

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This study was commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat, in response to the Communique issued by the Commonwealth Heads of Government following their meeting in the Bahamas in October 1985 which requested the Commonwealth Secretary-General "to explore the scope for new Commonwealth initiatives in the field of open learning".

The study was funded by the Overseas Development Administration of the United Kingdom. The study reviews experience of distance and open education within Commonwealth countries, looks at existing examples of international cooperation, and leads to suggestions or proposals for new Commonwealth initiatives. The study concerns itself with the whole range of distance teaching for further, higher and continuing education. While it examines the use of distance teaching for undergraduate degrees, it pays particular attention to programmes for human resource development in the widest sense, including continuing education.

1.2 **Collection of evidence**

- 1.2.1 The study consists of this final report and sixteen background papers as follows which, for convenience, we have divided into three groups - Regions, Themes and Sectors.

Regional Papers

1. Commonwealth Africa
2. Commonwealth Asia (excluding India)
3. Australia
4. Canada
5. The Caribbean
6. India
7. The Commonwealth islands of the South West Pacific
8. The United Kingdom

Theme Papers

9. The costs and costing of Distance/Open Education
10. Evaluation in distance learning
11. Information and research for distance education
12. Media in distance education
13. Staff training for distance education

Sector Papers

14. Accountancy in distance education
15. Agriculture in distance education
16. Health and medical studies in distance education

These papers form the basis for much of this report and unless otherwise acknowledged material is taken from them.

- 1.2.1 In order to report on the experience of open and distance learning, our first step was to identify and make contact with major initiatives in those Commonwealth countries which are involved in the creation, design, production, administration, delivery or evaluation of programmes and courses which use distance and open learning methodologies. A survey questionnaire was therefore sent to just over 400 institutions throughout the Commonwealth to explore the range of issues raised by the terms of reference. The questionnaire was designed so as to generate data comparable with that held on the database of the United Nations University International Centre for Distance Learning housed at the UK OU.

We have created a database which contains data on the 306 distance teaching institutions in the Commonwealth that replied to the survey, and also held extensive discussions with a number of major institutions.

1.3 Synopsis

- 1.3.1 This chapter provides an introduction to the project and its terms of reference (the chapter descriptions below mirror the terms of reference), the content and structure of the report, and the contributors.
- 1.3.2 Chapter 2 of the report is an introduction to open and distance learning.

1.3.3 In Chapter 3, we present the information obtained from our survey to highlight:

- * the main areas of existing provision of open and distance learning - by subject and level;
- * the actual and potential beneficiaries of open learning systems;
- * the main types of organisational structures which have been developed;
- * the main media used.

Besides data from the survey, material from the regional papers (1-8) is included, and data from the sector papers (14-16) places a focus on distance education for manpower development.

Chapter 3 also includes data on sources of training for practitioners of open and distance learning within the Commonwealth (paper 13) and on organisations at national, regional, and international levels which have been established to promote the use of open and distance learning.

1.3.4 Chapter 4 draws on theme papers 9, 10 and 12 and covers:

- * the criteria by which the effectiveness of distance and open learning systems have been measured in terms of meeting their objectives, whether academic, operational, economic or political;
- * the choice and use of media;
- * evidence and effectiveness, paying particular attention to the quantification of unit costs and comparison with the cost of conventional education systems.

1.3.5 In Chapter 5 we report and review experience of cooperation and collaboration in open and distance learning at national, regional and international levels; and we identify and compare alternative organisational models for such cooperation, assessing their comparative educational and economic advantages.

1.3.6 In Chapter 6 we set out proposals for Commonwealth cooperation. We list proposals, and suggest a framework in which these proposals can be considered. The proposals themselves largely arose in the course of discussions in the regions, and full details are given in the regional papers 1-8 and paper 11. This report gives a brief summary for each, and indications of cost where these are possible.

1.4 Contributors

- 1.4.1 The Commonwealth Secretariat contracted the work jointly to the International Extension College and the Council for Educational Technology. The two organisations provided the services of Geoffrey Hubbard (CET) and Janet Jenkins (IEC) as Principal Consultants, and Christopher Yates (Research Assistant). Office facilities and management support were provided by both organisations. In addition, contributions were received from:

Jo Bradley	International Extension College
Tony Dodds	International Extension College
Solomon Inquai	International Extension College
David Warr	International Extension College
John Coffey	Council for Educational Technology
Chris Humphries	Council for Educational Technology
Tony Bates	Open University
Keith Harry	Open University
Adrian Kirkwood	Open University
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Raj Dhanarajan	Universiti Sains Malaysia
Marian Croft	Laurentian University Canada
Gerald Lalor	University of West Indies
Don Bewley	Massey University New Zealand
P Satyanaryana	Indira Gandhi National Open University India
Patrick Guiton	Murdoch University Australia

- 1.4.2 We are also grateful to the following who agreed to serve on our Advisory Group:

Lord Young of Dartington (Chair)	International Extension College
Mr Tony Dodds	International Extension College
Mr David Anderson	Trustee, International Extension College
Dr A Christodoulou	Association of Commonwealth Universities
Dr Hilary Perraton	Commonwealth Secretariat
Mr Sandy Edington	British Council
Mr Nigel Paine	Scottish Council for Educational Technology
Mr Chris Humphries	Council for Educational Technology
Dr John Daniel	Laurentian University, Canada
Mr Nicholas Kuhanga	University of Dar-es-Salaam
Mr Patrick Guiton	Murdoch University, Australia

- 1.4.3 Many others gave up time for discussions and commented on papers. We are grateful to them all, and have acknowledged this assistance in the appropriate papers.