
UNIT 3 SUPPORT SERVICES: INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND MODELS

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

So far in this block we have discussed the system's approach to learner support. Now we turn to institutional mechanisms and models of learner support. As you know, the focus of all Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions is directed towards the packaging and delivery of instruction for the independent distance learner. Equally ODL institutions are concerned about the design and development of an appropriate learner support system to support the learning endeavour of distance learners. As Keegan (1990) pointed out that the planning and preparation of learning materials and the provision of learner support services is that which distinguishes Distance Education (DE) from private study and teach yourself programmes.

In this unit we will discuss the changing face of learner support in the context of the evolution of DE through three generations namely, correspondence education, the open and distance education and the online education. The models that have emerged will be described with the help of suitable examples. Institutional arrangements for learner support will be dealt with in detail. We shall consider the role of Headquarters, Regional Centres as well as Study Centres as a means of providing support to distance learners. Finally we shall discuss how with the adoption of ICT, the institutional arrangement for learner support can be totally redefined. You will soon realize that the learner no longer has to go to a site i.e. either to the Headquarters or to a Study Centre or Regional Centre but can access support services 24x7

sitting at his/her desktop using a personal computer with an Internet connection.

This unit should interest you as it will make you more aware of how an ODL institution supports your learning endeavour. You will also be able to identify the category to which your institution belongs and finally be able to evaluate the support being provided to you.

3.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- Enumerate and describe the three generations of Distance Education;
- Trace the evolution of Learner Support through these three generations;
- Identify the various models of Learner Support;
- Outline the support provided by Directorates of Distance Education, Open Universities, and Online Universities;
- Describe the role of Headquarters, Regional Centres, Study Centres and Web based support.

3.2 EVOLUTION OF LEARNER SUPPORT

As you know that the distance education system came into existence 150 years ago as an effort to replace classroom based instruction by adopting technology mediated methods of instruction. You may recall the famous Pitman notes, pertaining to shorthand, and how Sir Issac Pitman came up with the ignominious idea of delivering these through penny post in England in the 1840s. It is often quoted as the beginning of Correspondence education in the world. Correspondence education is considered the oldest form of DE. Ever since then DE has evolved and taken on several distinctive forms. DE institutions have been at the fore-front of adopting new technologies to increase access to education and training opportunities. Broadly, it can be said that DE institutions have evolved through three generations, namely Correspondence Education, Open and Distance Education and Online Education. The models of DE institutions that emerged under these three generations and evolution of learner support at these DE institutions is presented below in Table 3.1.

3.2.1 First Generation: Correspondence Education (1840 Onwards)

In the 19th century, distance learners were provided only with the course outline, some written notes related to the course, previous examination papers and a list of places where the examinations were conducted. However, over a century's worth of research into cognition, there emerged pedagogical methods and the concept of providing effective support to the distance learner. Essentially the one-way communication offered by pre-prepared teaching materials which were in the form of printed notes distributed by a variety of media was augmented by the limited use of two-way communication through face to face contact, postal correspondence and possibly telephone contact

between a learner and a tutor. However, this distance education model was a teacher centred one with limited teacher-student interaction. Even today this model is continuing at Directorates of Distance Education functioning at conventional universities.

Table: 3.1: Models of DE Institutions

DE Institutions	MODEL-1 CORRESPONDENCE COURSE INSTITUTES	MODEL-2 OPEN UNIVERSITIES/ DIRECTORATES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION	MODEL-3 ONLINE/VIRTUAL UNIVERSITIES
Characteristics	First Generation Correspondence Education (since 1840s)	Second Generation Open & Distance Education (since 1970s)	Third Generation Online Education (since 1990s)
Goals & Target Group	To reach out to those at a distance from the educational institution	Respond to the problems of distance but mainly to the needs of the disadvantaged	Less about distance or disadvantaged. More about more education to more students anywhere, anytime to provide on campus, off campus access
Pedagogy	Teacher centered modelled on face-to-face pedagogy	Guided independent study through SLMs	Collaborative/Co-operative (virtual) learning, using distributed learning resources
Instructional Design	Content centered	Learner centered and Content centered Packaged knowledge facilitated by tutors	More learner centered problem based Technology mediated flexible learning Enhanced interactivity both individual and social interaction
Delivery (use of technology)	Print	Print, audio & video tapes, CML, CAL, Broadcast TV, Radio and Teleconferencing (Audio & Video conferencing)	Interactive multimedia, CD-ROM, Internet based CMC
Learner Support	Absence of Effective Support Limited student teacher interaction F to F Contact Written Communication Telephone Contact	Through Regional and Study Centres More frequent Student-Teacher-Peer Group interaction: F to F Sessions Through Interactive technologies	Enhanced quality interaction anywhere, anytime Synchronous & asynchronous communication Equal opportunity to participate/contribute Interpersonal interaction tutor, learner, peers Social Networking and Collaboration

Source: Srivastava & Reddy (2002)

3.2.2 Second Generation: Open and Distance Education (1970 Onwards)

The second generation distance education coincided with the establishment of the first Open University namely the Open University, UK, in 1969, which introduced the concept of planned and systematic learner support as an integrated activity to make the learners interact with the materials and provided continuity of concern through personal and individual support. For the first time a separate department was set up to systematically plan and provide effective support services to distance learners as close to their homes as possible through a network of Study Centres and Regional Centres. Emulating the example of the first Open University, many Open Universities provide learner support services through Study Centres and Regional Centres. At the Study Centres, the distance learners have face to face contact with academic counsellors and the Regional Centres facilitate and oversee the functioning of the Study Centres. Such thought and action are a consequence of how the founders of the Open University of the UK, as well as others who followed them, viewed distance education as essentially a learner centred system.

In their endeavour to be learner-centred, OUs also provide personal support to each of their learners through a specially designed learner support system and dedicated faculty and staff trained to facilitate heterogeneous learners. **The teachers who are involved in learner support services are not involved in preparing the course materials, and are known as academics.** They provide counselling and tutoring support to the learners through interactive technologies including limited face-to-face sessions arranged at Study Centres. Thus a paradigm shift has taken place from a teacher centred model to a learner centred model. Avenues for interaction and feedback are created by the OUs through systematically organized periodic face-to-face contact sessions, technologically mediated sessions like radio counselling, telecounselling, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, etc., which can be even online. The learning experience is mediated through the efforts of the academic counsellors who create learner-centred environments through specially designed collaborative activities, peer interaction, interaction with the SLMs (courseware), mentoring, reflection tutoring, etc., in groups or even on a one-to-one basis (individually). Practice sessions are also conducted for transmission of required skills and competencies depending on the nature and requirement of the programme. Collaborative and self-paced learning environments are specially offered to learners enrolled at OUs to facilitate their learning. Learners' performance is also assessed through formative, continuous evaluation. Assessment is used as a valuable pedagogical tool (Srivastava, 2012).

Thus, the second generation distance education goes beyond the use of mere text and postal correspondence which are typical of first generation distance education, by adopting multiple media to provide instruction as well as support services to distance learners.

3.2.3 Third Generation: Online Education (1990 Onwards)

The third generation of distance education that evolved is the current online education phase. After the establishment of the Open Universities, the creation of Online Universities has been an equally dramatic shift in the world of ODL, caused by rapid developments in

information technology, specially the Internet. This technology promises greater learner-centeredness than before, as also better quality of interaction.

This evolution is moving the locus of control of learning to the learner. As the learner can now access all types of support from his/her own networked computer rather than having to go to a Regional Centre or a Study Centre. Online education has also changed the method of distance education by providing all services from programme selection and registration to programme completion and award of degree, at the click of a mouse. Online education provides synchronous and asynchronous interactive modes of assisting the learning process. A dynamic website powered with a Learning Management System (LMS) and Learning Content Management System (LCMS) gives access to course content in multimedia format (text, audio, video, and animation), library, virtual labs, virtual tours, institutional information and updates, facilities for registration, re-registration, online testing, counselling services, evaluation services, feedback on performance, and above all 24x7 interaction with the institution, with peers and teachers. Computer mediated communication (CMC) has made speedy communication among distance learners and teachers possible and also subverted all hierarchies and biases that can occur in face-to-face mode. ICT technologies that online universities use, enable more two-way communications and dialogue to take place between the learners and teachers and among learners themselves: one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many from any location.

Check Your Progress 1

- Notes:** a) *Space is given below for your answer.*
b) *Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.*

Briefly describe the support services provided by Open Universities. Answer in about 50 words.

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Thus, Online Education is providing an antidote to the main weaknesses of both the first and second generations i.e. the lack of frequent contact between learners and dependence on the teacher.

3.3 MODELS OF LEARNER SUPPORT

If we analyze the existing models of learner support we could broadly group them under three heads: models existing under Correspondence Education; Open and Distance Education and Online Education. We will explain each model with the help of suitable examples drawn from each of the categories mentioned above.

3.3.1 Model 1: Under Correspondence Education

The institutions that are offering Correspondence Education are providing support services to their learners from the main campus i.e. the Headquarters of the institution. All services such as enquiry, admissions, tutorial support, library facilities, practice sessions etc. are centralized at the main campus. However examinations may be

conducted at other venues besides the main campus. Sale of application forms for admission to various programmes may also be available at other venues in order to expand the outreach and enhance the enrollment opportunities.

As mentioned above, in India most of the Directorates of Distance Education attached to conventional universities are still following this model.

Let us look at an example. The Directorate of Correspondence Courses (DCC) attached to Panjab University, Chandigarh provides all support services to its distance learners from its main campus located within the university campus. Like other Directorates of Distance Education, it offers classroom based instruction via face-to-face contact sessions in one spell of 10-14 days in an academic year. This is basically a teacher-centred approach that is being followed. Such institutions are yet to adopt learner centred approaches even though many of them including DCC, Panjab University have transformed teachers' notes into printed self-learning materials (SLMs). Generally the teachers who coordinate the design and development of course materials at the Directorate are the ones who conduct the contact sessions and handle all the student queries and provide counselling and tutoring services to their learners.

3.3.2 Model 2: Under Open and Distance Education

In the Open and Distance Education model that is best represented by the Open Universities, OUs have a Support Services Division at their HQs and some of them have adopted a two tier/three tier approach by operating through Study Centres (two tier) or through Study Centres and Regional Centres (three tier). The academics who are teachers working in the Support Services Division and are appointed by the institutions on a full time basis are posted at the HQs and Regional Centres.

There is yet another set of full time faculty members who are known as teachers and who are involved in the instructional design and coordination and development of the programmes of study. It is they who also design the delivery mechanism and detail out the learner support services (specific to a programme) that need to be provided to the distance learners. The technological media to be adopted for delivery of instruction as well as to support the two way communication with the learner and provide support services is decided by these teachers at the planning stage itself. Even the qualifications and experience of the academic counsellors to be appointed for a particular programme is decided by these teachers at the planning stage. The entire blue print is then submitted to the Support Services Division for implementation by the academics posted there.

Regional Centres are the branch offices of the university that are set up to expand the outreach of the university and are manned by full-time staff of the university. Regional Centres in turn identify suitable educational institutions/industrial units/Skill Development Centres/Primary Health Centres/Hospitals, etc. depending on the programme requirements to serve as Study Centres. The academics posted at Regional Centres/HQs are responsible for identification and operationalization of Study Centres. They are also responsible for appointment of part time staff and faculty (academic counsellors) at Study Centres. It is the academic counsellors who provide academic

support and counselling services to distance learners attached to Study Centres. The academics oversee the functioning of Study Centres and also constantly monitor their performance.

We have taken the example of OU Malaysia that has adopted a two-tier approach and provides support from its HQs and through its network of 17 Learner Support Centres. The other example is that of IGNOU that has adopted a three tier approach and is offering support from its HQs, its 62 Regional Centres and more than 2500 Study Centres. For details of types of support services provided through this three tier system refer Table 3.2. Most OUs have adopted a three tier system of learner support in addition to other channels through the adoption of interactive technologies such as interactive radio, interactive TV, videoconferencing, teleconferencing, computer conferencing, SMS alert services through mobile phones, online counselling through e-mail, online support to a dynamic website and Learning Management System (LMS) etc. In fact some OUs have set up Mobile Learning Centres by using big vehicles that transport both human resources and materials to the interiors, particularly to support the learners residing in remote and rural areas, which are quite a distance from the nearest Study Centre. This approach has come to be known as 'a diversified delivery system'. Most OUs have adopted a diversified delivery system to handle the increase in the number of students as well as the number of programmes that Study Centres alone cannot serve. Also new technologies facilitate the reaching out to the unreached, which is yet another reason for OUs to adopt this approach.

3.3.3 Model 3: Under Online Education

Under Model 3 we may consider all Online Universities also known as Virtual Universities where all services are delivered online from registration to examination, that are provided to learners directly to their homes. In such a system the learner must have a personal computer (PC) with an Internet connection and for those who do not have the facility, some universities like African Virtual University has set up Learning Centres (LC) where state of art workstations have been provided to learners to access all online learning resources, as well as avail online support services that are organized and managed by the university. Examples are African Virtual University (Africa), Australian Universities' overseas campuses, Kentucky Virtual University and other such Online/Virtual Universities of the world (Srivastava & Reddy, 2002).

Some of the common services that are available to the learners on-line are: access, control, personalized user-interfaces for registration/re-registration; payment of fees; course content and assignments; video on demand; video and audio clips; portals and repositories; library services; counselling and tutoring services; information updates regarding the institution and programme of study; discussion forums; contact details of peers and teachers; student presentations; project work; self testing; formative and summative evaluation tools; feedback on performance; information about grades and results. These can be understood in a grid system where various services are phased in a serial manner – The information phase, the guidance phase, the registration phase, the help desk, the learning phase, the evaluation phase and the final results phase. As it suggests the pre admission information, course selection, admission, the knowledge acquisition

period and the terminal information and various placement and career counselling associated services are also provided on-line to the learners.

Under this category there are other models too, namely the Consortium Certification model. A highly specialized online provider pools together a large number of distance education courses offered by different institutions into a consortium. Such a consortium does not provide instruction but is authorized to award credentials and to provide a variety of services such as registration, assessment, maintenance of learning records etc. Examples are Regents College (US), Western Governors University (USA), Open Learning Agency (Canada), etc.

There is yet another model, namely the Consortium Service Provider model. This type of consortium offers a pool of courses offered by different institutions and provides a variety of services, but does not have the right to confer certification/awards. Example: California Virtual University (USA).

We may conclude that today what is emerging is a 'blended learning' environment, which is promoting social and collaborative learning leading to deconstruction of hierarchy, and the anonymity of relationships between the learners and the support staff etc. The "call centre" approach is being adopted by many Open Universities of the world, which are gradually replacing local officers posted at Study Centres and Regional Centres, and FAQs placed on their websites are replacing enquiry services on telephone. So what we are heading towards is the industrialization of services.

Check Your Progress 2

- Notes:** a) Space is given below for your answer.
b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

What are the support services that can be provided online to a distance learner? Answer in about 50 words.

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3.4 INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUPPORT SERVICES

We have discussed in section 3.2 about the evolution of learner support through broadly three generations of DE, namely Correspondence Education, Open and Distance Education and Online Education. We have also pointed out that how each model of learner support that evolved under the next generation was an improvement over the previous one. Let us recall under Correspondence Education, there was hardly any method used to provide feedback and advice to the distance learner. Hence there was a distance between the teacher and the taught. To combat this, OUs set up local Study Centres as a site for contact and Regional Centres as a bridge between the HQs and the Study Centres. We have also discussed that with the advent of ICT, the concept of a support services has been redefined that has resulted in a move towards learner centred learning and the integral role of support services in promoting the intellectual development of the distance learner through continuous interaction and active participation

in the learning process from his/her own networked personal computer without having to go to a Study Centre or Regional Centre for the same. Thus overcoming the problems of limited interaction, and distance between the learners, peers and teachers. Against this backdrop we will discuss the institutional arrangements for learner support under various models of ODL outlined in this unit namely: the centralized model, the decentralized model and the web based model (online model).

3.4.1 Centralized Model

In the centralized model, support services are provided only from the headquarters/main campus of the institution. The Directorates of Distance Education set up by conventional universities come under this category. Each Directorate of DE has a dedicated building which has office rooms, classrooms, seminars halls etc. The university's library, laboratories, hostels, canteen etc. are used by both the regular as well as distance learners. The terms and conditions may vary. For example, hostel facility may be provided to a distance learner only during the limited period of contact sessions which is 15-20 days in a year. A distance learner may be permitted to use the library for reference purposes only and may not be able to issue books like regular learners. For availing any type of support the distance learner has to come to the Directorate or contact the Directorate over telephone or email.

The Directorates have dedicated full time staff both academic and administrative to perform all the activities of a DE institution. The Directorate is headed by a Director who is a senior teacher of the university who is the overall in charge of the Directorate and functions under the supervision and control of the Vice Chancellor of the university. The Director is provided both academic and non-academic staff for discharge of academic and administrative responsibilities of the Directorate. The staff strength and nature of staff i.e. permanent or temporary contractual varies from Directorate to Directorate. However as per norms, there has to be one full time faculty member to coordinate a programme offered by the Directorate. Hence the faculty strength is determined by the number of programmes on offer/to be offered. The faculty members are responsible for coordinating the programme right from its inception to its delivery. Course design and development is a major activity that involves the regular faculty of the university and the various statutory bodies of the university. The faculty members organize and conduct contact classes, provide counselling support and also do the evaluation work assigned to them. Directorates have full-fledged administrative staff to manage the admissions, support services, providing information and counselling, conducting evaluation as Directorates function as autonomous bodies with the parent universities. The examination system is centralized and examinations are conducted by the Evaluation Department of the university. Even declaration of results and award of degrees is the responsibility of the Evaluation Department of the University and not the Directorate as degrees are conferred by the University.

3.4.2 Decentralized Model

The Open Universities mainly represent the decentralized model of support services. As mentioned earlier, OUs have set up Study Centres to provide support services as close to the learner as possible. Many OUs that have a large number of SCs have established Regional Centres for greater administrative efficiency and serve as a channel of communication between the HQs and the local Study Centres.

At an OU, support services are available to a distance learner at the – Head Quarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres. However, the type of support available varies as the services are decentralized by the Head Quarters to the Regional Centres and Study Centres. This has been presented in Table 3.2 given below.

Table 3.2: Types of Support Services Provided at Head Quarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres

STUDY CENTRES (SCs)	REGIONAL CENTRES (RCs)	HEADQUARTERS (HQs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotion and publicity of the OU and its programmes ● Sale of Prospectus ● Attending to student queries ● Pre-admission counselling ● Organization of induction for newly enrolled learners ● Maintaining of student records pertaining to; student admission; attendance; assignment submission; evaluation (grades awarded) etc. ● Preparation and distribution of counselling schedules ● Organization of academic counselling (Theory) ● Conducting practical's ● Playing of audio/video programmes ● Organizing workshops, seminars, extended contact programmes, field visits etc. ● Providing library facility ● Arranging teleconferencing ● Handling of assignments (receipt and return after evaluation) ● Evaluation of Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) ● Providing feedback on TMAs ● Tabulation of grades awarded ● Submission of grade lists to Evaluation Division ● Conduct of entrance examinations and Term-end-Exams (theory and practicals) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotion and publicity of the OU and its programmes ● Sale of Prospectus ● Pre-admission counselling ● Student registration ● Distribution of students among SCs ● Collection of fees from students and issue of the receipts ● Attending to student queries ● Facilitating scholarships for distance learners ● Planning/organization of induction for newly enrolled students ● Facilitating dispatch of study material to students and RCs and SCs ● Facilitating change of SC/RC ● Maintenance of student records ● Providing library facility ● Training of staff of RC/ SC ● Organization of Seminars/Conferences/ Workshops ● Conduct of teleconferencing at downlink centres ● Planning and organizing of interactive radio counselling ● Monitoring of support services provided by Study Centres ● Coordination of assignment grades forwarded by SCs to HQs ● Monitoring conduct of Term-end-Exams ● Conduct of project evaluation and viva-voce ● Issue of migration certificates to students ● Arranging convocation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotion and publicity of the OU and its programmes ● Preparation and printing of prospectus ● Forwarding guidelines for student admission ● Sale of prospectus ● Pre-admission counselling ● Attending to student queries ● Facilitating dispatch of study material to students and RCs and SCs ● Dispatch of Assignments to students and RCs and SCs ● Consolidation and maintenance of student records ● Organization of seminars/ conferences/workshops ● Framing guidelines for conduct of counselling and evaluation ● Planning Term-end-Examination ● Conduct of Teleconferencing ● Organization and conduct of Telecasts and Radio broadcasts ● Receipt and evaluation of project synopsis and project reports ● Planning and organization of Term-end-Exams (theory and practicals) ● Tabulation of grades of Assignments and TE exams ● Receipt/acceptance of Term-end-Exam forms and issue of hall tickets ● Declaration of results ● Issuing of grade cards ● Award of degrees ● Issuing of migration certificates ● Monitoring support services provided by RCs and SCs

Source: Compiled by the Author

Role of HQs

At the HQs of the OU there is a dedicated department for the planning, organization and implementation of support services. The Support Services Department/Division develops the network of support services of the OU through identification and establishment of Study Centres within the jurisdiction of the university.

To manage large clusters of Study Centres, it may set up Regional Centres at different locations. All policy and planning pertaining to the running of Regional Centres and Study Centres is done by the Support Services Division at the Head Quarters. The Support Services Division is headed by a Director who is supported by a team of Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors and administrative staff. All are full time faculty appointed by the university and are known as academic. Academics are teachers not involved in course design and development of programmes but are appointed only for delivery and implementation of the programmes.

Role of Regional Centres

Regional Centres are the sub-offices of the OUs and are also intended to act as resource centres of the university in respective regions. The Regional Centre is headed by a Regional Director who is overall in-charge of activities of the university within the region. The principal responsibilities of the Regional Director are to direct and monitor academic operations and to coordinate the working of the Study Centres. Regional Director is provided with both academic and non-academic staff for discharge of academic and administrative responsibilities of the Regional Centre. The Regional Centre functions under the supervision and control of the Support Services Division at the Headquarters.

Regional Centres identify institutions that can serve as Study Centres. They also appoint staff at Study Centres and train them in distance education methodology. Regional Centres play a major role in handling admissions, student registration, material distribution, finalizing internal assessment of learners, answering student queries, identification and monitoring of examination centres and maintaining learner records. In some OUs, learners' assignment responses are evaluated at Regional Centres. Regional Centres may also be involved in organization of term-end examination. The degree of responsibility will depend on the level of autonomy granted by the central institution to the Regional Centres. Many Regional Centres also organize annual convocations (degree awarding functions) such as UKOU and IGNOU.

Regional Centres engage in a variety of promotional activities in order to create more public awareness in the region and a positive attitude towards ODL among academics, provincial and local government officials and employees.

The Regional Centre has to organize and implement the academic programmes launched by the OU. Apart from that they also play an important role in identifying, developing and implementing such academic programmes as may be required and feasible in the region. Academics posted at Regional Centres are additionally in a good position to collect feedback from the academic counsellors and learners to the teachers at the HQs on the courses developed by them. This is particularly useful at the time of revision of courses. Regional Centres

may also be involved in promoting systems research. They may also serve as resource centres for distance education in the region.

Regional Centres have an important role to play in counselling. They act as the reference point for serious problems, sometimes resolving the problems themselves, sometimes sending them to the HQs. They may also organize summer schools, residential schools, field work, and laboratory work for the benefit of those learners who are geographically dispersed or whose numbers are low. One of the major functions of Regional Centres is to closely monitor the functioning of Study Centres of their regions in order to maintain quality of support services provided to learners (Srivastava, 2012).

Role of Study Centres

Study Centres are the nerve centres of the University and also the face of the OU for the learners. Study Centre identification is a systematically planned activity that OUs have developed for accessing both infrastructural and academic requirements to transact the academic programmes effectively. Another major consideration is the proportion of learners who can make use of the Study Centre. Study Centres are usually borrowed rooms/laboratories/work centres in buildings at the above mentioned institutions that are used by concerned OUs outside the normal working hours, i.e., in the evenings and on weekends. The staff at the Study Centres is usually part time, majority of them are drawn from the host institution. A Study Centre is supposed to serve as a resource centre for learners as well as a meeting place for them to interact with their subject experts/teachers and their peers. Learners may come for seminars, private study or individual meetings with a tutor or counsellor, or to meet with other learners. It should be the first place that they turn to for finding the resources they need to supplement the materials they receive at home. Hence a Study Centre has a complete set of the institution's course material, including printed self learning materials, audio-visual materials and playback facilities and reference books. The Study Centre might have a library and a space for reading and classrooms/halls to conduct face-to-face counselling sessions and laboratories to conduct practice sessions for those courses that require special components. Study Centres are required to maintain records of learners and of local academic counsellors attached to it. It is at the Study Centre, however, that the learner has the best opportunities for counselling of all kinds, as there is access to advice from subject specialists, help with study skills, information about choice of courses, and assistance with non-academic problems. The environment of the Study Centre, the resources available, and the way in which the contact programme is organized, all contribute to providing opportunities for counselling to take place informally and naturally. Study Centres also provide enquiry services for prospective and registered learners and induction programmes for new entrants. Internal assessments and term-end examinations are organized and conducted at Study Centres. In other words, Study Centres are a one stop for all the services offered by the university ranging from providing information to academic support in the form of face-to-face counselling sessions for theory as well as practical courses, library facilities, audio visual aids, assignment evaluation and other methods of internal evaluation besides serving as the venue for term-end examinations (Srivastava, 2012).

3.4.3 Web Based Model

Online universities function through a dedicated website by adopting Learning Management System (LMS) and Learning Content Management System (LCMS). General information about the institution and its programmes, contact persons (Head of the Institution, Heads of Departments, Faculty members, etc.), current information and happenings etc. can be accessed by anyone, anywhere 24x7 from the institution's home page. To gain access to the registered programmes and courses in multimedia format including other resources posted by the institution for obtaining instruction and support, the learners are given a user id and a password. This enables the learner to utilize all the services that are provided online such as interaction with the faculty and their peers, counselling and tutoring services, library services, access to archives, information updates, project work, self testing, queries, submission of assignments, attempting examinations, obtaining feedback on performance and declaration of results.

Today there are several technological options available that are interactive and provide two-way communication such as discussion forums, chat sessions, video conferencing, virtual laboratories etc. that provide a class-room situation and real time synchronous interaction.

Check Your Progress 3

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answers.

b) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

- i) Write a brief note on Decentralised model for providing support to the learners.

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- ii) Consider a local Study Centre that you are familiar with. List its equipment and teaching resources. In your opinion what other resources might be useful?

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3.4 LET US SUM UP

Even though DE is regarded as an industrial model of education but having moved from a teacher centred system to a learner centred system, the focus of all DE providers is to enable more two way communication and dialogue between the distance learners themselves; one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many.

In this unit we have discussed that how from a near total reliance on print based courses; technology used in DE has expanded to include a plethora of technologies, shifting the emphasis from single technology delivery systems to integrated approaches using multiple technologies. Also with respect to the teaching-learning methodology there has been

a paradigm shift from Correspondence Education to Open and Distance Education and more recently to Online Education. Correspondence education totally lacked live/real time communication or for that matter any type of communication besides the course material. Gradually limited face-to-face contact sessions were introduced which are organized on the main campus of the institution. This practice is still continuing at Directorates of Distance Education attached to conventional universities.

However with the emergence of OUs (Open and distance Education) the first systematic effort to design a learner support system was made. A separate Support Services Division was set up by OUs that in turn established Regional Centres and Study Centres or only Study Centres in order to decentralize support services and take them as close to a learner's home as possible. Thus the two-tier and three-tier approaches to providing learner support emerged. With the adoption of more interactive technologies, multi channel delivery of support services, were introduced. Thus the diversified delivery system of providing learner support evolved. This is the most preferred approach adopted by most OUs of the world.

With the advancement of ICT purely online services are being offered by mainly online Universities. From student registration to award of degree, i.e. from entry to exit the learner receives support on his/her networked personal computer. Besides there are consortia that are providing online support services on behalf of a group of DE institutions. Some such consortia are even empowered to award degrees on behalf of the member institutions besides providing support services.

Finally the institutional arrangements for support services that have come up under the various models have been discussed in this unit. The role of Headquarters, Regional Centres, Study Centres and Web-based support has been outlined.

3.6 FEEDBACK TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

Check Your Progress 1

Please refer sub-section 3.2.2.

Check Your Progress 2

In the online model all services are delivered online from registration to examination, that are provided to learners directly to their homes. Some of the common services that are available to the learners on-line are: access, control, personalized user-interfaces for registration/re-registration; payment of fees; course content and assignments; video on demand; video and audio clips; portals and repositories; library services; counselling and tutoring services; information updates regarding the institution and programme of study; discussion forums; contact details of peers and teachers; student presentations; project work; self testing; formative and summative evaluation tools; feedback on performance; information about grades and results.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) The Open Universities mainly represent the decentralized model of support services. Many OUs that have a large number of SCs have

established Regional Centres for greater administrative efficiency and to serve as a channel of communication between the HQs and the local Study Centres. At an OU, support services are available to a distance learner at the – Head Quarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres. However, the type of support available varies as the services are decentralized by the Head Quarters to the Regional Centres and Study Centres.

- ii) Visit your local study centre and prepare the response accordingly.

3.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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