



The Open Schools Handbook

A Resource Guide
for Managers

ED DU VIVIER



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

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The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

 Commonwealth of Learning, 2009

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The Open Schools Handbook: A Resource Guide for Managers

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This book is one in a developing series of handbooks for practitioners in open and distance learning (ODL). The series covers the key roles and functions of ODL systems from the practitioner perspective. The purpose is to give practitioners advice and guidance about their tasks, functions and roles, and to enable practitioners to reflect on the critical issues they face. In this way, the series aims to model good ODL study materials and to provide key study materials for ODL training. In developing this series, the Commonwealth of Learning seeks to address the needs of ODL practitioners for accessible and practical training materials for professional development.

The Commonwealth of Learning is interested in hearing how you have used this handbook and in any feedback you may wish to give, including how you have adapted and added to the handbook, so that we can all share from each other's experience. Please send your feedback to Frances Ferreira, Educational Specialist (Basic Educations and Open Schooling) (e-mail: fferreira@col.org).

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PREFACE

In the decades since its foundation in 1988, the Commonwealth of Learning has published a variety of resources aimed at promoting and supporting the development of open and distance learning (ODL). Many of these address issues of particular relevance to tertiary-level ODL institutions and reflect that context. This handbook has been developed specifically for practitioners who seek to provide primary, secondary and vocational education for out-of-school learners using ODL methods.

The handbook has been designed to meet the needs of chief executive officers, managers and other senior staff who are:

- working in existing open schools or colleges
- in the process of setting up a pre-tertiary ODL institution from scratch, or
- charged with the transformation of a unit in a government structure into an autonomous open school.

This handbook can be used in a number of ways, including as:

- an informative text offering practical suggestions and advice
- a “how to” guide with step-by-step instructions for carrying out common management tasks
- a source of resource materials for a workshop or short training programme
- a kit of management tools
- a reference work to dip into as required, and
- a starting point for networking with other practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

Open schools are institutions that provide education through open and distance learning methods. Normally, this education is at the primary or secondary level, but open schools may also offer vocational, enrichment and pre-tertiary courses or programmes. If you are not familiar with this form of learning, a number of questions are likely to arise:

- Why is open schooling important?
- What is open and distance learning?
- What methods are used to deliver open and distance learning courses?
- What decisions need to be taken when setting up an open school?

The discussion below seeks to answer these questions. Even if you are already working as a manager in an open school, this introduction may prove useful in stimulating further discussion and debate on the future of your institution.

RATIONALE FOR OPEN SCHOOLING

In recent decades, dramatic strides have been taken in countries around the world towards achieving the goal of universal primary education. As a result, more and more young people are coming up through the lower grades and want to enter secondary education. Currently, conventional secondary schools are unable to absorb all of the pupils who have successfully completed their primary education. While the global average for gross enrolment in secondary school is 65 per cent, the rate in sub-Saharan Africa is less than half that figure (30 per cent). Those living in rural areas may not have access to education at this level. In most countries, participation rates for girls also lag far behind those for boys. In addition, there is a significant demand from young and not-so-young adults in developing countries who were unable to complete their secondary education when they were younger (Daniel, 2008: 1).

Ambitious programmes for building new schools are being undertaken in many countries. However, financial resources are rarely adequate to meet the capital costs of construction. Even when funding is available, it can take several years to complete all phases of planning, procurement and construction. Moreover,

The study concludes by noting that “as the demand for secondary schooling increases, open schooling is neither a second chance nor a second choice possibility but is the only option that can help us to achieve Education for All” (COL, 2008: 4).

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Open and distance learning (ODL) refers to a combination of two approaches that share a common aim of expanding access to education (Freeman, 2004: 6–7).

Open learning is a loosely defined term that is used to describe both a philosophy and a set of methods for providing education. By removing what are seen as barriers to learning, supporters of this approach seek to encourage participants to take charge of their own learning. This involves giving learners greater control over:

- **Pace.** Rather than trying to keep up with others, learners can progress at their own pace, taking time off when needed for work or family commitments.
- **Place.** Learners are free to choose the most convenient place to study, whether that is at home, in the workplace, in a local library or resource centre, or in a school.
- **Time.** Learners do not have to carry out these activities in accordance with a fixed schedule. Instead, they can find the most convenient time to pursue their studies and finish the course when they are able.
- **Process.** Rather than following a prescribed path through the content of a course, learners are given the freedom to choose how they approach the material. They can also choose activities that suit their preferred styles of learning.

Where possible, open learning programmes eliminate entrance requirements for courses so that those without formal educational qualifications are able to further their studies (Freeman, 2004: 39–40).

Distance education, on the other hand, is a term used to describe methods where teacher and learner are physically separated from each other for most of a course. In its earliest form – the correspondence course – distance education

interactions between learners and their tutors that take place at different times. For example, when a learner submits an assignment by post, a considerable period of time can pass before the assignment is marked and returned.

ODL methods evolve as educational technology develops. Correspondence courses used the most up-to-date technology of their time – the printing press and the postal system – to deliver content and facilitate learning experiences. Since that time, the introduction of new teaching and learning technologies have transformed distance education processes in stages that may be thought of as a series of generations (Garrison, 1985; Bates, 1995: 23). Correspondence courses represent the first generation of distance education technology, which was characterised by asynchronous instruction and paper-based materials.

Second generation distance education delivery methods incorporate multiple media – audio and video. These enrich the learning process and enable learners to experience processes (such as scientific experiments or the pronunciation of words in a foreign language) that would be difficult or impossible to illustrate on paper alone. The advantage of audio and video materials is that once they are recorded, they can be delivered either synchronously (via radio or television broadcasts) or asynchronously (via audio or video cassette tapes, CDs or DVDs).

The development of information and communications technologies in the 1980s and 1990s created a third generation of ODL methods. For example, computer-assisted learning packages enable students to receive immediate feedback on their performance in multiple-choice tests or mathematical problems. The emergence of the World Wide Web as a powerful tool for information sharing and research, along with affordable access to broadband Internet, has facilitated the development of this new generation of ODL delivery methods. Many institutions, particularly at the tertiary level, have adopted virtual learning environments or other learning management systems, where students can:

- attend lectures virtually, by reading notes, viewing presentations, listening to podcasts or viewing webcasts;
- access reading assignments from electronic textbooks or journals;
- take part in virtual seminars either synchronously (through chat rooms or web cams) or asynchronously (by means of threaded e-mail discussions);
- interact with their classmates to complete group projects;

Activity for Managers

Before proceeding further, as a manager in an open school you need to clarify how your beliefs about ODL will be translated into practice. There are several key issues that should be decided in consultation with stakeholders and other managers and staff members at your institution. These are particularly important if you are in the process of setting up a new open school, but those working in existing institutions would also benefit from reflecting on the questions below.

1. Open Access or Not?

- *Should learners be allowed to enrol in your open school regardless of their previous level of education?*
- *What practical problems might arise if you removed all entry requirements for those who wish to study at your open school?*

Many open schools seek to remove barriers to access by getting rid of entrance requirements. However, learners may need to have a minimum level of proficiency in another language if the medium of instruction is different from their mother tongue. Likewise, those pursuing certain courses may require some prior knowledge of the subject. In addition, not everyone will have the same capacity for learning on their own, which requires good study skills and habits. Studies have shown that dropout rates can be higher when entry requirements are eliminated (Freeman, 2004: 44–45).

Even when ODL institutions put in place opportunities for open access and build in mechanisms for supporting those who are new to the system, some categories of potential learners tend not to enrol in the numbers expected.

- *Who might be unintentionally excluded from your institution's courses or programmes?*
- *What can your school do to reach out to them?*

Cost is likely to be an issue for many learners. Even when fees are kept low or eliminated, learners must spend money on a variety of things (books, stationery, travel to tutorial or examination centres, etc.) in order to pursue their studies. Physical disability can also act as a barrier to access, though this is usually less of a problem when studying at a distance. Issues associated with gender, race and/or ethnicity can also have an impact on enrolments (Freeman, 2004: 45–46).

though it is often assigned to a national qualifications authority or a professional association with international links. These bodies set minimum standards for qualifications at different levels, including school-leaving certificates and qualifications for different professions (e.g., legal practitioners or accountants).

Although continuous assessment is widely used in the classroom, examinations are the most common form of assessment marking the end of different phases of formal education. Many countries have established bodies to administer a national system of examinations at the end of primary school, and again on completion of the junior and senior cycles of secondary education. Some open schools make arrangements for their learners to sit for these examinations so that any certificates they receive will be recognised as equivalent to those awarded to school-based students.

Alternatively, those registered with an open school may sit for examinations administered by an international body that also awards certificates. Finally, an open school may choose to set its own examinations and award its own certificates while seeking to have these accredited by national or international authorities.

Since the requirements for certification and accreditation must be built into any learning materials that your school develops, as managers you must have confidence in the system you select. Changing over to another system of certification and accreditation at a later date will be very costly. (Freeman, 2004: 61–62)

- *Which body will set, invigilate, mark and moderate examinations for learners registered with your open school?*
- *Which body will award certificates to successful candidates?*
- *How will these certificates be accredited?*

SUMMARY

Open schools can provide courses of comparable quality to conventional educational institutions at a considerably lower cost. Setting up an open school or making an existing ODL institution work better involves a number of critical issues related to access, pacing, modes of delivery, assessment, certification and accreditation. To a great extent, the future direction of your open school depends on the decisions taken at this stage. For this reason, adequate time should be set aside for stakeholders to discuss their concerns in relation to the issues raised in this brief introductory section.

SUGGESTED READING

- Butcher, Neill. December 2003. *Technological Infrastructure and Use of ICT in Education in Africa: An Overview*. Phoenix, Mauritius: Working Group on Distance Education and Open Learning (WGDEOL), Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA).
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chapter 1

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR AN OPEN SCHOOL

Effective planning is essential to the success of any initiative undertaken by an open school. While planning should be done every time a change is introduced in an organisation, strategic planning is a process that normally takes place every three to five years. Strategic planning involves deciding what your open school aims to achieve in the medium term.

This chapter addresses the following questions:

- Why is strategic planning important?
- What is involved in strategic planning?
- How should we go about it?
- What are the steps involved in preparing or updating a strategic plan?

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING CYCLE

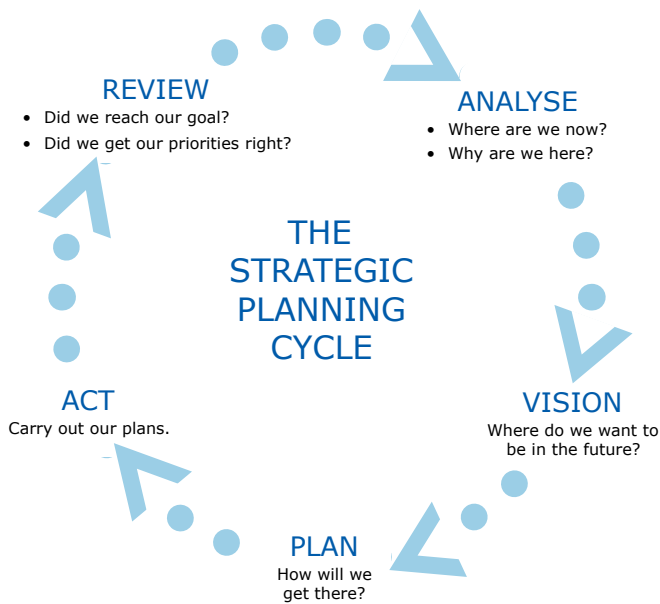
Strategic planning involves reflecting on where your open school is now, imagining where you would like it to be in the future and thinking of ways to make that vision a reality. However, planning should be a cyclical process. Regular reviews are required to identify the successes and failures in implementing the plan and the lessons learnt should be used to modify future planning. This strategic planning cycle is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

A strategic plan document is normally drawn up in a step-by-step fashion, starting with the broad picture and progressively narrowing in focus until detailed action plans have been devised for each new development. The outline for a typical strategic planning document looks something like this:

- Analysis of the current situation or context
- Mission and/or vision statement

- Organisational values
- Goals or aims
- Strategies or objectives
- Action plans
- Business plans.

FIGURE 1.1: THE STRATEGIC PLANNING CYCLE



This chapter outlines the steps you need to take in preparing a strategic plan for your open school or college. If you are working with a community-based organisation to provide alternative educational opportunities, you should refer to *Training for Transformation* (Hope and Timmel, 1995: Book III, 83–131), which provides instructions for another planning model more appropriate for use with such groups.

WHY IS PLANNING IMPORTANT?

Participants at a recent workshop of open school managers were asked, “Why is planning important?” Some of the answers they gave were:



- Planning provides a framework or structure to guide decision-making.
- Planning offers the opportunity to challenge existing paradigms – to look beyond the constraints of the current situation and imagine how things might be.
- Planning challenges stakeholders to be creative in devising ways to achieve your vision.
- Planning links the activities of your open school to broader goals in national development plans.
- Planning involves all staff and stakeholders in developing a common understanding of where you want to be in the future.
- Planning focuses on the issue of sustainability and provides the information needed to prepare funding proposals.
- Planning helps to ensure that you are meeting the needs of your learners.
- Planning forms the basis for assessing your school’s achievements and ensuring that it is accountable both internally and externally.



Unity, commitment and energy grow strikingly in a group when there is a clear goal which all believe in.

Anne Hope & Sally Timmel



All of these are important reasons for carrying out a strategic planning exercise.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

Strategic planning is most effective when it is done through participatory processes. There are many groups in society who have an interest or stake in the type of education offered and how it is provided. These groups include some or all of the following:

- current and potential learners;
- learners’ parents or other family members;
- other target groups identified as potential beneficiaries (for example, students in schools);
- communities in which these beneficiaries live;
- government, including office holders and senior officials at national, regional or local levels;
- potential funders, including international and local donors;
- members of your school’s governing body or advisory committee;

STEP 1 – SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The first step in the strategic planning process is to assess the current situation and context within which your open school must operate. It involves taking a frank look at institutional strengths and weaknesses, as well as analysing the wider national and international environment that may have an impact on the future of your school. There are several different ways to go about this.

Legal and Policy Framework

Any planning process must take account of existing policies (whether national, provincial, regional, local or institutional) that will influence developments in the education sector. In addition, a decision to pursue a particular course of action may face legal constraints in the form of provisions contained in primary legislation (acts of parliament), ministerial regulations or other statutory instruments. These should be reviewed in a systematic way by senior managers at the outset of any strategic planning exercise.

Activity for Managers

Prior to getting together to begin planning, one participant should be assigned the task of collecting existing legal and policy documents and becoming familiar with their contents. Photocopies of the relevant sections should also be made for others involved in this stage of the planning process.

- *What market research or consultations have taken place to assess needs? What are different stakeholders likely to say if they are asked about their expectations?*
- *How have these needs and expectations been met in the past? Are other institutions or organisations providing similar services? How will the services we offer be different?*
- *What policies (whether written or unwritten) are in place to guide your decisions about providing these services?*
- *What legal provisions (if any) are in place in the jurisdiction to authorise or regulate the activities that will be carried out by your open school? Is any additional legal authority required?*

Opportunities What is happening outside our organisation that we could capitalise on?

Threats What significant external events have the potential to affect our performance?

The benefits of a SWOT analysis can be maximised by following some simple rules:

- Remember that this exercise focuses on the current state of your institution and the wider environment, not on where you expect to be at some point in the future.
- Be honest and realistic about the strengths and weaknesses of your open school. No one will benefit if things are exaggerated or problems are ignored.
- Try to be as specific as possible when listing points. Avoid generalisations and grey areas.
- Remember that a SWOT analysis will always be subjective. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Keep the exercise short and simple. Avoid complexity and over-analysis. (Marketing Teacher, 2000–2008)

An example of a SWOT analysis for an open school might look something like Figure 1.4.

FIGURE 1.4: SWOT ANALYSIS EXAMPLE

	Positive	Negative
Internal	<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to provide courses of a standard comparable to conventional schools but at lower cost • dedicated and well-trained staff 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a majority of learners are severely disadvantaged and cannot pay substantial fees • examination results of our learners lag behind those of students from conventional schools
External	<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • growing demand for secondary education which cannot be met by existing school system • potential new market for technical and vocational training 	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public opinion views ODL institutions as inferior to conventional schools • downturn in the global economy may have an impact on funding for our school

Another tool for carrying out a situational analysis is PEST. This explores Political, Economic, Socio-cultural and Technological factors that may have an impact on the future of an open school. (See http://www.marketingteacher.com/Lessons/lesson_PEST.htm).

STEP 2 – MISSION OR VISION STATEMENT

The next step in strategic planning is to develop a clear and concise statement of your institution’s mission and vision for the future. Some authors suggest that separate statements are required for these two aspects of planning. Advocates of this approach say that the mission statement should describe the purpose of the organisation and why it was established. In contrast, the vision statement is intended to describe how the future will appear to potential students and other beneficiaries after the plan has been implemented. Vision statements tend to use more compelling and inspirational language, while mission statements are often functional and pragmatic. In practice, however, there tends to be a considerable overlap between the two.

CASE STUDY

To understand the difference between a mission statement and a vision statement, consider these examples from the National Open School of Trinidad and Tabago (NOSTT):

Vision

To establish a dynamic system that will complement the conventional education system and provide individuals at any stage of educational development with unrestricted access to quality programmes and courses using a blended learning delivery mode.

Mission

To develop and deliver a comprehensive and diverse range of primary, secondary, enrichment, vocational and pre-tertiary open learning programmes and courses enabling unrestricted access to quality open learning experiences, resources and support services through the use of

appropriate technologies, and act as a resource centre and model for an open and distance learning system at the school level.

(NOSTT, accessed May 2008 at http://www.moe.gov.tt/National_Open_School.html)

A mission or vision statement is important because it:

- provides a convenient summary of what your open school aims to do
- can inspire staff and other stakeholders
- can mobilise support around a view of the future
- can act as the driver for the planning process by suggesting goals and objectives
- can serve as the “guiding star” – a point of reference against which you can measure progress.

Once you have drafted a mission and/or vision statement for your open school and it has been approved by your governing structures, it should be prominently displayed on brochures, annual reports, posters and even your letterhead stationery.

Drafting a mission and/or vision statement can be an enjoyable part of the strategic planning process, but make sure to set limits on the time taken for this exercise. One way to go about it is to allow participants to share their dreams for the future. Alternatively, you can brainstorm key words that describe what your open school does or aims to do, including the groups you serve and the services you wish to offer. Participants should also consider what sets your organisation off from others that provide similar courses or services. Once you have written up a list of key words, these can be combined into a coherent statement.

In order to be effective, a mission or vision statement should be short and to the point, preferably no longer than a single sentence. If it

.....
What we consider as
a ground-breaking
record today becomes
a simple minimum
requirement tomorrow.

Frances J. Ferreira
.....

is much longer than that, your mission or vision statement runs the risk of being ignored. Shorter statements often turn into simple slogans, such as “taking education to the people” (NAMCOL) or “removing barriers, providing opportunities, transforming lives” (NOSTT). While creating a slogan for your open school can be useful, it is not a substitute for a well-drafted mission or vision statement. One way of ensuring that your statement is as concise as possible is to go through it word by word, considering how deleting each word would change its scope and impact.

Activity for Managers

1. Consider the following examples of mission and vision statements:

We are committed to providing wider access to quality educational services for our learners and other customers using a variety of open learning methods. (Mission statement, Namibian College of Open Learning, 1998).

To empower the Nation with knowledge and skills through open access to quality, innovative distance learning programmes and services for the promotion of global competitiveness and a culture of life-long learning. (Mission statement, Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning)

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), with international recognition and presence, provides access to sustainable and learner-centric quality school education, skill upgradation and training through open and distance learning and ensures convergence of open schooling organisations, resulting in an inclusive learning society, human resource development, national integration and global understanding. (Vision statement, from presentation by M.C. Pant, Chairman: National Institute of Open Schooling)

2. Now answer the following questions:

- *How complete is each statement? Does it provide you with enough information for you to understand what each open school does or aims to do?*
- *How accessible is each statement? Do you think that staff, students and other stakeholders are likely to read these statements and take away something meaningful?*

- *If your open school has a mission and/or vision statement, evaluate it in light of the discussion above.*
- *What positive ideas can you take away from this exercise to help in developing or improving your own mission and/or vision statement?*

STEP 3 – ORGANISATIONAL VALUES

The preceding exercises should have involved some debate about the most appropriate wording of your mission and/or vision statement. Sometimes, we use words borrowed from different contexts without recognising the values and belief systems they refer to. This can convey meanings that were not intended. For example, the word “customers” is taken from a business environment and its use in NAMCOL’s mission statement (see above) implies a particular orientation to the people served by the college. It is important to make explicit the values and assumptions implicit in the language we use in strategic planning in order to ensure that there is a broad consensus among staff and stakeholders.

Activity for Managers

Without trying to suggest what values your organisation should subscribe to, the following questions might be considered in discussion with other stakeholders:

- *Is promoting equality between different groups a priority for your organisation?*
- *How is power (embodied in wealth, status, knowledge and expertise) distributed in your country? Where does your school stand in this hierarchy of power?*
- *What is the ideal relationship between tutors/teachers and learners/ students? Do the terms we use for these different roles have an impact on the standing of either group?*
- *To what extent do ethnic differences contribute to instability in your society? What contribution (if any) should your institution be making in this area?*
- *What is your attitude to profit and other business practices?*
- *To what extent should learners be responsible for their own advancement?*

- **AIMS** are broad statements that embody a key aspiration in your school’s mission and/or vision. Their wording tends to be general and imprecise, showing only the direction in which you intend to go but not the final destination. For example:

Aim A – In order to enhance the quality of our services, we aim to develop a customer-care orientation among our staff.

- **GOALS** are expressions of what things will be like at a specified point in the future if the plan is carried out. Well-drafted goals should be SMART – that is, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

Some of your goals are likely to relate to the organisation as a whole.

For example:

Goal A – At the end of five years, all current members of staff will have received at least five days of training in customer care.

Others may be linked to specific programmes or courses.

For example:

Goal B – In three years’ time, we will be offering five new courses at the junior secondary level.

- **STRATEGIES** are descriptions of how you plan to achieve your goals. There may be several different ways to achieve a particular goal. For example, in order to meet Goal A (above), you might decide to:

Strategy A.1 – Organise a series of workshops in customer care, facilitated by outside experts; or

Strategy A.2 – Ensure that all staff members complete online training courses available through [named] company/institution; or

Strategy A.3 – Provide bursaries and study leave to enable two staff members to complete the Certificate in Customer Care course at [named] Polytechnic, so that they can provide training for other staff.

- **OBJECTIVES** are the intermediate stages that must be completed in order to meet the overall goal. Objectives should also be drafted in line with the SMART principles listed above, but the wording tends to be more specific and concrete than that used for aims, goals and strategies.

.....
 Very often when a divided group complains of poor communication, the root of the problem is that there is an unspoken disagreement on goals.

Anne Hope & Sally Timmel

.....

or objective requires a number of years to complete, it may be necessary to prepare a separate sheet for each year. The action plans should also include a statement of the arrangements made for monitoring progress towards achieving the objective. This issue is covered in greater detail in Chapter 7.

STEP 6 – BUSINESS PLANS

Although most open schools are not commercially viable, it is essential to adopt principles of best business practice in managing such institutions. Drawing up a business plan does not necessarily involve an attempt to make a profit. Rather, it sets out in detail how your school will finance what you have planned. Because ODL normally involves a higher level of up-front investment in the development of study materials than conventional education, this expenditure needs to be carefully costed.

Some approaches to drawing up an annual budget (such as zero-based budgeting) require that a detailed business plan be drawn up for all of an institution’s activities. However, because this is a time-consuming exercise, most open schools do not bother with this for ongoing programmes. Under these circumstances, business plans are prepared only to motivate funding for new developments or for higher levels of activity in an existing programme.

A business plan should answer questions such as:

- How much will it cost to carry out each of your action plans?
- How much income do you expect to receive during each year of the plan?
- For each year, what will be the gap between income and expenditure?
- To what extent will the action plans be self-financing?
- To what extent will the action plans be dependent on grants and subsidies?
- How can you ensure that the plans develop in line with the money you have available? (adapted from Freeman, 2004: 63–64)

The worksheets shown in Figure 1.5 for setting out action plans can also be used to prepare detailed cost estimates for these activities. The totals from each worksheet can then be compiled into a single spreadsheet that indicates the cost of implementing each goal or strategy for each year of the plan. In addition, the

.....

Change is no longer a spectator sport. Everyone is involved. What is more, the goal posts are shifting and the rules of engagement are changing continuously.

Frances J. Ferreira

.....

FIGURE 1.5:
ACTION & BUSINESS PLAN, FINANCIAL YEAR: 2008/09

Strategy/Objective: A.1.1 – Within nine months’ time, the Finance Office will have advertised, evaluated and awarded a tender for the provision of training services.

ACTION PLAN

Action(s)	Target Date(s) for Completion	Person(s) Responsible	Indicator(s) of Success
Prepare terms of reference	16 May 2008	Finance Manager	ToR completed and approved
Advertise invitation to tender	30 June 2008	Procurement Clerk	Ads placed in two local newspapers
Evaluate tenders	30 September 2008	Tender Panel	Recommendation to award tender
Prepare and sign consultancy contract	23 December 2008	Finance Manager	Signed contract

BUSINESS PLAN

Type of Resource	Number of Units	Unit Cost	Total Cost
Full-time staff	Finance Manager – 4 days	1,000/day	4,000
	Procurement Clerk – 2 days	300/day	600
	Tender Panel – 4 x ½ day	average of 600/day	1,200
Part-time or contract staff			
Training costs			
Transport			
Travel and subsistence allowances			
Postage, courier, freight costs	Courier for contract docs	150/each	150
Equipment (additional)			
Materials			
Hire of venue			
Monitoring/assessment costs			
Other costs	Newspaper ads x 2	2,000/each	4,000
Institutional overheads	30% of direct costs		2,985
		TOTAL COSTS	12,935

business plan should identify where the money to carry out this work might come from, whether through government subsidies, donor funding or learner fees.

Activity for Managers

Choose a programme, project or other activity that you need to make plans for.

1. Using a copy of the worksheet in Figure 1.6, prepare a detailed action plan.
2. Once the action plan portion of the table has been completed, move on to the section for estimating costs. This will complete your business plan.

STEP 7 – REVIEWING THE PLAN

A comprehensive review of an organisation’s strategic plan, involving all stakeholders, normally takes place only towards the end of the planning period.

However, the management team for an open school or college will want to assess progress in achieving goals and objectives on a much more regular basis, at least once a year. In addition, there are benefits in carrying out these annual reviews with staff on a unit-by-unit basis. By doing this, employees can feel a greater sense of involvement in and ownership of the planning and evaluation cycle. Chapter 7 discusses different approaches to monitoring and evaluation, which can be used to inform a review of your strategic plan.

SUMMARY

The importance of strategic planning for an open school cannot be over-emphasised. Knowing where you want to go and how you hope to get there are of critical importance when making decisions about how you will manage the available resources along the road to your goal. Likewise, you need to have envisaged where you want to be in the future in order to know whether you have arrived there at the end of the planning period. Without careful planning and regular monitoring, initiatives are likely to fail and resources may well be wasted.

FIGURE 1.6: ACTION & BUSINESS PLAN WORKSHEET

FINANCIAL YEAR: _____

Strategy/Objective: _____

ACTION PLAN

Action(s)	Target Date(s) for Completion	Person(s) Responsible	Indicator(s) of Success

BUSINESS PLAN

Type of Resource	Number of Units	Unit Cost	total Cost
			TOTAL COSTS

SUGGESTED READING

- Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL). <http://ww.moe.gov.bw/bocodol/index.htm>
- Bottomley, John & Jocelyn Calvert. 2003. *Open and Distance Learning Policy Development* (with particular reference to dual-mode institutions). Knowledge Series. Available as an electronic document at www.col.org/knowledge
- Commonwealth of Learning. 1999. *Planning and Management of Open and Distance Learning*. Trainer's Toolkit No. 3. Vancouver, BC, Canada: COL, in conjunction with the Asian Development Bank and the International Extension College.
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- McNamara, Carter. 1997–2008. “Basics of Developing Mission, Vision and Values Statements,” adapted from the *Field Guide to Nonprofit Strategic Planning and Facilitation*. Available as an electronic document at www.managementhelp.org/plan_dec/str_plan/stmnts.htm#anchor519441
- Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). 1998. *Strategic Development Plan, 1998–2003*.
- Wikipedia. 2008. “SMART (Project Management).” Electronic document accessed in May 2008 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_%28project_management%29
- Wikipedia. 2008. “SWOT Analysis.” Electronic document accessed in May 2008 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis

chapter 2

RECRUITING AND DEVELOPING STAFF

The lifeblood of an open school is its staff. No matter how well you have planned your programmes, they have little chance of success without employees who are adequately trained and highly motivated. This chapter addresses the following questions:

- How should an open school be structured?
- What are the staffing needs of open schools?
- What is the best way to recruit staff for an open school?
- What training is needed and how should it be provided?
- What can be done to retain trained and experienced staff?

INTERNAL STRUCTURES

(Adapted from Du Vivier, 2008: Chapter 1)

Each open school has its own history and unique structure. However, ODL institutions may be established using one of the following legal forms:

- part of a government ministry or department;
- a unit attached to another educational institution;
- a semi-autonomous institution, established by ministerial regulations;
- an autonomous body, established by an act of parliament;
- a non-profit entity (foundation, trust, voluntary association, etc.);
- a private company limited by shares (for profit);
- a public limited company (for profit).

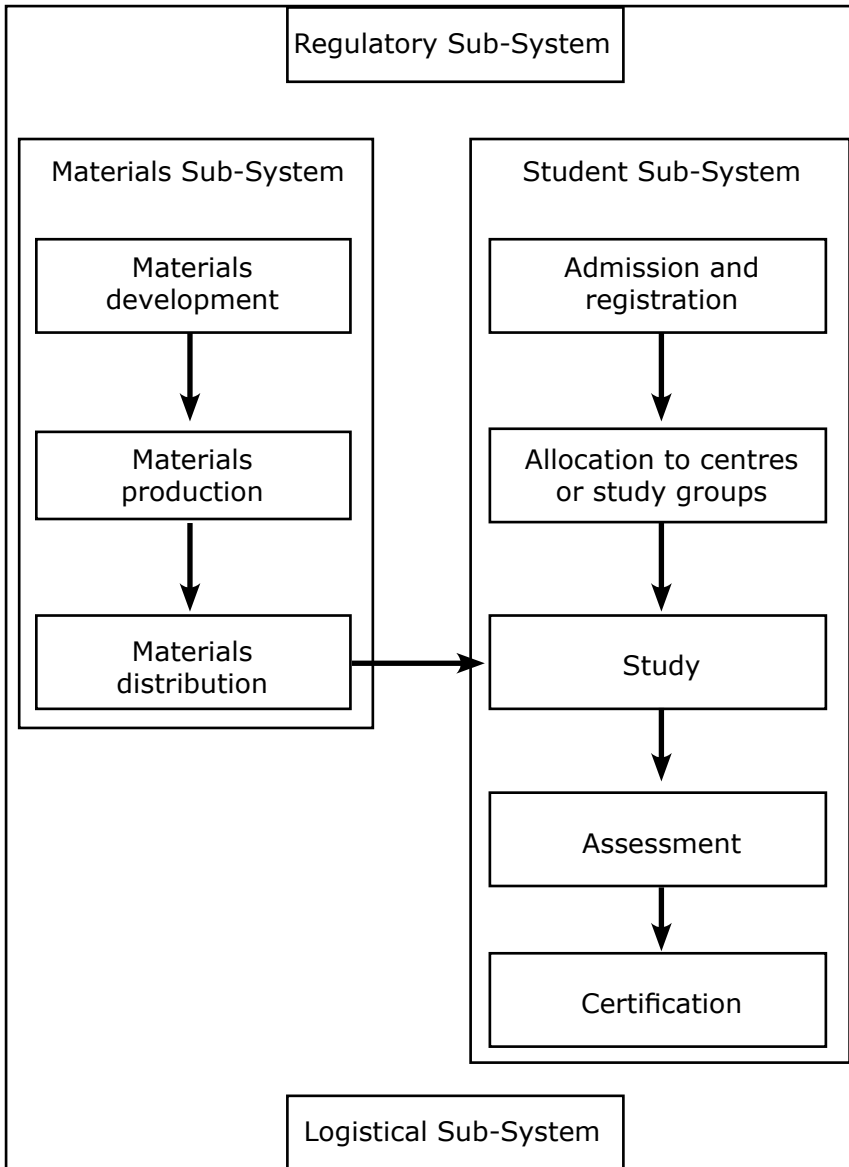
Because the groups targeted by open schools are likely to have limited means, the fees paid by learners or their families normally do not cover the full cost of

providing the service. Even when governments provide subsidies for this service, open schools rarely operate at a profit. For this reason, it is unusual for ODL institutions at this level to be constituted as private or public companies.

In terms of their internal structures, open schools are organised in many different ways. Rumble (1986: 15–17) proposes a simple model that looks at the operations of ODL institutions in terms of four interrelated sub-systems. The value of such a model is that it clearly identifies the main areas of activity in any open school and defines the relationships between them. It also suggests an analogy between a factory producing items for consumption and the “quasi-industrial processes” of an ODL institution. Just as in a factory, ODL involves the specialisation of tasks and the division of labour between different units. The four sub-systems in Rumble’s model are illustrated in Figure 2.1 and described below:

- **Materials sub-system:** This includes all activities involved in developing, reproducing and distributing self-instructional materials, whether these are primarily print-based or involve other media.
- **Student sub-system:** Once learning materials have been produced, responsibility for learners is passed over to the student sub-system. This comprises all of the activities, staff and other resources that are involved in facilitating learning by students and managing their progress through a programme.
- **Logistical sub-system:** The materials and student sub-systems are supported by other units that procure and manage resources for the institution. Those units which look after finances, human resources and information and communications technology constitute the logistical sub-system of any open school, college or university.
- **Regulatory sub-system:** Finally, overall management and guidance are the responsibility of the regulatory sub-system, which is sometimes referred to as the “brains” of the institution. All activities related to strategic planning, policy formulation and monitoring of the institution’s performance in meeting its goals are part of this sub-system.

FIGURE 2.1: SYSTEMS MODEL OF AN ODL INSTITUTION



Source: Rumble, 1986: 17

Many ODL institutions have replicated the sub-systems of Rumble's model in their internal organisational structures. This means that they have set up separate units with responsibility for:

- materials development, production and distribution;
- learner support services;
- logistics;
- management and governance.

The boundaries between these units may differ from one institution to another. Nevertheless, this type of internal structure is commonplace among ODL institutions offering courses primarily through a correspondence model.

However, this is by no means the only way to structure an open school. Developments in the field of ODL in recent decades have led to the evolution of new models for configuring such institutions. Critics of the systems model highlight the central role played by academic staff in both developing materials and providing tutorial support. Moreover, separating the materials development process from that of providing tuition makes it more difficult to identify areas where study materials need to be revised because they are unclear or incomplete.



CASE STUDY

In 1917, the provincial government of British Columbia set up a correspondence branch to provide access to education for students in rural areas who lived too far away from existing schools. Over the years, this open schooling programme moved away from a correspondence model and now offers online courses at the junior and senior secondary levels (Grades 8–12). Changing the technology used for delivering courses has also had an impact on how materials are developed. Instead of having a separate unit to carry out this function, it is now integrated with course delivery. All members of academic staff are responsible for selecting study materials for the courses they teach. In addition, they provide tuition, mark assignments and give individual feedback and other forms of academic support. The learning resources used for these courses can include textbooks and other paper-based materials, but the teachers increasingly rely on resources available free of charge on the World Wide

Web. As part of the learning process, groups of learners are expected to research topics and develop their own materials, at least some of which are posted on the Web. In 2007, the open school changed its name to the Vancouver Learning Network (VLN) to reflect this new way of working.

(Adapted from a presentation by Cindy Gauthier, Director: VLN)



Activity for Managers

If you are a manager in an existing open school, consider the following questions:

- *How does the structure of your institution compare to the systems model?*
- *What are the advantages of organising things the way you do?*
- *What are the drawbacks of the structures in your open school?*

For managers who are in the process of planning or setting up an open school:

- *What insights can you take from the systems model in terms of structuring your institution?*
- *How can the internal structure of your school be aligned with its strategic plan?*



STAFF NUMBERS AND COMPETENCIES

When an open school begins its life as part of a government ministry, decisions on the number of employees it requires are often influenced by rules and procedures that guide staff structures in the civil service. Traditionally, such structures are hierarchical, with a predetermined organisational structure involving a wide range of post categories, each with specialised duties linked to existing pay grades. Typically, preference is given to filling established full-time posts, while employing part-time or contract staff is discouraged.

If you wanted to start your own small business, you would probably adopt a very different approach. New jobs would be created only when existing employees could no longer cope with a growing workload. Preference would be given to employing new staff on a part-time or contract basis in order to minimise costs. Instead of sticking to narrowly defined job descriptions, employees would be expected to carry out a range of tasks to meet the requirements of an expanding business. Salaries would reflect the demand

.....
We have to create the capacity to deal with change positively, flexibly and effectively. Creativity is key.
.....
Sir Kenneth Robinson

for such workers in the labour market, and employees are rewarded for the contribution they make to the success of the business.

While open schools and colleges are not usually expected to make a profit, they must still adhere to principles of best business practice to ensure that they provide ODL services as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. The advantage of taking a

businesslike approach to the issue of staffing is that it enables the staff complement of your open school to develop in response to demonstrated need rather than a predefined plan. It also requires managers to make a case for any new position to be filled by justifying need in terms of the value such an employee will add to the organisation as a whole.

Normally this involves drawing up a job description that spells out exactly what the post-holder is expected to do. The job description should also state whether this is a full-time position or whether the staff members will be employed on a part-time basis for a specified number of hours per week or per month. If the work outlined in the job description is linked to a specific project, such as writing materials for a particular course, then the post should be filled on the basis of a fixed-term contract. When the work is expected to continue into the future, the position can be made permanent, provided that sufficient funding is available.

Regardless of how your open school or college is structured, similar competencies will be required. In order to be competent at something, an employee has to combine certain knowledge, attitudes and skills in a way that enables him or her to achieve a complex action. The box below gives some examples of the competencies required for subject tutors.

Competencies of Tutors

Those in direct contact with learners, in teaching, tutoring and learner support roles, require the following competencies and attributes:

- ease with learners;
- awareness of particular needs and circumstances of learners;
- expertise in a subject area or discipline, and in teaching that subject area or discipline;
- knowledge of how open and distance learning works, and about the kinds of resources and timeframes needed for open and distance learning course delivery;
- ability to work as a member of a team;
- knowledge of administrative systems in the open school or institution;
- openness to new ideas and new perspectives in their own discipline;
- willingness to learn new approaches to teaching and learning;
- ability to balance demands of their academic discipline with the needs of the learner;
- ability to communicate the needs of learners to the open school or institution, as well as the institution’s perspective to learners; and
- interpersonal skills in advising and counselling learners.

(COL, 1999: 8.9)

Before a staff member can be recruited, a list of the required competencies should be prepared, normally through consultation between the institution’s human resources unit and the relevant manager. This list is often referred to as a “person specification” and can be used for recruitment and selection.

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Activity for Managers

This activity is best carried out on your own, though you may wish to share it with colleagues after you have finished.

1. a) Think of what you do in your job and make a list of all these tasks.
 - b) If you have a formal job description, compare it with the one you drew up.
 - c) Draw up a separate list of the competencies required for your post.
 - c) If there is a person specification for your post, compare it with the list of competencies you drew up.
 - *How are job descriptions/person specifications/competency lists drawn up for staff in your open school or college?*
 - *Does this exercise provide any insights for improving that process?*

2. Now apply these insights to a practical exercise for employing a new member of staff in your section or unit.
 - a) Draw up a job description for the post, listing all the duties the new employee will be expected to carry out.
 - b) Decide whether there is sufficient work for this position to be full-time. If not, specify the number of hours per week or per month that the post-holder will be expected to work.
 - c) Decide whether the post should be filled on a permanent basis. If not, decide how long the contract should be.
 - d) Draw up a list of competencies for the position that you wish to fill. These should include knowledge, attitudes and skills.

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RECRUITING STAFF

Recruiting the right people from the start is essential to the success of your open school or college. Where an open school is part of a government ministry or another institution, it is normally required to follow established procedures when hiring new staff. In some cases, the ODL unit may be used as a “dumping ground” for employees who don’t fit in elsewhere. When staff members are transferred from conventional schools or reassigned from other units because of restructuring, this can cause difficulties for your open school. Such employees can be sceptical about non-traditional forms of education and may resist the process of adapting their skills and work practices to a new context. Where

possible, preference should be given to candidates who are enthusiastic about ODL even though they may lack experience or formal qualifications.

A special case arises when an open school undergoes a process of transformation from a unit in the civil service to an autonomous institution. Where the transformation involves changes in the terms of employment for staff, this will inevitably raise fears that they could lose their jobs or be forced to accept less favourable conditions of service. Resistance to change is natural under such circumstances. However, this resistance can be reduced if you apply the following key principles of change management:

- **acknowledge fears** – do not try to make light of them;
- **inform** – never withhold information that might have an impact on employees;
- **champion** – gather and share information about how the change might benefit staff;
- **consult** – listen to what your staff have to say, even when they appear to be negative;
- **involve** – create structures, such as task teams and consultative groups, that engage staff in planning and implementing the change;
- **support** – offer opportunities for training and staff development (*adapted from Freeman, 2004: 20*).

When it comes to filling vacancies, your open school needs to have clearly defined policies and transparent procedures for recruiting and selecting candidates. It is essential that these are in line with the legal requirements for the jurisdiction(s) in which your institution operates. For example, in some countries, employers must put in place affirmative action plans to redress historical imbalances in the employment of women, certain ethnic groups or people with disabilities. Other procedures for hiring employees may be negotiated with trade unions, staff associations or employee representatives. For example, some open schools advertise vacancies internally in order to give existing staff members the first chance at promotion. Only if no suitable candidate can be found within the institution are the posts advertised externally.

Recruiting part-time staff to provide face-to-face tuition or other forms of learner support can also be a problem. Before appointing tutors, managers in open schools need to know that a minimum number of learners have registered

for a particular course or subject, but these figures may only be available after enrolments have closed. Although the same people may act as tutors from year to year, it might still be necessary to identify, select and appoint new staff within a limited period. The process can be speeded up if posts are advertised and applicants screened prior to registering students. Letters of appointment can be issued once a predetermined quota of learners has been enrolled.

The legal mechanisms for appointing staff members can also differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In larger institutions, where the rules and procedures applicable to all employees are set out in documents such as a staff handbook, letters of appointment are commonly used. At a minimum, the letter of appointment should contain the title of the post, the starting salary (or point on an established salary scale) and the starting date. Reference can then be made to supplementary documents that provide details of the institution's procedures in relation to a range of human resource issues, including:

- salary scales and other remuneration (bonuses, salary increments, etc.)
- entitlements to other staff benefits (medical aid/insurance, housing or travel allowances, etc.)
- probation period
- leave entitlements and procedures
- performance management systems
- code of conduct and disciplinary procedures.

When these issues have not been spelt out in other documents or when staff are being appointed for a fixed term only, then it may be necessary to issue contracts of employment. You should take advice from a legal practitioner or human resources specialist regarding the requirements for employing staff in your jurisdiction.

TRAINING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

(Adapted from COL, 1999: Topic 8)

In many countries, it can be difficult to find people with the necessary competencies to design and deliver effective ODL programmes. For this reason, training and ongoing development of staff are essential. All employees are likely to benefit from training, regardless of whether they are full- or part-time,

permanent, fixed-term or temporary, but different types of training are required at different stages:

- Newly appointed staff members need an induction programme covering the policies and procedures of your open school, as well as an orientation to open and distance learning.
- Employees who are taking on new roles should have their responsibilities clearly explained and receive support while they develop new competencies.
- Staff recruited from conventional educational institutions need to learn how to adapt their existing knowledge or skills to ODL applications.
- Existing staff should be offered opportunities for continuous professional development in order to maintain their skills and motivation.
- When change is being introduced across the institution – for example, because of the introduction of new technology – specific training should be made available to all of the employees affected.

Staff development at an open school or college can take a number of different forms:

- **On-the-job training.** More experienced staff can be assigned to work with new employees as mentors, showing them what needs to be done and how to do it, and providing feedback on their work.
- **Face-to-face workshops.** This type of training can happen either on a one-on-one basis or in small groups, and is generally of limited duration. Depending on the type of training, it may be possible to use experienced staff from your open school to facilitate these workshops. Where the required expertise is not available in-house, a trainer will have to be brought in from outside. When training is provided by means of a workshop or course, it should be more than simply theoretical. Exercises should be included to enable participants to apply their knowledge and skills in situations that simulate real life. Ideally, those who take part should be able to apply what they have learned to tasks that they will undertake shortly after the training has been completed.
- **Study visits and attachments.** An effective way to develop new working practices is through short-term study visits to or longer-term attachment with another open school or ODL institution. Those who take part can learn how things are done elsewhere and bring back useful ideas for improving procedures in their own place of work.

Activity for Managers

Consider the following questions either on your own or in discussion with other staff:

- *Is there a training/staff development policy in place for your open school? Is it widely known among staff?*
- *How are decisions made about the provision of training? Who decides? Who is consulted?*
- *What methods are used to identify staff development needs in your institution?*
- *What criteria are used to decide which staff members should receive training opportunities?*
- *How is the provision of staff development linked to the goals, strategies and/or objectives in your school's strategic plan? How can these links be strengthened?*

(COL, 1999: 8.13–8.14)

Most open schools employ teachers from conventional education institutions on a part-time basis to provide face-to-face tuition. However, teaching in the classroom has traditionally followed the banking model described by Freire (1977 [1972]: 45–59), which involves teachers depositing knowledge in the minds of passive students. Freire advocates a radically different approach, where teachers act as facilitators who pose problems for learners to analyse and resolve for themselves. Even if open schools do not subscribe fully to this philosophy, it is common to promote participatory and learner-centred methods for use during tutorial sessions.

It is important to provide training and support so that those teachers employed as part-time tutors will understand that the role of a tutor is different, requiring them to act as facilitators of learning. This involves a conceptual shift that some teachers may find difficult to make because it challenges their professional self-image. Even when teachers make attempts to introduce more participatory methods in their classrooms, students may complain that they are not receiving the didactic style of teaching they have come to expect. Moreover, where not all students have access to textbooks, the teacher may play an important role

- 1. Setting agreed targets.** The starting point is to specify exactly what is expected of each employee in your unit in the form of agreed work targets. These need to be worded in a form that is SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. It is essential that employees are fully involved in the process of setting these work targets so that they cannot claim later that they were over-ambitious or impossible to achieve.
- 2. Appraising performance.** Normally this takes place during a one-to-one meeting between you and each staff member in your unit. A record of the targets set for the period should be given to the employee. This is followed by a frank discussion about which targets have been achieved or exceeded, and which have not. The employee should be given an opportunity to explain why certain activities have not taken place as previously agreed. The results of the appraisal are then recorded on a performance management system form.
- 3. Allocating rewards.** Employees whose performance is above average should be rewarded for their efforts by receiving an incentive. Some performance management systems make provision for higher rewards for staff members who did an exceptional or outstanding job during the period under review. Normally, the details of such rewards are treated as confidential, but it is a good idea to acknowledge the contributions of especially productive employees at staff meetings. Praising staff members either privately or in front of their peers can be a powerful motivating force in itself.
- 4. Setting new targets.** Performance appraisal is a cyclical process, so you will need to sit down with each staff member to agree on new targets for the coming period. In most cases, this can be combined with the appraisal interview. More challenging targets can be set for employees who performed beyond your previous expectations. For under-performing staff members, special arrangements should be put in place. These typically involve a sequence of procedures that starts with regular meetings between you and the employee, and progresses to more intensive supervision and support, including counselling, exploring other career options, and so on. Only after all these processes have been exhausted should dismissal be considered.

It is essential for staff members to feel a sense of ownership of the performance management system adopted for your institution; otherwise it will not be accepted. Involving employees in drawing up annual work plans for their units is also an important part of the process.

SUGGESTED READING

Commonwealth of Learning, in conjunction with the Asian Development Bank and the International Extension College, UK. 1999. *Planning and Management of Open and Distance Learning*. Training Toolkit 3. See Topic 8. Vancouver, BC, Canada: COL.

Freeman, Richard. 2004. *Planning and Implementing Open and Distance Learning Systems: A Handbook for Decision-Makers*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Commonwealth of Learning. Available as an electronic document at www.col.org/TrainingHandbooks

Freire, Paulo. 1977 [1972]. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Middlesex, England: Penguin.

O'Rourke, Jennifer. 2003. *Tutoring in Open and Distance Learning: A Handbook for Tutors*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Commonwealth of Learning. Available as an electronic document at www.col.org/TrainingHandbooks

Rumble, Greville. 1997. *The Costs and Economics of Open and Distance Learning*. London: Kogan Page in association with the Institute of Educational Technology, Open University.

Rumble, Greville. 1986. *The Planning and Management of Distance Education*. London: Croom Helm.

Staff Training and Development Resources

In co-operation with the Asian Development Bank and the International Extension College in the UK, the Commonwealth of Learning has produced six comprehensive manuals for use in training distance educators. The training “toolkits” include a set of case studies that are used for all six topics. Published in 1999, the toolkits can be ordered at www.col.org/TrainingResources:

- *An Overview of Open and Distance Learning* (Trainer’s Toolkit 01)
- *Designing Materials for Open and Distance Learning* (Trainer’s Toolkit 02)
- *Planning and Management of Open and Distance Learning* (Trainer’s Toolkit 03)
- *Use and Integration of Media in Open and Distance Learning* (Trainer’s Toolkit 04)
- *Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning* (Trainer’s Toolkit 05)
- *Learner Support in Open and Distance Learning* (Trainer’s Toolkit 06).

The Commonwealth of Learning has also published a series of handbooks for ODL practitioners. Each handbook can be read in a number of ways: as an informative text, as part of the materials for a workshop or short training programme, or as part of an extended training and study programme requiring learners to undertake a practical project. All of these handbooks are available for download as electronic documents at www.col.org/TrainingHandbooks

chapter 3

RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

Before making a commitment to develop a new course or programme, open schools must conduct thorough research. Making a convincing case involves collecting and analysing data on the needs of potential target groups. Once a decision has been made and materials have been acquired or developed, these need to be pilot tested to ensure that they are effective in helping learners meet the objectives of the course. This chapter addresses the following questions:

- Who should be involved in research and development?
- What do we need to know about the target group?
- How can we find this out?
- How should draft materials be piloted and who should be responsible for doing this?

MANAGING RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

(Adapted from a presentation by Cindy Gauthier, Director: Vancouver Learning Network)

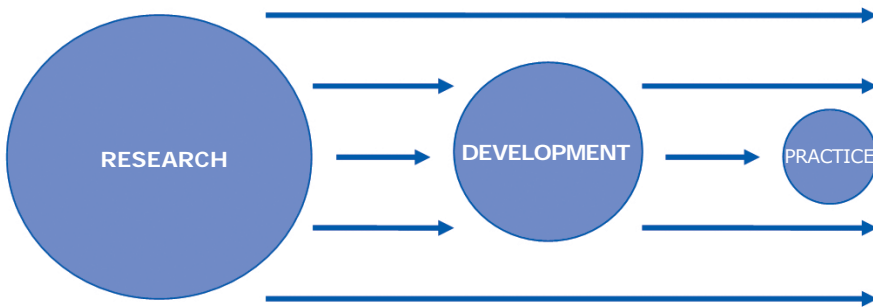
There are several pathways through which research can influence educational practice in an open school or college, including:

- the development of new or improved educational materials
- enhancing pre-service and in-service training of teachers and administrators
- devising more effective ways to provide services for learners and the institution's other customers
- informing the “public” (learners, their parents, teachers, the media and other stakeholders).

These pathways can be strengthened by including a mechanism for collecting and disseminating the collective knowledge base about teaching and learning. In this way, it becomes a collaborative approach for creating knowledge and developing practice.

Traditionally, research has been treated as a specialised function that is carried out by experts. Some open schools have separate research units, while others employ consultants, academics in universities or other “experts” for this purpose. Information obtained from this research is passed on to another group, generally senior managers or professional staff in the open school, who make recommendations for new practices or programmes. The actual development of materials and procedures for delivering the programme is generally carried out by another group of professional and administrative staff. Finally, the programme or course is passed over to field staff and tutors, who must translate it into practice. The traditional model of research and development is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

FIGURE 3.1: TRADITIONAL MODEL OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

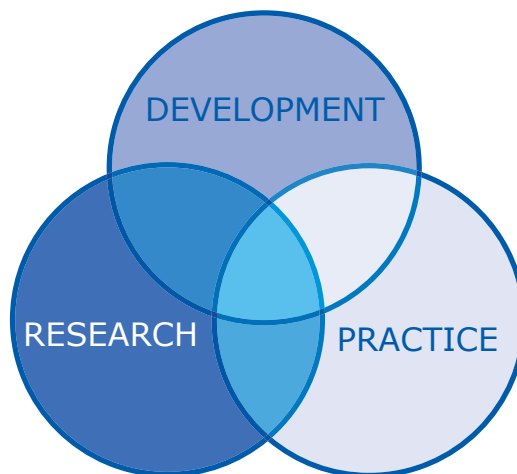


Although the research may produce rich data and useful insights into the needs of learners, a lot of this detail is lost in the process. The limitations of the traditional model are:

- Information and decision-making flows in one direction only, with little or no feedback from the field.
- Each of the components in the research-development-practice cycle is isolated. This can result in a programme or course that is weakly aligned with the genuine needs of learners.
- With this model of research and development, programmes frequently miss the mark and have only minimal impact on the problems they were intended to address.

Over the last decade, some ODL institutions have devised a new and improved approach to research and development. This model views the process as an integrated one and recognises the importance of everyone involved. As can be seen in Figure 3.2, there should be involvement at all levels, with an overlap between the groups and continuous interaction between them.

FIGURE 3.2: INTEGRATED MODEL FOR RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICE



Demographics

This refers to information that is normally obtained through the census or household surveys, and includes factors such as:

- **Age range.** This can provide you with insights into learners' motivation and prior experience of learning.
- **Gender.** Norms and taboos for males and females in certain cultural groups may influence how you plan to deliver the course.
- **Residence.** Knowing where potential learners live is important when determining the location of study centres and other arrangements for contact sessions.
- **Employment.** If potential learners are employed, this may be linked to their motives for furthering their education. It may also limit the time they can devote to their studies. If they are not employed, they may not have the means to pay substantial fees.
- **Home circumstances.** Information on whether learners have access to electricity, telephone, radio and so on will influence the choice of technologies used to deliver your programme.

Motivation

Knowing why learners have decided to further their education is essential in planning a course to meet their needs and expectations. The main categories of motivation include:

- **Vocational.** When learners register for a course to improve their prospects of finding a job or getting promoted, they tend to see education primarily in vocational terms. These learners may not be interested in the theoretical aspects of a subject, preferring instead to acquire practical skills that can be applied immediately in the workplace.
- **Academic.** Some people find the learning process rewarding in itself or have a particular interest in a subject that they wish to pursue. Such motivation may be characterised as academic rather than practical. These learners are likely to demand an in-depth and systematic approach in the courses they take, and they may wish to go beyond the basic course content by reading more widely.
- **Personal.** Since education is linked to social status, some people feel inferior or embarrassed if they have not attended or completed their

schooling. These learners tend to register for further studies in order to boost their self-confidence and enhance their self-image.

- **Social.** Learning can also be a social activity, providing opportunities to interact with others who share similar interests. However, those studying at a distance may feel isolated without opportunities to come together for group contact sessions. This will have an impact on the way you plan to deliver a new ODL course or programme.

Study Skills

In a conventional school, students with poor study skills can seek help from their teachers or classmates. For those taking ODL courses, success depends more heavily on how effectively they study on their own. While there are many techniques that are useful to learners generally, the following study skills are of critical importance for ODL learners:

- **Planning.** Learners must be able plan their study sessions so that they will have enough time over the academic year to cover all that has to be learned. In conventional schools teachers do this for their students, but students in ODL courses rely on advice from tutors and self-discipline to pace themselves.
- **Active involvement.** Many education systems reward learners for memorising content, but this is essentially a passive process. Good ODL study materials are full of activities, and learners must actively engage with these in order to benefit fully.
- **Self-assessment.** When learners study in isolation from their peers, it can be difficult for them to realistically assess how they are progressing. If they over-estimate their progress, they will work less diligently than they need to. If they under-estimate their progress, they may lose heart and give up.

Prior Learning

For certain courses, learners must have completed a minimum level of prior study in order to make further progress. This is particularly true for subjects such as mathematics, sciences and languages, where knowledge and skills are developed in a step-by-step manner. If any assumptions are made about prior learning during the process of writing a new course, a note should be made about what knowledge or abilities are needed. Potential learners can then be given advice or take diagnostic tests to ensure that they meet the minimum requirements.

NATIONAL OR LOCAL PRIORITIES

In addition to finding out about the needs and characteristics of your target group, it may be necessary to ensure that any new course or programme is consistent with national or local priorities for development. This is particularly important where government or donor funds are being sought to defer the costs of course development and/or delivery. For example, there is no point in planning a vocational training course to produce carpenters if the labour market is already over-supplied with workers who are qualified in this craft. However, even where considerable numbers of school-leavers are unemployed, providing out-of-school secondary education courses or high-school equivalency programmes may be justified, since these qualifications are normally required to gain access to further education or training.

Activity for Managers

You may not require all of the information listed above in order to develop a course, but it is essential to decide what you are looking for before carrying out any research. This exercise will help you to focus on the type of information you will need to plan for the development of a new course or programme.

Choose a new course that is being considered for development.

- *What is the target group for this course?*
- *Why was this particular group chosen?*
- *What demographic information is available for this group? Which of these facts will affect the content or delivery methods for this course?*
- *Why do you think that learners will register for this course? How will their motivation(s) influence how it is designed and delivered?*
- *Do potential learners have the study skills required to make progress? If not, how do you plan to assist learners in developing these skills?*
- *Will learners need prior knowledge or skills to make progress? How can you ensure that those who take the course meet these minimum requirements?*
- *Can you think of information in addition to that discussed above that would be useful in planning and designing your course?*

MARKET RESEARCH

Market research can be defined simply as finding out what your customers (or learners) want. It can be conducted using data that is obtained either from existing documentary sources or through activities designed to answer specific research questions.

Before making a commitment to developing a new ODL course, you should know how many people are likely to register for it. In many cases, this can be estimated with a reasonable degree of accuracy using data from existing sources, such as:

- **Census of population.** Information on all persons resident in a country is normally collected by a central statistics unit every 10 years. Census reports include details of age, gender, employment status and highest level of education attained, and this information can be used to quantify the total potential market for an ODL course. In some cases, these statistics are cross-referenced against one another so that it is possible to know, for example, how many females in a certain age range and geographical area have completed primary school but have not finished their secondary education.
- **Household surveys.** Many governments also conduct periodic sample surveys of household income and expenditure, normally in between censuses. These can provide information about the percentages of households with access to facilities (such as electricity, telephone, radio and television), which will help you to choose appropriate technologies for delivering the course. In addition, levels of disposable income can normally be derived from household cash consumption. This data can be used to estimate an affordable level of fees for a particular target group.
- **Labour force surveys.** From time to time, information on the labour force is also collected in most countries. In addition to providing statistics on the numbers of persons who are employed in either the formal or the informal sector, such reports can also indicate which skills are in short supply. This data can be used to identify gaps in the existing provision of vocational education and training, which your open school may wish to address.



- **Education statistics.** All education ministries have planning units that are charged with collecting annual statistics on the number of students enrolled at different levels of the education system. Where these reports provide information on the numbers that drop out of school or fail examinations, such statistics can be useful in planning programmes for these groups.

The above sources should be thoroughly reviewed to determine what information can be obtained about the target group for the course you are proposing. As carrying out specialised market research is an expensive and time-consuming process, it is in your interest to use existing data wherever possible. Moreover, because specialised market research utilises sampling methods, it may not be able to define the total potential market (the total number of persons who might benefit from a particular course or service).

Existing documents can only provide a broad picture of the potential market for a new course or programme. Obtaining more detailed insight into the needs and preferences of potential learners may require specialised market research. As noted above, designing a research study, selecting a sample and analysing data require specific expertise, which can be provided either in-house or through outside experts. Ideally, those responsible for developing and delivering the course should be directly involved in the process of data collection. Data can be collected in a number of ways, and the advantages and disadvantages of some common methods are summarised in Figure 3.3.

.....
Research is what I'm
doing when I don't know
what I'm doing.
Werner von Braun
.....

FIGURE 3.3: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF MARKET RESEARCH METHODS

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Questionnaire (through the post)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheapest • Easy to administer • Easy to analyse • Can sample larger numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can only obtain narrowly defined answers • Does not explore respondents' views in depth • Low return rates lead to doubts as to how representative responses are
Structured interview (by telephone or face to face)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate cost • Moderately difficult to administer • Easy to analyse • Can sample larger numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can only obtain narrowly defined answers • Does not explore respondents' views in depth • May also encounter problems with response rates
Depth interview (face to face)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide a more detailed picture of respondents' views • Can provide unexpected results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most expensive to administer • Difficult to analyse complex and lengthy responses • Respondents may seek to confirm researcher's expectations • Small sample size means that results cannot be generalised
Focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheaper than individual depth interviews • Can provide a detailed picture of group's views • Can provide unexpected results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive to administer • Difficult to analyse complex and lengthy responses • Respondents may seek to confirm researcher's expectations • Small sample size means that results cannot be generalised
Participatory Rural Appraisal or Participatory Learning for Action techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest level of involvement by participants in devising new programme • Prioritises needs • Responses reflect lived experience of participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most time-consuming and expensive • While results may have a high degree of validity, they may not be replicable with another group • Non-representative methods – results cannot be generalised

Sources: Adapted from Freeman, 2004: Table 3, page 34; Chambers, 1997.

If you wish to generalise from what respondents tell you, you should choose postal questionnaires or structured interviews, which may be carried out by telephone or face to face. You will also need to select a sample that is representative of your target group. Likewise, statistical tests will need to be used to test the significance of your results. These are specialised tasks that require the advice of an expert in research or statistics.

Activity for Managers

Choose a new course or programme that you wish to develop. Ideally, this should be a continuation of the previous activity, where you drew up a list of the information you need to collect about the target group. Before starting, gather together any existing documents (census reports, household surveys, labour force surveys, education statistics, etc.) that may shed light on learners' needs or motivations.

- *What (if anything) were you able to find out about your target group from the existing documents?*
- *What other information is absolutely necessary before you can decide to develop the course/programme?*
- *Which method(s) would be most appropriate for researching this market?*
- *Who will advise on the research design, provide training in research techniques and edit the research report?*
- *Who will be involved in collecting and analysing the data?*

PILOT TESTING

After a decision has been taken to develop a new course or programme, study materials will need to be acquired, adapted or developed (see Chapter 4). New procedures may also need to be devised to provide learners with effective support (see Chapter 6). However, before launching the course, the materials and delivery systems should be comprehensively pilot tested, in order to ensure that:

- the language used is at an appropriate level for the target group;
- the content is clear, straightforward and easy to understand;
- the materials are comprehensive – in other words, they cover all parts of the curriculum;
- the technologies chosen for delivery are accessible to learners;
- the supports provided for learners actually enhance the learning experience.

Pilot testing involves choosing a sample that is representative of the target group of learners and putting them through part or all of the course. Once learners have had an opportunity to use the study materials and experience all of

the delivery methods, their views on the above issues can be obtained through one of the research methods listed in Table 3.1. Any assessment exercises (such as assignments or examination papers) that learners complete as part of the pilot phase should be reviewed to identify topics where a number of learners have made errors. The study materials can then be revised to clarify or give additional attention to these points of misunderstanding.

Ideally, those responsible for developing and delivering the course should be involved in collecting feedback from learners. As these staff members are most familiar with the study materials and other elements of the course, they are in the best position to question learners about strengths and weaknesses. They are also likely to be involved in any revision arising from the pilot testing and can focus changes specifically on problem areas identified by learners. If tutors and learner support staff are not part of the research team, their views about the course should also be obtained using questionnaires, interviews or focus groups.

An alternative approach to pilot testing is to treat the first year of any course or programme as action research. Once materials have been drafted, the course can be offered in the normal way. Any learners who enrol will then form part of the research group, by giving feedback on anything that needs to be changed. Those responsible for face-to-face tuition can provide supplementary inputs on these topics, while the course writers work on revising the study materials. Learners who register for the course in its second and subsequent years will receive the revised materials and will benefit from supplementary inputs from tutors. The main advantage of this approach is that the course development cycle is shortened by at least a year. In addition, this approach eliminates the need to bring together a special group of learners for the pilot phase, where this is difficult to do.

CREATING A LEARNING INSTITUTION

A key theme that runs throughout this handbook is fostering a culture of continuous improvement and development in your open school or college. This involves moving away from the typical patterns of behaviour in hierarchical organisations. Traditionally, information is generated by a small group of specialists and channelled through the management cadre, who control its dissemination and use. Instead, we are advocating a more participatory

approach, where everyone with a stake in how information is used can participate in generating data, analysing it and putting it into practice.

Research is of critical importance in the development of any educational institution. By adopting a model that integrates research with improved practice, the process will have a positive impact on the quality of services provided by your open school (see Chapter 7). Staff members need to be involved in such research, not only in the ways described above, but also by providing opportunities for reflective practice (as outlined in Chapter 2). This means moving away from a culture of blame towards one that encourages staff members to engage in a critical examination of their own practice. In addition, much can be learned from the attempts of peers who do not meet their targets. In this way, your open school or college can be transformed into a true learning institution.

SUMMARY

None of us has a crystal ball to reveal what the future of open schooling will look like. It is therefore essential to put in place an effective and interactive model of research, development and practice that enables us to respond to future circumstances. Such an approach ensures that the procedures you adopt in your open school, the programmes you develop and the methods you use to deliver them are responsive to the needs of your learners. Carrying out a thorough investigation of students' needs and preferences prior to drafting study materials, and pilot testing these before distribution, can also save considerable time and expense.

SUGGESTED READING

Chambers, Robert. 1997. *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Freeman, Richard. 2004. *Planning and Implementing Open and Distance Learning Systems: A Handbook for Decision-Makers*. See, in particular, Unit 1. Commonwealth of Learning. Available as an electronic document at www.col.org/TrainingHandbooks

chapter 4

ACQUIRING, DEVELOPING AND DISTRIBUTING STUDY MATERIALS

Open and distance learning relies upon self-instructional resources to carry out many of the tasks performed by teachers in a conventional classroom. These self-study materials are the main vehicle for outlining what the course is about, helping learners to reflect on what they know already, transmitting new information, challenging them to apply new learning, assessing their progress and providing encouragement. Without these materials, studying at a distance would not be possible.

This chapter does not include a technical discussion on how to design instructional resources. There are many sources of information on how to develop study materials for different target groups using different media. The list of resources for further reading at the end of this chapter includes references to pamphlets, style handbooks, training toolkits and academic monographs on this topic. Instead, this chapter addresses the following issues for managers:

- Which technologies should your open school use to develop and deliver self-study resources?
- How can your open school obtain suitable materials?
- What do you need to know about copyright?
- Which is the most cost-effective way to reproduce paper-based materials?
- What organisational structure should be adopted for materials development?
- How should you plan the process of acquiring, developing and distributing materials?

CHOOSING THE MOST APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

The first generation of distance education methods – correspondence courses – involved three simple types of technology: printing or copying on paper, writing on paper, and exchanging paper through the national postal service. Most open schools still rely on paper-based materials for some or all of the following functions:

- providing information about courses for potential learners (posters, leaflets)
- communicating with students about administrative and academic requirements (course prospectus, information sheets or circular letters)
- diagnosing learning needs (questionnaires or pre-tests)
- enrolling students (application and registration forms)
- providing learning content (printed study materials)
- assessing a learner’s progress and achievement (assignments, quizzes, examinations).

As discussed in the introduction to this handbook, open schools now have a wider range of teaching and learning technologies to choose from. Some technology choices will only affect the internal operations of your open school. For example,

..... whether you keep paper-based student records or store this information in a computer database will have little or no direct impact on learners. Other choices affect your learners. For example, if you decide to deliver part of a course via the Internet, then only students with access to Internet-linked computers will be able to benefit from that part of the course (Freeman, 2004: 52–58).

First we make the
media, and then the
media make us.
Marshal McLuhan

Deciding on the most appropriate technology or technologies to use for delivering a course to a particular group of learners requires a detailed assessment of several factors. Because the choices you make regarding course delivery can affect how you develop or acquire study materials and how they are reproduced, it is essential to plan the technologies you will utilise from the start. The following factors need to be considered.

Cost of Reproducing Materials

Calculating the total and unit costs of developing and delivering a new ODL course is a complex process, involving estimates of:

- costs associated with acquisition or development of study materials
- costs of offering a course (e.g., expenditure for publicity, which is incurred regardless of how many learners actually enrol)
- costs of reproducing and distributing study materials
- costs of any additional technology required to use the study materials
- course delivery costs (e.g., wages for tutors)
- institutional overheads.

Because these costs behave in different ways, they must all be treated separately (Du Vivier, 2008a: Unit 6). Once total expenditure has been estimated, the cost per learner is derived by dividing this figure by the number of learners who are expected to register for the course over its lifetime. Recently, some tools have been developed to make these calculations easier (Du Vivier, 2008b).

One of the reasons why paper-based materials are still used so widely for ODL courses is that they are generally seen as cheaper to reproduce. However, the unit costs of reproduction are dependent upon the number of copies required and the technology that is used. In general, the cost per page for offset printing is lower than for bulk photocopying or digital copying. However, this is true only when more than a certain number of copies are made. For lower volumes, photocopying is cheaper per page. Using a computer printer is normally the most expensive way to reproduce materials on a page-by-page basis.

However, as the price of personal computers, laptops and other portable electronic devices continues to decline, delivering learning content through these technologies has become less and less costly. For example, a recent analysis of expenditures on printing booklets for the senior secondary programme at the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre indicated that it is now cheaper to supply each learner with a low-cost laptop pre-loaded with learning materials for the full course of six subjects (Du Vivier, 2008b: 21). With this technology, there is virtually no cost to reproduce materials, apart from staff time spent in pre-loading files onto the device. The cost of the laptop itself is recouped through savings on printing costs. As the cost of these electronic devices is reduced and their reliability improves, this option will become increasingly cost-effective.

Flexibility

Of all the current technologies for delivering ODL courses, paper-based materials offer the highest degree of flexibility for learners. They are convenient to transport and can be used almost anywhere that is dry and well-lit, even when travelling or out of doors. Unlike other delivery systems, no other technology is required to study a paper booklet, nor is a reliable source of electricity needed to power or recharge the device. That said, various alternatives to mains electricity are now available to power laptops or other hardware for delivering electronic content, including clockwork mechanisms, hand-cranked or bicycle-pedal generators, and solar cells.

Reliability

Paper-based materials also come out on top in terms of their reliability. A workbook or study guide can still be used after being dropped in a mud puddle. The same may not be true for a laptop or other electronic device. If a booklet is missing some pages, it is relatively cheap and easy to replace it with another one. Debugging or repairing a computer, laptop or other portable hardware is expensive and time-consuming.

Security

When learning content is provided through paper booklets, issues of security generally do not arise. A study guide or workbook is unlikely to be stolen, whereas an audio player, television or laptop will need to be secured. Likewise, paper study guides and workbooks cannot be corrupted by computer viruses.

Access

Audio and (to a lesser extent) video materials have an advantage over printed booklets for learners who are visually impaired and who can listen to a spoken commentary. In addition, audio materials can be invaluable as supplementary resources for those who are just learning to read for the first time or starting to pick up another language. Delivery systems using multimedia devices share the advantages of audio and video. In addition, the display settings on some computers can be easily modified to enhance the readability of print for visually impaired users.

Learning Experience

Resources provided on laptops are typically media-rich, which means they incorporate colourful diagrams, illustrations, photographs, audio and/or video clips and, possibly, interactive activities. If these are linked to other resources on the World Wide Web, then learners can access a virtual library of additional information on the topic they are studying. When compared to existing paper-based materials used for many ODL programmes, these digital resources are more effective in engaging a learner’s attention and can provide a richer variety of learning experiences.

Other Benefits

When laptops are supplied as part of the study package for a course or programme, both the open school and its learners can benefit in other ways. Many aspects of course administration can be carried out remotely through an Internet connection. Learners can collaborate with one another in study groups or for group projects via e-mail. They can also submit assignments and receive feedback from their tutors. In the process, learners will acquire basic computer skills that may enhance their employability in the labour market.

Ultimately, a decision on the most appropriate technology to adopt for delivering a course or programme will depend upon the characteristics of the target group, the prevailing circumstances in the areas where they live and the relative weight given to each of the factors described above.

Activity for Managers

Figure 4.1 shows an example of a management tool that can provide a structure for making a decision on an issue that is influenced by a complex range of factors. The tool is called a “decision matrix” and should be used as follows:

1. Along the top, list the different options that are being evaluated. In this example, we are considering four different technologies for delivering a senior primary education programme for out-of-school youths living on the fringes of large urban centres.

FIGURE 4.1: DECISION MATRIX

Course: Senior primary education

Target Group: Out-of-school youths living on the urban fringe

Factor	Weighting of Factor	TECHNOLOGIES for DELIVERING COURSE											
		Paper Workbooks		Audio MP3 Players		TV Broadcasts		Laptop Computers					
		Ranking	Weighted Score	Ranking	Weighted Score	Ranking	Weighted Score	Ranking	Weighted Score				
Reproduction costs	10	2	20	4	40	1	10	3	30				
Distribution	3	3	9	4	12	1	3	2	6				
Flexibility	6	4	24	3	18	1	6	2	12				
Reliability	5	4	20	3	15	1	5	2	10				
Security	6	4	24	3	18	1	6	2	12				
Access	2	3	6	4	8	1	2	2	4				
Learning experience	10	1	10	2	20	3	30	4	40				
Other benefits	8	3	24	1	8	2	16	4	32				
TOTALS			137		139		78		146				

Weighting of factors: Ranging from 1 to 10 with 1 = Not Important, 10 = Very Important. Note that two or more factors can receive the same score.

Ranking: Each technology should be ranked in order from 1 to 4, with 4 = Lowest Cost, Easiest to Distribute, Most Flexible, etc.

2. In the first column on the left, list the different factors that need to be considered.
3. In the next column, assign a weighting to each factor on a scale from 1 to 10. The more important you believe the factor to be, the higher the weighting you should give it. In this example, reproduction costs and the quality of the learning experience were both assigned the highest possible weighting.
4. There are two columns for each of the options under consideration. In the first of these, you should assign the option a rank. In this example, since there are only four technologies under consideration, the ranking scale goes from 1 to 4. The highest value should always correspond with the best outcome for a particular factor. So, in this example, the lowest reproduction costs can be achieved using MP3 players, which also provide the easiest way to distribute materials. Notice that the highest value (4) has been entered in these two cells of the matrix (column E, rows 4 and 5).
5. The second column under each option contains the weighted score. This is calculated by multiplying the ranking of each option by the weighting for the factor in that row.
6. When all the weighted scores have been calculated, the total weighted score for each option can be obtained by adding all the figures in the same column. In this example, the technology with the highest weighted score is the laptop computer. This is the best option for delivering this particular course.



ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES

Undoubtedly, there is sharp contrast between developed and developing countries in levels of access to information and communications technologies. In many (though by no means all) parts of the industrialised world, having a computer with broadband Internet access is taken for granted. However, people in many countries of Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific have difficulty finding a working computer and are frustrated by costly and low-speed Internet connections. For this reason, computer-mediated delivery methods are often rejected as unfeasible.

We need to take into account current realities while planning for the possibilities that will be available in the not-too-distant future. There are ways to improve access for learners in open schools, including establishing computer labs and/or open learning centres in regional or district towns through public-private partnerships or with corporate social responsibility funds. Schoolnet projects are also pushing new technologies into rural areas of many countries, and open schools should arrange for their learners to have access to these facilities.

Nevertheless, there is a tendency among managers in some open schools to abandon the idea of providing study materials through computers or similar devices because their learners cannot afford the hardware. Such an argument diverts attention away from the economic realities of the situation. As noted above, in at least some cases, giving each learner a low-cost laptop pre-loaded with electronic study materials would be cheaper than providing them with the same materials on paper. This means that the open school will save money, even if learners are not charged any additional fees to cover the cost of the laptop computer. Although pilot testing of these new technologies is required to determine their robustness and reliability in the field, cost is not necessarily a factor precluding their adoption.

OBTAINING STUDY MATERIALS

First generation distance education technologies use two main approaches to provide content for learners:

- Study guides or workbooks can be developed to **wrap around** a particular textbook that is used to provide the bulk of the information students require for that subject. In such cases, the study guide or workbook serves the function of “teacher talk” – the inputs typically provided by a teacher in a classroom environment to introduce the material, clarify possible points of misunderstanding and assess students’ comprehension of the material after reading the textbook.
- The alternative is to develop **self-contained** study materials, which provide not only the “teacher talk” but also all of the information (facts, figures, explanations, discussion) that is normally contained in the textbook for the subject. Obviously, this approach involves a considerably higher investment of time and resources in the development phase, since self-contained study materials will need to be much longer than wrap-around study guides or workbooks.

Acquiring Existing Study Materials

A second approach to obtaining study materials is to purchase them from another ODL institution or academic publisher. The Commonwealth of Learning provides access to course materials that may be freely used and adapted (www.col.org/CourseMaterials). Many modern textbooks have adopted features of good ODL materials and can be used successfully for the purpose of self-study. For example, Cambridge University Press, in collaboration with the Namibian College of Open Learning, has developed a series of workbooks for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education. These are available at commercial rates from Cambridge University Press in South Africa.

The best way to predict the future is to invent it.

Alan Kay

Increasingly, open schools offering secondary and basic education are adopting the technological tools pioneered by ODL institutions at the tertiary level, and this is having an impact on how content is developed and presented to their students. In many cases, those responsible for designing ODL courses are no longer drafting content, but are instead making use of the remarkable amount of content that is freely available in electronic form. There are several ways in which this content can be acquired:

- **World Wide Web.** The World Wide Web offers a bewildering array of information on any conceivable topic. A simple search can yield thousands if not millions of web pages where reference is made to key words typed in the search box. While many of these references provide germane and accurate information, some may be unreliable or vexatious and the majority are likely to be irrelevant. The task for those designing ODL courses is to identify websites that present the required information in the most straightforward and stimulating way. They then give learners the website addresses and provide guidance on how to use these resources as productively as possible. This web-based approach is analogous to the wrap-around study guides of previous generations of delivery methods.
- **Open educational resources.** A second way of exploiting new technologies is to make use of open educational resources (OERs). OERs are learning materials that can be downloaded from the World Wide Web and used for educational purposes. Increasingly, both educational institutions and individual educators are posting content they have developed on the Web for others to make use of. Worksheets, exercises,

units, modules and whole courses may be accessed at little or no charge, as long as the author or source is acknowledged and other conditions are observed. Where students of a particular ODL institution do not have regular access to the Internet, OERs can be downloaded as computer files and reproduced on paper. Alternatively, content can be copied and pasted into pre-formatted templates to conform to the institution's house style before being sent for printing. A list of websites containing OERs is included at the end of this chapter.

- **Digital textbooks.** Finally, a number of bodies have initiated projects to produce free digital textbooks in a range of subjects commonly taught in schools. Again, these textbooks are available online and can be downloaded onto a computer's hard drive or onto a memory stick or flash drive. If students do not have regular access to a computer, these textbooks can be printed out and reproduced by either photocopying or other methods.

The use of web-based resources has several advantages over the approach currently used by many open schools for developing paper-based study materials. Adopting this new approach could:

- **Shorten the materials development cycle.** It can take up to three years for new study materials to be drafted, edited, laid out and printed for distribution to learners. By utilising one or more of the approaches outlined above, this time can be reduced to six months.
- **Reduce development costs.** If an open school can acquire suitable study materials at little or no charge, it will not have to pay for course writing, content and language editing, or layout. This can result in considerable savings when compared to traditional approaches to developing courseware.
- **Facilitate the updating of materials.** Updating ODL study materials should be done on a regular basis to accommodate any changes in the course curriculum or syllabus, as well as incorporating new developments in the subject as an academic discipline. Any time a web page is updated, the new version becomes available immediately, so there is no need to scrap existing materials and print new ones.
- **Ensure higher quality in terms of design and layout.** Typically, OERs include many tried and tested features to enhance their pedagogical effectiveness. They also use templates that have been developed by

professional web designers to incorporate features (such as different fonts and font sizes, navigation boxes, icons, etc.) that guide users through the materials. Even when OERs are printed off and reproduced as paper-based materials, their layout is superior to that in many paper-based workbooks or study guides supplied by open schools.

The introduction of web-based materials has changed the dynamics and economics of educational publishing. When materials were paper-based, content was the most important product, but it is no longer what ODL institutions are about. Instead, open schools can add value to the services they provide by supporting the learning process, as well as assessing and certifying its outcomes.

The Commonwealth of Learning is currently hosting a project to develop high-quality open education resources for open schools in developing countries. The project is training 100 teachers to use the Commonwealth of Learning Instructional Design Template, and participants are collaborating online, using a project management system to develop OERs in 20 subjects.

Activity for Managers

1. Choose a new course that your institution is planning to develop in the coming year and carry out a web search for relevant open educational resources. Be sure to visit some of the OER websites listed at the end of this chapter.
2. Select one or more of the resources available on these websites. Download it or print it out and circulate it to staff in the materials development unit at your open school for evaluation.
3. With your colleagues, discuss the following:
 - *How closely do these materials follow the prescribed curriculum for your course?*
 - *What would need to be changed, adapted or rewritten for your course?*
 - *What features of these OERs are particularly useful or innovative?*
 - *If you agree to use these materials in their existing form or to adapt them for your course, who will be responsible for ensuring that all copyright issues are resolved?*

Acquiring web-based study materials does not require a high degree of technology. Even if there is only one work station with Internet access in your institution, these resources can be downloaded for adaptation, layout and reproduction on paper. By getting involved in projects for producing open educational resources, open schools can also benefit from the contributions of the Commonwealth of Learning and other partners, rather than duplicating the effort (and cost) of developing materials in each country.

Adapting Existing Materials

The final approach for obtaining study materials is to acquire rights to existing materials and adapt these as required. Although this may seem like an attractive option, adapting existing materials may not always be the cheapest approach. Where the original materials are protected under an all-rights-reserved copyright (see below), permission will need to be obtained from the copyright holder to use certain parts of the publication while changing others. Normally, this will also involve royalty payments to the copyright holder, either on a one-off or per-use basis. Moreover, when materials must be heavily edited to adapt them for use by a particular target group, this can be more time consuming (and therefore more costly) than drafting new materials from scratch. If the materials are paper-based, it may also be necessary to repeat the desktop publishing process after the content has been edited.

With OERs, on the other hand, permission is usually given to adapt materials to suit your institution's requirements. You may wish to rewrite parts of the text, add extra emphasis for certain points, include additional examples that reflect a local context or devise more relevant self-instructional activities. As many OERs can be edited on the Web, these changes may not have any significant impact on their layout or other features.

COPYRIGHT

All ODL institutions have a role in the creation, publication and consumption of information and copyrightable materials. As creators and publishers of educational resources, open schools have a financial interest, in that an investment has been made to produce them. ODL institutions also have an interest in the public relations value of being identified as the publisher of these materials. On the other hand, as consumers, open schools are concerned with

the cost of acquiring rights to use such resources. The challenge is to find a balance between these competing interests.

In most common-law jurisdictions, copyright vests automatically in the author, regardless of whether or not the author asserts his or her rights. The copyright holder must give express permission to use copyrighted work. Copyright applies not only to text or written materials, but also to computer software, photographs, tables, illustrations and other graphics.

The procedures for asserting copyright vary from country to country. In New Zealand, for example, copyright comes into effect as soon as a work is created. In other jurisdictions, procedures may need to be followed in order to produce evidence of original authorship. Copyright can be assigned to an ODL institution by agreement with the writer, who should, nonetheless, be credited as the author. However, you must ensure that local laws regarding copyright are adhered to when contracting course writers to draft original materials. The contract should also include a declaration by the writer that the content he or she supplies is original work. A clause indemnifying your institution against possible losses is also advisable, in case a writer's work infringes someone else's copyright.

There is a range of options for asserting rights over educational content or non-software materials:

Full Copyright ©

Under this option, all rights are reserved by the copyright holder. This means that:

- No portion of the work may be reproduced without express permission.
- Fair use can be made of the work for educational purposes. Normally this means that a student can make a single photocopy for study purposes, but multiple photocopies are not allowed. In most countries, learners can copy up to 20 per cent of a book or a single article in a journal or anthology.
- It is usually necessary to make royalty payments in order to obtain permission to reproduce the work, either in whole or in part.
- The work may not be uploaded on the World Wide Web without express permission.



Public Domain

After a certain period of time, copyright lapses and the work can be used freely and without any restrictions. The period before materials come into the public domain may vary from one jurisdiction to another. Some materials, particularly those produced with state funds, are issued in the public domain from the time of publication.

Creative Commons Licences

Creative Commons (CC) licences enable authors to retain their full rights, while allowing others to use the material under certain terms and conditions. CC licences are concerned with the regulation of four categories of rights of copyright holders:

- **Attribution** – the right to be identified as the author of a work, which is shown by the letters *BY* on the license.
- **Share alike use** – the right of the author to ensure that the copyrighted work is used by others in the same manner and under the same terms as the author originally intended. It does not restrict the medium the work is shared in. This is indicated by the letters *SA*.
- **Derivative works** – the right of the author to determine whether others can adapt or otherwise change the work for their own purposes. When such derivative works are not allowed, the letters *ND* are used. If these do not appear, then there are no restrictions on changing or adapting the work. In many cases, authors of educational materials will not have any objections to their work being adapted to reflect a different context, perhaps by changing examples to ensure that they reflect local conditions. However, there are instances where such changes raise the possibility that the original meaning of the work will be distorted – for example, when reporting statistical data. Under these circumstances, it is advisable to restrict the capacity of other users to produce derivative works.
- **Commercial use** – the right of the author to determine whether the work can be used for commercial purposes. When commercial use is prohibited, then the letters *NC* are used on the licence. If these letters do not appear, then the work does not carry any restrictions in relation to its use for profit. In the context of copyrighted resources, it is important to note that the non-commercial designation does not mean that an open school

cannot charge for the material. Institutions can recoup all costs incurred in reproducing (either printing or copying) and distributing these materials, as well as for associated staff salaries and overheads. This is true irrespective of the nature of the institution, whether it is in the public sector, a non-profit body or a for-profit venture. The key issue is whether or not the programme or course in which the material will be used is intended to make a profit. You cannot use materials with a CC-NC copyright for a programme where income is expected to exceed expenditure.

By combining these rights in different ways, 11 different licensing options are available.

REGISTERING A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE

Registering a CC licence is a simple process that can be completed online:

1. Open your web browser and type in <http://creativecommons.org/license/>
2. Click on the “License Your Work” button at the top right.
3. Answer the questions by clicking on the relevant buttons.
4. In the box labelled “Jurisdiction of your licence” select the country where your institution operates. If it is not listed, select “None of the above.” This will give you an “ported” licence that will be valid around the world.
5. Click on the “Select a Licence” button.
6. Click on the Creative Commons icon to access the “human readable” version of your licence.
7. Highlight the text of the licence with your mouse, and copy and paste it onto the copyright page of your paper-based publication.

Note: The “lawyer readable” version of your licence may be found by clicking on the coloured text labelled “Legal code (full licence)” at the bottom of the human readable licence page.

8. If you are publishing your document on a website, go to the “machine readable” version of your licence on the “License your work” page.

9. Copy the text of the licence and paste it at the appropriate place in your web page while in editing mode.

Note: The Creative Commons website can also be used to search for text, music, images, and so on to use in educational materials:

1. Open your web browser and enter the URL for the Creative Commons website: <http://creativecommons.org/>
2. At the top of the page, click on the icon labelled “Search CC licensed work.”
3. Choose one of the search engines or databases listed along the top: Flickr contains photographs, blip.tv is for video clips, and Owl is a music search engine.
4. Enter your search terms in the space at the top of the page and hit the “Enter” or “Return” key.
5. Browse through the different images or video/music clips and double-click on the one you want to view.
6. When a web page appears, it should indicate at the bottom what sort of CC licence has been issued with regard to its use.
7. The file can be downloaded and inserted in whatever type of materials you are using with the attribution (where required) and other licence conditions.

Before using any materials, whether they have been developed from scratch or acquired from elsewhere, it is essential to confirm the licensing conditions that apply. As the issue of copyright is a complex one, you may need to seek legal advice to ensure that the rights of others and those of your institution are fully understood. Infringing someone else's copyright can involve lengthy and time-consuming legal proceedings, so it is important to get this right before publication. Ideally, a manager or senior member of the professional staff in your open school should be given responsibility for all copyright issues.

STRUCTURING THE PROCESS OF MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION

In the systems model of an ODL institution, the development, production and distribution of study materials all form part of the materials sub-system (see

Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2). This sub-system is reflected in the internal organisational structures of many open schools that offer their courses primarily through paper-based study materials. Normally, these materials development and production units include a number of full-time and/or part-time staff who act as subject experts, content and language editors, artist/illustrators, graphic designers, and desktop publishing technicians.

.....
So the coin of the realm is not memorizing the facts that they're going to need to know for the rest of their lives. The coin of the realm will be: Do you know how to find information? Do you know how to validate it? Do you know how to synthesize it? Do you know how to leverage it? Do you know how to communicate it? Do you know how to collaborate with it? Do you know how to problem solve with it? That's the new 21st century set of literacies, and it looks a lot different than the model that most of us were raised under.
Ken Kay
.....

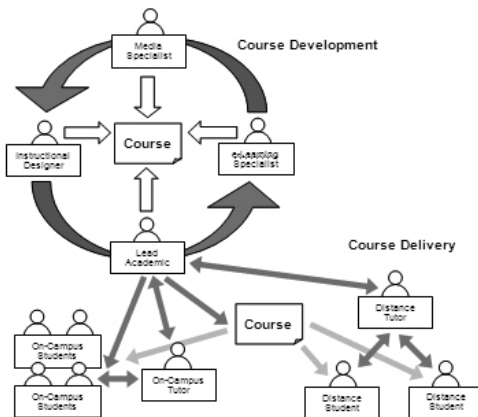
While drafting course content is a relatively easy task, ensuring that the resulting materials are effective tools for open and distance learning is the work of an instructional designer. In addition, making the best use of media other than print and exploiting the potential of information and communications technologies demand high levels of expertise. These skills are currently in short supply, not only in developing countries but around the world. For this reason, many open schools provide training for their subject experts to ensure that the materials developed under their guidance include a minimum of ODL features. However, this approach is problematic, as such staff can find it difficult to keep abreast of changes in their academic field as well as the latest developments in ODL technologies.

CASE STUDY

The Bible College of New Zealand (BCNZ) is a dual-mode institution that provides its courses through both conventional face-to-face classes for students on campus and ODL methods for those studying at a distance. As a result of the problems outlined above, the BCNZ has adopted a team approach to materials development. A subject expert or “lead academic” is given overall responsibility for designing and delivering a course in his or her particular area of expertise. Course content is selected or drafted by the lead academic, with the assistance of contract course writers, where necessary. They are advised and supported by a team of specialists in instructional design, multimedia and e-learning. Each of these specialists is involved in a number of course development teams.

The lead academic also lectures to on-campus students and supervises a team of tutors. Some tutors are based at the main campus of BCNZ and work with on-campus students. Other tutors work from satellite centres, providing face-to-face instruction for ODL students and marking their assignments. The lead academic performs a quality assurance function by moderating the marking of assignments for both groups. In this way, common standards are maintained for on-campus and off-campus studies, while deficiencies in the course materials can be remedied as the course is updated. The lead academic model at BCNZ is illustrated in Figure 4.2.

FIGURE 4.2: LEAD ACADEMIC MODEL



Source: Adapted from a presentation by Mark Nichols, e-Learning Specialist: BCNZ.

One of the main advantages of the lead academic model is that a limited number of specialists in instructional design, multimedia and e-learning can support several different initiatives at the same time. Because their expertise lies in the area of ODL technologies, it is easier for them to keep abreast of the latest approaches, techniques and software in their fields. As many open schools do not need to develop new courses every year, it can be difficult to justify the cost of employing such specialists on a full-time basis. Under such circumstances, the services of these specialists can be contracted out to support materials development activities in other ODL institutions.

REPRODUCING STUDY MATERIALS

Once paper-based materials have been developed to a stage known as “camera-ready copy,” they are passed on for reproduction. A key decision for those who manage the materials production process is whether to print materials in-house or to outsource this function. For most ODL institutions, the cycle of reproducing paper-based study materials is seasonal. Peak demand occurs in the months preceding student enrolments and then tapers off as existing stocks are distributed. Where an open school has its own printing facilities or print shop, it may not be able to supply all of the institution’s requirements during peak periods. Conversely, during off-peak months it may not be working at full capacity.

One solution to this problem is to stagger the enrolment dates for different programmes so that demand for printed materials is spread more evenly throughout the year. Spare capacity during slack periods can also be used to print materials for other bodies in order to earn additional income for the open school. However, the market for contract printing services can be very competitive. Because of this, many open schools now outsource the bulk of their printing requirements while retaining limited printing facilities in-house to cope with incidentals, such as assignments and tutorial letters.

Where an open school already has its own print shop, it is important to investigate whether this unit is adding value to the organisation or undermining its sustainability. In order to evaluate the most cost-effective way to provide these services, an activity-based cost analysis should be carried out. This involves calculating all the costs incurred by the print shop, including:

- expenditure on staff (salaries or wages and all other allowances for full-time, part-time and casual workers)
- supplies (paper, ink or toner, etc.)
- operating expenses (including electrical power)
- depreciation or leasing of machinery
- a proportion of institutional overheads.

When the total expenditure over the financial year is divided by the total output of the print shop during the same period, this yields the unit cost per page of product. This figure can be compared with quotations obtained from commercial printers. If in-house printing proves to be significantly more expensive, the print shop supervisor and staff should be given an opportunity to increase their productivity. After a trial period of one or two years, the cost-effectiveness of in-house printing services can be re-evaluated against the outsourcing option. A decision can then be taken on the future disposition of the print shop and the staff employed in this unit.

Reproducing other types of study materials depends upon the technology you will use to deliver them. Multiple copies of audio cassette tapes or CDs and video cassettes or DVDs can be made with specialised equipment, though it may be more cost-effective to outsource this work. Digital resources for other electronic devices, such as MP3 players or laptop computers, can be pre-installed by a technician in advance of distributing the devices to learners. Alternatively, they can download materials remotely from a web-based virtual learning environment or learning management system maintained by your open school. If learners do not have access to the Internet, these materials can be installed onto their devices from a computer at a local study centre.

PLANNING THE MATERIALS PROCESS

As the process of acquiring or developing and reproducing study materials can be lengthy, complex and bound by time limits (such as the start of a new academic year), it must be carefully planned. A useful tool for doing this is called the Programme Evaluation and Review Technique – PERT (Hope and Timmel, 1995: Book II, 109–113).

Activity for Managers

1. With other senior staff responsible for this process, brainstorm all the steps or activities that need to be carried out in order to place the materials in the hands of learners. Write down each of these steps on a small piece of paper (Post-Its are ideal).
2. Arrange the small pieces of paper on a larger sheet, table top or blank wall.
 - Some of the activities will proceed in a step-by-step fashion, each depending upon the completion of the previous one. These should be placed in a straight line from left to right.
 - Some activities can be carried out without waiting for others to be completed. These should be arranged in lines above or below the main line.
3. Once all the pieces of paper have been arranged in an agreed order, check that you haven't left anything out. If necessary, write down other steps on additional pieces of paper and place them in their correct position.
4. Go to the last action and decide when it must be completed. Write this deadline at the top or bottom of your large sheet of paper (or write it on another small piece of paper and fix it on the table top or wall).
5. Going backwards in time, decide how long the preceding activity will take to complete and write the date when it must be completed. Repeat this until deadlines have been set for all of the activities.
6. Before finalising your plan, think about those activities which have caused problems with deadlines in the past. For example, some course writers may not provide their copy on the dates stipulated. Allow extra time for this kind of slippage.
7. On the small pieces of paper, write the initials of the staff member who is responsible for each activity.
8. Finally, copy the plan onto a single sheet of paper or type it in a spreadsheet so that it can be easily revised and circulated to relevant staff.

An example of a PERT plan outlining the steps that should be followed when developing audio materials for an existing course is shown in Figure 4.3.

SUMMARY

Good study materials are the starting point for any open and distance learning course or programme. The technologies you choose for delivering study materials to learners will have a major impact on how the process is structured, as well as the way materials are produced and reproduced. Obtaining study resources does not necessarily involve developing these from scratch. Instead, you should explore a range of options before deciding to take this route. Careful consideration should also be given to the issues surrounding copyright when acquiring or adapting existing materials or developing new ones. As the materials process can be a lengthy one and timing is often critical, it must be carefully planned and monitored. If these issues are managed properly and materials are delivered on time, then you will be giving your learners the best possible start to their studies.

FIGURE 4.3: PERT PLAN FOR DEVELOPING AUDIO MATERIALS FOR AN EXISTING COURSE

Course Title: English Language Level: Upper Primary

Target Date:	January 2010	February 2010	March 2010	April 2010	May 2010	June 2010
Decision-Making	Alert Management Team and Board of need for audio materials (Materials Manager)	Prepare submission for developing audio resources (Materials Manager)	Budget for development and production of audio materials (Materials Manager)			
Materials Design	Identify what audio resources are required (Programme Officer: English)	Devise general format of audio materials (Programme Officer: English)		Finalise format of audio materials (Programme Officer: English)		Draft guidelines for script writers (Programme Officer: English)
Target Date:	July 2010	August 2010	September 2010	October 2010	November 2010	December 2010
Materials Development				Contract writers prepare scripts (Programme Officer: English)	Contract writers prepare scripts (Programme Officer: English)	Contract writers prepare scripts (Programme Officer: English)
Administrative Services	Advertise for contract script writers (HR Manager)	Select script writers (Programme Officer: English, Editor and HR Manager)	Finalise contracts for script writers (Editor and HR Manager)			
Target Date:	January 2011	February 2011	March 2011	April 2011	May 2011	June 2011
Materials Writing & Editing	All draft scripts received from writers (Editor)	Send draft scripts for content editing (Editor)	Send draft scripts for language editing (Editor)	All scripts edited and ready for recording (Editor)		
Audio Recording		Book time in recording studio (Editor)	Identify actors for audio recording and finalise contracts (Editor and HR Manager)		All audio recording completed (Editor)	All audio editing completed (Editor)

Materials Reproduction	Master CD received (Production Manager)
Administrative Services	Award tender for copying CDs (Finance Manager)
	Evaluate tenders for copying CDs (Finance Manager)
	Deadline for receipt of tenders (Finance Manager)
	Advertise tender for reproducing CDs (Finance Manager)
	Finalise documents for tender to copy CDs (Finance Manager)
	Send camera-ready copy for CD labels to printing contractor (Production Manager)
	Design label for CD cases (DTP Technician)
	Send master CD to contractor for audio reproduction (Production Manager)
	All CD labels and cases delivered to materials store (Production Manager)
	All CDs delivered to materials store (Production Manager)
	All CD cases labelled and CDs inserted (Stores Supervisor)
	All CDs packed with other study materials for course (Stores Supervisor)
	Start of enrolments (Transport Officer)
	03 February 2012 –

Target Date: July 2011 August 2011 September 2011 October 2011 November 2011 December 2011

Materials Reproduction

Materials Reproduction

Materials Reproduction

Materials Packing

Target Date: January 2012 February 2012

Materials Distribution

All materials delivered to enrolment points (Transport Officer)

03 February 2012 –

Start of enrolments (Transport Officer)

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Open Educational Resources

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Wikieducator | http://www.wikieducator.org/ |
| OER Commons | http://oercommons.org/ |
| COL | http://www.col.org/KnowledgeServices |
| Open Content | http://opencontent.org/googleocw/ |
| Curriki | http://www.curriki.org/xwiki/bin/view/Main/WebHome |
| Wikipedia | http://www.wikipedia.org/ |
| Wikibooks | http://www.wikibooks.org/ |
| Wikiversity | http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Wikiversity:Main_Page |
| UK Open University | http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/ |
| Podcasts | http://www.podcast.net/ or
http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcasts.html |
| Connexions | http://cnx.org/ |
| Google Apps | http://www.google.com/a/help/intl/en/index.html |

chapter 5

MARKETING, RECRUITING AND ENROLLING LEARNERS

Chapter 3 discussed the type of market research that must be done before developing a new course or programme. This chapter explores the topic of marketing in a wider context, as an ongoing relationship with customers and other stakeholders. This relationship begins even before information about the courses and programmes offered by your open school is disseminated to potential learners, and it continues throughout their involvement with your institution. Marketing also refers to the relationship that your school establishes and maintains with its sponsors, as well as the public at large.

This chapter addresses the following questions:

- What is marketing? Why is it important for your open school or college?
- How should you draw up a marketing plan?
- What sort of promotion and publicity is needed?
- How can your institution improve its system for enrolling learners?

MARKETING OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES

(Adapted from a presentation by Jeane Schocroft, Principal: Senior Secondary, Open Access College, South Australia)

If you were asked what marketing is done by your open school, you might answer by talking about information campaigns, posters, brochures and, perhaps, advertisements in the media. All of these activities relate to the promotional side of marketing – telling people about what the institution offers.

.....
Marketing is so basic that it cannot be considered as a separate business function; **it is the whole business...** seen from the customer's point of view.
Peter Drucker
.....

However, this is only a small part of the marketing function. Marketing can be defined as:

everything done by an organisation to anticipate the needs and wants of its customers and to provide services to meet those needs.

Identifying target groups and their needs is discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of researching and developing new courses or programmes. However, you must also consider what your learners want, and then figure out how to supply what they want. In open schools, there is a tendency to lose sight of your learners, because you don't see them on a daily basis. Nevertheless, it is essential to take into account the context in which these learners live their daily lives. From this perspective, the customer, client or learner *truly* comes first.

Marketing, then, is not just about promoting what you have available. It is linked to:

- your open school's vision and mission
- how your school's activities tie in with national development priorities
- how your school acquires or produces study materials
- the ways in which your school's courses are delivered
- the results achieved by your learners.

Marketing must be integrated into everything you do.

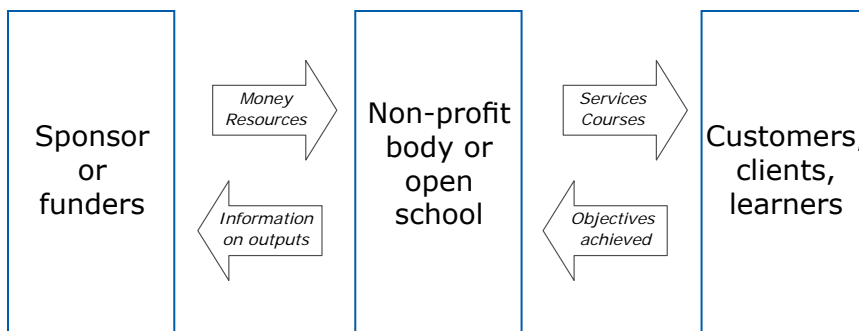
It is important that staff in an open school understand their roles in marketing the institution. Their attitudes and behaviours reflect on the institution every time they:

- answer the telephone;
- speak to a learner, a potential learner and their parents or family members;
- present a lesson or tutorial;
- mark an assignment or provide learners with feedback.

For example, if learners registering for a course must find their way around the corridors and queue in different places to fill in registration forms, pay fees and collect materials, this conveys a particular message about your open school. In an organisation where the needs of customers come first, these processes would be organised in such a way that new learners feel welcomed and the time required to register for a course is kept to a minimum.

The definition of marketing above shows the importance of establishing ongoing relationships with your customers. This will enable you to obtain feedback on whether they have achieved their objectives as a result of the services provided. This is a central focus for private-sector companies. However, for state-funded open schools in the non-profit sector, it is important to establish comparable feedback loops with two distinct groups. You need to create and maintain positive relationships not only with your learners, but also with your sponsors, whether they are central government ministries, local education authorities, international donors, non-governmental organisations or private-sector bodies. This is referred to as the “marketing exchange,” which is illustrated in Figure 5.1.

FIGURE 5.1: THE MARKETING EXCHANGE IN THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR



The practice of marketing in the non-profit sector differs from that in the private sector. State-funded open schools must:

- achieve social objectives set by funders – simply giving customers/learners what they want may not be good enough;
- ensure that learners meet benchmark criteria (normally linked to results in examinations or standardised tests) to ensure continued funding;
- operate within fixed budgets, rather than simply increasing sales.

Tensions can arise because open schools are answerable to two different groups of stakeholders (funders and learners), whose expectations may differ.

There is also the wider problem of public image. Distance education as a whole, and open schools as agents of ODL, are often seen by the public and Ministry of Education officials as second-best or marginal. Fees for ODL courses that are low in comparison to those for conventional courses may only confirm these negative perceptions. It is a common belief that “you get what you pay for,” and people may equate low fees with poor quality. Multiple strategies should be used to bring the message to the public that the education provided by open schools can be as good as, or even better than, what is provided by conventional schools. It is important that these marketing messages are not simply ad hoc or issued in reaction to a crisis situation. However, you should not under-estimate how difficult it is to change public opinion once it is fixed. It is a long-term process that requires a well-planned strategy and ongoing expenditure.

DEVELOPING A MARKETING PLAN

The steps in developing a marketing plan are very similar to those used for strategic planning (discussed in Chapter 1) and for developing new programmes or courses (Chapter 3). The processes complement and feed into one another, though each has a different focus. In order to decide on the most appropriate marketing strategy, you need to consider what opportunities are available in the market and identify which segment of the market you wish to target. It is also essential to clarify the position you aim to achieve in the market in terms of six *P*'s:

- **Products:** What courses or programmes will your open school offer?
- **Price:** How much will it cost learners to study at your school?
- **Promotion:** What information will be provided for potential learners?
- **Place:** How do learners experience your school when they come in?
- **People:** Are staff members dedicated, enthusiastic, proactive?
- **Process:** What will the experience of enrolling, receiving materials, attending tutorials, and so on be like for learners?

A useful tool for analysing the potential for growth in the market for

educational services is Ansoff’s matrix. As shown in Figure 5.2, the four cells of the matrix represent market penetration, market development, product development and diversification. When applied to educational services, the products or services are courses, and the customers or clients are learners.

FIGURE 5.2: ANSOFF’S PRODUCT-MARKET GROWTH MATRIX

		<i>Products/Services (Courses)</i>	
		<i>Existing</i>	<i>New</i>
<i>Customers/Clients</i>	<i>Existing</i>	<p>MARKET PENETRATION <i>Existing Courses for Existing Learners</i> <i>Low Risk, Low Cost</i></p>	<p>PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT <i>New Courses for Existing Learners</i> <i>Low Risk, Moderate Cost</i></p>
	<i>New</i>	<p>MARKET DEVELOPMENT <i>Existing Courses for New Learners</i> <i>Moderate Risk, Moderate to High Cost</i></p>	<p>DIVERSIFICATION <i>New Courses or Services for New Clients</i> <i>High Risk, High Cost</i></p>

Market Penetration

When using Ansoff’s matrix in the context of an open school, the market penetration cell describes how a school markets its existing courses to the group from which it draws its current learners. In most cases, there are many more people in the target group for a particular course or programme than actually enrol. Some of these will never decide to further their studies for any number of reasons. However, others in the target group may not know about the course or programme, while some may be aware of it but need additional information or encouragement before they register.

In order to achieve growth in market penetration, you need to do more to promote existing courses or programmes. This may involve an intensified

information and publicity campaign, but it may also be desirable to re-brand the institution, with a new logo and signage. However, at this stage, no changes are expected in the courses themselves, nor are you seeking new customers. This is a marketing strategy that involves almost no risk and that can be achieved at relatively low cost.

Market Development

Market development involves marketing an institution's existing product range to a new group of customers or potential learners. This means that the courses or programmes remain the same, but you are targeting new audiences. For example, in many countries the incidence of HIV/AIDS is high within the teaching profession. As a result, students lose out because of prolonged absences of subject teachers. The self-study materials produced by an open school can be marketed for use by students in conventional schools so that they won't fall behind in their studies. Another option is to sell your study materials to an open school or college in another country. Again, these strategies involve very little risk, though a marketing campaign for potential new customers usually involves some costs.

Product Development

Product development means new courses or services that can be provided for your existing target group(s). For example, you might think about increasing the range of subjects in one of your programmes in order to give your existing learners more choice. Innovations that add value to existing services, such as career guidance for learners in an out-of-school secondary education programme, can also be included here. As considerable expenditure may be required to develop new study materials, this option will incur moderate to high costs. There is also some risk that the new courses or services will not be taken up by as many learners as expected.

Diversification

Diversification involves completely new products for new groups of customers. The easiest way for an organisation to diversify is to expand into a related market. For example, your open school might secure the local franchise to offer business courses developed by an ODL institution in another country.

Attempting to provide unrelated services in markets where your institution has no previous experience is much more risky. In addition, acquiring or developing materials for new courses can be very costly.

Activity for Managers

1. Take four pieces of flipchart paper and label them Market Penetration, Market Development, Product Development and Diversification. Stick them on a wall in the same arrangement as shown in Figure 5.2.
2. With other managers and senior staff in your open school, brainstorm all the ways you could increase the number of people from your existing target groups who register for your existing courses. Write these ideas on the Market Penetration sheet.
3. Discuss ideas for marketing your existing courses or services to new groups. Write these on the Market Development sheet.
4. Think of other courses or services that are needed by your existing learners. Write these ideas on the Product Development sheet.
5. Finally, brainstorm ideas for new courses or services that could be delivered to learners who are not currently serviced by your open school. Write these points on the Diversification sheet.

Any proposals arising from the exercise above must be thoroughly planned before they are implemented. This involves using the procedures for developing action and business plans outlined in Chapter 1, including:

- specifying **actions** for each strategy or objective
- setting a **target date** for completing each action
- delegating **responsibility** to a named person or persons
- determining what **indicators** will be used to assess whether the initiative has been successful
- listing the human, material and financial **resources** required.

Just as with your institution's strategic plan, it is also necessary to monitor

progress on your marketing plans in order to determine the extent to which the goals and objectives have been achieved. Where your objectives have not been achieved, it may be possible to find out why. Evaluating your marketing plan also enables you to decide whether the results justify the expenditure made in terms of staff time, money and/or other resources.

PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

Most open schools and colleges organise an annual information and publicity campaign to promote their courses. This can involve some or all of the following means:

- brochures, pamphlets or flyers, which are distributed in various ways;
- information booklets or prospectuses;
- posters;
- presentations at a variety of venues, including community meetings, career fairs, churches or religious festivals;
- meetings with large employers in both the public and private sectors;
- word of mouth from current learners and past pupils;
- newspaper ads;
- advertisements or announcements on radio and/or television;
- press releases or conferences (especially to announce new programmes).

Freeman (2005: 153) argues that a person goes through a number of stages in making the decision to register for an ODL course. This suggests that different promotion methods are required at different stages in the decision-making process.

FIGURE 2.3: STAGES IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS LEADING TO ENROLMENT



The starting point for any information and publicity campaign is making potential learners aware of your institution and the programmes it offers.

Media that are particularly suited to raising basic awareness include posters, newspaper advertisements, and radio or television announcements. Moving from simple awareness to comprehending what is involved in studying at a distance involves more information than can be given through the methods mentioned above. Potential learners will need to be provided with a detailed brochure or prospectus that explains how the programme works, how long it takes and how much it will cost. Convincing potential learners that the programme your institution offers is right for them is the next stage.

Reaching this level of conviction can be facilitated by talking directly to students, or through open days or taster courses. The final step is enrolment, which should follow automatically from conviction. However, it is important to “strike while the iron is hot,” so application or registration forms should be made available at the open days or taster courses.

However, in order to be effective, publicity campaigns must exploit channels of communication that are used by members of your target group. For example, if an institution puts a lot of effort into creating a website to disseminate information on its courses, this can be a complete waste of time if potential learners don't have access to Internet-linked computers. Likewise, if your target group does not have access to television broadcasts, any money spent promoting your courses through this medium will be wasted. For this reason, finding out what technologies potential learners have access to is an important part of market research and course planning (see Chapters 3 and 4). In many cases, the most effective means of promoting your courses is through word of mouth. Existing learners can be encouraged to circulate information about your open school through their social networks in order to reach others in the same target group.

.....
It is often said that 50 per cent of expenditure on marketing is completely wasted. The problem is that no one knows which half.
Folk wisdom
.....



CASE STUDY

Open Access College (OAC) is based in South Australia and offers a range of educational programmes for out-of-school learners from Kindergarten through Grade 12 using a variety of ODL methods. In order to increase enrolment, the college placed advertisements in a number of newspapers at a cost of over AUD3,000. When students came to register for their courses, they were asked how they heard about the OAC. Only two students had learned about the programme by reading the newspaper ads.



Some commercial concerns also question the effectiveness of advertising for bringing in new customers. However, experience has shown that when a business stops advertising, its sales decline. Advertising may thus be seen as part of keeping the company's brand and products in the public eye, thereby maintaining a relationship with existing customers. This is particularly important for open schools and other non-profit bodies that need to project a certain public profile in order to ensure recognition and continued support from funders. For this reason, education ministers or other national and local politicians are often invited to launch information and publicity campaigns, as a way of keeping an open school's activities in the public eye.

Activity for Managers

Reflect critically on the means your open school uses at present to publicise and promote courses.

- *How much was spent on these activities in the last financial year?*
- *Are there any methods you use that are particularly effective at reaching the target group?*
- *Do you have any way of obtaining feedback from learners about the most effective means of promoting your school's courses and programmes?*
- *Are there ways in which your school could improve its marketing?*

ENROLLING LEARNERS

Enrolling learners may seem like a simple and straightforward process; in fact, a number of different steps must be carried out. Where an ODL institution has a two-stage process, with separate application and registration stages, the actions outlined below can be spread over the two stages. The steps that must be carried out to enrol new learners include:

1. Informing learners about what is needed to register

Prospective learners need to be informed of exactly what is required to register for a course or programme. In order to confirm their identity, learners must present an ID card, passport or birth certificate at the time of registration. They may also need to provide evidence that they live at a particular address or in a given area. Normally, this information is spelt out in a prospectus or brochure, but it is advisable to check that learners have all the necessary documents before proceeding with the remainder of the registration process.

2. Providing advice or guidance

In order to ensure that prospective learners choose the right courses to meet their goals and aspirations, they need guidance on what is most suitable for them. This may involve diagnostic testing to determine a learner's aptitude or ability level. In addition, when learners aspire to further education or training beyond what is offered at your open school, they may need to pass certain subjects in order to be eligible for such programmes. This information can be provided in written form, but an individual consultation with someone qualified to provide advice and guidance is the ideal.

3. Checking minimum entry requirements

Minimum requirements are usually set for entry to accredited courses, and these are normally spelt out in the prospectus or brochure. However, it is necessary for an employee of your open school to confirm that each applicant has the necessary documentation – certificates, statements of examination results, and so on – and that it is in order. When places in a course are limited and priority is being given to candidates with particular characteristics (e.g., gender, income, area of residence, ethnicity), applicants also need to be screened to ensure that they meet the necessary criteria.

6. Assessing eligibility for financial aid

Some open schools make provision for needy students to receive financial assistance to pursue their studies, through a fee waiver scheme, scholarships, subsidies, corporate sponsorship or a hardship fund. In order to qualify for such assistance, learners normally have to provide additional information on their circumstances and household income. Again, the documentation must be reviewed and assessed by an official from the open school or college to determine whether an applicant is eligible for financial assistance.

7. Collecting payment

The registration official will also need to calculate how much the learner has to pay, as well as collecting that payment and issuing a receipt. Most learners prefer to pay fees and other charges in instalments, as this enables them to manage with limited cash flow. However, such systems are expensive to administer and it may be difficult to collect second and subsequent instalments. From the point of view of the ODL institution, payment in full at the time of enrolment is the ideal.

8. Distributing study materials

Because of problems distributing materials to learners by post, a number of open schools and colleges have switched to a system of handing over study materials at the time and place of enrolment. However, ensuring that all enrolment venues have sufficient stocks of materials can be a problem.


While a number of the steps above can be carried out by post, some (e.g., confirming a learner's identity) require face-to-face contact between an enrolment official and the prospective learner. To minimise the number of times that learners must travel, many ODL institutions have adopted a "one-stop shop" approach, where all of these actions can be completed on a single occasion.



CASE STUDY

Because Namibia has a small population scattered over a large territory, it is not feasible to require ODL students to come to the country's capital to register for their courses. Even travelling to a regional town can involve a round trip of 500 kilometres or more. In order to reach out to potential learners, the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) carries out registration at over 100 enrolment points. These are staffed by part-time officials, who distribute copies of the programme prospectus, offer guidance, confirm that prospective learners meet course entry requirements, fill in registration forms and collect fees. These officials are paid a fixed rate for every registration form that is correctly completed.

NAMCOL's sister institution, the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning, is fitting out a number of motor vehicles to serve as mobile enrolment points and tutorial centres in that country.



Before leaving the topic of registering students, you need to consider how the enrolment period will be structured. Where ODL institutions follow the same calendar as conventional schools, enrolments usually take place during a fixed period at the start of the academic year. However, some open schools have done away with such restrictions. For example, the Vancouver Learning Network (VLN) in British Columbia, Canada allows new learners to register and start their studies at practically any time of the year. VLN learners can also complete their end-of-module assessments whenever their tutor feels they are ready. There may be significant cost implications for open schools who wish to adopt an open enrolment system, because tutorials and other face-to-face contact sessions will take place in smaller groups or even individually. In addition, this may not be an option if examinations are controlled by a separate body and can only be taken at certain times, usually once or twice a year.

An interesting development in this regard is the On-Demand Examination System introduced by the National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS) in India. The system enables those studying at junior and senior secondary level to sit the final examination in any subject on any day of their choice. A unique

computerised question booklet is generated from a question bank on the basis of a blueprint and paper design template, and the exam is invigilated via closed-circuit television. Password-protected results are available to learners on the NIOS website during the first week of the following month. This examination is recognised as equivalent to those regulated by other boards of school education throughout India. (*Adapted from a presentation by M.C. Pant, Chairman: NIOS*)

Activity for Managers

Consider the way in which your open school currently registers new learners.

- *What are the advantages and disadvantages of the existing system?*
- *If registration can only be carried out at a limited number of centres, what problems might arise if your institution decentralised enrolment?*
- *What problems might arise if your school were to adopt an open enrolment system?*
- *Are there ways to restructure the registration process at your institution to make it more learner-friendly?*

SUMMARY

Marketing is much more than selling your courses to potential learners. It involves shifting perspective to see your open school or college from the learner's point of view. It requires a reassessment of the ways in which your institution promotes and publicises its programmes. It necessitates re-evaluation of the process by which information is provided and learners are enrolled for studies. Detailed marketing plans must also be put in place to develop and maintain ongoing relationships between your open school and its customers, including not only your learners, but also sponsors and other stakeholders.

SUGGESTED READING

Bernhardt, Victoria. 2002. *School Portfolio Toolkit*. New York: Eye on Education.

Freeman, Richard. 2004. *Planning and Implementing Open and Distance Learning Systems: A Handbook for Decision-Makers*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Commonwealth of Learning. Available as an electronic document at ww.col.org/TrainingHandbooks

Medlin, Chris. 2007. *Market Planning to Improve School Services*. Adelaide, SA, Australia: University of Adelaide, School of Commerce.

Wikipedia. 2008. "Product-Market Growth [Ansoff's] Matrix." Electronic document accessed in May 2008 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Product-Market_Growth_Matrix

chapter 6

LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

Simpson (2002: 3) defines learner support as “all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of learners in their studies.” In the past, learner support was seen as a range of services available to learners that they were free to use or not use as they saw fit. However, research indicates that the learners who are least likely to use these services are the ones who need them most. For this reason, there has been a shift towards a more interventionist approach. Increasingly, open schools are promoting their support services as a way of helping learners to engage more actively in the learning process and achieve greater success in their studies (Freeman, 2004: 116).

This chapter addresses the following questions:

- What kinds of services need to be provided for learners?
- What is the most effective way to provide support services?
- What staff and other resources are required to support learners?

WHAT KINDS OF SUPPORT DO LEARNERS NEED?

People who study with an open school or college face many challenges over and above those encountered by students in conventional schools. When deciding what type of support services your open school will provide for learners, the starting point should be an analysis of the difficulties they face. Figure 6.1 shows some of the typical problems encountered by those studying through ODL methods.

The table also shows the types of supports that open schools and colleges can put in place for learners. These learner support activities can be grouped into the following categories:

- administrative support
- academic advice and counselling
- tutorial support
- peer-to-peer interaction
- access to resources and technologies.

FIGURE 6.1: ADDRESSING TYPICAL CHALLENGES FOR LEARNERS STUDYING THROUGH ODL

TYPE OF SUPPORT	CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS	CENTRALISED LEARNER SUPPORT SYSTEMS	DECENTRALISED LEARNER SUPPORT SYSTEMS
Administrative Support	Finding out what courses are available	Brochures, posters and national publicity campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brochures, posters, local and national publicity campaigns • Open days or visits to local centre • Information available from staff at local study centre
	Obtaining study materials	Distribution through the postal system, or at time of enrolment	Distribution through local study centres
	Submitting assignments	Assignments submitted and returned by post	Assignments submitted and returned at local study centres
	Checking learner's record	Queries answered by letter, telephone or e-mail	Queries can be answered by staff at local study centre
Academic Advice and Counselling	Finding out which course is suitable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brochure or prospectus • Advice by telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brochure or prospectus • Advice and guidance from staff at local study centre
	Not knowing who to contact about different problems	Contact with student advisor by letter, telephone or e-mail	Dropping in to study centre for advice or support
	Inability to manage time effectively	Advice available in printed learner handbook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice available in printed learner handbook • Orientation workshop
	Coping with family or work commitments	Advice by letter, telephone or e-mail	Advice from staff at study centre
	Personal problems not related to studies		Referral to other local services
	Inclination to give up and drop out of course	Follow-up on missed assignments or tutorials by letter, telephone or e-mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up by telephone • Home visit by staff from local study centre

Tutorial Support	Difficulties understanding materials	Telephone tutorial or teleconference	In-class discussion with tutor and other learners
	Lack of skills needed for written work (assignments or essays)	Written feedback from tutor by post or e-mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class discussion with tutor • Written feedback from tutor
	Passive approach to learning from text	Written projects or assignments	Projects, assignments or other activities set as homework between contact sessions
	Expecting traditional teaching methods		Use of participatory learning methods during face-to-face sessions
	Too far to travel to face-to-face tutorials		Study centres closer to where learners live
Peer-to-Peer Interaction	Feeling alone and isolated	Contact with tutor by letter, telephone or e-mail	Meeting with tutor and other learners during face-to-face contact sessions
	Feeling inferior to other learners	Interaction with other learners via e-mail	Interaction with peers during face-to-face sessions
	No opportunities to learn from each other	Self-facilitated study groups	Study groups monitored by staff at study centre
Access to Resources and Technologies	No place to study		Use of facilities at local study centre
	No access to textbooks or library resources		Use of books, learning resources and other technologies at study centre
	No access to radio or other technologies		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to AV and computer technologies at study centre • Tutor can play back audio or video at contact sessions

Source: Adapted from Freeman, 2004: 115

Activity for Managers

Make copies of Figure 6.1 and distribute to other managers and senior staff in your institution. Then consider the following questions in relation to one of the ODL programmes you offer:

- Do your learners face challenges that have not been included in the table? Make a note of these.
- Which of these challenges has the biggest impact on learners? Choose the five most important.
- Look at the table for suggested ways to address your top five challenges. Are there other ways to provide support services for your learners?

STRUCTURING LEARNER SUPPORT

A key decision for managers in devising a learner support system is whether services will be provided from a single centre, usually the institution’s head office, or from a number of centres in strategic locations throughout the country or the geographic area it serves. These two models represent ideal endpoints on a continuum from a completely centralised to a fully decentralised service. In practice, the learner support systems adopted by most open schools are a mixture of the two. For example, the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre organises tutorials for those enrolled for its ODL programme in six districts around the country. However, academic guidance and counselling is provided only by staff at the centre’s head office, who can be contacted by post or by telephone.

Centralised Systems for Learner Support

The classical correspondence model of distance education relies upon a centralised system to provide tutorial and other supports for learners. Assignments or other written work are submitted by post to the institution’s head office and marked assignments are returned by post. Face-to-face contact is kept to a minimum and learners pursue their studies largely in isolation from their peers. Other services, such as advice on developing effective study habits, may be provided using tried and tested technologies, especially print on paper.

Chapter 4 highlighted how the introduction of new information and communications technologies has transformed the way in which materials are developed for ODL courses. The same is true in relation to the provision of learner support services. For example, in the last decade, mobile or cell phones have become common throughout the world as an alternative to fixed-line telephony. The relatively low cost of this new technology means that, in most countries, sending a Short Message Service (SMS) text message is now cheaper than posting a photocopied letter as a way of contacting learners. Where a large percentage of learners have access to such technologies, they may present a more cost-effective option for routine communication – for example, to remind learners of an upcoming event.



CASE STUDY

The Technology-Supported Learning (TSL) Unit of the provincial government of Saskatchewan, Canada, has developed a centralised help desk facility for learners studying at a distance. Queries can be submitted by either e-mail or voice-mail to a central unit, which forwards them electronically to the appropriate staff member, who responds within 24 hours. If a learner is late in submitting an assignment (by e-mail) or misses a scheduled tutorial (by web-conferencing), the course tutor will follow up with an e-mail or SMS text message to find out if the learner encountered a problem. The TSL Unit has also introduced a computerised learning management system that can send out text messages in batches to all learners on its database or to specific categories of learners (e.g., only those taking a particular subject). At the same time, the system makes a record of all interactions with each learner (including texts, e-mails and telephone calls) so that these can be monitored and followed up as necessary.

(Adapted from a presentation by G. B. Henderson, Director: TSL, Ministry of Education, Saskatchewan)



Centralising learner support functions in a single unit is an effective way to keep down the costs of providing such services. However, while expenditure may be reduced for your open school, learners will have to bear higher costs for telecommunications charges, as well as for travel, accommodation and subsistence when attending contact sessions at a central venue. A centralised model also enables an ODL institution to employ specialised staff or to provide

..... • advanced training for specialised tasks, such as counselling for out-of-school learners. Where learners have access to Internet-linked computers in their own homes or workplaces, such systems can provide more regular contact with tutors. Information and communications technologies can also facilitate peer-to-peer interaction through group projects, threaded e-mail discussions or voice-over-Internet “telephone” calls.

It’s about relationship;
it’s about community;
it’s about connectivity;
it’s about access.
Greg Whitby

Decentralised Learner Support Systems

The alternative to a centralised model of learner support is to establish satellite offices or study centres at various places around the country or geographical area served by your open school. This means that many of the problems faced by those studying at distance can be addressed locally. Such a decentralised system can provide services on the spot, thus eliminating the delays that frequently arise when services are the responsibility of staff based at the institution’s head office. Technology-mediated communication, which may be strange and intimidating for learners, is replaced with face-to-face contact, which many learners find less threatening and more supportive.

CASE STUDY

The National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS) was established in 1989 by the government of India’s Ministry of Human Resource and Development. It is the largest open school in the world, with almost 350,000 learners registered in its courses during the 2007/08 academic year. In order to provide support services for learners, NIOS has established local study centres for different programmes:

- 1,945 academic study centres for its junior and senior secondary learners

- 1,002 study centres for its Open Vocational Education Programme
- 341 study centres for the Open Basic Education Programme
- 23 study centres delivering NIOS programmes in the Middle East and Nepal.

These local centres are monitored and supervised by 11 regional offices of NIOS. Study centres for the academic and vocational programmes are under the direct control of NIOS, while the Open Basic Education Programme is provided in collaboration with registered and accredited non-governmental organisations.

(Adapted from a presentation by M.C. Pant, Director: NIOS)

LEARNER SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Although each open school must decide for itself exactly what services should be provided for learners, some of the more common approaches, identified in Figure 6.1, are outlined below:

Administrative Support

During any course of study, learners need to interact with the administrative staff of an educational institution at different stages. Such interactions involve the exchange of information in relation to a number of key processes, including:

- recruitment
- registration or enrolment
- distribution of study materials
- timetabling
- assessment or examinations
- paying fees and other charges.

The first three of these processes were discussed in preceding chapters, along with issues surrounding payment at the time of registration. In the context of open schooling, timetabling refers to the allocation of learners to study and/or

tutorial groups, the scheduling of tutorials, providing learners with information about important deadlines and other important dates, and following up with these as necessary.

Administrative staff also play an important role in the assessment process, particularly where assignments or other written work is submitted on paper. Assignment scripts must be registered and date stamped as they come in, then bundled for distribution to academic staff who are responsible for marking. Once the scripts have been graded, the marks must be recorded and the scripts, with the marker's comments, returned to learners. Normally, a random sample of assignment scripts is sent for moderation by a chief marker or external examiner. If your open school is responsible for examinations, administrative staff play similar roles. In addition, they may be involved in registering learners for the exam, issuing exam timetables and entry passes, as well as invigilating while learners sit the exams.

The vast majority of these functions can be carried out by post, telephone, e-mail or online using a computerised learning management system. These methods of communicating at a distance offer a convenient means of dealing with routine administrative matters and can save learners a lot of time. However, when a problem arises, trying to deal with it at a distance can be extremely frustrating for both parties. Sometimes, there is no substitute for a face-to-face meeting to resolve such matters. In these circumstances, having a local office where ODL learners can go for administrative support can be a distinct advantage. This face-to-face contact is particularly important when the learners in question have minimal levels of education or do not have ready access to information and communications technologies.

Academic Advice and Counselling

There is little agreement on what *counselling* means in the ODL context. However, four key tasks are normally envisaged when this term is used:

- advising learners on their course choices;
- assisting learners in developing study skills and habits;
- suggesting strategies for learners to cope with the multiple demands of study, work and personal/family life;
- counselling learners with personal problems (Freeman, 2004: 144).

Some open schools argue that they have neither the expertise nor the capacity to provide individual counselling for issues that are not related to a learner's studies. In such circumstances, when learners raise personal problems of a non-academic nature, they are referred to other counselling services.

Many open schools employ student counsellors or learner advisors to carry out the tasks outlined above. This is most often the case where the institution has adopted a centralised model of learner support and the numbers requesting these services justify the creation of specialised positions. Other institutions combine these functions with the roles of administrative staff or tutors. In particular, where an open school has established local study centres, it may not be cost-effective to employ specialised staff to provide these types of support at all these venues. Study centre administrators are therefore expected to advise learners on the most appropriate course to take. They may also be trained in basic skills of active listening so that they can respond appropriately when learners indicate that they are having difficulty coping with their studies.

A particular problem arises in relation to learners' study skills. Conventional schools in many places tend to reward learners for memorisation and recall rather than for more active forms of engagement with the course content. In addition, teachers in the classroom environment have traditionally played a key role in planning a study programme, setting the pace at which students progress through the curriculum and assisting them in developing good study habits. For those studying at a distance, who may not have regular contact with a tutor, study skills (such as planning, active involvement and self-assessment) are even more important (see Chapter 3). Learning to learn is increasingly seen as essential to ODL students achieving success in their studies.

Open schools attempt to address this need in different ways. Some include tips for effective learning in the course materials given to learners. Others devote time to this issue during orientation workshops for new students. Tutors are also expected to advise learners on effective study habits during contact sessions. Still other open schools have developed learner handbooks or good study guides. These are self-instructional resources that incorporate all the features of good ODL materials and that aim to teach learners how to learn. They are distributed at the time of registration, so that learners can develop effective study skills and habits while carrying out their coursework.

.....
It is critical for all of us in the field of Open and Distance Learning to remain at the cutting-edge of this fast-moving environment.
Frances J. Ferreira
.....

Tutorial Support

Although tutors are just one means of supporting learners, they are widely seen by both learners and other stakeholders as the single most important component of a support system (Freeman, 2004: 117). Learners place a high value on contact with tutors, particularly when it comes to explaining aspects of a course that are still unclear after reading the study materials provided. In addition, as experts in a particular subject, tutors can provide a broader view and additional examples to illustrate particular topics. They can also provide individual feedback on written work so that learners can improve their performance. However, from the point of view of an open school or college, providing tutorials is very costly, accounting for as much as 30 per cent of expenditure on ODL programmes (Rumble, 1997: 119). For these reasons, decisions about how to provide tutorial support and how frequently such contact will take place should only be made after careful consideration of both costs and benefits.

The roles tutors are expected to play differ from institution to institution, depending upon many factors. However, the functions carried out by ODL tutors are distinctly different from those traditionally performed by classroom teachers in conventional schools. In the past, classroom teachers took full responsibility for planning a programme in line with the curriculum, and selecting and preparing content, which was delivered through didactic methods such as “chalk-and-talk.” This approach creates a situation where students are largely dependent upon their teachers to tell them what to learn, how to learn it and when it has been learnt satisfactorily.

When learners study through ODL methods, the same level of dependence is not sustainable. Most of the people who study with open schools do so voluntarily. They thus have greater freedom to decide what they want to learn, how best to go about this and (to some extent) when they have had enough learning. Because learners have only intermittent contact with a tutor, the entire curriculum cannot be covered in the time available for tutorials. This means that most of the learning that students do takes place between contact sessions. As a result, the most effective role that a tutor can adopt is that of a resource person, advisor, mentor or learning facilitator.

However, there can be tremendous resistance to this new model of tutoring and learning. Where teachers from conventional schools or colleges are employed

to act as tutors, they frequently have difficulty understanding and adjusting to the new role. Normally, this topic forms a central part of any training programme for tutors (see Chapter 2). ODL learners may also expect the same style of teaching that they experienced at school and adopt a passive stance in interactions with tutors. When tutors experiment with a facilitative approach, learners may even complain that such teaching is inferior (Rogers, 1986: 123–130). For this reason, open schools must plan ways to prepare their learners (as well as their families and other stakeholders) for what to expect, by highlighting the differences between studying through ODL methods and attending a conventional educational institution.

Regardless of the approach adopted by tutors, they can interact with learners in many different ways. Typically, the methods of carrying out these interactions are classified as either face-to-face or distance tutoring. The latter category can be further subdivided on the basis of the technology used to bridge the divide. However, what really determines how tutors support learners is whether their interactions take place at the same time (synchronous) or at different times (asynchronous).

ASYNCHRONOUS TUTORING

When a tutor makes an intervention and there is a delay before the learner or learners respond, this is referred to as *asynchronous* tutoring. This can happen when tutors and learners correspond with each other by post or by e-mail. In many cases these are one-to-one interactions that enable an individual learner to ask questions, have things explained, obtain feedback on work completed and assess progress made. However, it is also possible to involve other learners through techniques such as threaded e-mail discussion. This involves the tutor posting a question or series of questions on the institution’s learning management system or virtual learning environment. All of the learners in a particular course are notified of this posting and given instructions on how to reply within a given time period. Learners can then add their own replies or comment on the replies of other learners whenever they can find time before the deadline.

While asynchronous tutoring allows a certain level of interaction, the delays in communication pose significant constraints. Synchronous communication enables both tutor and learner to fine-tune the interaction by asking

Some open schools have been using telephones for many years to provide tutorial support, either on a one-to-one basis or with small groups through conference calls. Although most learners prefer face-to-face tuition, telephone-mediated tutorials can provide a much more cost-effective option where distances are large.

However, learners may find it difficult to maintain concentration for extended periods when they can't see their tutor or other participants. It can also be extremely demanding for the tutor. In addition, there are inherent constraints in using a technology that allows only for audio communication when dealing with subjects that require visual inputs. Although learners can be supplied with prepared diagrams or illustrations with their study materials, telephone-mediated communication poses additional difficulties when tutoring in mathematics, sciences, and practical and vocational subjects (Freeman, 2004: 135–137).

It is also possible for a tutor to interact synchronously with learners using an Internet chat room. Essentially, this is a discussion via e-mail where each contributor logs on to a reserved area of the institution's virtual learning environment or learning management system and takes part through instant messaging. However, this technology shares many of the limitations of telephone tutorials. In addition, it can be very frustrating for those who are unfamiliar with computers or have yet to master the keyboard. For these reasons, this form of tuition is probably feasible only for one-to-one or small group interactions.

Some ODL institutions have invested heavily in facilities for video-conferencing, in order to provide both audio and video communication between tutors and learners. Earlier forms of this technology only allowed information to flow in one direction, from tutor to learner, and were little better than conventional videotapes or DVDs. However, in the last decade, video-conferencing has become more interactive and it now allows for two-way communication that is second only to face-to-face tuition. At the same time, such systems require considerable expenditure to set up and maintain. For this reason they may be prohibitively expensive for many open schools.

.....
 ...whilst learning skills may be a factor in student success, a much more important one is learner motivation. Without appropriate focus on motivation, learner support for developing or remediating learning skills may be largely wasted.

Ormand Simpson

Web-conferencing using computer workstations with microphones and web cameras linked to a high-speed Internet connection offers a lower cost alternative. However, the images available through this technology are not as good as those provided by video-conferencing equipment, though the quality of video-streaming on the Internet is improving all the time.

Mobile/Itinerant Tutors

Another option that should be considered is for tutors to travel to where learners actually live or work. This approach is particularly useful when learners live in relatively isolated circumstances at some distance from one another. For example, the Open Access College employs itinerant teachers to provide tutorials for children living on remote ranches in South Australia. It can also be effective when promoting a programme for the first time or extending ODL services into areas without sufficient infrastructure. For example, the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning has equipped a lorry to act as a mobile learner support centre to bring tutorial support and other services to learners in remote parts of the country that do not currently have access to these.

Tutorial Centres

When an open school or college arranges for face-to-face tutorials in venues other than its head office, these are often referred to as *tutorial centres*. Contact sessions usually take place in existing buildings – typically schools or community centres. Tutorials are scheduled in the afternoons, in the evenings or at weekends when the facilities are not being used and when learners who are employed are free to attend. Alternatively, tuition can be provided during holiday periods when school-based learners are on vacation.

CASE STUDY

The tutorial centre approach has been adopted by the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), which registers about 28,000 learners per year in its Secondary Education Programme. At the beginning of the academic year, part-time officials are appointed on a contract basis to register learners at roughly 100 enrolment points. These venues are confirmed as tuition centres only if a minimum number of learners register for the same

combination of subjects. The enrolment officer then becomes the Head of Centre, with responsibility for:

- distributing study materials;
- timetabling tuition, recruiting subject tutors (as required) and supervising their work;
- administering the assignment process (including receiving assignments from learners, passing them to tutors for marking, recording these marks, taking a sample of the assignments for moderation and returning marked assignments to learners).

NAMCOL learners receive about three hours of face-to-face tuition per week in each subject. Formerly, learners also sat for mock examinations in each subject to improve their exam-writing technique and identify topics for revision, but this service was discontinued because it proved too costly. Centre heads and tutors are paid only for the hours they work, at a fixed hourly rate. Where these tutorial centres are based in government schools, no rent is paid for use of the facilities. However, NAMCOL does make a modest contribution for each learner to cover the additional running costs incurred by the school.



OTHER FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY TUTORS

Since tutors are often the only representatives of an open school who have regular contact with learners, they are sometimes expected to perform additional functions. They act as administrators or managers of the learning process by taking attendance at face-to-face sessions, reminding learners of deadlines and keeping individual records of how each learner is progressing. They may also play the role of assessor or examiner when marking assignments or giving credit for coursework where a continuous assessment scheme is in place. From time to time, tutors may also be called upon to act as counsellors, providing learners with advice and guidance not only on issues relating to the course, but also on non-academic matters.

The social interaction that takes place in such groups also provides additional motivation for learners to continue their studies (O'Rourke, 2003: 108–109).

Where those enrolled in a particular course or programme live within a reasonable distance of one another, they can be asked to form self-facilitated study groups. These work best when numbers are kept low (roughly 8–12 learners) so that each member has an opportunity to participate. Guidelines should be provided so that participants understand how the group will be managed and what is expected of them. Group learning activities must also be carefully planned so that there is a clear focus for each session or series of sessions. Ideally, tutors should give clear, written instructions on what study groups must do between contact sessions.

FORMAL STUDY GROUP MEETINGS

Where too few learners in a particular area register for a course or there is no one qualified to act as a subject tutor, it will not be possible to establish a tutorial centre. However, your open school may wish to appoint someone from the community to act as the coordinator for a formal study group. Normally these coordinators are given some training in how to facilitate such a group, and they may also be supplied with a teacher's guide that gives detailed instructions on how to work through the study materials with learners. Group coordinators are also expected to identify and recruit new learners from the area. Formal study groups can be a very low-cost option for providing support services for learners, though considerable staff time is required to train study group coordinators and monitor their work.

Normally, these study groups meet in existing buildings – schools, community centres, churches or temples, clinics, government offices or the coordinator's own home. In some areas, learners come together to study under a shady tree when weather permits. For example, this approach is used by the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre to deliver its Basic Education Programme. These study groups are known locally as "Learning Posts," and over 200 of them have been established in remote locations around the country. Under the guidance of a Learning Post coordinator, these groups decide when and how often they will meet, as well as how long each session will last. A study carried out in 2001 (Chabane: 36) found that almost 80 per cent of Learning Posts met three times per week or more.

Access to Resources and Technologies

Learners registered for ODL studies may experience difficulties finding a place to study without being disturbed. From time to time, they will also need to use reference books and other resources not provided with their study materials. In particular, problems can arise when audio-visual materials or technology-mediated communication are central components of a course and some learners do not have access to these technologies. For these reasons, many ODL institutions seek to establish study centres that can offer a full set of services and facilities, including some or all of the following:

- information on courses
- academic advice and guidance
- registration of learners
- distribution of study materials
- face-to-face tutorials
- administration of the assignment process
- space for individual or group study
- library facilities (including photocopying)
- other audio-visual equipment and learning resources
- Internet-linked computers.

Full-service study centres are normally located in specially designed structures or buildings that have been adapted for this purpose. One or more full-time employees are required to administer the centre and provide services.

Establishing and maintaining a full-service study centre involves a considerable capital investment for buildings and equipment, as well as relatively high levels of recurrent expenditure for staffing and operations. This can only be justified where large numbers of learners make use of these facilities, thus bringing down the average cost per learner.



CASE STUDY

The Namibian Open Learning Network (NOLNet) is a useful example of how access to full-service study centres can be provided at a minimum cost. This body was established to promote collaboration between government-funded ODL institutions in Namibia. One of its first projects was to mobilise donor funding to develop full-service study centres in each of the country’s 13 regions. None of these centres is the property of NOLNet; instead, they are owned and staffed by different bodies, including the University of Namibia, the Community Library Service, Teacher Resource Centres and local government bodies. However, NOLNet was instrumental in forging an agreement that allows students registered for ODL studies at any of the publicly funded institutions to have free access to these facilities. The full-service study centres are supplemented by a network of satellite centres with more limited resources.



Activity for Managers

This activity can be carried out as part of a strategic planning exercise, during periodic reviews of your strategic plan or as the focus of a review or planning process with employees from the learner support unit(s) and provincial, regional or district centres in your open school.

1. Use a white board or a blank piece of flipchart paper laid on its side (landscape format). Start by writing “Administrative Support” at the top, then draw lines to create one broad column on the left, two narrow columns in the middle, and another broad column along the right. Label the columns as follows, from left to right: “Services,” “Centralised,” “Decentralised” and “Model of Delivery.”
2. Now answer the following questions, filling in the columns as appropriate:
 - *What support services do you currently provide for learners?*
 - *What services do you plan to provide?*
 - *Which of these services will be provided centrally and which through local centres?*

- Which model for providing learner support services is most cost-effective for the particular environment in which your institution operates?
3. Once you have exhausted all of the group's ideas for Administrative Support, repeat the exercise for each of the following categories:
- Academic Advice and Counselling
 - Tutorial Support
 - Peer-to-Peer Interaction
 - Access to Resources and Technologies.

SUMMARY

Deciding whether or not to adopt a decentralised system for delivering support services to learners involves consideration of factors such as the number of learners registered for a particular course, their geographical distribution and the availability of funds. Before your institution commits itself to establishing a particular form of learner support, it should carry out a detailed analysis of the costs and benefits. There are a number of lessons that can be learnt from the experience of other open schools:

- You need to stay focused on meeting the needs of learners, keeping in mind the varied contexts in which they live. For example, you might schedule tutorials in the evenings on the assumption that this is the most convenient time for learners who are employed during normal working hours. However, this is not always the ideal. For example, Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning learners who live along the northern border of Botswana cannot travel on foot after dark because elephants and other wild animals roam freely.
- Providing effective learner support is a complex and evolving process. You can never say that the system is finalised, as each new crop of learners brings a new set of needs and expectations.
- Any learner support system you devise must be flexible and must optimise the use of scarce resources. Promoting collaboration and partnership with other ODL institutions can help you to achieve this.
- It is also essential to coordinate plans and activities within your own

institutions. For example, combining the piloting of new study materials with monitoring visits to local centres can cut down on the costs of travel.

- Learner support processes should be documented in procedural manuals, which can then be used to train full- and part-time staff at study centres.

SUGGESTED READING

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chapter 7

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The term *evaluation* is used in a number of different ways. Perhaps the most appropriate is when we review and evaluate programmes or other broad areas of activity. However, we sometimes speak about *student evaluation* when it might be more correct to refer to this process as learner *assessment*. Often we are asked to carry out *evaluations* of teachers or tutors, but *performance appraisal* might be a better term. In most cases, we *evaluate* workshops that we offer, but usually this involves collecting standardised *feedback* from participants. Using the term *evaluation* in so many different contexts creates the potential for confusion.

For the purpose of this handbook, evaluation is defined as “the systematic determination of merit, worth and significance of something or someone” (Wikipedia). This definition highlights the fact that evaluation is about values and involves making value judgements. Monitoring, on the other hand, refers to observing processes and products on an ongoing basis and checking to ensure that they meet quality standards. While the information collected during a monitoring exercise can be useful for evaluation, monitoring itself does not involve value judgements. Both monitoring and evaluation are key processes for assuring your learners and other stakeholders of the quality of the education provided by your open school or college.

.....
Quality refers to a product's fitness for purpose according to a set of required standards.
.....

This chapter addresses the following questions:

- What is total quality management? Why is it important for managers in open schools?
- What needs to be monitored and how should you go about it?
- What aspects of your open school need to be evaluated?
- What sort of evaluation should be carried out?

QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Quality management comprises all the activities carried out in your open school to *prove* that the programmes and other services provided are of a defined standard. These processes are also central to *improving* the quality of your school's methods and outcomes. An effective system of quality management helps to build public confidence and maintain the credibility of any educational institution (Kirkpatrick, 2005: 2).

Activity for Managers

(Adapted from COL, 1999: 2-2)

Ideally this exercise should be carried out in collaboration with other managers and senior staff in your open school.

1. Break the larger group into pairs (or threes) and pose the following question: *What does quality mean in the context of open schooling?*
2. Have each pair write as many answers as they can think of on blank pieces of paper. There should be only one word or phrase per sheet, written large enough so that everyone can see.
3. Ask one person from each pair to pin up one of their sheets on a whiteboard or bare wall, explaining briefly what they had in mind. Go around the room asking each pair to do the same until all of the ideas are up.
4. Have the whole group discuss the similarities and differences between these aspects of quality and consider whether the papers can be rearranged to form categories of similar ideas.

Issues that may arise from this exercise include:

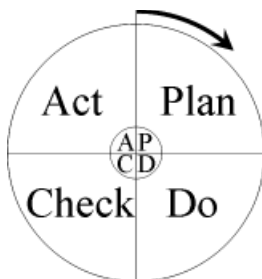
- *Quality involves identifying criteria or standards.*
- *Quality is measured relative to these standards.*
- *Quality is important not only when checking the products produced by your institution, but also in relation to the processes it uses to achieve those outputs.*
- *Quality is not simply something that is measured, but also involves public perceptions.*
- *Even if the quality of your products and processes is high, this means little if they are not what your learners or other stakeholders are looking for.*

While everyone will agree on the need to ensure quality, defining exactly what quality means can be more difficult. This is because “quality” is a judgement that cannot be seen in isolation from the value system of the person(s) who make that judgement. Each group of stakeholders – learners, their parents or family, staff of your open school, funding bodies – is likely to have different priorities when defining quality. For example, a learner might judge the quality of an ODL course on the basis of whether or not she achieves good marks in the examination. However, the Ministry of Education in your country, state or province may allocate funds on the basis of the number of learners registered in the course, regardless of their examination results. (See discussion of the marketing exchange in Chapter 5.)

Traditionally, the quality of a product was assessed by the buyer at the time of purchase. This can still be seen in informal markets where customers check fruit and vegetables before they hand over their money. However, as industrial processes became more complex and goods produced for the marketplace became increasingly standardised, quality assurance processes were formalised. Initially, these took the form of *quality control*, whereby a special worker inspected and removed faulty products at the end of the production process. Quality was often measured in terms of the percentage of sub-standard products that came off different production lines.

Since the middle decades of the 20th century, industry has moved away from the quality control model towards a more proactive approach called *quality assurance*. Rather than dealing with faults only after they arise, quality assurance involves devising and implementing measures to prevent faults from happening in the first place. One of the most widely used approaches to quality assurance is the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) model (also known as the Deming Wheel or Shewhart Cycle). The PDCA model is illustrated in Figure 7.1.

FIGURE 7.1: PDCA MODEL



Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:PDCA.gif>

Author: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Xsmith>

Licence: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNU_Free_Documentation_License

STEP 2 – Standards

Once a quality management policy has been agreed upon for the institution as a whole, quality standards need to be developed for each major function. Most of these will relate to how your institution serves its external customers, mainly learners, and should be written from their point of view. For example, the unit responsible for delivering materials might set the following quality standard for its activities:

Ninety per cent of learners for the Upper Primary Programme will have received a complete set of learning materials within three weeks after registrations close.

However, where a functional unit, such as the human resources department, primarily serves other parts of the institution, it can still draft quality standards for these internal customers. For example, the financial services unit of your open school might set the following standard:

Every member of staff who makes a query about non-payment or under-payment of salary will receive a written response within five working days.

As with the strategic planning process, you need to draft quality standards that are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. Ideally, staff members responsible for achieving these standards should be involved in the process of setting them. This is a good way to ensure that they feel a sense of ownership of the finished product.

STEP 3 – Critical Functions

If you think about all the steps that must be completed to achieve a particular quality standard, it becomes clear that some cause more problems than others. For example, when distributing materials to learners, some parts of this process may be outside of your control, such as the time it takes the post office to deliver materials. In some cases, it may be possible to eliminate delays by aligning the processes in your institution with those used by outside suppliers. In this example, the post office might deal with study materials more quickly if they are packaged and labelled in a uniform way. Your quality management plan should identify these critical functions, identify existing shortcomings and devise procedures to deal with any problems that arise in the future.

STEP 4 – Documentation

In order to ensure that all staff members are clear about what is required of them in performing their critical functions to an acceptable standard, it is useful to document the procedures that must be followed. This involves writing down every step that should be taken, who is responsible for it, and any relevant standards against which performance will be measured. The example below is taken from the *Procedures Manual for Learning Centres* produced by the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning.

Learning Centre Supervisor:

- a) Enter learner number on back of each postal order,
- b) Issue receipt and enter number in enrolment form,
- c) Sign enrolment form at (2),
- d) Inform learner to return after three weeks to collect study materials,

(When learner comes back for study materials):

- e) Complete the following sections of the enrolment form:
"Materials dispatched"
"Materials not available"
- f) Issue available materials,
- g) Get learner to sign the enrolment form,
- h) Tear off top copy and give to learner,
- i) Tear off second copy, staple postal orders to it and place in the Learning Centre Administrator's folder for collection;
- j) Tear off third copy and file it in the Learning Centre enrolments file.

STEP 5 – Monitoring

Quality doesn't happen all by itself, no matter how well it has been planned and documented. Standards won't be maintained or improved without regular observation and checking. Accordingly, your quality management plan should include details of how progress will be monitored, including:

- what should be observed
- how it should be recorded
- who is responsible for monitoring
- when monitoring should take place
- who should receive the results of the monitoring exercise
- who is responsible for taking action to correct situations where standards are not being met.

STEP 6 – Staff Training and Development

It is not enough simply to communicate your quality management plan to staff. They must be thoroughly familiarised with what it involves, how it will benefit learners and other customers, what is required of them and how their performance will be assessed. In addition, maintaining and improving quality may also demand new attitudes, knowledge and skills that can be inculcated through a concerted programme of staff development. Details of who requires training, what form it should take and how it will be delivered should also be included in the quality management plan.

Activity for Managers

This is an activity that can be carried out with staff in the division or section that you manage.

1. Select an area where there are currently problems with the quality of your unit's output.
2. If your open school does not have a formal policy for quality management, draw up a broad statement of the agreed approach in your unit.
3. Agree on a standard with the staff in your unit that will improve the quality of outcomes for clients in the problem area.
4. Identify the critical functions that have an impact on the quality of outcomes.
5. Document the procedures that should be followed by each employee in the unit to perform these critical functions to the agreed standard.
6. Devise ways to monitor these processes on an ongoing basis.

METHODS FOR ASSESSING QUALITY

Maintaining and improving quality in any organisation involves systematic assessment at various stages. You will need to know how things stand at present so that you can plan for the future. You will also need to check your progress in implementing those plans. And you will need to sit back and reflect on what has been achieved after the plan has run its course. Common methods for assessing quality in open schools include:

- internal **monitoring**
- external **peer review**
- formal **audit**
- collecting relevant **statistical information**
- **evaluation** research.

Chapter 8 discusses ways to collect and use statistical information and report on your institution's performance. Other methods of assessing quality are outlined below.

Monitoring


The term *monitoring* is normally used to refer to a continuous process that is carried out by an institution's own staff. In a factory setting, monitoring of production is normally the responsibility of a specialised unit of inspectors. Even with the quality management model, champions are needed to take the lead and ensure that this becomes an integral part of the institution's culture (Kirkpatrick, 2005: 5). Nevertheless, total quality management should be the concern of every staff member. This implies that each employee, from the top to the bottom of your open school, should be monitoring the quality of his or her own work on a continuous basis. For example, during slack periods the workers who pack study materials can carry out spot checks to determine what percentage of packets include everything they are supposed to. At the other end of the hierarchy, senior managers can devote an hour per week to reviewing the quality of the work they have produced.

While self-monitoring is essential, it may not be objective and impartial. For this reason, supervisors are normally required to monitor the work of their subordinates. However, it is impractical to check every action or process that

is carried out. For example, moderation of assignment marking cannot involve checking of all papers. A random sample of 5 to 10 per cent of assignment scripts from each tutor will usually give a statistically valid picture of the quality and reliability of their marking. Where monitoring requires periodic inspections, ideally these should not be announced in advance. In addition, the times and dates of inspections should be changed frequently so that those being inspected cannot anticipate and prepare for them.

FIGURE 7.3: SUPERVISOR PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL FORM

BOTSWANA COLLEGE OF DISTANCE AND OPEN LEARNING



BOCODOL

GABORONE REGIONAL OFFICE

Community Study Centre Supervisor Appraisal Form

CSC Name:

Date:

	In Place	Not in Place
Weekly Enrolment Updates		
Study/tutorial schedule		
Tutor Attendance register (Monthly)		
Learner Attendance register (Monthly)		
SCS Supervisors attendance register		
Course progress Records		
Tutor Records (Monthly)		
Stock balance from (Teaching Aids)		
Learner Enquiries Log Book		

Remarks by Supervising Officer:.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Typically, information obtained during a monitoring session is recorded on a standardised form. One of the easiest forms to use is a checklist, which simply requires the person carrying out the monitoring to note whether or not certain actions have been carried out. An example of a simple checklist is provided in Figure 7.3. This is the form used by the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning to monitor the performance of supervisors at community study centres.

While such an approach simplifies the process of inspection, monitoring quality must not be equated with mere paperwork. Filling in forms is of no use to anyone unless the information they contain is regularly analysed and action is taken when necessary.

Peer Review

Peer review involves arranging for a panel of experienced practitioners from outside your open school to appraise the quality management practices you are using. Those who carry out the peer review should be drawn from another ODL institution or institutions, either in your own country or outside its borders. Rather than relying on “experts” to comment on the effectiveness of quality management policies, plans and procedures, this approach engages peers in comparable positions elsewhere. Unlike experts, who may not appreciate the problems faced by managers when promoting quality in a local context, peers can provide more practical suggestions for improvement. There are also advantages for those who carry out such peer reviews, since they are exposed to different practices that can be adapted to enhance quality in their own institutions.

Formal Audit

In many countries, national qualifications frameworks have been put in place to ensure the quality of awards made by educational institutions. In order to have awards validated, it is necessary to seek accreditation from such bodies. If your open school prepares learners for examinations validated by an international body, certain minimum standards may also be imposed. Even where such structures do not exist, ministries or departments of education normally have criteria and procedures for registering educational institutions in order to weed out those that provide sub-standard services. Ensuring that an open school

meets the minimum requirements for accreditation or registration requires a formal audit or inspection. This is normally carried out by representatives of the accrediting body and involves a review of the institution’s policies, practices, staffing and facilities against a checklist of prescribed features.

Evaluation

Monitoring sessions, peer reviews and formal audits are all effective ways to assess internal processes that can contribute to maintaining and improving quality. However, in order to determine what impact these are having on the services provided for key stakeholders, you need to carry out evaluative research. In this context, stakeholders include not only the learners themselves, but also “graduates”¹ and dropouts, as well as families, employers and others who benefit from the services provided by your open school. Three common types of evaluative research are discussed below.

OBJECTIVES-BASED EVALUATION

Objectives-based evaluation involves the collection of information to assess the extent to which predetermined objectives have been achieved. The underlying assumption is that adequate planning has identified all of the critical issues and framed these as objectives. Normally, objectives-based evaluation is *summative*, meaning that it takes place only toward the end of the project or programme or after it has been completed. Such an approach sums up what has or has not been achieved, but can do nothing towards improving the project while it is still running. Evaluation processes can be improved by introducing *formative* evaluation at the planning stage to collect baseline data, assess where you are starting from and improve the framing of objectives. Carrying out *process* evaluation on an ongoing basis helps to appraise the adequacy of implementation plans, operational procedures, financial and human resources.

Objectives-based evaluation is widely used and broadly accepted, because it:

- has a common-sense appeal
- is grounded in a straightforward question: *Have we achieved what we set out to do?*
- frequently relies on objectively observable evidence.

1. This term is used loosely to refer to anyone who has successfully completed a course or programme, regardless of the level of studies.

However, objectives-based evaluation also has a number of limitations:

- It provides information to characterise outcomes, but not to judge their value.
- It depends on the adequacy of initial objectives. If these have been framed poorly, then it can be difficult to draw any conclusions.
- It does not identify, measure or place value upon unintended outcomes. In effect, you can only measure what you are looking for.

For example, some of the most important outcomes of adult basic education are higher levels of self-confidence and improved self-image for participants. Unless these were specified as objectives and baseline information was recorded at the outset of tuition, objectives-based evaluation will not bring them to the fore.

LEARNER-CENTRED EVALUATION

A learner-centred approach to evaluation focuses on how the beneficiaries of a course or programme assess its outcomes, as well as the value they place on the experience. The assumption underpinning this approach is that participants are in the best position to make these value judgements. Regardless of the objectives that were set at the start of the programme, learner-centred evaluation collects information on everything that has changed for better or worse as a result of their participation. Those who further their education outside of conventional schools often find that learning has had an impact on other aspects of their lives – in terms of enhancing their employment prospects, improving levels of self-confidence and increasing involvement in community and civic affairs. Learner-centred evaluation can highlight all of these positive outcomes.

The key strengths of learner-centred evaluation are that it can:

- focus on specific issues of concern to learners
- provide a variety of perspectives
- validate (or refute) practitioners' beliefs about programme outcomes
- involve participants in the evaluation process.

The weaknesses of the learner-centred approach to evaluation are that:

- it tends to be biased in favour of learners
- the information obtained can be dismissed as subjective and self-interested, and
- as a result, it may have low external credibility.

Finally, given the complex nature of the data obtained from learners, this form of evaluation can be difficult to summarise in a form that is easy for decision-makers to take in. All too often, the latter are inclined to read only the bullet points or a single-page summary.

An example of client-centred evaluation in the context of open schooling is a booklet published by the Namibian College of Open Learning (Kavetuna et al., 2004). It includes a collection of personal accounts by students in the Certificate in Education for Development course. Graduates of the course were asked to write about their experience with the college and the impact this has had on how they do their work and live their lives.

TRACER STUDY

A tracer study involves tracing (or finding and making contact with) students who were in a particular course some years previously. The intention is to document how they feel about the course after the fact and to determine what impact (if any) it had on their lives. Tracer studies often focus on those who successfully completed a course, but they can also be used to assess the views of those who dropped out or failed. Feedback from the latter can be of critical importance in improving placement and retention of learners.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Despite the importance of evaluation in maintaining and improving quality in open schools, sometimes it has only minimal impact on future action. Many well-researched reports gather dust on shelves, while the cogently argued recommendations they contain have never been put into practice. Stuart and Latchem (2004: 104–105) suggest a number of reasons for this:

- All too often decision-makers do not read the information made available to them. This may be because they lack the time or interest to wade through detailed research reports.
- Findings that confirm the unconscious beliefs, prejudices and feelings of policy-makers and practitioners are the most likely to be acted upon.
- Policy-makers may also view research primarily as a way to find an answer to a particular problem. They tend to latch onto what they consider a

workable solution and lose interest after that.

- Moreover, research does not necessarily come up with easy answers. Sometimes it simply serves to show how complex the problem is and that further investigation is needed.
- It is also important to remember that knowledge is socially constructed and confers power on some while disempowering others. “The specialised knowledge of the expert may be in conflict with the conventional wisdom of the layperson.”

In light of the above, you may well ask, “Why should we bother to evaluate at all?” There are four key reasons for carrying out such research:

- Evaluation exercises are valuable in terms of staff morale and commitment to the institution. Relevant staff members should be given copies of all available documentation as part of a review of the unit’s performance. This will enable them to hear what they have achieved, and to see where improvements still need to be made. It will also send out a very strong message that their work is valued.
- By giving a voice to participants and other stakeholders, learner-centred studies can have a tremendous impact. When evaluators document what learners say, this is a practical expression of the fact that their contribution is valued and that the whole initiative is responsive to their input.
- Even if only 20 people ever read an evaluation report, the impact will depend on who those 20 people are. If they are the right people, the evaluation can have an impact on decision-making and the allocation of funds.
- Evaluation research is also essential for recording information that is short-lived and easily lost. For example, details of examination results may only be available as computer printouts that are difficult or impossible to find and interpret even a few years later. Extracts from evaluative documents can prove very useful for future research and planning.

SUMMARY

Educational institutions around the world must prove that they are providing high-quality courses and other services in order to ensure public credibility. Maintaining and improving quality involves researching what potential learners want, putting in place procedures to avoid faults wherever possible, as well as correcting those that do arise. Continuous monitoring is also needed to ensure that these procedures are being carried out and that quality standards are being met. The checklist on page 145 summarises the key requirements for putting in place a system of total quality management for your open school or college.

SUGGESTED READING

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- Kirkpatrick, Denise. 2005. *Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning*. Knowledge Series. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Commonwealth of Learning. Available for download as an electronic document at www.col.org/knowledge
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See also the core modules and handbooks in the Practitioner Research and Evaluation Skills Training (PREST) series, published by the Commonwealth of Learning, in collaboration with the International Research Foundation for Open Learning. Available as electronic documents at www.col.org/prest

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST

(Adapted from Robinson, 1994: 187–88, as cited in COL, 1999: 2-10–2-12)

QUALITY POLICY AND PLAN

- Has your organisation developed a policy on quality with which all staff are familiar?
- Has this policy been translated into a practical plan?

SPECIFICATION OF STANDARDS

- Are specified and clearly defined standards in place?
- Have they been communicated to all concerned?
- Are they specified for key activities?
- Are they achievable?
- Are they reasonable?
- Are they measurable?

IDENTIFYING CRITICAL FUNCTIONS

- Have the critical functions for achieving the standards been identified?
- Have they taken the learner as the starting point?
- Have the procedures to achieve them been analysed?

DOCUMENTATION

- Are the procedures to be followed clearly documented?
- Are they explicit?
- Do they represent fact or fiction?
- Are they consistent in different documents?
- Are they concentrated on essential procedures?
- Are they in a readable and user-friendly form?
- Do all those who need them have access to copies?

STAFF INVOLVEMENT

- Have all staff been involved in the development of quality assurance systems?
- Have their suggestions been built in?
- Has enough time been given to this process?

MONITORING

- Are there systematic monitoring mechanisms for critical functions?
- Do they check whether standards are being met and procedures followed?
- Are the findings disseminated?
- Are they linked to appropriate action?
- Do they result in improved performance, a review of practice or a reappraisal of standards?
- Do they provide effective feedback loops between providers of services and learners?

STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Is there adequate provision for training and staff development?
- Is this linked to the achievement of standards?
- Are there effective mechanisms for assessing training needs?
- Are these reviewed regularly?
- Are resources allocated to meet these training needs?

COSTS

- Is there a strategy for monitoring the costs of implementing and maintaining quality assurance activities?
- Are the costs greater than the benefits?

chapter 8

ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY TO STAKEHOLDERS

Accountability means giving an account or report of your activities to those you are answerable to. It is not simply about the financial accounts for your open school, though these are an important part of the process. Accountability involves identifying what information is required by stakeholders, collecting, processing and analysing it, and reporting on the results. This chapter aims to answer the following questions:

- Who has a stake in the success of your open school or college?
- What do they need to know?
- What information about your learners is needed to account to stakeholders?
- How should that information be managed, collected, processed, analysed and acted upon?
- What is the best way to communicate relevant information to your stakeholders?

WHO MUST WE ACCOUNT TO?

Throughout this handbook we have used the term *stakeholders* to refer to those who have an interest in how an open school or college does its job. As noted in Chapter 5, institutions in the not-for-profit sector have two major categories of stakeholders. On the one hand there are those who benefit directly or indirectly from the services provided. In the case of an open school these are learners, their parents and other family members, and their employers. On the other hand, bodies that sponsor or fund the service – government ministries or departments, international donors, non-governmental organisations and others – also have a stake in how the institution performs. In addition, managers and staff of the open school have a legitimate interest in how well it is fulfilling its mission.

FIGURE 8.1: ACCOUNTING TO DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder	Purpose	Concerns/Questions	Possible Data Sources
Learners	Choosing an institution	What courses/programmes are available?	Open school's prospectus
		How do they compare with a conventional school?	Documents from national curriculum body
	Getting educational qualifications	What percentage of learners pass their courses and obtain qualifications?	Exam board statistics Open school's learner records system
	Finding a job	What percentage of graduates find employment?	Tracer study
Government ministry/ department	Policy formulation and planning	What percentage of the target population is being reached?	National census Open school's learner records system
		What percentage of learners pass their courses and obtain qualifications?	Exam board statistics Open school's learner records system
		What percentage of graduates find employment?	Tracer study
		Do the courses/programmes meet the needs of employers?	Questionnaires or interviews with employers
	Allocation of resources/ funding	How much does it cost per learner?	Open school's financial records
		How much does it cost per graduate?	Open school's learner records system
	Accounting for state funds	Are resources being used efficiently?	Ministry of Education's financial records
		How do unit costs compare with those for conventional schools?	Statistics for formal education system

Information Needed	Reporting Method
List of courses/programmes	Information campaign
	Open days/evenings Career fairs
Learners who successfully complete courses/programmes, divided by total number in learner cohort	As above, plus open school's annual report
Graduates in employment divided by total number of graduates in learner cohort	As above
Total number of learners divided by total number in target group	Open school's annual report and budget submission
Learners who successfully complete courses/programmes, divided by total number in learner cohort	Open school's statistical digest
Graduates in employment divided by total number of graduates in learner cohort	Research report
Satisfaction ratings by employers, additional needs identified	Research report
Total expenditure on course/programme divided by total number of learners Total expenditure on course/programme divided by total number of graduates	Open school's annual report and audited accounts
Total expenditure on conventional schools (plus ministry's overheads) divided by total number of school-based students Total expenditure on conventional schools (plus ministry's overheads), divided by number of school-based graduates	Open school's annual report and budget submission

WHAT DO THEY NEED TO KNOW?

Meeting the expectations of these different stakeholders can be extremely demanding. Since each group has different interests and concerns, addressing these requires different types of information. The first step in accounting to stakeholders is identifying what they need to know. Figure 8.1 gives examples of the issues that might be of concern to different stakeholders.

Activity for Managers

1. Make a copy of Figure 8.1, but leave extra space for additional ideas.
2. Try to think of other concerns that learners and government ministries might have about your open school.
3. Brainstorm a list of other stakeholders.
4. Now try to put yourself into their shoes and imagine what concerns them. The questions you formulate should provide sufficient information for them to make judgements about how effectively your institution is meeting their expectations.

(At this stage, don't worry about the columns labelled "Possible Data Sources," "Information Needed" and "Reporting Methods.")

The exercise above suggests that different stakeholders share similar concerns. Many of the questions raised are likely to touch on the efficiency and effectiveness of your open school and its programmes.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

(Adapted from Du Vivier, 2008: Unit 9)

In the latter decades of the 20th century, education was thought to be the key to unlocking the human potential of developing countries and enabling them to "take off" on a modernising trajectory. In many countries around the globe, significant sums have been devoted to expanding access to education

and improving the quality of inputs. In recent years, however, this investment in education has increasingly been scrutinised by economists who question the efficiency and effectiveness of many programmes. Open and distance learning institutions have not escaped this critique and must justify their existence by quantifying their cost-effectiveness relative to conventional education.

The term *effectiveness* is defined as the extent to which an organisation or programme produces particular outputs (which are concrete and measurable) or outcomes (which may not be measurable). When an educational institution or programme meets its own goals, this is generally referred to as *internal effectiveness*.

The only way forward is to take one step back.
Folk wisdom

However, there are numerous examples of programmes that have high internal effectiveness yet fail to meet the broader needs of society as a whole. For example, the formal education system may be internally effective in producing a very high pass rate in terminal examinations, but employers often complain that young people are not adequately prepared for the “world of work.” When an education system produces graduates who are well prepared for the multiple demands placed upon them outside of school, then it is said to have high *external effectiveness*.¹

In popular usage, efficiency is linked with money and is used to express how expensive or inexpensive something is to produce per unit. For the purpose of this discussion, *efficiency* is defined as the extent to which an organisation or programme maintains a particular level of production with fewer resources (Rumble, 1986: 211). Efficiency is concerned not only with resources expended (in terms of materials, labour, equipment and the costs associated with them), but also with what is produced (courses, study materials or student enrolments).

We all know from experience that the cheapest product is not always the best. For example, one pair of shoes may cost £20 but wears out in only two months, while another pair that costs £60 will last for a year. The more expensive shoes are actually better value for money, as the cost per month of wear is only half of that for the cheaper shoes. In contrast, a programme can be very effective without being efficient. For example, intensive one-to-one tutorials are generally very effective in producing good examination results, but are a very expensive and inefficient way of doing so.

1. Economists tend to use the terms internal/external *efficiency* when referring to what is defined here as internal/external *effectiveness*.

We need another term to express the balance between effectiveness and efficiency. *Cost-effectiveness* is that term. Hülsmann defines cost-effectiveness as “the most efficient way to achieve a set goal” (2004: 22). Essentially, it expresses a balance between attempts to keep costs to a minimum while maximising the outcomes/outputs of an educational institution or programme. The most common measure of cost-effectiveness is the average cost per graduate. In this context, the term *graduate* refers to a student who successfully completes a subject, course or programme rather than someone who holds a qualification from an institution of higher education. The calculations required to determine the cost-effectiveness of your open school relative to those in conventional schools are not difficult, but you will need certain data. The process is described in detail in Unit 9 of *Costs and Financing in Open Schools* (Du Vivier, 2008).

However, those studying at a distance may not be taking the same course load (number of subjects or courses per year) as students in conventional schools. Because of this, you will need to make a calculation to convert registrations with your open school into full-time equivalent student numbers. Various ways of carrying out this calculation are discussed in Unit 8 of *Costs and Financing in Open Schools* (Du Vivier, 2008). There are some drawbacks to using full-time equivalent student measures, as illustrated in the case study below.



CASE STUDY

The Vancouver Learning Network (VLN) is an open school that provides online courses for learners in the province of British Columbia in Canada. In order to calculate the funding it receives from the provincial Ministry of Education, VLN uses a formula to convert its enrolment data to full-time equivalent student numbers. In the 2007/08 academic year, over 7,000 individual learners registered with VLN to study one or more subjects. When the calculations were performed, the formula yielded a figure of only 1,100 full-time equivalent students.

However, the figure for full-time equivalent students does not reflect the actual costs incurred by an open school to look after its learners. VLN must do the same amount of administrative work for each individual

learner as administrators in a conventional school do for their students. A separate file must be prepared for each of VLN's 7,000 learners, including an individualised learning plan and records of all work produced. Moreover, while conventional schools can copy much of the information in a learner's file from year to year, the high turnover of students at VLN means that a new record or file must be created for every learner each year.

(Adapted from information supplied by Cindy Gauthier, Director: VLN)

Performance Indicators

Another measure that is commonly used to assess and report on the outcomes of educational programmes is the performance indicator. Although the term is used rather loosely in different contexts, performance indicators may be defined as quantitative measures that specify the extent to which goals have been achieved. The process of devising performance indicators is closely associated with quality assurance (see Chapter 7). However, whereas quality assurance tends to be an internal activity, performance indicators are usually driven by the external demands of funding bodies (COL, 1999: 9-13).

Performance indicators are normally set during strategic or programme planning, and they should be clearly linked to the institution's mission, goals, strategies and objectives. A well-drafted performance indicator should be:

- relevant
- easy to update (when targets are met and new ones need to be set)
- based on objective data
- clearly understandable to stakeholders, and
- valid – that is, it actually measures what it is supposed to measure (COL, 1999: 9-16–9-17).

For example, the ratio of pupils to teachers is commonly used as a quantitative indicator of quality in classroom-based education. If a programme aims to improve the quality of education in conventional schools, a reduction in the pupil-teacher ratio can be used to show how well the programme has performed in achieving that goal.

Many concerns have been expressed about the use of performance indicators. These concerns include:

- If the information required to calculate the performance indicator is not part of the data your institution already collects, the additional costs of obtaining this information can be considerable.
- Performance indicators are, by definition, quantitative measures. They are not suitable for reporting qualitative information. There is also a tendency to use performance indicators in isolation, without other measures that reflect professional judgement. In the example above, the pupil-teacher ratio is only an indirect indicator of the quality of teaching in a classroom. Other measures – such as peer reviews, inspectors’ reports or classroom audits – are needed to provide qualitative data on performance.
- Sometimes the same performance indicators are used to compare or rank institutions in relation to one another. However, such comparisons may not be appropriate when open schools or colleges are compared with conventional, classroom-based education.
- On occasion, quality indicators can be imposed by funders against the advice of the professional educators who devised the programme. This raises suspicions that funders will evaluate the programme on the basis of its economic efficiency at the expense of quality. (COL, 1999: 9-17)



Activity for Managers

One of the most common indicators used to assess the performance of formal education systems is the examination pass rate. This is calculated by dividing the number of candidates who received the minimum mark or above by the total number of candidates who sat the examination.

Answer the following questions for one of the programmes in your open school or college.

- *What was the pass rate for learners registered with your institution? What has been the trend over the last five years?*
- *If students in conventional schools take the same examination or a comparable one, how does the pass rate for your learners compare with theirs?*
- *Do you believe that this is a valid comparison? What reasons can you think of to argue for alternative measures?*



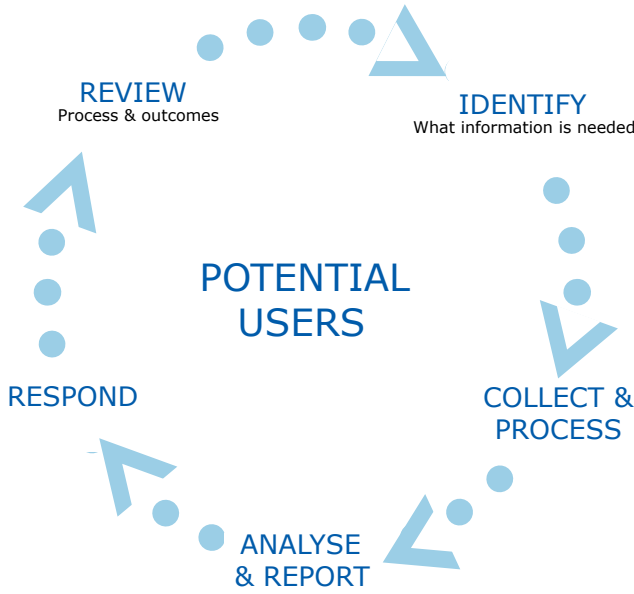
When there is a widespread perception that open schooling is inferior to conventional education, use of the examination pass rate finds favour as a performance indicator because it is based on what students in the two systems actually achieve. Typically the results of learners from open schools in external examinations lag behind those of full-time students in conventional education. However, such a comparison is misleading, as it does not compare like with like. In most countries, the system for promoting learners from junior to senior secondary school (or from senior secondary school to university) is based on academic achievement, and this has the effect of “creaming off” the most successful students. Those who have had the least success in education (either through their own limited aptitude or because of social, economic and educational disadvantage) are relegated to the alternative programme offered by an open school or college.

For example, consider the following scenario. Two students are in the final year of junior/lower secondary. One attains the minimum mark in the English examination for admission to senior/upper secondary school; the other receives a mark just below the minimum and is obliged to continue her education through open school. While both receive a “C” in the senior secondary English examination, the learner from the open school has actually achieved more because she started from a lower level (Du Vivier, 2008: 93). In these circumstances, a more valid performance indicator would be the average learning gain (expressed in terms of improved marks in examinations) rather than the examination pass rate (Rumble, 2001/02: 5). However, it may not be possible to obtain all of the data required to perform this calculation.

WHERE DOES THIS INFORMATION COME FROM?

All open schools keep records of their learners, but few make optimum use of the information they have available. Such information needs to be managed through a series of steps or stages. Once you have identified what information is needed, data has to be collected and processed. However, unless this data is analysed and reported to the relevant manager or official, a timely response is not possible. After appropriate action has been taken, it is important to review these processes to ensure that they have had the desired outcomes. These steps form the cycle for managing information, which is illustrated in Figure 8.2.

FIGURE 8.2: THE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT CYCLE



Consider a simple example of how the information collected by your institution can be used to respond to a changing situation. Imagine that, because of unanticipated delays, the delivery of study materials to learners in a particular area will take place three weeks later than originally scheduled. This means that the date of the first contact session must be put back by a few weeks and the deadline for submitting the first written assignment will also be extended. The contact details for learners should have been collected at the time of registration. This data can be analysed to identify which learners live in the area affected, and the addresses can be copied onto envelopes. You can then draft a circular letter to all of these learners to inform them of the changes. After these letters have been sent off through the post, the process can be reviewed to see whether any improvements can be made. For example, if most of your learners have mobile/cell phones, it might have been quicker and cheaper to inform them through an SMS text message sent to multiple contacts. The same process can be used to notify learners of a change of venue for a contact session or to remind them of deadlines for assignments or examination registration.

Designing a Management Information System

Your system for managing information must be carefully designed. As the type of information you collect will be limited by the technology you use, the first decision that must be taken is what type of system you will adopt.

PAPER-BASED INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Prior to the introduction of computer technology, information was recorded by hand on paper. This technology is tried and tested, and has proved extremely reliable. However, analysing data using a manual system is extremely tedious and time-consuming. Nevertheless, where the number of learners registered for a particular course or programme is low, paper-based records can prove more cost-effective.

OFF-THE-SHELF COMPUTER PROGRAM

A growing number of open schools have begun to use computer databases that have been specifically designed for student records. Some of the more complex management information systems link all data related to a given learner – contact details, academic programme, assessment results and financial information – so that it can be used in an integrated way. This enables very sophisticated forms of analysis and allows the information to be used for the full range of administrative processes.

Off-the-shelf computer packages for managing student records can be bought from companies that specialise in such software. Normally, this involves substantial expenditure up-front to have the system installed on computers in your open school. In addition, many software packages include annual payments for royalties or licensing fees. The advantage of this option is that such fees normally entitle your school to receive software updates and may also include some form of support for when problems arise.

Because such off-the-shelf computer packages are developed to meet the needs of different types of educational institutions (universities, schools, conventional educational institutions and ODL bodies), they are unlikely to meet the specific requirements of your open school. They may contain more information fields than you need or they may not have any place to store information that is essential for your operations. Likewise, they may not allow you to carry out

common operations, such as changing the study centre a learner attends for tutorials when he or she moves to a different town or city.

CUSTOMISED COMPUTER PROGRAM

The final option is to pay a computer consultant(s) to develop a customised system for managing information on your learners. These are normally based on commercial database packages, but less complex systems can be created by using standard spreadsheet applications software. Open-source software can also be downloaded from the World Wide Web, either free of charge or at minimal cost. *Open-source* means that the codes that make the programme operate, which you normally cannot see, can be customised without a licence to meet your institution's requirements. While it may be possible to link into a support network of other individuals and institutions using the same software around the world, you will still need to find an expert to set up and customise the application for you.

If the system is well designed, customised software will give you the best functionality. This simply means that the system will do what you want it to do. However, because many hours of an expert's time are required to set up the system, the start-up costs are usually very substantial. In addition, it will be necessary to pay the expert to maintain and update the system from time to time. Two or three staff members in your institution should be trained to administer the system on a day-to-day basis so that you are not completely dependent on outside expertise.



CASE STUDY

The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) was established in 1997 to provide learning opportunities for adults and out-of-school youth. Prior to that, distance education studies and evening classes were offered by different units of the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture. However, the statistics on students registered for studies with these units in the ministry were unreliable. In part, this was the result of the fact that record-keeping for face-to-face classes was the responsibility of staff in the ministry's regional offices. The only information available on learners was recorded in attendance registers, and this data was compiled once a year to produce a national figure. In addition, a paper-based system was

used to keep track of students registered for distance education, but this proved extremely cumbersome.

The first task in creating a management information system for NAMCOL was setting up a reliable way to keep learner records. This was achieved in 1997, when a customised database using proprietary software was brought on stream. The second task was to abstract the data available through this system, analyse it and present the results in a usable form for management. In order to look at the output of NAMCOL courses, it was also necessary to access the data available from other sources. The examination results for NAMCOL learners were obtained from the ministry unit responsible for administering state examinations and these were summarised in usable form. Finally this data was published in the *NAMCOL Statistical Digest* as part of the institution's annual accounting to government and other stakeholders.

Regardless of the option you choose, introducing a computerised record system is very demanding for the staff involved. During the transition period, which may last a number of years, they will need to learn how to use the new system while still carrying out their other work. While the transition is taking place and for a number of years thereafter, it is advisable to hold on to your existing paper-based record system as a back-up in case problems arise with the computer database.

What information do you need to collect?

Take another look at Figure 8.1, especially the columns labelled “Possible Data Sources” and “Information Needed.” While much of the data required to answer questions raised by stakeholders may come from other sources, your learner records system will provide essential information. In order to plan the best structure for that system, you need to be clear at the start what information should be included and how you plan to use it.

Activity for Managers

Go back to the list of stakeholders' concerns that you prepared earlier in this chapter, using a copy of Figure 8.1.

1. Fill in each cell in the "Information Needed" column by answering the following questions:
 - *What information will you need to answer the questions likely to be raised by each stakeholder?*
 - *What calculation(s) should be carried out to convert raw data into a usable form (e.g., percentages, mean scores, modal distribution)?*

2. Fill in each cell in the column labelled "Possible Data Sources" by answering the following question:
 - *Where might you find the information you need?*

The exercise above should provide you with a checklist of the information you will need to collect and maintain in your learner records system. You should also think about what other information you will need to administer the course or programme efficiently. Your learner records system is likely to include some or all of the information outlined below:

- **Contact details:** Full name (first, middle and last names, each in a separate field); name of parent/guardian or next of kin; national identification or passport number; postal address; physical residence (if different); city/town/village; state/province/region/district; telephone number(s); cell/mobile phone number(s); e-mail address.
- **Demographic data:** Date of birth²; gender; first language (mother tongue); other languages; ethnic group (if relevant); employment status; occupation; income level.
- **Administrative data:** Highest level of previous education (including subject passes if these are prerequisites for admission to higher-level courses in the same subject); choice of courses; payment method; total amount due; amount paid; amount outstanding; date when materials were dispatched or handed over.

2. It is important to find out a learner's date of birth rather than his or her age on the date of enrolment. This is because an individual's age can always be calculated from his or her date of birth, but the figure for age changes from year to year.

- **Individual performance indicators:** Attendance at tutorials; participation in e-mail or online discussion forums; use of facilities at study centres; course completion; progression within programme; number of assignments submitted; mark by assignment; mark in examination or final assessment by subject.
- **Communication with learners:** Dates of circular letters, e-mails or SMS text messages; dates and copies of individualised letters, e-mails or SMS texts; dates and summary of individual telephone calls; copies of assignments with marker’s feedback; date assessment marks sent to learner; original examination scripts (in case a learner requests that the marking be checked); date examination marks sent to learner; complaints from learners.

While some computerised learner records systems can store all of the above data in electronic form, such sophisticated systems can be quite costly. Moreover, it may not be necessary to collect all of the information in a single place. For example, attendance at contact sessions is normally recorded on a paper register, which is kept by the tutor or at a local study centre. It is relatively easy to calculate average attendance rates from this document, as well as identifying learners who have missed several contact sessions to see whether any follow-up is required. This means that a local, paper-based record system is sufficient for these purposes.

The question you should ask is what information needs to be included on each learner’s record in a central file or database. While it may sound like a good idea to put all of the information you collect into a single database, this may not be the best solution. In the above example, costs will be incurred to transfer the data from the attendance register to the electronic record for each individual learner. There will also be a delay unless the data entry and analysis is carried out within a few days after attendance is recorded on the paper register. Once analysed, the staff member responsible for responding to a problem (in this case, the tutor or administrator at the local study centre) must be informed. The basic principle underlying the design of a centralised learner records system should be fitness for purpose – collecting only as much information as is required for your intended purpose.

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Education is now, by any measure, one of the world’s largest businesses. It is a massive, global enterprise, and every country in the world is trying to reform its education system, without exception. Anyone who thinks education is not about the economy is going around with their eyes shut.

Sir Kenneth Robinson

.....

Although the data collected for a management information system can answer many questions of a quantitative nature (e.g., how many students have achieved a pass mark in particular subjects), it may not reveal much about qualitative issues (e.g., how satisfied learners were with the service they received). Nor can it contribute to an assessment of the external effectiveness of a course or programme in terms of its value in meeting the needs of employers or society as a whole. In order to answer these questions, you will need to consult other data sources or carry out evaluative research (see Chapter 7).

Collecting and Processing Data

The starting point for collecting information is clear instructions for those responsible so that the process is carried out in a uniform and consistent way. Normally, all of the information needed to register a learner is collected on a pro forma document at the time of enrolment. Multiple copies of these forms can be made using carbon paper or self-copying sheets. Learners should receive a copy of the form to confirm their registration details. Additional copies can be made as required, depending on how these forms will be used when the data is processed. Usually, one copy is kept at a local study centre or provincial, regional or district office while another is sent to the head office of the ODL institution. Each form should include a unique learner number to identify the record for that particular learner. These numbers are also useful for checking to see if any forms have been misfiled or lost, which would be indicated by a gap in the numbering sequence.

If your record system is paper-based, the registration forms can be filed in whatever way is most convenient, either alphabetically, by course, by learner number or by local study centre. If you are using a computerised system, the data from the registration forms will need to be captured or converted into electronic form. Traditionally this was done by clerical workers who simply copied the information on the form into a template on a computer. An alternative is to use Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) forms for registration. These forms include a series of boxes or bubbles that must be blacked out with a pencil or pen. The forms are then fed into an OMR reading machine, which converts the information into digital data that can be saved on a computer hard drive or server. Web-based registration systems enable learners to fill in all the information required without the need for a paper form. In most cases, however, printouts are made of web-based registrations in order to have a paper back-up.

Once the data has been entered, checks should be carried out to identify places where mistakes have been made (e.g., data entered in the wrong field, values entered outside the possible range). The data must then be “repaired” by going back to the original form to check what should have been entered. Copies should also be made of all records and kept at a separate, secure location to ensure that the data is not lost through fire or other mishaps. If you are using a computerised database, learner records should be backed up on a removable storage device or on a server in a different building. The confidentiality of any learner information collected by your open school must be safeguarded in accordance with legal provisions for data protection in the jurisdiction(s) within which it operates.

Analysing Data

Paper-based record systems allow for only the simplest forms of data analysis. For example, determining the gender of learners involves going through the files form by form and counting the numbers of females and males. Cross-tabulations are more difficult and time-consuming. If you wanted to know how many female learners had registered for a particular course, for example, you would need to separate out all the records for that course and then count the number of females. All of the papers must then be put back into their original order to ensure that they can be retrieved for other purposes.

Alternatively, data can be compiled either by hand or on a computer using a tally sheet. This is a table that you can create in any spreadsheet application (e.g., Microsoft Excel, Open Office Calculate) with a separate row for each learner record. The unique learner number should be recorded in the first column of each row, but the learner’s name and address are not necessary. You will then need to create a series of columns for each possible response to a particular question. For example, if you want to know how many learners live in a particular region and there are seven regions in your country, you will need seven separate columns, one for each. Again, it will be necessary to go through all of the forms, transferring data to the tally sheet, placing the digit “1” in the relevant cell of the table. Once all the data has been entered on the tally sheet, the 1’s in each column can be added up to produce totals. Percentages or averages can then be calculated as required.

.....
 What we learn we do,
 and when we do, we
 see what is wrong.
 So we learn also from
 our mistakes and
 achievements. The
 mistakes show where
 there are shortcomings
 in our knowledge, weak
 points which have to be
 eliminated. This means
 that it is in the process
 of producing that we
 correct our mistakes.

Samora Michel

.....

Even a very basic computerised record system will simplify the process of data analysis. This can be particularly important when a large number of learner records must be analysed or cross-tabulations are required. During the initial development and testing of the database, commonly requested reports should also be set up so that they can be run with minimal training. Behind the scenes, the database software performs the function of the tally sheet described above and automatically calculates total numbers, percentages, mean values or other mathematical functions as needed. In most cases, this data can be imported into pre-formatted tables for reporting purposes.

A fully integrated computerised information management system allows for very sophisticated forms of analysis. For example, if a group of learners failed their final examinations, it is possible to explore possible links between this cluster and a particular tutor, the late delivery of study materials, non-attendance at contact sessions or any number of other factors. Such a review of the data would allow you to make proactive and targeted interventions to prevent such failures in the future. These interventions might include

providing in-service training for particular tutors, allowing additional time for the delivery of study materials or encouraging and monitoring learners' attendance at contact sessions.

Retrieving Information and Responding

Retrieving records for future use is as important as collecting and processing the data in the first place (Randall, 2005). Responsibility for maintaining information systems is normally assigned to a separate unit – a registry or data centre – or to specialised staff. Ideally, however, everyone who could make use of this information – managers, learner support staff, centre administrators, tutors and researchers – should have access to relevant data.

For example, if a centre administrator notices that a particular learner has not attended the first two contact sessions, a letter or telephone call might correct this situation before the learner becomes a statistic in the “dropout” category. However, if the centre administrators must wait until they receive a printout of learners' addresses or telephone numbers from the registry unit at the

institution's head office, they cannot make a timely intervention. Where data is collected in a centralised learner records system, provision should be made for staff posted in locations outside your school's head office to access that information either by telephone or Internet connection.

Reporting

After information has been collected, processed, analysed and acted upon (as required), it should be reported to stakeholders. Planning how to communicate such information will depend upon your target audience(s), their concerns and the most effective method of reaching it. For example, an annual report might be an effective way to put the activities and achievements of your open school on the record to account for state funding. However, this document may not be useful for communicating the same information to learners and their parents, who might not read it. An information campaign, public meetings and open days are likely to be more effective for reaching these target groups.

Activity for Managers

Go back to the copy of Figure 8.1 that you worked on earlier in this chapter. Fill in each cell in the "Reporting Methods" column, by answering the following question:

- *What are the best ways to communicate information to address the specific concerns of a particular group of stakeholders?*

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Accounting to stakeholders should not be seen as a one-time event, but as part of your institution's strategy for communicating with its public(s). Although there are many definitions of public relations, most of the current ones emphasise two-way communication. Multi-directional communication can be even more powerful and effective, but it is time-consuming to establish and maintain additional lines of communication. However, these are essential in times of development or change.

A good way to approach public relations is to think of it in terms of “distributed relationships” or ongoing conversations with a range of stakeholder groups. Such distributed relationships require the ability to:

- communicate in multiple directions
- add value to information by conveying it in a manner that is readily understood by the target audience
- use a variety of media
- invite dialogue between stakeholders and staff on many levels
- use the concerns expressed by stakeholders to inform research, development and practice.

Ideally, public relations should be planned and sustained over time, though in many cases it takes place in an ad hoc and unplanned fashion in response to a problem. Managers of open schools should move from reacting to issues as they arise towards a more proactive approach to public relations. One way to do this is to initiate discussion forums with different groups of stakeholders before problems arise.

SUMMARY

Even when open schooling proves to be more cost-effective than conventional education, it is often viewed by the public and funding bodies as second best. Overcoming this impression involves a consistent approach and a sustained effort when communicating with your stakeholders. In order to account for your institution’s activities, you should start by finding out what information is required to address the concerns of different stakeholders. You must then develop a management system for collecting, processing, analysing and responding to this information. Finally, effective ways must be devised to report this information to different audiences as part of an ongoing dialogue with stakeholders.

SUGGESTED READING

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For an example of open access software for learner records, see the *Open Admin for Schools* website at <http://bcsa.richtech.ca/index.shtml>

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS, ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

3G. Third Generation of mobile phone technology, capable of transmitting high-speed data as well as voice.

accreditation. The process whereby an external body, independent of the institution that issues a certificate or diploma, makes a statement about the value of such certificates.

asynchronous. Interactions between learners and tutors that take place at different times, such as submitting assignments for marking by post.

AV. Audio-visual or audio and/or video.

blended-mode. Courses, programmes or institutions where learning takes place through ODL methods, as well as more conventional classroom techniques.

BOCODOL. Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning

CAL. Computer-Assisted Learning – software programs that provide a structured learning experience with some interactive elements for testing one’s own progress and understanding. Other terms that are sometimes used for similar delivery systems are CAI (Computer-Aided Instruction) and CBL/CBT (Computer-Based Learning/Training).

CC. Creative Commons licences – enable authors to retain their full rights, while allowing others to use the material under certain terms and conditions.

CD. Compact Disc for digitally recorded audio.

certification. The process whereby an educational institution recognises that a learner has reached a given standard or level of competence. This recognition is usually signified through the awarding of a certificate.

cohort. A term used in research and statistics to refer to a group of people under study who share common characteristics, particularly those in the same grade at school.

cost-effectiveness. The amount expended to produce a particular outcome or output. In education, this is normally expressed as the cost per graduate or cost per subject or course passed.

OMR. Optical Mark Recognition – a process by which marks on a pre-formatted piece of paper can be converted into computer data by a machine.

PDA. Personal Digital Assistant – a hand-held or palm-top device that can include the functions of a computer, a cell phone, a music player and a camera.

PDF. Portable Document Format – a means of saving documents in a form that cannot be easily altered but that can be read on any computer with free Adobe AcrobatTM Reader software.

performance indicators. Quantitative measures that specify the extent to which goals have been achieved.

podcast. A series of digitally recorded files providing audio content that can be downloaded from the Internet and played by the user at a suitable time. The term may be an acronym for Personal On Demand broadCASTing.

SMS. Short Message Service – a way of sending text messages from one mobile/cellphone to another.

synchronous. Occurring at the same time. The term is used to describe occasions when learners interact with a tutor or other learners without any delays in communication. Face-to-face workshops and telephone tutorials are examples of synchronous teaching and learning methods.

USB. Universal Serial Bus – a standard for connecting external devices to computers via plugs or ports. Most flash drives or memory sticks utilise a USB connection.

VLE. Virtual Learning Environment – a software package that enables students to receive general information about a course or programme, obtain study materials, correspond with tutors and fellow students and carry out administrative tasks, such as registering for examinations. Such services can be accessed remotely through any computer with an Internet connection.

VLN. Vancouver Learning Network

webcast. The transmission (or broadcasting) of audio and video content over the Internet. Webcasts may comprise live (actuality) or pre-recorded material.

World Wide Web (abbreviated as *www* in many website addresses). A system of interlinked documents accessed via the Internet.

Page 73	Alan Kay, American computer scientist	Meeting of Palo Alto Research Center staff and Xerox planners, 1971. (http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Alan_Kay)
Page 80	Ken Kay, President: Partnership for 21st Century Learning Skills	<i>Learning to Change/Changing to Learn</i> [video]. Pearson Foundation. (http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/pg5.6.html)
Page 91	Peter F. Drucker	Drucker, Peter F. 2007. <i>Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices</i> . Edison, NJ: Transaction. (p. 63)
Page 99	Folk wisdom (sometimes attributed to Henry Ford)	
Page 112	Greg Whitby, Australian educator	<i>Learning to Change/Changing to Learn</i> [video]. Pearson Foundation. (http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/pg5.6.html)
Page 115	Frances J. Ferreira	Fifth meeting of the Southern African Development Community Technical Committee on Distance Education, 2002, Windhoek, Republic of Namibia.
Page 119	Ormand Simpson	Simpson, Ormand. 2008. "Motivating Learners in Open and Distance Learning: Do We Need a New Theory of Learner Support?" <i>Open Learning</i> 23 (2), 159–170.
Page 151	Folk wisdom	Quoted in Hope, Anne & Sally Timmel. 1995 [1984]. <i>Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers</i> . London: ITDG. (Book II, p. 121)
Page 161	Sir Kenneth Robinson	ArtSmart Conference, Regina, SK, Canada, 17 October 2008.
Page 164	Samora Machel, Revolutionary leader and first President of an independent Mozambique	From a 1971 speech, quoted in de Braganca, Aquino & Immanuel Wallerstein (Eds.). 1982. <i>The African Liberation Reader, Volume I</i> . London: Zed Press. (p. 116)



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