
UNIT 1 MANAGEMENT OF A MEGA OPEN UNIVERSITY: A CASE OF IGNOU

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Block 2 of this course gave you a panoramic view of the growth and development of higher education in India. We had also discussed in that Block the major landmarks in the Indian higher education development narrative, including of course, the policies followed and the efforts initiated to ensure that sufficient facilities were provided and that the provision of higher education in the country was of an acceptable quality. Almost at the beginning of this long journey, the Indian higher education planners and policy makers were confronted with the problem of expansion to meet the rising expectations of the Indian people and the insurmountable problem of funding the necessary resources to establish more schools, colleges and universities and recruit adequate number of teachers to run those institutions. Inevitably, the search for suitable alternatives for institution-based full-time formal education started from the early 1960s. We shall now take a more detailed look at these efforts and their outcomes in this unit.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- describe the origin and growth of non-formal education in the Indian higher education system;
- discuss the major weaknesses of the correspondence mode of education and how establishment of open learning and distance education programmes became a policy imperative to meet the rising demand for good quality higher education;
- identify the major features of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and how it laid the foundations for one of the world's largest distance education systems;
- analyse the strategies and approaches adopted by the government and the university to meet the challenges involved in establishing a credible and sustainable distance education system; and
- examine the strategies and approaches that led within a period of less than two decades, IGNOU emerging as one of the global provider of open and distance learning.

1.3 EXPANSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: POLICY OPTIONS

We had provided you with graphic details of the expansion of higher education in India since independence in Block 2. While the numbers in absolute terms appear staggering, in terms of the rising demand for higher education places, the institutional facilities were far too inadequate. Access to higher education was highly inequitable; there were several social and economic groups that have had little or no opportunity for pursuing higher education. These deprived categories included women, those belonging to rural areas, the economically weaker sections of society and different social groups called the Scheduled castes and tribes. Several state governments were trying their best to set up more universities and colleges, but most of them simply did not have the resources to set up these institutions and equip them with the necessary facilities.

The Third Five-Year Plan (1961-66) took note of the benefits of correspondence education to meet at least partially the rising demand for higher education and proposed two major strategic initiatives; first, to provide for greater diversification of higher education by expanding facilities for professional, technical and vocational education, and second, to increase the opportunities for general higher education by providing facilities for evening, part-time and own-time education. This new strategy saw the launch of correspondence education as a pilot project by the University of Delhi in 1962.

1.3.1 The National Policy on Education, 1968

There were considerable preparations before the correspondence programmes were launched. An Expert committee appointed by the Central Advisory Board of Education framed the following guidelines for launching correspondence courses:

- The flexibility that the correspondence method permits, especially in the combination of subjects leading to a degree, should be fully exploited to make undergraduate programmes relevant to the needs of students;

- For ensuring academic standards, well-prepared instructional materials, easy-to-understand texts, sample exercises, etc. should be used and top-ranking scholars and teachers should be associated with their preparation;
- Correspondence courses should be part of the wider academic framework that is provided by the university;
- There should be personal contacts between the teachers and students for about three weeks in a year, preferably on a tutorial rather than lecture basis;
- Training and guidance should be provided to build the teacher into the study material.

Although the Delhi University launched the correspondence programme in 1962, acceptance of correspondence education as a policy option came much later. The Education Commission (1964-66) recommended that opportunities for part-time education through facilities like evening colleges and for continuing education through systems like correspondence courses should be made available. The Commission did not see any other possibility to expand higher education facilities to extend opportunities for those who were not able to join full-time institutions, and those who had to drop out of the education system for economic reasons. Among the other significant recommendations of the Commission were the imperatives of involving the electronic media (All India Radio was the only medium with a country-wide presence then; Television was still in the early stages with a token presence in metropolitan cities) and the advisability of using the correspondence method to improve the knowledge and skills of workers in industries, agriculture and other fields. Interestingly, the Commission did mention fields like architecture, drafting, construction, industrial electronics, auxiliary nursing, hospital management, business administration, etc. as potentially significant areas for inclusion in correspondence education.

The National Policy on Education, 1968 that captured the major directions of development in the field of education recommended in a section titled “Part-time and Correspondence Education” that:

- Priority should be given to setting up Study Centres wherever there is high concentration of students; and
- The provision of contact programmes should be an essential feature of the correspondence courses.

1.3.2 Expansion of Correspondence Education

Following the 1968 policy, many more universities launched correspondence education programmes leading to Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. Many of them attracted large enrolments. With a view to maintaining high standards, the UGC in 1978-79, prescribed fresh guidelines for starting correspondence courses. These included:

- Only one university in a state should introduce correspondence education at the undergraduate level;
- Correspondence courses should be started only by those universities that have well established teaching departments;
- It should be compulsory for every student enrolled in correspondence courses to return a certain number of response sheets;
- The provision of contact programmes should be an essential feature of correspondence education;

- Study centres should be established wherever there is a concentration of students.

By the mid-1980s, a large number of universities were running correspondence courses.

Apart from Bachelor's and Master's degrees, there were also courses in Information Science, Journalism, Tourism and Hotel Management, Library Science, etc. Although the numbers were quite large, correspondence education was not evenly spread across the country at that time. The largest number of universities offering correspondence courses was in the southern states; the western and north-western states also had several universities offering programmes through correspondence. But the north-eastern and eastern states had very little to do with correspondence education initially; gradually universities in the region took initiatives to start and strengthen distance education.

1.3.3 Correspondence Education: A Bag of Mixed Experience

Impressive though the expansion of correspondence education programmes in India in the 1970s and 1980s, it cannot be claimed that this initial effort at distance education covered itself with glory in any manner. True, it did offer opportunities for large numbers to acquire university degrees; it also demonstrated the reality that there was a large constituency of adult learners that was looking for opportunities for enhancing their qualifications and improving their prospects in life. Among those who were looking for opportunities for acquiring higher degrees were women, serving personnel, especially teachers, unemployed youth and a large number of people who lost opportunities for college education early in life. They were highly motivated, and they were prepared to pay higher fees than what regular full-time students were paying.

This huge demand for higher education facilities led to many consequences. First, most universities found correspondence education as a major source of revenue for them especially when state funding was always tight. Second, correspondence education did not involve heavy investments; existing teachers prepared the lessons with little or no extra cost to the university. All it cost the university was the expenditure on printing and mailing them. Most universities did not appoint any additional teachers for running the correspondence programmes; all they did was to recruit some administrative staff for managing admissions, despatch of materials and keeping student records. Overworked teachers found preparation of lessons in addition to their regular class room engagement an avoidable burden. Eventually, correspondence education became a means of making money with indifferently prepared and unattractively produced material. Doubts began to be raised about the quality and standards of the degrees acquired through correspondence education.

Though the Education Commission was convinced that the correspondence method of education was the only way to “take education to the millions who depend upon their own efforts to study whenever they find time to do so”, the universities which were actually offering these programmes did not make any investments on them; no efforts were made to diversify the programmes on offer, value addition through skill development was the last on their list of priorities. At best, correspondence education remained a soft option to acquire a university degree.

An examination of the working of the institutions of correspondence education in the country revealed that they faced several problems and constraints that contributed to their ineffectiveness. These were:

- No efforts were made to design and develop programmes and courses that were relevant to the needs of life and work of most adult learners; most of their programmes were the same that were offered in their classrooms;
- Most universities did not make any effort to develop suitable structures for the management and development of their correspondence education initiatives. In consequence, there were no initiatives at innovations in the design, development and delivery of useful and relevant programmes. The traditional conservatism of the academic and administrative structures inhibited bold experiments and innovations.
- Low staff motivation and morale was reflected in the preparation and production of instructional material of indifferent quality;
- There were no systematic efforts in providing necessary and useful support to the learners who were mostly left to fend for themselves;
- Poor quality printed material was the only medium of communication between the institution and the students; even radio was not harnessed to reach out to the students.

1.4 THE IDEA OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

The successful launch of the UKOU in 1969 did attract considerable interest in India. A seminar on Open University was held by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the University Grants Commission in 1970, focussed on the relevance of the concept of Open University to developing nations and its ability to reach out not just to the traditional college-going students, but the much larger number of students who drop out from schools at various stages, the neoliterates and eventually all adults who desire to avail themselves of programmes of continuing education. The seminar recommended that the idea of the Open University was worth trying and that its efforts should be directed to meet the needs of highly motivated adults lacking the necessary formal qualifications and/or the means for joining a university on a full-time basis. At the same time, the Open University should be designed as a quality institution, of which an outstanding feature was to be its openness to new ideas and schemes of operation. It should also have the best of curricula from all the existing universities in India and abroad.

The method employed by the open university and its approach to delivery of programmes should be based on multi-media integration, using postal communications, radio and television programmes and individual or group guidance. The setting up of a network of regional offices, with some resources being made available from the existing universities and colleges, was considered an essential feature of the Open University. Finally, the seminar recommended that a study group should get down to work out the details of the organisation and working of the university so as to ensure the establishment of an open university at an early date.

1.4.1 The Establishment of the National Open University

The Working Group set up in pursuance of the recommendations of the seminar submitted its report in 1975-76. The Working Group observed among others that:

- Social and political awakening was rapidly spreading to the rural areas and to the less advanced sections of the society, and so, the demand for higher education in these areas and from these social groups was increasing at a rapid pace;

- Though more and more institutions were being established every year, the resources available for higher education to cope with such a tremendous expansion were limited, leading to lowering of standards and other undesirable results.
- The Group recommended that establishment of an Open University was the answer to address these concerns and that an outstanding feature of the Open University, when established, should be its readiness to innovate and experiment. It should be free to experiment with new types of courses, course structures and educational technology.

The proposal for establishment of a national open university was formulated in some detail following the recommendations of the Working Group, but the government did not proceed with it at that time. In 1984, the proposal was revived, and the government decided to set up a Project Committee to draw up a blueprint including the draft legislation for setting up a National Open University.

In the meanwhile, several other developments took place. The idea of the Open University captured the imagination of several state governments as well. India's federal constitution permits state governments to set up universities within their states. The state government of Andhra Pradesh went ahead with the proposal to establish a state open university, incidentally India's first; in 1982 (we shall look at this university later in this Block).

There were other significant developments too in the field of education. Early in 1985, the new Prime Minister, on assumption of office, announced a comprehensive review of the education policy primarily with a view to ensure that programmes of education and training were relevant to the work and life of the people. He also announced the Government's commitment to the establishment of the National Open University on which work was initiated an year earlier. This political commitment saw the completion of all formalities, including the adoption of the necessary legislation to establish the National Open University, in August 1985. The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), named after the former Prime Minister, was formally launched in September, 1985.

The revised National Policy on Education (NPE) was adopted in 1986. The policy made the following statements on open and distance learning:

- Lifelong education is a cherished goal of the educational process. Opportunities will be provided to the youth, housewives, agricultural and industrial workers and professionals to continue the education of their choice at a pace suited to them. The future thrust will be in the direction of open and distance learning;
- In view of the present rigid entry requirements to formal courses restricting the access of a large segment of the people to technical and managerial education, programmes through distance learning process including the use of mass media will be offered;
- The open university system has been initiated in order to augment opportunity for higher education and as an instrument of democratising education;
- The Indira Gandhi National Open University established in 1985 in fulfilment of these objectives will be strengthened;
- Strong commitment indeed to the idea of the Open University and its efforts to augment educational opportunities and provide greater access to education for larger numbers.

1.4.2 IGNOU: The Vision

We mentioned earlier the appointment of a Project Committee to prepare a blue print for setting up the National Open University. On the basis of the recommendations made by this Committee, and the Government's commitment to establish and promote the open learning system as an independent and possibly an alternate channel for providing education to a large number of people, the IGNOU Act, 1985 passed by Parliament declared the IGNOU's objectives in the following terms:

- To advance and disseminate learning and knowledge by a diversity of means, including communication technology;
- To provide opportunities for higher education to a large segment of the population;
- To promote the educational well being of the community; and
- To encourage the Open University and distance education systems in the educational pattern of the country.

The legislation enjoined on the university to strive to fulfil its objectives through diverse means of distance and continuing education, and emphasised, in particular, the following approaches:

- Strengthen and diversify the degree, diploma and certificate courses related to the needs of employment;
- Provide access to higher education for a large segment of the population and in particular, the disadvantaged groups such as those living in remote and rural areas including working people, housewives and other adults who wish to upgrade or acquire knowledge through studies in various fields;
- Promote acquisition of knowledge in a rapidly developing and changing society and continually offer opportunities for upgrading knowledge, training and skills;
- Provide an innovative system of university level education, flexible and open, in regard to methods and pace of learning, combination of courses, eligibility for enrolment, age of entry, conduct of examination and operation of the programmes with a view to promote learning and encouraging excellence in new fields of knowledge;
- Contribute to the improvement of the educational system in India by providing a non-formal channel complementary to the formal system in India and encouraging transfer of credits and exchange of teaching staff by making wide use of texts and other software developed by the university; and
- Promote and coordinate open and distance education system in India and maintain standards.

These are clearly wide ranging functions, and the vesting of the role of a national level apex body in the university was indeed an extraordinarily important decision for which there is no parallel elsewhere in the world. That made IGNOU a unique university, an open university that is also a system leader. However, it may be noted that since June 2012 this role has been transferred to University Grants Commission which regulates ODL and online learning too. Also, that the independence of IGNOU to design, approve and deliver its own programmes has been ensured by MHRD/UGC since 2019.

1.4.3 IGNOU: Organisation and Structure

In its organisation and structure, IGNOU had adopted the model developed by the UKOU with appropriate adaptations to suit the Indian situation. The latest organisational structure is given in Figure 1; which is self explanatory, however highlights of the structure are presented in the following paragraphs:

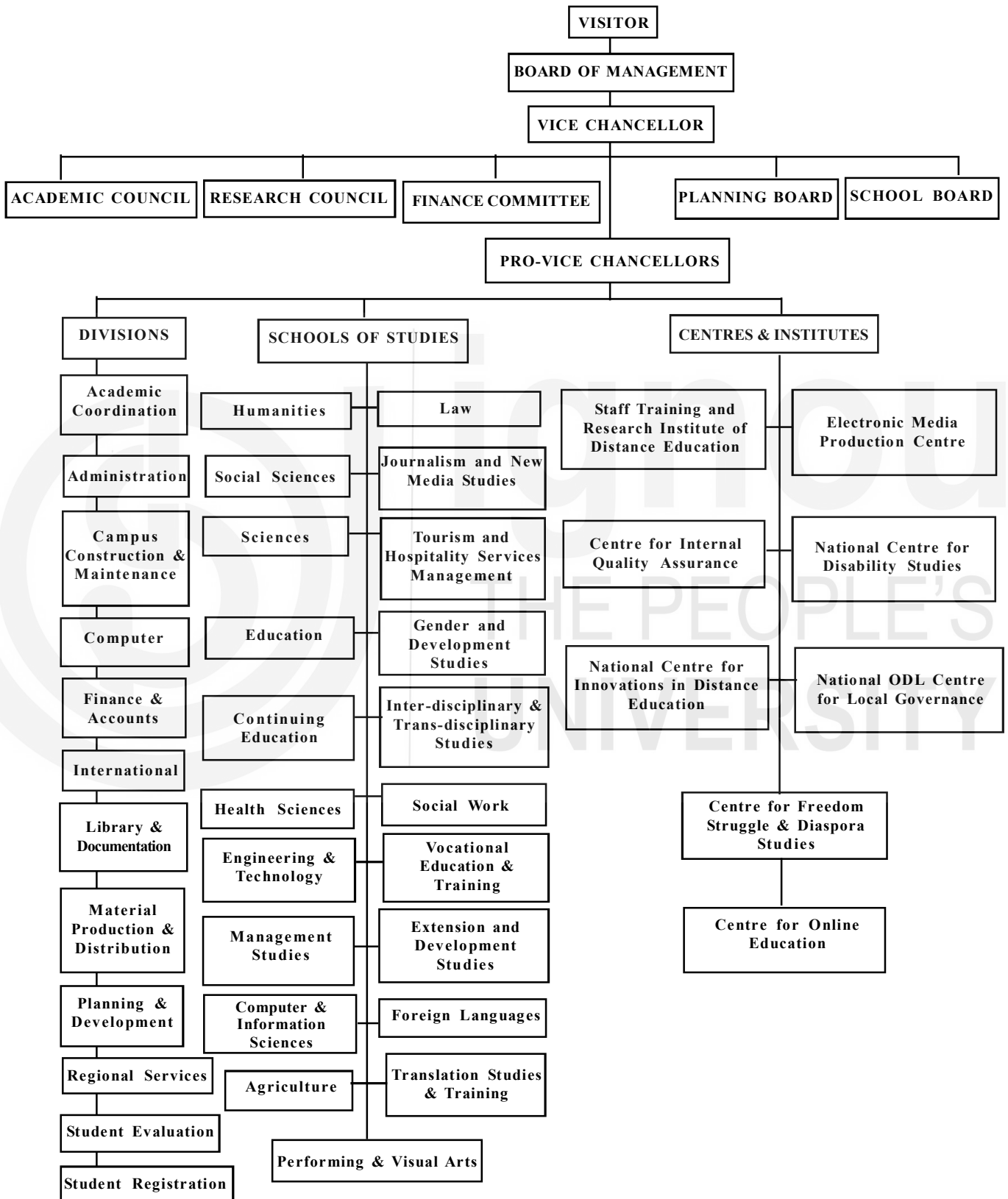


Figure 1: Organisational Structure of Indira Gandhi National Open University

In India, all universities need to be established under a Central or State legislation. IGNOU was set up under an Act of Parliament. The Act provided that the University will have the following authorities:

- The Board of Management as the principal executive authority;
- The Academic Council as the principal academic body;
- The Planning Board responsible for all planning and development functions;
- The Schools of Studies responsible for prescribing programmes of study, formulating courses, determining their content and structure, and developing and producing the learning packages;
- The Finance Committee responsible for the management of university finances; and
- The Distance Education Council performed the apex level functions of promotion and coordination of open and distance learning in India till June 2012.

All universities established under Act of Parliament have the President of India as their Visitor who performs the broad supervisory functions of the state over the universities. The Visitor appoints the Vice-Chancellors, can institute inquiries into the affairs of the universities and approve or withhold approval to statutes framed by them to run their affairs. The Visitor does not exercise any executive powers. These powers are exercised by the Officers of the University specified in the Act. They are:

- The Vice-Chancellor who is the chief executive and academic officer of the university;
- The Pro-Vice-Chancellors who are appointed to assist the Vice-Chancellor in the performance of his/her functions;
- The Directors who head the Schools of Studies or functional Divisions like the Media and Material Production, Information Technology applications, the Regional Services, Planning and Development, etc.; and
- The Registrars who are responsible for university administration and other functional areas like student registration, evaluation, material distribution, etc.

While the Vice-Chancellor is appointed by the Visitor, all other officers are appointed by the Board of Management on the recommendations of specially constituted selection committees.

We shall also turn our attention briefly to the structure of the IGNOU. Like any other open university, IGNOU too has several sub-systems, each with defined functions and responsibilities. We shall briefly mention these sub-systems and their roles.

The Schools of Studies

During the initial years, the University had nine Schools of Studies each of which represented a group of cognate disciplines. These were the Humanities, the Social Sciences, the Sciences and professional areas like Management Studies, Engineering and Technology, Computer and Information Sciences, Education, Continuing Education, and Health Sciences. More Schools were added from time to time, and in 2011, the University had 21 Schools of Studies. These Schools represented a wide variety of professional, technical and vocational fields and in many ways

also marked a significant move towards skill development as a major focus in the university's new initiatives. The new Schools were organised around the areas of Agriculture, Law, Journalism and New Media Studies, Gender and Development Studies, Tourism and Hospitality Services, Social work, Vocational Education and Training, Foreign Languages, Translation Studies, Performing and Visual Arts, etc.

The Electronic Media Production Centre

Started as a modest Communication Division to prepare audio/video programmes to supplement the print material, the current EMPC is a state-of-the-art media production and transmission facility that also serves as the nodal centre for managing Gyan Darshan and other education channels and Gyan Vani stations.

Gyan Darshan

Gyan Darshan is an exclusive 24-hour national education channel that telecasts programmes in a variety of subjects offered by IGNOU, covering a wide range of viewers.

Gyan Vani

Gyan Vani is an educational FM Radio Channel that operates as a media co-operative, with its day-to-day programmes being contributed by several educational institutions that include most of those using the education television channels. These Radio Channels have been reactivated in 12 centres across the country. These centres are broadcasting education programmes for eight to sixteen hours a day.

The Media Production Centre of IGNOU has so far produced over 4915 videos and 3063 audios. Besides, programmes are acquired from other countries on various science and technology subjects including development studies. The facility was built with the liberal support from the government of Japan in the mid-1990s and further supported recently for strengthening the centre and upgrading its equipment.

Student Services

Like all open universities, IGNOU also provides a variety of services and learning support to its students. As we noted, a country wide network of over 3430 learner support centres, assisted by about 64,470 academic counsellors offer such support services as tutorials, assignments and feedback, access to information and materials, and other help in getting through the programme of studies. Most of these centres also function as the examination centres. The work of these learner support centres is coordinated and supervised by 67 Regional Centres of the university.

Material Production and Distribution

Self-learning print material is the mainstay of IGNOU's teaching and learning processes. The university has a dedicated Division for printing and distribution of its learning material. With 241 programmes and over 11,47,056 students enrolled in them in 2018-19, the enormity of the printing and distribution functions can only be dimly visualised. With the help of the mass mailing system of the Indian Postal Service, the university has been able to reach the material to its students across the country with considerable success though there could be minor delays in transit and problems arising from the frequent relocation of learners. Considering

the fact that these operations involve despatch of millions of packets (1.59 crore study material blocks printed in 2018-19), the production and distribution functions have been reasonably satisfying.

Management and Administration

From the start, the University has been making efforts to computerise all its operations. All student records including admission and examination data are computerised. Similarly, all administrative and financial operations including budgeting and accounts are all automated. The university has also set up a Planning and Development Division that is responsible for preparing the development plans of the university over five-year planning cycles, determining the resource allocation among the activity centres and monitoring their performance.

Staff Development and Training

From its inception, IGNOU has been focusing on the training and development of its faculty and staff as well as those working in other open universities and distance education institutions. IGNOU had always believed that a cadre of well trained professional staff is the key to a successful launch of distance education in India. One of the very first programmes launched by the university was a post-graduate diploma in distance education that gave the university a head start. We have discussed how this initiative developed into a major international launching pad for the university. The addition of a second module that made the programme a Master's degree in which a large number of international students are enrolled has been a pioneering effort. Apart from this full programme, the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) conducts training workshops and seminars for the personnel of a large number of Open Universities in India and its neighbouring countries as well as the personnel running the distance education Directorates of a very large number of conventional universities in various states.

Other Centres/Units

In recent times, the university has initiated several new activities and programmes. These include establishment of a Centre for Internal Quality, Assurance, National Centre for Innovation in Distance Education, Centre for Online Education. Other notable initiatives include the establishment of several Chairs like the ISRO Chair for Satellite Communication in Education, The Raman Chair for Sciences, Chair for Sustainable Development, The CBCI Chair for the development of relevant programmes in the area of HIV/AIDS and the Ambedkar Chair on Social change and Development.

1.4.4 Playing the Role of System Leader

We mentioned a little while ago that within less than one year of the establishment of IGNOU, the Government of India adopted a new policy on education that set out the priorities and new directions for the education sector. The new policy proposed the strengthening of the delivery system of the Open University and media support to its programmes in cooperation with the national radio and television networks. Referring to the role of promotion, coordination and setting of standards assigned to IGNOU, the Programme of Action for implementation of the 1986 policy proposed the framing of guidelines for state governments who

wished to establish their own open universities, or wanted to take advantage of the facilities of IGNOU. It also proposed the development of a network of courses in the Open University system that would offer a wide range of options to students. We shall take up this role of IGNOU as a system leader in some detail in the next Unit as it is distinctly different from the role of a university as a provider of academic programmes and courses.

Because of the uniqueness of this role, and the doubts and reservations expressed in various quarters about a university performing the roles of a provider as well as a standard setter at the same time (it was even suggested that IGNOU will be a player and an umpire at the same time), it took some time for working out the procedural and logistical aspects of working out the apex body role. Indeed, it was only in 1992, a full six years after the university started its academic operations that the apex body functions were given practical shape. The 1986 Programme of Action framed after the new policy adopted was firm about IGNOU's role of promoting and coordinating the Open University and distance education system in the country. In pursuance of this, the University formulated the following strategies and approaches for giving effect to the role of promotion and coordination. These proposals giving the directions of development during the five year period 1990-95 noted that in the previous four years, IGNOU had gained considerable experience in designing, developing and delivering courses and programmes for the open university system; it had useful experience in the management of distance education; it had developed a structure and pattern for open university programmes and had established a network of support systems and structures for delivering them.

This strategy paper observed that IGNOU would not be able to make a significant impact on the open university and distance education system in the country unless it catered to the substantial needs of continuing education through training and retraining the people at work and also of the large numbers of the disadvantaged people, especially women. The task was too large to be left to a single institution, and it required several new strategies and approaches. The document suggested that IGNOU should take the lead to:

- Promote a network of open universities and distance education institutions to extend their reach to cover large numbers of people;
- Design, develop and deliver a large number of courses which are relevant, functionally useful and can meet the employment needs of various sectors;
- Set up a coordination mechanism to prescribe the broad design, structure and pattern for courses and programmes for all open universities and also develop norms and guidelines for organising and managing a variety of student services;
- Establish close linkages with industry, trade, commerce and other employing sectors in the design and production of programmes/courses as well as their delivery; and
- Organise and strengthen a student-friendly management system for distance education programmes.

As we mentioned earlier, a state open university was established in Andhra Pradesh as early as in 1982. More such universities were set up later in Bihar, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra in the second half of the 1980s. It was time to look at the apex level responsibilities more seriously. The IGNOU formulated certain guidelines. In order to help matters, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) that consisted of representatives of all state governments set up a Committee to formulate appropriate guidelines for effective performance of the coordination function. The Committee endorsed the IGNOU proposals that envisaged:

- Establishment of one open university in each major state;
- Creation of a network of all open universities that could share programmes, courses and physical facilities for the delivery of programmes;
- Adoption or adaption of good programmes developed by any one university by other universities in the network to avoid duplication in the preparation and production of course materials;
- Pooling of courses offered by all open universities to provide students with a wide range of options in respect of courses and programmes;
- Establishment of a Coordination Council consisting of representatives of all the open universities.

We shall return to these issues and consider how it all worked out in the next unit.

1.4.5 Emergence of a Mega University: The Initial Phase

While the planning and development initiatives proceeded at a rapid pace, the IGNOU launched its first programmes in 1987, a diploma in Management and another in Distance Education. Some 4500 students enrolled in these two programmes. More programmes were added in the next five years; these included Bachelor's degree in several disciplines, Master's degree in Management and Library Science and several diploma and certificate courses in diverse fields that included teacher education, Computer applications, rural development, and so on. In 1991, the enrolment crossed 50,000 and by 1994, it had reached over 78,000. By any reckoning, it was a tremendous success. Sir John Daniel in his book *Mega Universities and Knowledge Media* called IGNOU a MEGA University (a university with an enrolment of 50,000 or more) along with some other open universities that included UKOU; STOU, Bangkok; PNU, Iran; AIOU, Pakistan; UT, Indonesia; UNISA, Johannesburg; and so on. IGNOU had arrived and was soon taken note of.

What was it that made IGNOU so popular and attractive? Without any doubt, it can be claimed that it was the quality of the learning materials produced by the IGNOU in the initial phase that attracted a great deal of attention. Unlike the UKOU that put the course development system through an elaborate process of writing, revision, scrutiny and further revision all of which took 3-4 years to get the materials to the production line, the responsibility for writing the first

set of courses for the IGNOU programmes was accepted by well known senior teachers and scholars in their relevant subjects. Of course, they had the UKOU course materials as a model for presentation. And many among those teachers and scholars took up the responsibility of course writing not so much for what the university offered as a token honorarium, but for what they felt was their obligation to share their knowledge and experience with the less privileged members of the society who would not have had any opportunity to learn at universities and colleges. Soon, these materials captured the attention of not just the Indian academia but the distance education experts outside the country as well. It was no surprise that the Commonwealth of Learning, an inter-governmental organisation established by the Commonwealth Governments to promote open and distance learning across the Commonwealth, found that the materials produced by IGNOU for its Distance Education programmes were of high quality. After a detailed evaluation of these materials, the COL conferred the status of Centre of Excellence in Distance Education on IGNOU and instituted fellowships for students from the developing countries of the Commonwealth to pursue a Master's degree in Distance Education of IGNOU. Instituted in 1994, this programme is still continuing.

We called this section the initial phase of development. That is primarily because as a fledgling university, venturing into uncharted territory, IGNOU had to establish its credentials and claim equality with the traditional universities. One possibility was to focus on academic reform initiatives that everyone wanted universities to take, but no one was too willing to do. One such area was the restructuring of undergraduate degree programmes. For years, the successive Education Commissions and the UGC have been urging universities to redesign their undergraduate degree programmes to incorporate different skill sets that would help graduates apply the knowledge they had acquired to solve problems. The UGC had, in fact, developed comprehensive guidelines for this exercise, but universities were reluctant to embark on the experiment. As a new university, and as an innovator, IGNOU took up this challenge and introduced its undergraduate degree programme with basic foundation courses, a series of specialised courses in various subject areas and a set of application-oriented courses relevant to different subject areas. There was no rigid structure requiring a fixed combination for a degree programme; a student had only to secure the required number of credits to earn a degree. These steps were taken by IGNOU way back in 1987-88; which are being followed by other universities very recently.

It would be worthwhile to turn attention to the strategic goals that IGNOU set for itself in its initial phase of development. These were:

- Expand higher education facilities and widen access to education that would empower increasing diversity of people;
- Ensure relevance for educational programmes by diversifying the course provisions and developing high quality multimedia open learning curricula, designed to meet the academic, technical and vocational needs of diverse student groups;
- Reach out to large numbers of learner groups, especially those who have no opportunities to pursue good quality higher education programmes and

enable them to acquire knowledge, skills and competence to become productive participants in development;

- Foster and lead developments in knowledge related technologies relevant to large scale distance education;
- Establish and develop large networks of open universities and other distance education institutions as well as communication networks for development of programmes and their delivery.

Table 1 provides an overview of the achievements of the IGNOU in terms of its strategic goals during the first decade of its operations:

Table 1: IGNOU achievement in the first decades

Strategic Goals	1987	1990	1993	1998
Programmes on offer	2	8	27	39
Courses on offer	10	119	210	486
Students Registered	4381	52376	75666	163394
Students on Rolls	4381		182400	430832
Regional Centres			16	19
Study Centres			219	315
Academic Counsellors			9400	17991
Degrees/diplomas and certificates awarded			4444	25095
Staff				
a) Faculty				245
b) Others				1049
State Open Universities using IGNOU programmes			2	5

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

Why COL conferred the status of Centre of Excellence on IGNOU? (Answer in about 40 words).

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1.4.6 Quality, Credibility and International Recognition

We had mentioned earlier in this Unit that the experience with correspondence education was not too satisfactory. The rationale for establishing IGNOU was, among others, to remedy the inadequacies of the prevailing forms of correspondence education and to create conditions in which distance education methods and practices were endowed with credibility, acceptability and recognition. Higher education qualifications obtained through correspondence were never considered the same as those acquired through full-time campus-based education. High quality learning materials enhanced the quality of the programmes offered. But that was not enough. IGNOU had to ensure that the delivery of the programmes was strengthened with high quality services too. The instruments that ensured the quality of student services and learner support were the Study Centres and the Academic Counsellors at those centres. Most of these centres were located in the local educational institutions, mainly colleges. These colleges provided their facilities (accommodation and staff) after normal college hours; it was convenient for IGNOU students too because most of them were working or otherwise engaged to find time during normal working hours. The college staff running the study centres were paid a nominal honorarium and the teachers were paid an hourly honorarium for helping students with tutorials and other academic counselling. The work of a group of study centres located in each state was coordinated and supervised by IGNOU Regional Centres that are full-time establishments.

From the beginning, IGNOU made efforts to supplement the printed learning packages with multimedia materials as well. With the generous help provided by the Government of UK and later by Japan, IGNOU had developed the capacity and competence to develop and produce audio and video materials that were made available at the study centres. Although the creation of effective communication networks was one of the major strategies, it did not really happen till the late 1990s. The initial phase had therefore to do with audio and video tapes and play back facilities provided at the study centres. Nevertheless, the use of technology in establishing effective communication networks was always integral to IGNOU's strategy for development, and in close cooperation with the Indian Space Research Organisation, several experiments were under way in organising one-way video and two-way audio conferencing with students assembled at Regional Centres and occasional satellite-delivered teleconferencing between students and academic counsellors. We shall come back to the technology integration in IGNOU programme delivery when we look at the second phase of development.

Besides the quality of the materials and the methods of their delivery, considerable attention was also given to the provision of a variety of services to the learners. Admissions were decentralised through the Study Centres/Regional Centres, students assignments and feedback were available from the study centres that also function as the examination centres twice a year, and computerised student record management helped prompt attention to student services like provision of grade cards, progress cards and records of fee payments, etc.

As we had noted earlier, IGNOU had tried to involve a variety of stakeholders in its programme development initiatives; employer organisations and professional bodies were among them. More importantly, skill development was built into the programme structure. There was, therefore, no major problem for IGNOU graduates in finding jobs. Those who wanted to pursue further education by enrolling in traditional universities also did not encounter any significant impediment

if they met the prescribed merit criteria. After all, IGNOU is an institution established under an Act of Parliament and its degrees and awards have the sanction of law.

It does not follow that the question of quality of the education provided is settled by law. We shall look at the issues of quality in the provision of distance education when we take up the standard setting function assigned to IGNOU in the next Unit.

The recognition by the COL as a Centre of Excellence in Distance Education offered, provided IGNOU the opportunity for exploring the possibility of offering its programmes abroad. Several countries and organisations in India's neighbourhood, the Gulf region, the African Continent and the Caribbean Islands have been asking IGNOU to offer its programmes in those countries and/or make available its learning materials for use by their institutions. In 1997, IGNOU established its first set of nine study centres in the Gulf Region. Since then, the number of overseas centres has been going up steadily and in 2010, IGNOU had 60 study centres in 36 countries across South Asia, the Gulf Region, and Africa.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

a) What made the senior teachers and scholars to contribute to IGNOU course materials in the initial stages? (Answer in about 50 words)

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b) What aspects are contributed by IGNOU to maintain quality? (Answer in about 30 words)

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1.5 IGNOU-EMERGENCE OF A GLOBAL PROVIDER: THE SECOND PHASE

In the previous sections, we have tried to trace the development and growth of IGNOU as a leading ODL provider. In what follows we shall take a close look at IGNOU as it operates today, and some of the recent initiatives it has taken including the new directions that are emerging.

1.5.1 New Perspectives and New Approaches

We had mentioned that the IGNOU legislation provided a vision for the University; it was not just about developing and offering traditional academic programmes of higher education for the college-going students. The legislation envisaged that the university will, apart from diversifying degree, diploma and certificate programmes and enhancing access to educational opportunities for large numbers of people, especially those in remote and rural areas, working people and women

at homes, and shall, in particular, engage with the imparting of knowledge and skills necessary for building the economy of the country. We had discussed how the university has tried to translate this vision into a reality in the initial years. The planning perspectives and directions clearly required the university to embark upon initiatives that addressed the employment needs. A large number of initiatives were taken in the first 15 years. These included:

- Launching of programmes with the explicit support and cooperation from professional bodies like the Indian Nursing Council;
- An MBA programme for the banking industry developed in cooperation with the Indian Bankers' Association;
- Degree, diploma and certificate programmes in tourism and hospitality management, etc.; and
- Two skill development programmes were developed for workers in the construction industry and those engaged in tanneries (leather industry).

In the initial stages, only those programmes that promised degrees and diplomas attracted any significant enrolment. The skill development programme for construction workers and leather industry personnel did not attract much attention. Perhaps, it was a reflection of the mindset of the 1990s. There is growing evidence now to show that this mindset is changing decisively and today more people are willing to join vocational and skill development programmes, irrespective of their educational background. Programmes of training in skill development in a variety of fields ranging from poultry farming to garment stitching, event management and fashion industry to shoe making are now on the list of programmes of IGNOU. This change in the mindset is apparently due to several reasons:

- A university degree does not necessarily guarantee a job; employers often complain that university graduates do not have the skills or the competence required at the workplace to solve problems arising on a day-to-day basis;
- Most employer organisations emphasise the essentiality of a set of skills that every graduate must possess to become an effective worker and that the curricula offered by the colleges and universities are grossly inadequate to develop these skill sets;
- The emphasis on degrees and examinations has robbed education of its basic purpose of training the individual and making people responsible to themselves and to the society; and
- The repeated call from education reformers and high level commissions like the Knowledge Commission of India to reorient the education system to ensure skill development among people as a necessary condition for growth and development.

It is to IGNOU's credit that it has seized the initiative in this direction in the last few years and launched a large number of programmes for skill development in a wide spectrum of areas ranging from aircraft maintenance to airline ticketing and entrepreneurship development to Motor Cycle Service and Repair. In more ways than one, this new initiative takes IGNOU on the path of fulfilling its original mission.

In an arguably controversial initiative, IGNOU had launched a large number of programmes on the campus that involve face-to-face teaching (between 2008-

2011). Most of these programmes are at the Master's level in such subjects as Chemistry, Life Science, Journalism and Mass communication, Electronic Media Production and Management, Actuarial Science, Actuarial Economics, Applied Quantitative Finance, Environmental Economics and the areas of performing arts, visual arts (classical dance forms, painting and music). There have been different views on this initiative. While some welcomed it, some critics felt that entry into full-time campus-based programme could become a drain on IGNOU's resources and might dilute its main mandate as a provider of distance education.

1.5.2 Distance Education and Technology Integration

While discussing the organisation and structure in the previous section, we mentioned that IGNOU began its journey in 1985 with not too much of a technological support system at its disposal. It depended primarily on low-cost technologies, audio tapes and video cassettes and playback facilities at the study centres. It did not have even a worthwhile media production facility; nor were the national television and radio networks involved in the broadcast of educational programmes. In fact, the national television network acquired significant coverage of the country through terrestrial transmission only in 1982 with a reach of about 65-70% of the population. Colour television was just launched at this stage and entertainment was the primary focus of the television network. There were no 24-hour channels then, and programme transmission was limited to specified hours in the mornings and evenings. The radio network played some part in education broadcasts, but it was confined to a few local stations that joined some universities and/or selected development agencies like the State Departments of Agriculture and Health to broadcast programmes to improve community awareness. Radio as an instrument for curriculum-based educational broadcasts was practically unknown.

We mention these circumstances to underline the point that the availability of a well established and developed technology infrastructure is not necessarily a pre-requisite for the successful launch of ODL in any country. As we said earlier, the nucleus of the initial Communication Division of the IGNOU comprised not more than one or two specialists associated with the delivery of agricultural extension programmes at local radio stations. Nevertheless, IGNOU recognised the need to build on this nucleus, and with the support provided by the government of UK, initiated serious efforts to build capacity in the production and transmission of media materials to support the printed learning packages. The IGNOU-ODA project for capacity building in electronic media production lasted through the most part of the first ten years of its operation. During this period, IGNOU also secured support from Japan to establish a state-of-the-art media production facility on its campus. These two projects together launched IGNOU on the path of technology integration in its ODL delivery systems.

India had recognised the significance of technologies in developing and expanding education. As early as in 1975, with the support of NASA, who provided the satellite transmission facility, Indian Space Research Organisation conducted an experiment covering several districts in six states to reach out to village communities with instructional programmes in general education, health and agriculture. The experiment called Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) yielded valuable lessons in technology applications in the field of education. But it was not until 1983 that India could launch its own satellite and commence, among others, educational broadcasts on a modest scale. And it took another 12-15 years before India could claim that it has created the infrastructure to make educational broadcasts an enduring success. We shall discuss how these

early efforts blossomed into the building of full-scale education technology infrastructure and the launch of dedicated education satellites and several transmission channels in the following section.

1.5.3 Networking and Collaboration

In the last decade or so, IGNOU made a decisive breakthrough in securing the cooperation and collaboration with a very large number of organisations and establishments for developing and introducing several innovative academic programmes and also skill development initiatives. These networking and collaborative initiatives envisage the following major objectives:

- Specialised professional bodies and agencies associate with IGNOU in developing academic programmes and training;
- Large establishments with a countrywide network of their own join IGNOU in developing and delivering programmes of education and training;
- National and International Organisations joining IGNOU in extending the range of programmes as well as its outreach;
- Collaborations for sharing learning materials;
- Sharing the broadcast transmission facility of radio and television (Gyan Vani and Gyan Darshan) and establishing and managing FM radio broadcasting at other universities; and
- The Community colleges scheme that seeks to empower those who missed mainstream educational opportunities.

In the last five years (2006-2010), over 300 memoranda of understanding were signed with various national and international organisations for cooperation and collaboration. It would be worthwhile to look at some of them to gain a deeper understanding of the scope and purpose of these collaborative initiatives.

The IGNOU-ISRO collaboration and EDUSAT supported interactive networks and National Repositories was a major initiative launched by the university in collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in the mid-1990s. It was a modest beginning then with the limited objective of testing the effectiveness of education broadcasting. In 2000, drawing upon the ISRO-supported ICT networks, IGNOU started TV transmission of less than 1500 hours per year. With the launching of a dedicated education satellite (EDUSAT) in 2004, and the commencement of the Gyan Darshan bouquet of channels based on IGNOU's Media Production facility, the 24-hour education channels now transmit programmes of education and training of several institutions and organisations.

The Indian Army-IGNOU collaboration for the education and training of the armed services personnel has been a significant instance of extending the benefits of education through the ODL system. The 1.5 million strong Indian Army sees about 50,000 of its soldiers retire every year. This body of disciplined, hardy, trained, intelligent human capital is an asset for any nation-building process. The Army-IGNOU collaboration project envisages the use of 47 Regimental Army Training Academies as the Army-IGNOU Community Colleges that would provide the serving soldiers the opportunity to pursue a structured vocational training programme of their choice and acquire an Associate degree from IGNOU that would equip them with the knowledge and skills to seek a second career on retirement at a relatively young age. Under this project some 125,000 Indian

soldiers were enrolled in this programme. As employers of large workforce, the Indian Air Force and Navy and the Indian Railways are also considering similar initiatives. This initiative of large employer organisations turning to a credible ODL provider to train their work force at their work places have indeed turned a new chapter in education-employment linkages and collaboration and the ODL system emerging as the key to the success of such collaboration. In fact, this initiative is a testimony to the success of ODL becoming the instrument for the training of a large mass of serving personnel without disturbing them from their workplace. In the mid-1990s when this cooperation began, IGNOU agreed to enrol serving personnel of the Indian Army on its programmes and to provide all learner support to them through specially designated establishments of the Army that were called recognised Regional Centres and Study Centres. What came to be known as a 'Single Window Operation' for the delivery of services soon emerged as a model of large employers turning as learning service providers at work places with the support of IGNOU. This experiment has turned out to be a new model for work-integrated education.

The Community Colleges Scheme, launched in 2009 is another significant initiative of IGNOU. The key concept of this scheme is the provision of an alternate system of education to those who for some reason or other have missed the opportunity of mainstream education. The provision of academic programmes based on the needs of the community at the Certificate, Diploma and Associate Degree levels, focused primarily on vocational studies is, in many ways, a new skill development initiative backed by the association of a large national university. In the first year of its launch, the scheme attracted some 270 vocational training institutes from across the country; in the second year, the number has gone up to 517 and the enrolment rose to 43,000. Though a modest beginning, the scheme primarily focuses on endowing vocational studies and skill development initiatives with social acceptability, employer credibility and education-work integration. The provision for the award of an Associate degree from IGNOU that could be a bridge for earning regular university degrees at a later stage after further education, and the involvement of governments, employers and civil society in the implementation of the scheme surely seeks to address the earlier concerns of the popular perception that vocational education is a terminal stage and those who pursue them will find all roads ahead of them closed for ever.

Check Your Progress 3

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

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

a) How is initiative of full-time campus-based programmes at IGNOU a controversial one? (Answer in about 40 words)

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b) What was the reason for skill development programmes not attracting students in the initial stages of IGNOU? (Answer in about 40 words)

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1.5.4 IGNOU: A Global Provider of ODL

We mentioned briefly in an earlier section of this Unit how international recognition and credibility helped IGNOU reach out to several developing countries and providing opportunities to their students to pursue higher education programmes through the distance mode. We also mentioned the physical dimensions of this reach in that brief discussion.

In this section, we shall explore this journey of India's National Open University in to the international arena and its emergence as a global provider of ODL systems and programmes. As we have said on many occasions, when IGNOU was established in 1985, India did not have a credible and sustainable distance education system. The correspondence mode of education followed by most Indian universities was of an indifferent quality, and apart from the fact that it offered an opportunity for highly motivated students to acquire a university degree through self-study, there was not much of an active involvement of the universities in supporting them with tuition or good quality materials. The immediate challenge before the IGNOU was, therefore, to leave behind the poor image of a university engaged in correspondence education. It has to be admitted that the model of the UKOU that established the credibility and effectiveness of distance education methods (as opposed to the conventional form of correspondence education) was available for IGNOU to emulate. From the beginning, therefore, IGNOU sought the cooperation and collaboration of the UKOU in designing and organising its teaching-learning systems and practices. A joint initiative for this purpose was formalised through an agreement entered into between the Governments of India and the UK.

This collaboration enabled IGNOU to establish the following new approaches:

- Design and organise a national network of learner support services that include local study centres and Regional Centres;
- Establish a professionally managed and efficiently organised materials production and distribution system;
- Create and maintain an automated student record management system; and
- Develop and organise the nucleus of an electronic media production facility that included training of personnel and essential hardware.

This collaboration that began with the founding of IGNOU in 1985 continued through the initial ten years during which IGNOU gained significant experience and competence as a modern distance education provider. The only major area in which IGNOU did not seek any support from UKOU was content development for its courses and programmes though the quality and standards of the UKOU course materials set the benchmark for IGNOU's own efforts.

As we mentioned earlier, the high quality of IGNOU courseware soon captured the attention of the international community, especially those in the developing countries of Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. What began with visits of personnel from these regions to acquaint themselves with the ways in which IGNOU went about establishing its distance education system soon developed in to closer and deeper collaboration in efforts at content development, capacity building, exchange of materials and of course in extending the reach of IGNOU programmes to students in these regions who were offered the facility of enrolling themselves in the programmes of their choice and IGNOU eventually setting up its own learner support systems in their home countries. What began with a

modest enrolment of less than 200 students some ten years ago has now turned out to be a global enterprise covering 40 countries in which some 67 study centres are operating with an enrolment of over 35,000 students in 2010.

It is not direct enrolment of foreign nationals in IGNOU programmes that makes IGNOU a global distance education provider. IGNOU is involved in many ways in providing professional, technical and material assistance to several developing countries in establishing and maintaining ODL systems and building their capacity. Some notable efforts in this direction are:

- Capacity building in ODL through professional training of working and potential distance education personnel. Apart from the fellowship scheme sponsored by the Commonwealth of Learning for personnel from the developing countries of the Commonwealth to pursue IGNOU's MA degree programme in Distance Education, some universities in Africa, for instance, have been permitted to run this programme as their own and enrol students. The Universities of Addis Ababa, Ghana and the National Open University of Nigeria fall in this category.
- Facilities are provided by IGNOU to distance education personnel from the developing countries to visit IGNOU to acquaint themselves with the methods and practices followed by IGNOU in every aspect of its operations ranging from course development and production, material storage and distribution, learner support systems and their organisation, media production and diffusion, etc.
- IGNOU is now involved in a big way in the establishment and maintenance of the Pan African e-Network that delivers learning materials and services to all the 53 countries in the African continent;
- IGNOU has entered into collaborative arrangements with several international providers of distance education to deliver the programmes and courses developed by them to students who wish to pursue those programmes;
- IGNOU has also established close collaboration with international agencies like the UNESCO, the Commonwealth of Learning, etc. to extend and strengthen the provision of ODL as an effective instrument for widening access to education, provision of educational opportunities in areas that are relevant to the life and work of people who are at work, but do not have any formal educational qualifications to advance in their careers.

1.5.5 IGNOU: The Profile in Numbers

Having discussed the different stages and forms through which IGNOU has moved from a modest distance education provider 30 years ago to a modern ODL system and a global player, it would be useful to take a look at the profile of the university. The following Table provides a graphic picture of the physical dimensions of the operations of IGNOU:

Strategic Goals	2000	2005	2010	2019
Programmes on offer	50	101	445	241
Students Registered	196,650	366,161	650,598	11,47,056
Students on Rolls	561,167	1,311,145	2,677,527	30,93,583
Schools of Studies			21	21

Regional Centres	21	54	62	67
Learner Support Centres	376	1,200	3,107	3430
Overseas Centres		35	67	26
Academic Counsellors	20,000	33,300	39,000	64,470
Staff				
a) Faculty	294	300	752	503
b) Others	1383	1069	2191	1343
Students awarded degrees/diplomas/certificates (cumulative numbers)	53,298	468,196	1,108,452	

1.5.6 Some Lessons

As students of distance education, what are the lessons you would like to draw from the phenomenal growth and development of an open university in a developing country? At the outset, it has to be admitted that the large numbers tell their own story. India has a population of over 1.3 billion people and the large numbers joining its education system are only a natural reflection of its size. Nevertheless, there are important indicators behind these numbers. We shall try to take a close look at them.

As we have mentioned repeatedly, India launched its distance education initiative as early as in 1962 with the introduction of correspondence education. Many universities followed this experiment; correspondence education attracted sizable numbers of students. Except for the highly motivated who could benefit from self-study, correspondence education did not make any noticeable impact on the country's goal of augmenting educational opportunities. At best, it served two major purposes; first, it helped those who were keen on obtaining a university degree, and second, it helped universities to augment their revenue. In just about two decades, the correspondence provision lost credibility and serious doubts were raised about their utility. The environment into which IGNOU made its entry was not, by any means, too welcome though it promised to make the distance education provision far more attractive, relevant and purposeful. In what we have described above, we have tried to elaborate how IGNOU redeemed this promise and captured the imagination of the Indian people. We shall briefly recapitulate some of these efforts:

- From the beginning, IGNOU focused its attention on offering programmes that were relevant to the aspirations of people who were looking for opportunities for education. Though offering conventional degree programmes was an easier option, IGNOU did not succumb to this temptation. Instead, it began to explore possibilities of providing educational programmes that might benefit large numbers of working people who, for want of any recognised qualifications, were stagnating in their careers. They could not afford enrolment in traditional institutions due to a variety of reasons that included rigid entry requirements like formal qualifications, age, relocation from work place to campuses and not the least the loss of income caused by the absence from work. IGNOU's choice of the initial programme mix was dictated by these considerations and the decision to launch programmes in such areas as business studies for working personnel, first degree programmes with a pronounced bias towards skill development and a number

of diploma and certificate programmes that either enhanced the employability of the educated unemployed or improved the knowledge and understanding of people in general irrespective of their age, gender, previous qualifications and stations in life. These innovative approaches to choice of programmes and courses gave IGNOU a warm welcome and an enthusiastic response.

- Though over a period IGNOU's programme mix did reflect the significance of traditional degree programmes, the emphasis was always on more employment-related areas. IGNOU recognised that there was a large constituency of people at work who could advance in their career if only they could improve their qualifications either by acquiring a traditional degree or by doing specialised professional qualifications. The general Bachelor's degree programme as well as the diploma and degree programmes in such areas as computer applications, management, library science, nursing, etc in the initial stages set the stage to establish the credentials of IGNOU as a university with a difference that promised enormous potential and resolve to enter uncharted areas with the close involvement of professional bodies, employer associations and well known experts and professionals. The curricula of the programmes and courses reflected this involvement that ensured the credibility of programmes and their acceptability by user agencies.
- The significant move towards skill development initiatives in the later stages, especially of those at work, further strengthened the relevance and significance of IGNOU as an educational provider that uses distance education methods and practices. The fact that large employer organisations like the Indian Army, the Railways, etc. have been seeking the help of IGNOU to train their workforce at their workplace strengthens the view that distance education methods and practices are efficient and effective from the perspective of both the employers and the employees. This model of employer-ODL provider collaboration can be replicated even in smaller countries where small employer groups can come together in clusters for training their employees in fields that are common to their employee interests.
- The success of distance education systems does not necessarily depend on investments in high technologies or the levels of their sophistication. For almost two decades after its launch, IGNOU relied on low-cost technologies like audio and video tapes and playback facilities at the study centres to enhance the learning experience of its students. The use of these technologies in the initial phase helped create an environment that supported application of better technologies as they became available and accessible to larger numbers, as the demand for distance education facilities multiplied and the technologies themselves became increasingly sophisticated. Thus the transition from audio and video tapes to live satellite transmission of interactive teaching-learning sessions was a natural process. The most important lesson from this transition is that instead of technology driving the provision of distance education, it was the increasing demand for distance education facilities that drove technology expansion and applications in fields that are of primary significance to the lives and work of people (education, health, etc.).
- The growth and development of IGNOU in the last 30 years have provided very valuable learning experience to India's education system. For instance, it has established beyond doubt that the effectiveness of the education system depends as much on the relevance of the provision as on its quality.

Conventional degree programmes that merely emphasised knowledge transfer and responded more to the quest for a university degree as a status symbol are slowly but surely yielding place to more application-based skill development initiatives that enhanced the employability of graduates and their productivity in the employing sectors. Equally importantly, it has proved that learning is a lifelong process and that any person who is willing and has the desire to learn has the opportunity and the means to do so and move from one level of accomplishment to the next throughout his/her life and effective ODL systems are the means to help people achieve this goal. The IGNOU experiment of Community Colleges that help people to acquire formal qualifications/certificates and the nation to build a vast repertoire of skilled workforce is indeed a major step forward that is worthy of emulation by ODL systems in the developing countries.

- Having highlighted the major initiatives and achievements of IGNOU during the last quarter of a century, it would be worthwhile to reflect on the possible directions of development in the future. By all accounts, IGNOU is perhaps the largest university in the world. The scale of its operations, the diversity of its functions, and the reach of its responsibilities not just within India but across the world including the whole African continent, place extraordinary planning and management responsibilities on this institution. Quite naturally, issues concerning efficiency, costs and quality will acquire greater attention as well as concern in the near future. While it is not for us to suggest the course of future action, as planners and managers, we need to take note of these issues and reflect on possible steps that need to be taken to ensure that IGNOU remains the largest university in the world and also one of the best.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

We have presented in this Unit the founding of an open university that has, in a span of about three decades, developed into the largest open university in the world. It is not just the student numbers that make the IGNOU what it is today. Its reach, the diversity of its functions, the range, relevance and the depth of its programme mix that responds to a variety of learner needs, its capacity and willingness to join forces with all those who are willing and keen to extend educational opportunities through sharing their facilities and competence, and not the least, its readiness to engage with the less glamorous field of skill development, make it, by any reckoning, a truly modern distance education provider. It had a big vacuum to fill: the gross enrolment ratio in higher education in the mid 1980's in India was no more than 7-8%. Still, IGNOU did not choose just the conventional academic programmes only; it had entered several new fields that offered opportunities for employment ranging from business studies and computer applications to early child care as well as food and nutrition. In many ways, these initiatives made IGNOU relevant and distance education systems and methods credible.

1.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) conferred the status of Centre of Excellence on IGNOU for the quality materials developed for Master's Degree Distance Education Programme.

Check Your Progress 2

- a) Well known senior teachers and scholars in their relevant subjects contributed to IGNOU by writing the course materials not so much for what they are paid as a token honorarium, but their urge to share their knowledge and experience with the less privileged members of the society who would not have had the opportunity to learn at universities and colleges.
- b) Besides the quality of the materials and the methods of their delivery significant attention was given to the provision of diverse services to the learners. These services include – admissions decentralisation to SCs, assignments and feedback availability at SCs, computerised student record management to process grade cards, fee payment etc. While maintaining quality all these aspects have to be kept in mind.

Check Your Progress 3

- a) It is a controversial area because of many reasons, mainly because the mandate of IGNOU is to provide programmes through distance education, when it is deviated from that it could become a drain on IGNOU's intellectual and physical resources.
- b) The mindset of people in 1990s i.e. initial stages of IGNOU was to join in the programmes which fetch degrees and diplomas; hence skill development programmes offered at that time did not attract students.

