

CHAPTER 5

EXISTING COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION

- 5.1 There are four primary components in an open learning system; (i) course production, (ii) delivery, (iii) student support and (iv) assessment and accreditation. Collaboration may relate to any or all of these components. There are also different geographical patterns, extending to a sub-region, a region or to the whole Commonwealth, and further, collaboration may be bilateral (between two countries or institutions) or multilateral, involving either a few or many countries or institutions.
- 5.2 **Forms of collaboration**
- 5.2.1 Collaboration may take many forms. There can be enormous differences in contribution (in terms of finance, expertise and effort) and benefit negotiated between the parties involved. A common model is the consultancy model where one country provides expertise in open and distance learning to another that wishes to develop its provision. A second pattern might involve the joint development of a course or programme between equal (in terms of contribution and benefit) partners. A third might involve a fully devolved approach for, perhaps, the parallel development of similar schemes where mutual benefit is obtained from the exchange of information and/or staff. We have not sought to provide a taxonomy of collaborative patterns as we have not found any clear progression along the axes of autonomy, contribution, and benefit.
- 5.2.2 We do believe, however, that there is a hierarchy of collaboration in terms of increasing difficulty and risk of failure, coupled with greater benefits in the event of success, set out in Figure 5.1. The majority of existing collaborations we have identified come under the first six of these headings.
- 5.2.3 Figure 5.1 requires some explanation. The risk of failure increases along the progression shown because the degree to which each of the participants may be required to compromise their existing systems and practices, and the extent to which comparative assessment of existing standards is required, increases. The benefits increase because the potential for cost savings, student interchange between countries, and the commonality of standards increases. In terms of long term benefits to the Commonwealth, the last two collaborations are clearly the most significant and yet there has been no discernible progress along these lines.

Figure 5.1. Risks and benefits of collaboration

Low Risk	Modest benefits
	* Sharing information * Exchanging experience * Exchanging advisers and consultants * Collaborative staff training * Accepting each other's students * Acquiring and/or exchanging external materials * Collaborating on evaluating external materials * Collaborating on adaptation of materials * Cooperating on development of related course units * Establishing credit transfer arrangements * Creating a common open learning system

High Risks	Major Benefits
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5.2.4 The combination of all these variables gives rise to a great range of potential collaborations. Rather than setting out all the possibilities, some of which do not exist in practice (perhaps for no more significant reason than that nobody has embarked on them) we give a set of examples. These are selected to show different levels of collaboration but inevitably cannot fully cover the range.

5.3 Costs of collaboration

5.3.1 It should be stressed at the outset that collaboration is never without cost, and that the most important costs may not be the obvious monetary ones. Collaboration involves working together, sacrificing a measure of autonomy, and attempting to understand other peoples' points of view. It involves sharing plans and accepting criticism of them; remembering to share information and

to keep colleagues informed on progress; being willing to keep to an agreed programme; compromising; helping collaborators out when they run into difficulties, and accepting help from them when you are in difficulties. If it were a perfect world, and educators and trainers were unredeemably high-minded and saintly, this would cause no problems. But it is not and they are not, and it does.

- 5.3.2 The costs of collaboration, whether monetary or non-monetary, increase according to the number of parties collaborating. It is not therefore surprising that most of the examples we have found are bilateral or, if not, relate a single lead institution to several associates. One particular and well established example of this is the role of central validating bodies, which by providing one element only have allowed many diverse organisations (local institutions, correspondence colleges, and individual external students, for example) to supply the other elements in different ways.

5.4 Sharing information and research

- 5.4.1 The collaborative regional research programme in Asia initiated by the Canadian International Development & Research Council is an example at the regional level of a relatively low level collaboration. IDRC's role is that of a facilitator; the participants initially shared information about their research activities and this has developed into agreeing collectively the research each will undertake.

Example 1: An Asian regional research programme

The project started in 1984, and is due to finish in 1987. It started as a result of a contact between Dr Dhanarajan of the Universiti Sains Malaysia and the IDRC Social Science division. Discussions concerning the need for research in distance education led to a meeting in Penang Malaysia, which various Asian distance education institutions were invited to attend bringing with them proposals. Four institutions arrived with proposals; the Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan; the Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia; the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand; and the Universiti Sains Malaysia. A representative of the Open Learning Institute Canada also attended, and has remained associated with the project throughout as research adviser, with Dr Dhanarajan of USM as coordinator.

The research projects are each intended to take two years. The researchers meet annually to discuss methodology, and are also able to visit each other.

The project is funded at \$250,000 Canadian altogether. This will cover research over two years at all four institutions,

with an equal division of the money, funds for three methodology meetings, visits to each other, consultancy and publication of results.

So far, the project goes well. The group has been able to agree on research areas and methodology for all four projects, and has developed useful instruments and approaches to analysis. It is hoped that the programme will expand on completion of the initial phase, and develop into a comprehensive regional research network concerned with open learning in Asia.

(Source: Paper 2)

5.5 Collaboration on adapting materials

5.5.1 There are several variations on the idea of using other people's course materials, either with or without adaptation and with varying degrees of support by the originator. DISTED services in Malaysia, for example, uses courses from institutions such as the Open Learning Institute, Canada, and examinations are marked and credits awarded from Canada. The Open College of the University of East Asia in contrast buys in materials and awards its own qualifications.

5.5.2 When adaptation is necessary, it can be one of the most effective forms of staff development. Indeed even the process of examining material to establish whether it is suitable and whether adaptation is necessary can be made to serve the same purpose.

The case study below describes such collaboration between Open Universities in Britain and Sri Lanka.

Example 2: Adapting a university maths course

The collaboration involved information transfer, the adaption of existing UK OU course materials, the generation of new ancillary and support material. the exchange of consultants, and collaboration on the evaluation and assessment of these materials. The collaboration began in 1983 and has been funded by the British Council. The initial aim was to provide the recently established Sri Lankan Open University with five short courses at foundation level. This was later extended to include some higher level courses. It illustrates some of the problems and difficulties encountered at this level of collaboration. The main problem area can be grouped under the following headings:

Pedagogic problems

- matching existing UKOU course materials to the Sri Lankan University syllabus;
- generating new course materials and integrating them with the existing UKOU materials;
- reducing a multi-media course package to essentially a single medium (print);
- maintaining course coherence and continuity;
- overcoming linguistic problems;
- developing suitable support networks.

Technical and organisational problems

- maintaining and extending lines of communication;
- overcoming problems associated with the production and distribution of course materials;
- resolving questions of ownership of intellectual property;
- generating a sense of joint ownership and involvement.

In order to make the UKOU course materials compatible with the requirements of the Sri Lankan University syllabus it was necessary to select material from a number of UKOU courses and compose a sequence of study that adequately served the syllabus requirements. To a certain extent this was at the expense of course coherence and continuity. Certain content areas could not be met from existing UKOU materials and some new course materials had to be generated to fill these gaps. In the main these were produced by Sri Lankan academics from conventional universities. It was then necessary to integrate the two sets of materials.

One problem was how to convert a multi-media approach to one using a single medium. The UKOU course texts have fully integrated audio and television support. In order to compensate for the loss of this support, detailed 'study guides' were produced. To what extent these were successful is not clear: some have been translated into Sinhala in an attempt to reduce language problems, but translation into Tamil has apparently proved problematic. Audio tape support, particularly important in mathematics, is planned in the two main indigenous languages.

For the collaborators it was difficult to communicate except

face-to-face and several visits had to be made by the UKOU academics. Much of this time was spent producing materials that could have been generated in the UK. There were technical problems associated with printing in Sri Lanka, and some students receive their materials late. Over the question of copyright it was agreed that the study guides and Sri Lankan generated course units would become the property of the SLOU and the UKOU units remain UKOU copyright.

From the UKOU point of view this venture was regarded as a particularly successful collaboration. However, the level of Sri Lankan involvement appears to have been lower than originally anticipated. This was particularly true for the junior staff members. SLOU now sees the project as important for staff training but an inefficient means of course production. It would seem that the participants could have benefited greatly from some kind of electronic-mail system which could have reduced the amount of direct face-to-face contact necessary and facilitated the mutual development of study materials.

(Source: Paper 2)

5.6 Collaboration on course development

- 5.6.1 There is a long tradition of established institutions assisting emergent institutions in various ways (eg London University's external degree activity), and this continues in the open learning field. An example of collaboration involving one institution in a key central role helping with course and institutional development but with the satellite institutions controlling delivery and student support is the link between the Open Learning Institute Canada, and the Universiti Sains Malaysia. The greater the distance between the central organisation and the satellites the more reliance must be placed on communications. This link is particularly interesting as the use of technology evolved to suit the needs of the project.

Example 3: Using appropriate technology for collaboration

USM uses as course writers university lecturers from the mainstream. Right from the start of the Off-Campus programme, there was a serious need to reorient these part-time writers to their new job. In 1983 agreement was reached with OLI to train two chemistry and biology writers. A Canadian spent one month in late 1983 with USM starting the process, then the four writers came to OLI in early 1984. The pattern was to continue with four people a year, and would also involve training the course developers, (that is, the Malaysians who would train other writers),

supporting the development of materials, and upgrading the USM production system.

With the emphasis on course production, progress was held back as USM equipment needed upgrading. In 1984 two extra grants were made to allow USM to upgrade its computing and wordprocessing equipment and provide a facility whereby diskettes could be passed directly between OLI and USM. This extended to the introduction of laser printing at USM, so that a complete new production system could be linked with the writing.

USM now has a slate of materials that can stand comparison with any. It also has equipment to support its production system, and uses an established model for course design which encourages a high standard.

The innovations in course development methods and the acquisition and use of new equipment have improved overall productivity and quality at USM. The Off-campus Unit has been able to shift from traditional methods of publishing to modern 'desktop' approaches, with resultant reductions in production time and costs, combined with a better product.

The use of new technology has had an impact on USM as a whole, for example the registration system has been streamlined.

Involvement in the project has brought benefits to OLI staff in the form of job satisfaction. At a time of lack of job mobility in Canada, staff have had the opportunity to take part in a stimulating partnership. Those that have had contacts with Malaysians have frequently gained new enthusiasm, confidence, and an assurance that their skills are of value. There is a noticeable increase in productivity among staff after such contacts, although this has to be set against the loss of labour during consultancy work.

OLI and USM have developed a system which uses a computer to provide a framework for the construction of units. In contexts where writing tends to be concentrated in short bursts at workshops or during attachments, this modelling system has proved of great value. It also promises well as a model of course development for the region, well-suited to large open universities which need to develop a big range of materials rapidly. The project has combined training in course design and writing with the introduction of suitable easy to use production technology.

(Source: Paper 2).

- 5.6.2 Collaboration in course development is exemplified by the University of the South Pacific/ Massey University collaboration in the field of religious studies.

Example 4: Collaboration in course development: two countries

Massey University has a well established foundation course dealing with the phenomenology of religions; its focus on New Zealand as a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, makes it relevant to USP's cultural situation, but with some differences. The Massey University Course Controller was therefore invited as a consultant to join academics at USP devising such a course for internal and distance education purposes. His course materials became resource materials for originating a new USP course; he reports that his own course gained considerably in its multi-cultural aspects. It is taken by some Islanders who are New Zealand residents.

(Source: Paper 7).

- 5.6.3 Some more multilateral, subregional examples come from Africa.

Example 5: Collaboration in course development: regional

There have been at least three such programmes, all of them smallscale, for highly specialised groups, and concerned with professional personnel development. In West Africa in the early 1970s, Modern Mathematics of an agreed form was being introduced in the few Anglophone countries Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone in cooperation with the West African Examinations Council. There was an immediate need to train teachers to teach modern maths, but the teachers training college tutors were themselves still uninitiated. A correspondence programme was therefore developed at Cape Coast University in Ghana and taught to all maths tutors in teacher training colleges in the four countries, linked to travelling super-tutors and national seminars. A second project which is still running is the African Curriculum Programme run from Kenyatta University for the East and Central African region. In this senior curriculum development officers from all countries undergo an advanced post-graduate course, partly by correspondence and partly by residential seminars. A third example is still being prepared but is soon due to be launched. This is a joint

Youth Programme, for Africa Centre, in Lusaka for Botswana, Zambia and Kenya. This will also be run by correspondence courses linked to national seminars.

(Source: Paper 1).

5.7 Credit transfer

- 5.7.1 One aspect of collaboration which deserves to be examined in detail, since it is the issue which most of those consulted identify as of key importance, is credit transfer. In general, the greater number of degree-giving institutions in the Commonwealth accept each others' first degrees as an entrance standard for their second degrees. This acceptance rests on the wide use of each others' staff as external examiners and a considerable exchange traffic, which helps to maintain a reasonable equivalence of standards. How helpful it would be if this same principle could extend to units or modules within courses, so that studies could be undertaken partly in the country of origin, partly abroad, partly by on-campus courses, partly by distance learning. A vision emerges of a student passport, in which unit credits could be entered, and a full book of credits would entitle the student to a qualification, either from the institution granting the final credit, or from some over-arching Commonwealth qualifying institution.
- 5.7.2 The requirement for universal credit transfer appears to be simple. All course units eligible for credit must represent the same proportion (or multiples of a standard proportion) of the total content of the qualification; all institutions involved must teach all units to the same level of competence. But though the requirements seem simple they are also utopian. Countries which have a basically modular degree structure such as Canada have made some progress towards credit transfer, but stress that far from being automatic and standardised, the student in effect offers his clutch of credits and the receiving institution decides what they are worth, discounting their face value on the basis of the (unacknowledged) valuation of the according institutes. Some countries such as the UK, which have very diverse degree structures and a complex pattern of other qualifications, have made no real progress towards credit transfer.
- 5.7.3 This is by no means a specific open learning problem; indeed in one respect distance learning actually reduces the difficulties. The concepts of educational technology, generally more acceptable to open and distance learners than to others, point to the importance of defining, whenever possible, learning objectives. Courses which have clearly defined objectives and criterion-referenced methods of assessment, where the content is available for inspection in the form of distance learning materials and the student support arrangements are clearly described, should be relatively easily assessed and accepted by other institutions.

Collaborative curriculum development can also provide a basis for credit transfer between those involved, both by defining content in objective terms and by developing mutual confidence.

- 5.7.4 Three other points need to be made about credit transfer. The first is that it is clearly easier for institutions to gain confidence in each other and move towards accepting each other's work on a bilateral basis, and that this essential growth of confidence would be greatly helped by better communications. The second is that it is important to investigate the value of credit transfer outside formal systems, where it may not have as much significance. The third is that there is probably more going-on in this area than is generally recognised, and an investigation and information exchange on credit transfer would be of value.

5.8 Conclusions

- 5.8.1 Most examples of collaboration (and there are few) are at relatively simple levels (see figure 5.1). This suggests that care should be taken in initiating collaborative projects, and attention paid to the ends in mind and the risks involved. We should ask ourselves:

- * Is the level of collaboration matched to the benefits sought?
- * Are the benefits to be gained through that type of collaboration sufficient for the risk and effort involved?

- 5.8.2 It may be helpful to end this chapter by setting out some questions which should be addressed in judging whether a form of collaboration is appropriate and likely to be successful. It does not follow that a negative answer to any question should rule out collaboration, only that the answer should be taken into account in determining the form and level of appropriate collaboration out of the wide range possible.

- a) Are the proposed collaborators broadly culturally politically and economically aligned?
- b) Are the different systems of education and training roughly at the same stage of development and of internal organisation?
- c) Would the demands of the proposed collaboration be within the capacity of all involved?
- d) Can all those involved take advantage of the benefits?

This last question emphasises once again the key to collaboration. It must be voluntary, freely and explicitly negotiated, and clearly of advantage to all participants.