

tutorials was limited to a period from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. (Suva time) from Mondays to Fridays and 2 to 3 p.m. and 6 to 7 p.m. on Saturdays. Other times were available for administrative purposes and for continuing education. And, while the satellite links might ease communication between campus and university centre, this was not the same as reaching a student who might live a two-hour journey across an island from their university centre.

27. Computers were being used for three purposes in distance education. First, they were being used to help managers in a role which did not differ fundamentally from their use in university (or commercial) management. Second, a number of institutions were using them for the production of teaching material, using word processing programs. In some cases this eased the co-operative production of materials at two sites, where both had compatible hardware and software. Third, computers were beginning to be used to teach students at a distance. In theory, it was possible for students to link their home computers with a university mainframe computer and so achieve long-range, two-way, communication of a highly sophisticated kind. There was, however, little practical experience of this so far.

28. Two broad problems, applying to both computer and satellite developments, confront us. The first concerns the information gap between the north and the south, and the extent to which the new technology might widen or narrow the gap. The second, which is related, concerns the production of teaching material or other software for use either on computers or through satellite broadcasts. We raised, but did not pursue in detail, questions about the production of software which reflected the interests of the south rather than of the north - a theme which lies behind the discussion of co-operation in the next chapter. The issues here are likely to become more important as direct broadcasting satellites, which require smaller and cheaper ground stations, come into use.

29. In considering these and other issues concerning the new technology it is useful to distinguish between current educational experience of the technology, technical possibilities, and policy issues. Bearing these distinctions in mind, it was recommended that the Secretariat should develop a capacity to inform governments and educational institutions, especially of small states, of policy issues concerning the application of communications technology to education.

Chapter 5: MOBILITY OF PEOPLE, INFORMATION AND MATERIALS

30. The long history of co-operation and exchange between Commonwealth universities formed the backdrop to our meeting. One of our intentions was to explore how far that tradition could be adapted to co-operation in distance education. We also had a specific concern with the mobility of students and wanted to see how distance teaching might increase, or make more readily and effectively available, opportunities for students to benefit from distant institutions. As expenditure on study abroad throughout the Commonwealth was estimated at \$1.6 billion p.a. it was important to investigate the potential of moving information or materials as well as people.

31. Distance education has one particular advantage over conventional education so far as exchanges and co-operation are concerned: its teaching is tangible and visible. But any co-operation is dependent on information, about the practice of distance teaching, about institutions, about materials, and about copyright restraints on their exchange.

Information

32. Information about the practice of distance education flowed through the normal scholarly channels of publications and symposia. There were, however, difficulties. Much information about the rapidly developing practice of distance education appears in grey publications - occasional reports, studies and other semi-published materials, which tended to be elusive. No one information clearhouse, such as those run by the American abstracting agency ERIC, concentrated on distance education. The International Centre for Distance Learning of the United Nations University, housed at the British Open University, was building up a collection and circulating details of its acquisitions twice yearly, as well as developing a data base on institutions (see para 34 below). They were proposing in 1985 to investigate ways of cataloguing and disseminating information of this kind and of collecting additional types of information. Their finance was, however, not assured beyond 1986 and it was agreed that the value of the International Centre for Distance Learning of the United Nations University was recognised and the Secretariat and other agencies urged to support its endeavours to expand its staff and to achieve more secure funding.

33. There was a limited number of journals with a direct interest in distance teaching including Distance education, published in Australia Media in education and development, published in Britain by the British Council and Teaching at a distance published by the Open University in Britain but with an interest in distance teaching beyond that of its own institution. The three journals were complementary in interest and did not duplicate each other. Both titles published in Britain were at present threatened with closure because of financial cutbacks. The value of the two threatened journals (Teaching at a distance and Media in education and development) was recognised and the Secretariat asked to pass on the meeting's concern at their possible demise.

34. The International Centre for Distance Learning had set up a data bank which contained details of distance-teaching institutions throughout the world, including their levels, methods of operating, scale and programmes and courses available. It was possible to interrogate the data bank at Milton Keynes (but not on line outside the British Open University) and to search it using a variety of descriptors. The value of this work was recognised although it was necessary to monitor the actual use made of the data bank. Whereas in the past the Secretariat had published successive editions of a Guide to correspondence institutions in the Commonwealth it was agreed that in view of the work of ICDL the Secretariat should not produce a new version of its guide. Indeed, the Secretariat's role should not be one of acting as a specialist information service on distance education but should play a

role in passing information to and from information services and putting pressure on them to meet the needs of Commonwealth institutions. The Secretariat also had a role in advising Commonwealth institutions and educators about sources of information including specialist information services.

Co-operation and exchange

35. Although the International Centre (and the International Extension College) had collections of distance-teaching materials, neither had begun on the major task of cataloguing materials or the courses of which they formed part. Major problems of nomenclature (with similar courses and subjects being described differently in different institutions) and scale were involved. As a point of comparison, the British Educational Counselling and Credit Transfer Information Service (ECCTIS) had a staff of 14 and a grant of £900 000 for its three-year development programme. Its database, which was limited to British further and higher education, now had records of 4000 postgraduate taught courses, 10 000 first degrees, and 5000 nationally validated advanced courses. It would be unrealistic to propose major cataloguing activities on distance-teaching materials on a Commonwealth-wide basis.

36. Despite the problems of exchanging information, there was some experience in the Commonwealth of exchanging teaching material and co-operating on its development. The Open Learning Institute of British Columbia, Universiti Sains Malaysia and the University of the South Pacific have some experience of the co-operative production of course material. The University of the South Pacific and the City of London Polytechnic are working together on the development of materials in accountancy and there is interest in their wider use in the Commonwealth. In Australia, while there are barriers to co-operation, there are limited examples of the successful co-operative development of courses. Deakin, Murdoch and Queensland Universities have, for example, jointly developed a course in women's studies. In Canada, the Open Learning Institute and Athabasca University have also co-operated in the development of several courses.

37. We can distinguish various levels of co-operation:

37.1 One institution simply refers enquirers to another where the second is better able to meet the enquirer's needs;

37.2 One institution acts as an enrolment agent for another, enrolling the student, but leaving the teaching and accreditation to the distant institution;

37.3 One institution provides local support, such as tutoring, to a student enrolled with another;

37.4 One institution takes over a course from another, providing its own support and accreditation;

37.5 Two or more institutions co-operate in the development as well as the use of teaching materials.

All these kinds of co-operation are important, both regionally and throughout the Commonwealth. The Secretariat already has interest in regional co-operation in this area and it was recommended that the Secretariat should continue to encourage the development of regional co-operation in distance education. More generally it was recommended that in the light of the total expenditure within the Commonwealth on financing overseas students, the Secretariat should explore further the potential of sharing, exchanging and moving educational resources, as well as moving students.

38. It is possible to identify a number of the barriers to co-operation at any of the levels identified. We have touched on the problem of information: it may simply be difficult to find out about course material. Then there are issues of academic policy: there may be a reluctance to use material developed elsewhere or accredit students who have used such material which derives from long (and important) traditions of university autonomy. There are particular difficulties in importing course material in a mixed-mode institution where attempts are made to match closely what is offered at a distance with what is offered on the campus. Copyright and royalty restrictions may inhibit co-operation or exchange. Two factors may, in contrast, be encouraging the development of co-operative schemes: the possibility of economising on the cost of course production and the advent of new communications technology. Computer aided instruction may demand investment at a level which few institutions can, singly, bear while satellite links may demand audiences larger than most can offer.

39. In exploring further the possibility of co-operation on course material, a model for course development, which takes account of local and distant needs, may be helpful. In order to develop good practice in this area we recommended that the Secretariat should investigate, monitor and report on experience in the co-operative development of teaching materials.

40. There is only limited experience of universities' enrolling and teaching students from outside their own country. The University of London pioneered in enrolling external students, and in developing special relationships with developing universities, but made little use of distance teaching. The British Open University decided as a general policy not to enrol students outside Britain, but did make minor exceptions, including British servicemen, residents of Brussels and people who started their degree in Britain but then moved overseas. The Surrey University Diploma in the Practice of Higher Education and the proposed Wye College Masters course in agricultural extension were intended for students outside Britain as well as within. While many universities now encouraged students within their own country to do part of their degree course at a distance and part on campus, it was not generally possible to do this across national frontiers, although there could be clear benefits in this. Nor had universities yet developed access courses, which would be studied in their own countries by students from abroad, as a means of preparing them for on-campus study. Such possibilities deserved further investigation, although it was recognised that they raised problems of logistics, of providing tutorial support and of accreditation.

41. One particular financial difficulty was identified. While it was possible for students to seek, and sometimes obtain, grants for overseas study through various channels, including Commonwealth channels, it had proved impossible for students to obtain grants to enrol on correspondence courses from distant universities, even where suitable courses were available. A case in point was the University of Surrey course in the practice of higher education.

42. In the light of the discussions on exchange and co-operation it was recommended that in exploring these issues the Secretariat should examine:

42.1 the potential of enrolment by distance-teaching institutions of the Commonwealth of students from countries other than their own;

42.2 issues of accreditation and credit;

42.3 the possibility of mixed-mode study, with some work being done in a student's own country and other work on a distant campus;

42.4 barriers in the way of inter-institutional co-operation including finance, information and copyright.

43. We also agreed that the Secretariat should explore with CFTC and other agencies the possibility of making scholarships available for students working at a distance as well as those travelling to study face-to-face.