scheduling can be done so that managers at the unit levels can monitor the progress of every activity and sub-function.

The system in the first phase covers the whole cycle of operations beginning with student registration and ending with the end of term examinations. This phase does not include the stages of course development and preparation.

The existence of a Management Information System does not guarantee that tasks are performed and on time. Several factors intervene to disorient even the most carefully prepared MIS. There is institutional inertia, organisational fatigue and, of course, a variety of external variables that could intervene in the smooth flow of activities across the system. For example, industrial strife could delay the supply of paper which may hold up the production of print materials and their distribution. However, the purpose of MIS is to control and manage changes through the careful monitoring of every activity over which it has control, through system wide coordinated efforts, and to contain the adverse impacts that inordinate delays can cause to the system.

Check Your Progress 4

In what ways does the Management Information System in place at IGNOU help improve efficiency? Answer in about 50 words.

Note: i) Space is given below for your answer
   ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.
4.3.3 Quality control

There are several dimensions to the issue of quality in a distance education system. If one were to look at the quality issues from the conventional business perspective, these are the issues concerned with the quality of the products, namely the learning packages, the assignments and the project work, and issues concerned with the quality of the processes such as the counselling services, assignment evaluation and feedback, and administrative services like the assignment of students to study centres, the timely supply of materials and arrangements for examinations. There is also an aspect of quality that has to do with the broader ethics and culture of the institution itself, reflected in its concern for the satisfaction of students, commitment of the staff, and the principles and values that render institutions accountable to society.

Generally, distance education institutions tend to concentrate on the quality of learning materials as they are the most visible part of the teaching-learning process. But it has to be remembered that production of the best learning packages does not by itself guarantee learning on the part of students. In order to ensure that learning does take place, the study materials have to be accompanied by a variety of services as well, not the least among them being the interaction among students or between students and the teacher or students and the institution. It is the quality of these services that will ultimately strengthen this interaction and will also be the result of the way people perform in specific situations.

There is no magic that can make this happen. IGNOU seeks to achieve this objective by

- an induction training of all staff at the time of their recruitment. This training is designed to inform newly recruited staff of the goals of the university, its functions, structure and processes;
- orientation and refresher programmes at regular intervals to inform the staff about changes in existing procedures and practices as well as new developments in technology induction and application;
- keeping staff at all levels fully informed about the new decisions taken by various bodies and authorities which have implications for them as well as the ways in which they perform their functions;
- preparation of detailed hand books and manuals for the guidance of major functional areas and for their functionaries;
- organisation of induction programmes for students at the study centres to appraise them of the methods and practices followed by the university;
- newsletters to all students (thrice a year) to inform them of all the details affecting their studies (supply of materials, assignments, counselling schedules, telecast schedules of videos, teleconferencing schedules, examination dates, and so on).
There is however no substitute for personal commitment and willingness to perform. These will depend largely on the principles and values that the institution as a whole stands for. But in real life there will always be some gap between idealism and practice.

### 4.4. PLANNING OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Planners and managers will certainly be keen to know what their efforts have achieved and whether the outcome of the planning processes was successful or not. What makes for the successful planning outcomes of a distance education system, and what are the pointers to the success of these outcomes? We shall explore some of these issues in some detail.

#### 4.4.1 Provision of opportunities

While discussing the establishment of IGNOU, we had noted that one of its main objectives was to widen access to higher education by augmenting educational opportunities, specially for the disadvantaged sections of society. Has this objective been achieved and how? A critical analysis of the enrolment profile should provide the answer. The IGNOU students are a vastly heterogenous group (age, gender, rural-urban backgrounds, employment status all vary), most of them do not have the kind of educational attainments that would get them into formal institutions of higher education, and many of them cannot, for economic reasons, withdraw from work for the exclusive pursuit of education and training programmes. Many of them, even if they wish to do so, may not be able to live up to the rigours that full-time study demands. For a large number of such persons, IGNOU does provide opportunities which are not otherwise available to them.

Distance education is an extremely flexible method of learning. It can be adapted to meet a variety of needs ranging from pursuing the traditional programmes offered by universities and colleges to tailor-made education and training capsules to meet the needs of working people. This versatility of the distance education system cannot, however, be taken to mean that all those who aspire for education have only to enrol in distance teaching institutions. For some people, distance learning has its drawbacks. Independent learning, home-based study and work-place centred training may not be to everyone's taste and inclination. The designers of teaching-learning processes have to take this factor into account and make adequate provisions for responding to the styles and preferences of various learner groups as well.

The popularity of several programmes offered by IGNOU, and the constantly increasing number of students do suggest that its objective of augmenting opportunities for education is being met very substantially.
4.4.2 Completion ratios and drop-outs

Popularity of programmes and expansion of enrolment do not by themselves guarantee that a distance teaching institution is able to fulfil its objectives. Retention of enrolment is a critical factor in measuring the success of an institution. What proportion of students, after enrolment, continue with the programme and complete it? Alternatively, what is the proportion of students who withdraw soon after enrolment, and do not proceed to the subsequent stages of completing their assignments, sitting for the term-end examinations and registering themselves for the succeeding stages.

In order to make a reliable assessment of these indicators, institutions will have to develop strong databases which store all relevant information, that can be retrieved and collated and regularly analysed. IGNOU has yet to develop a strong database for this purpose, but the current indications are that about 50% students registered on a programme sit for the year-end examinations and about 20-25% of students sitting in the examinations pass in the first attempt. Similarly, the general trend is that about 50% students re-register in the programme on the completion of one year of study. These are still general trends and more detailed studies have to be carried out with reference to enrolment cohorts on each course, and each programme to arrive at more reliable completion ratios and drop-out rates.

4.4.3 Quality of output

Quantitative parameters like completion ratios and drop out rates would not indicate the success or failure of the distance education system in all its aspects. These parameters would be valid only if it is established that every student enrolled in a programme did so with the sole objective of completing it and qualifying for the relevant award. In practice, however, that is not the case. The motivation for enrolment varies from learner to learner; some may enrol only for learning a short module of a major programme, some others only for the materials to fill the gaps in their knowledge and still others only to gain knowledge of subjects which they were not able to study in their time. These categories of learners are not drop-outs even if they do not sit in any examinations. The important point is that the system is able to respond to these fragmented demands and satisfy an existing need. In a measure, this capacity of the system speaks for its quality.

It is now well known that the learning materials produced by IGNOU are of a very good quality. The fact that these packages are extensively used by other open universities in India, as well as by some well-known institutions outside India, is evidence enough to establish the quality of IGNOU's study materials. The demand for these materials from students in the formal system, as well as from the general public reinforces this view. The processes for the production
of these materials as well as the participation of teams of experts drawn from a wide spectrum of scholarship and competence, subject specialists, writers, editors, language specialists, graphic artists etc. ensure the high levels of their quality.

The use of good quality materials is not sufficient by itself. The quality of the student’s learning is just as important. Here also, available evidence suggests that IGNOU graduates are able to compete successfully with the graduates of the best institutions in the country for higher education and research places in highly prestigious centres in India. It has to be admitted that the quality of learning is as much a function of the quality of students as it is of the quality of the materials and teaching-learning processes. The diversity of the background of IGNOU’s students, the differences in their motivation, and the variations in the individual learning objectives all make a difference in their quality of learning.

The quality of graduates can also be assessed on the basis of their employment status. If a large proportion of the graduates of a distance learning system remains unemployed for long periods, questions can legitimately be raised about their employability and the value addition that the system has made to their employment potential. It should be remembered however that education systems cannot accept all the blame for unemployment. All that education can do is to anticipate emerging employment needs, and in consultation with those in the employing sectors, design and develop programmes in the hope that people are equipped with the knowledge and skills that the job markets would need. The unpredictability of economic growth will continue to play a major role in determining the levels of employment. In the case of IGNOU, all that can be said at this stage is that there are no significant reports of unemployment among its graduates. However, it is required to be substantiated with reliable studies of the employment disposition of the University’s graduates, through tracer studies etc. which has not been done so far on a systematic basis.

4.4.4 Cost efficiency and effectiveness

Efficiency is rated on the basis of the relationship between input and output. An institution is more cost-efficient if it can produce the same output with less resources than another, or if it can produce more output with the same resources than another. Considered from this perspective, most distance education systems should be cost-efficient as they can take advantage of the economy of scales. The materials developed once can be used by any number of students, and for a longer period of time with no significant addition to the cost. According to some studies carried out by the University, the per capita student cost in IGNOU is less than one-third of the per capita student cost in the conventional system.
Effectiveness on the other hand, is concerned with the quality of the outputs. An organisation is cost-effective if it can meet the needs of its customers at a lower cost than other organisations. The variables in establishing effectiveness are so complex that most studies on costs stop at establishing efficiency.

Check Your Progress 5

Why is quality so important in the open learning system? What are the major parameters against which quality can be assessed?

Note: ) Space is given below for your answer
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

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4.5 LET US SUM UP

We have taken up for a detailed examination, in the form of a case study, the processes associated with planning and management in IGNOU, in this unit. The central theme is the role of macro-planning at the institutional level, and how the strategies and approaches adopted by IGNOU in the performance of its functions and activities have contributed to the fulfilment of its objectives. We have also dealt, at some length, with various operational aspects, especially, the strategies and approaches in relation to course development and production, and delivery of various services to students. We have also looked at the management information system as a tool for improving efficiency. While talking about efficiency, issues of quality and effectiveness also came up, and we have briefly touched upon these aspects as they are operating in IGNOU at present.

4.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : POSSIBLE ANSWERS

1. The major strategic initiatives taken by the university for the fulfillment of its mission were the decisions to become an institution of mass higher education offering a wide range of work-oriented, job-related programmes, and to seek co-operation and collaboration with industry
and other employing sectors in the design, development and delivery of programmes and courses.

2. IGNOU presently follows a four-stage process in launching new programmes. The first stage involves the articulation of a concept of the programme by the faculty of the concerned discipline; the second stage is the preparation of the programme design indicating the broad content and structure, the learner groups, the delivery strategies, networking arrangements, etc. These two stages are cleared by the Planning Board. The development stage then begins which involves preparation of learning packages in print and other media, finalisation of the systems and methods of delivery, the student assessment procedures, etc. The detailed project report incorporating all these details is cleared by the Academic Council. When all logistics for launching the programme are settled, the Coordination Committee decides to launch the programme after satisfying itself that all arrangements for delivery are in place.

3. Students of the open university constitute a vastly heterogeneous group with a wide variety of learning styles and preferences. There is no single method that can respond to all the varying needs of such a diverse group. The IGNOU’s response to this challenge is the design and development of programmes and courses providing for structural flexibilities with regard to levels and duration and also patterns of delivery. The university promotes different models for the preparation and production of its learning packages, to ensure wider participation and better quality. The core of the university’s delivery strategy is the networking of physical and intellectual resources available in the society to reduce costs and improve efficiency.

4. The Management Information System (MIS) in place at IGNOU concerns itself with the operational areas. The purpose of this MIS is to ensure that all activities flow as per pre-determined work and time schedules, and that information about adherence to schedules as well as slippages flows regularly across the system so that corrective action where necessary is taken well in time to avoid any major disruption in the operations. The operation of the MIS has considerably strengthened the university operations.

5. In the open learning system in which the learner is remote from the provider, learner’s satisfaction is an important element in establishing its credibility. This satisfaction depends largely on the quality of the learning materials as well as the quality and efficiency of the services provided. Though judgment of quality is difficult, some of the major parameters used in assessing the quality of distance education are the learning packages, sustenance of student interests, acceptability of the graduates in the employment market etc.