

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PART 1: SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS FROM THE FIELD

6.1 Overview

6.1.1 In our survey, in the regional papers and on our visits, we found widespread enthusiasm for collaboration in distance education. In most places, however, especially among distance educators in the third world sections of the Commonwealth, the enthusiasm was for practical down-to-earth collaboration which would make real differences to the range and quality of distance education facilities they could offer to their students, rather than for grandiose and expensive schemes, which benefit only a select few.

6.1.2 The main conclusion to be drawn from all the evidence we have gathered is that there are many educational needs within the Commonwealth that could be addressed by an extension of open learning. The prime requirement is for an overall expansion of open learning. We have therefore looked at the possibilities for collaboration from the point of assisting that expansion. In general there is a widespread and developing network of open learning institutions and education and training organisations which could apply open learning, and it is wise to use them wherever possible. Local systems and local knowledge are likely to respond best to the needs and conditions of the student, although one of the longer-term outcomes of collaboration should be an increase in the opportunity for international student mobility.

6.1.3 Certain basic guidelines for collaboration have emerged from our study. First, it is advisable for projects to involve only a restricted number of countries, often with a sub-regional focus. Second, work should be mainly through existing organisations, strengthening their provision. New organisations are only needed in order to fill gaps. Third, the main aim of collaboration should be to make more and better educational opportunities available to more people. Finally, such collaboration should be development orientated to make life better for those in the Commonwealth whose conditions of life particularly need improvement.

6.3 Activities proposed from the field

Our starting point for identifying potential collaborative activities is those projects which have been suggested to us. These include those listed below.

- 6.3.1 **Information Provision:** virtually all groups to whom we spoke expressed a strong need for adequate information on open and distance learning activities across the Commonwealth. Information was required on the range institutions and their programmes, their structure and organisation, areas of special expertise, teaching materials prepared by institutions, their quality and availability, research and evaluation findings, publications, articles, equipment. All regional papers and papers 10 and 11 expressed at least some requirements for an increase in available information.
- 6.3.2. **Training for Distance Educators:** training for open and distance educators is seen as a priority for collaborative action. There is a wealth of expertise and experience in the Commonwealth but it tends to be focussed in the advanced countries. Skill sharing through training should be available internationally, and where possible should be provided at a distance. More opportunities should be provided for regionally-based training. Much general training can be provided nationally (see especially papers 1, 2, 6 and 13).
- 6.3.3 **Regional Centres:** there was a strong concern expressed in many areas that they should be able to develop centres of excellence in their own regions that could act as a focus for regional activities and initiatives. In addition to providing easier access to expertise, these centres could disseminate information locally, provide training and advisory services, act as a resource centre, and co-ordinate local research. They are particularly needed in Asia, the Pacific region and Africa (see papers 1, 2, 6 and 7). In some continents sub-regional centres would be more practical.
- 6.3.4 **Research and Evaluation:** a number of suggestions have been made for Pan-Commonwealth and regional programmes of research and evaluation in open and distance education. Such programmes could address issues relating to many of the further questions that this study has raised and explore some of the issues associated with the design of materials and courses, the development of common costing tools, the problems of credit transfer and others. A collaborative research project in Asia (paper 2) involving four universities could well become a model for collaboration elsewhere (see for example suggestions in papers 1, 6, 9 and 10).
- 6.3.5 **Materials Development:** there is widespread agreement that in most subjects there is a shortage of good materials, and that in certain subjects there is sufficient cross-cultural homogeneity to consider the joint development of materials. Such collaborative ventures would normally need to be preceded by a survey of existing materials, to avoid unnecessary duplication. The major subject areas suggested are listed below. No particular order is implied because different regions often had very different priorities.

Rural development (rural development staff training and support; and non-formal basic education) (papers 1, 6, and 7, 15 and 16)

Health subjects (for nurses, doctors, community health workers), (papers 4 and 16)

Agricultural practice (for agronomists, agricultural extension workers) (papers 4 and 15)

Distance education skills (for teachers and trainers)(paper 13)

Management especially practical business studies (papers 1, 4, and 6)

English, especially for academic purposes (papers 1 and 6)

Other international languages, plus training for international officials and technicians (paper 1)

Several areas of professional training (for social workers, engineers, accountants, lawyers) (papers 1, 4 and 14)

Such collaborative projects could include the development of audio and video materials as well as print (for a full proposal on collaborative video production see appendix to paper 8)

- 6.3.6 **Open Polytechnic Consortium:** in addition to the subject proposals listed above, the African region has made a particular proposal for the establishment of a consortium to produce and exchange training materials in technical, managerial and professional studies. This proposal reflects a regional view that they are particularly weak in these areas and need to mount an intensive programme overcome the problem. (paper 1).
- 6.3.7 **Resource Centre Projects:** for some subject areas acceptable or good materials are available. It is suggested that an international service is set up to identify suitable sets of materials, negotiate terms of use and offer materials, together with advice on their use, to institutions wishing to start distance education or extend their range into new subject areas. In time, the service could commission materials to fill gaps. Such a service should be low cost, and will be of particular use to small states and countries with restricted finance available.
- 6.3.8 **Materials Exchange Support Service:** a more modest proposal than 6.3.7 is for a support service for materials exchange. This would go one step beyond providing information about materials. A list of materials would be provided, but in addition, any materials listed by the service as available for exchange must be fully described, evaluated and priced. Ideally, the service would also provide loans or subsidies to those countries where foreign exchange is hard to obtain.

6.3.9 **Technology Development Projects:** in thinly populated or scattered communities, student support services are difficult to organise. Newcommunication technologies open up possibilities and there are several ideas for extending the use of teleconferencing or satellite communications for such teaching (see papers 2, 5, and 7).

6.3.10 **Projects for Minorities:** several groups have expressed the view that open and distance education could contribute valuably in the provision of learning opportunities for minority groups such as the disabled, ethnic minorities, and refugees. However, no specific proposals have been forthcoming.

6.4 **Subject Areas**

6.4.1 In addition to offering suggestions on the types of collaborative activities that could be supported, many groups expressed views on the subject areas that should be considered as priorities. These tended to overlap with the specific subject areas proposed for materials development (6.3.5 above), but were seen as applying to all potential activities.

6.4.1 Perhaps one of the most widespread needs across the Commonwealth is in the field of **rural development** embracing agriculture, health care and social services. In rural areas field officers and advisory staff, health care workers, teachers are all in need of support, information, in-service training and professional updating. These workers are highly dispersed and usually fairly isolated, and yet it is crucial that they are as up-to-date as possible in their understanding of the techniques and research findings that relate to their work. Open and distance education offers the obvious solution to their needs. This has been frequently identified as an important area for collaboration.

6.4.2 Many countries have identified a need for courses in **technical and vocational subjects**. In many parts of the Commonwealth the need for such training far outstrips the provision, while a continued emphasis on academic subjects in school leaves young adults ill-equipped for a working life. Traditionally, commercial correspondence colleges have tried to cover this sector, but their impact has been small and the quality of their provision is often dubious. There is an international need to improve the quality and expand the range of open learning in technical and vocational subjects in general. There is also a particular need for vocational training related to information technology. There are profound questions involved concerning the impact of technological change on the developing countries, the danger of "technological imperialism" and the possibility of technological leapfrogging, which might enable countries to miss out whole stages of industrialisation. There will be few countries that do not wish to have the capacity and the skills to apply the technologies, and

which do not face serious problems in providing education and training in this field. There is scope for collaboration in the development of materials and courses and for the negotiation of arrangements between institutions for the transfer of existing courses and materials.

- 6.4.3 A further category of training needs is for **high-level specialist manpower**, for example specialist engineers, veterinarians, and international administrators, where numbers in any one country are small and collaboration between countries would lead to more economic programmes than those launched by individual countries.
- 6.4.4 Across the Commonwealth much instruction is in **English** both for historical reasons and because the language can serve as a common medium of communication in countries where there are many indigenous languages. There are also some subjects (particularly in the sciences and technology) where much of the source material is in English (though not necessarily of British origin). The teaching of English is thus a widely distributed requirement, and hence a suitable area for collaboration in the development of open learning approaches. However, general English is not all that is needed. To learn a particular subject the student needs first to learn a specialised form of language, the kind of technical English needed for a particular discipline or profession. Even native English speakers cannot properly comprehend specialists in say economics or microbiology. There is also a need for training for professionals in other international languages used by Commonwealth citizens.
- 6.4.5 There is perceived to be a general shortage of expertise in **open learning** itself; every development in the field requires the **training or retraining of professionals**. Hence if there is to be a wider application of open learning there is a clear need for enhanced training opportunities, and an obvious case for using the techniques of open learning to meet that end. New initiatives are particularly desirable for training those who would themselves train others.

PART TWO: RECOMMENDATION FROM THE REPORTING GROUP

6.5 **Considerations underlying recommendations**

- 6.5.1 All these subjects - rural development, technology, specialist manpower development, language training and in-service professional development of distance and open learning staff - are potential areas for collaboration. So are such support services to distance and open learning as research and evaluation and information and materials exchange. The advantages of collaboration are clearly recognised. But how can that collaboration take place, why, if the needs are there, is it not taking place already, what can be done to encourage and enable it

to take place? At this point we assess the evidence we have gathered and present an analysis based on the experience of educational development and the awareness, not always well documented, of the successes and failures in collaboration.

6.5.2 It seems clear to us that there are two main elements in successful collaboration. First, the collaborative projects must be important for all the individual institutions involved and must be seen to be projects in which collaboration will produce tangible benefits for each of them; two important benefits for most institutions in the Commonwealth would be the ability to offer more and better courses and services to their students and the opportunity to do so at lower cost. This first element relates to the content or subject matter of joint activities and stresses the importance of benefit to students. Collaboration in distance education and open learning which does not start here is in danger of being collaboration for its own sake. In the proposals which follow we try to avoid this danger.

6.5.3 The second element is the infrastructure required to make collaboration possible. All the expressions of support for collaboration which we have received, coupled with the paucity of successful collaborative projects, suggests that it does not usually happen just because it is seen to be a good thing. There needs to be some coordinating machinery which allows it to happen - channels of communication, forums for cooperative planning and development, and people to manage them. It is important however, that the infrastructure does not become an end in itself.

6.5.4 In the following paragraphs we suggest the different components of what might constitute a Commonwealth programme of collaboration. We start with collaborative projects which we believe are recognised to be of value to their potential students and societies by the distance-education institutions which have put them forward. We then describe the support services and organisational structure necessary to the development and success of such a programme: regional centres, an information system and network of regional centres, animateurs, and staff training. Finally we suggest how such a programme might be managed. The proposals are listed in the approximate order in which they could be implemented. Within these recommendations, we have incorporated the major recommendations from the field listed in section 6.3 above.

6.6 Collaborative material and course developments

6.6.1 We indicated at the beginning of this chapter that the institutions we consulted expressed a desire for an emphasis on practical and down-to-earth activities. We believe that there is much merit in this view (but also a need for research and support activities proposed below) and would suggest that the first priority for Commonwealth support be a range of material and course development projects on some of the priority areas

mentioned in sections 6.3 and 6.4 above.

6.6.2 On the basis of the support expressed for each of these areas of concern, and the suitability, in our view, of such areas for open or distance education, we would suggest the following as a prioritised listing:

- * Training for rural development workers in adult education and communication techniques. Two obvious subjects to start with are the training of agricultural extension workers to promote programmes of intensive food production and famine prevention, and training rural health workers in campaigns of disease prevention, for example, AIDS.
- * Specialist professional training or updating for groups such as social workers, engineers, accountants and lawyers. Two general needs identified in this area are public and private sector management education and accountancy. Each region could also identify specific needs for these groups.
- * Development of a series of high quality specialist English language courses for a variety of levels and special purposes, including for engineers and technicians, administrators, interpreters and open and distance educators.
- * Professional updating in health care techniques for nurses, doctors and community health workers. Such courses could usefully focus on the treatment of current priority diseases.
- * Agricultural practice for farmers, agronomists and agricultural extension workers.
- * A modular series of courses in the area of information technology, progressing from a general awareness level to technician training.
- * Training in open and distance education techniques for teachers and institutional administrators. (This is also discussed as a separate issue below.)

6.6.3 Whilst we believe these seven topics represent the primary areas of concern, our suggestions for particular projects within these broad headings are only suggestions. Regions should have the freedom within these headings to propose projects that address issues of concern to their region and relate to the educational expertise they have available.

6.6.4 If possible, at least one project should be launched in each Commonwealth region, and a condition of Commonwealth support should be that any materials or courses developed must be made available to all other Commonwealth countries. Each project should involve at least two countries, and, at least in the early

phase given the concerns expressed in section 5.3.2, no more than four. In each case, the fine details of the content and strategy of the project should be negotiated only after the organisations that will participate have been identified, presumably by tender arrangements.

- 6.6.5 All of these are activities that could be launched in the reasonably near future. We propose them as pilot projects for a broader Commonwealth programme incorporating features described in later sections.

6.7 A Commonwealth Open Learning Research Fund

- 6.7.1 In Asia recent experience (see paper 2) has shown how successful collaborative research can be. A current research project involves several Open Universities in several Asian countries. There is considerable interest in further research, both through extending the current Asian project, and from other regions such as Africa. Areas for investigation might include the effectiveness of different kinds of student support in various island communities, mentioned by those from the South West Pacific; thorough evaluation studies of costs and performance among African distance-teaching institutions, where little data is available; and the development of evaluative tools and models for effectiveness investigations. There are many others.
 - 6.7.2 As indicated in Chapter 4, many of the major questions about costing, quality and effectiveness in open and distance education still need to be answered. It is not realistic for us to attempt to identify all the key research issues in this report, since they will require some years to determine answers, and present research is already exploring related matters. We therefore propose the establishment of a Commonwealth Open Learning Research Fund to finance such investigations over the next five years. We believe that a fund of UK£200,000 per year would allow for up to ten small studies each year and should result in the creation of a sound research base for future Commonwealth decision making.
 - 6.7.3 Arrangements would have to be made to administer this fund and collect and disseminate the findings of studies so funded. These matters are covered by later proposals.
- #### 6.8 A network of regional centres
- 6.8.1 As indicated above (para 6.5.3), collaboration will be most successful when there exists an appropriate infrastructure to support and foster it. Our first recommendation is for the establishment of regional centres.
 - 6.8.2 One of the most important functions of such centres would be the collection and dissemination of information. They would need to collect information about distance education within the region,

and pass this information on to other regions through a central service (see 6.8). They would also need to provide information from the region and from elsewhere to practitioners and other enquirers in the region. The methods of collecting and disseminating information will vary from region to region, according to communication facilities and other resources available. Some information would be in the form of data and brochures submitted by institutions, and some would be drawn from resource material held in the centre. Thus, the centre would need to have a resource collection, probably including both publications about distance and open education and samples of teaching materials.

- 6.8.3 A second function for the centre would be the coordination of developments in open learning in the region. In particular, the centre could provide a local management point for Commonwealth funded activities such as the material and course development projects, could assist with the development and progress of collaborative projects and research activities, organise the detailed dissemination of project and research findings throughout the region and offer a consultancy and support service for other institutions in the region.
- 6.8.4 A third function for a centre would be the training of open learning professionals. The kinds of courses offered would vary from region to region but would range from region-wide courses for specialists to more general courses for individual countries. In some cases the centre would host and provide teaching for courses, in others it might act as coordinator. Programmes would need to be developed in the regions.
- 6.8.5 The centres could also act as at least the initial regional open learning resource centres in terms of the development proposed in 6.13 below.
- 6.8.6 The regions themselves will need to define the exact services to be provided by centres and a suitable structure for operation. Priority needs to be given to establishing and supporting centres in those regions or sub-regions with the least facilities and the poorest infrastructures.
- 6.9 **A Commonwealth Information and Documentation Centre**
 - 6.9.1 As indicated in 6.3.1 above, there was an almost unanimous agreement on the need for effective information provision on all aspects of open and distance education across the Commonwealth. Paragraph 6.3.1 indicates the wide range of information sought by those organisations.
 - 6.9.2 There is a widespread desire to share the results of research, and behind this is the possibility that research programmes might be planned in consultation, so as to avoid duplication and, by collecting mutually consistent data in different countries, give

more generally applicable findings. Moreover, every developer of learning systems has additional information needs. If they are to adopt the most cost-effective approach in each case, they need to know whether courses in related fields already exist; what materials exist, who is working in the field, what sources of expertise are available.

6.9.3 Politicians and policy makers are continually required to identify priorities for education and training investment, and strategies for future action. They too require detailed evidence on the merits and weaknesses of different approaches to learning, and the experience of other countries will always be of some value.

6.9.4 We would propose the establishment of a Commonwealth Open Learning Information and Documentation Centre. This centre would initially be charged with:

- * maintaining comprehensive databases of information on all aspects of open and distance education in the Commonwealth and the rest of the world (much of it drawn from the regional centres). Such information would include details of institutions and their programmes, details of packages available throughout the Commonwealth, research and evaluation findings, and such other information as may be relevant
- * storing and organising that information in an effective and efficient manner
- * answering queries, undertaking analyses of that data and coordinating other studies in response to requests from within the Commonwealth
- * undertaking such detailed research investigations as may be requested by Commonwealth authorities
- * disseminating findings of Commonwealth-funded research activities and collaborative projects to all member countries

6.9.5 The centre would logically be based within an existing open or distance education institution that has already established an open learning information service. Examples exist among the organisations surveyed in this report, but selection should be by competitive tender. Most information will be paper-based and therefore library facilities will need to be established, but a computer based indexing and abstracting system would greatly aid data location and analysis. It is difficult to provide detailed estimates of costs since they would depend to some extent on the number and type of enquiries received, but we believe that the centre would require a staff of two and a minimum annual operating budget in the region of £50,000 assuming that some facilities already existed at the institution. The conduct of detailed research exercises would require additional funding.

6.9.6 In the interim, we would recommend that immediate steps be taken to protect the data collected in the survey associated with this study. We propose that the data we have gathered should be put in the care of the United Nations University International Centre for Distance Learning based at the UK Open University and that they should be provided with the modest resources which would then enable them to maintain it. It is estimated that the annual cost of maintaining and regularly updating that database is in the region of £5,000.

6.10 An Open Learning Information Network

6.10.1 Regional centres and individual open learning institutions will wish to make regular contact with the Information and Documentation Centre, both to provide information and to seek it. As indicated in 6.3.9, a number of the regions have suggested that the potential contribution of the new technologies should be explored. We discuss the question of teaching via the new technologies in 6.15 below. What we propose here is the establishment of an electronic information network linking the regional centres and suitably equipped institutions to the Information and Documentation Centre and each other.

6.10.2 Whilst the studies undertaken for this report provide no direct evidence for the value of such an approach, many comparable systems exist and are used successfully. Two examples drawn from Europe are instructive. The European Academic Research Network (EARN) was established only a few years ago to facilitate the exchange of information and collaboration on research between the research institutions of Europe. Linking to the UK Joint Academic Network (JANET), it is already firmly established as a key element in European cooperation. EURYDICE and EUROCLÉE are two electronic mail and information networks, promoted by the EEC, to support European collaboration on the exploration of the contribution of information technology to education. We see no reason why, if such systems are successful in Europe, they should not prove equally so in the Commonwealth.

6.10.3 We propose the creation of an electronic information network linking regional centres and the Information and Documentation Centre and providing for the mutual exchange of data and information and the transfer of messages between users of the system. Such a network can be used in many ways, and is itself essentially an enabling facility. It could allow for the remote searching of the databases at the Information and Documentation Centre, but the precise facilities available will depend on the organisation responsible for its implementation.

6.10.4 The software to operate such a network already exists on many universities academic computer services (and certainly most if not all of the universities in UK, Canada and Australia that contributed to this study). The UK Open University already

operates this type of service for its staff and, on an experimental basis, for its students. For any suitably equipped university to extend their existing service to users throughout the Commonwealth may only require the allocation of computer identities and relatively small computer usage charges. We have not approached any of the universities involved for indications of their willingness to host such a network or the costs that might be involved, but we believe that the costs would not be at all unrealistic.

6.10.5 We do not propose that such a system be established immediately. Instead we propose (see section 6.15) the establishment of a New Technologies Applications Group who should be given the task of specifying the facilities that such a system should offer and seeking tenders from appropriate institutions for its development and operation.

6.10.6 We are proposing only a system to link regional centres (who can be equipped with suitable terminals from their establishment budgets) and such institutions as may already have access to appropriate equipment. The New Technologies Applications Group should address itself to the question of whether equalising opportunity of access to all Commonwealth institutions is an aim of the programme and whether some form of financial or technology support might be provided in developing countries to facilitate access.

6.11 Training open and distance educators

6.11.1 The provision of training for open and distance education staff is of crucial importance to the promotion of good practice. We have recommended that such training be provided through the regional centre network, perhaps utilising materials developed under collaborative development projects.

6.11.2 Even if our recommendation for the establishment of regional centres is not implemented, we would still strongly press for a programme of training for open and distance educators. Such a programme should concentrate on the issues highlighted in Chapter 4 as contributing to quality and effectiveness, and in particular should address:

- * techniques for costing open or distance learning courses and packages
- * designing and structuring an open or distance learning course
- * the design of effective learning materials
- * the organisation and management of effective materials distribution systems

- * monitoring and assessment for open and distance learning programmes

- * how to tutor an open or distance learning programme

6.11.3 The use of the large number of open learning staff training manuals available from many institutions (see section 3.16.2) should be explored.

6.11.4 If such a training programme were to be agreed, it could be developed as a series of open learning packages, but considerable attention would have to be paid to the provision of tutoring and counselling support in the case of most of these topics.

6.12 **Animateurs**

6.12.1 There is another aspect of developing cooperation. Many arrangements have been set up with the intention of facilitating communication and collaboration, but have been disappointing - those assumed to be avid for the opportunity offered have ignored it. This is also one of the reasons we have proposed the establishment of regional centres.

6.12.2 We believe that special steps need to be taken to involve possible participators by positively directing their attention to the benefits implicit for their own work. Our fourth proposal, therefore is that the Commonwealth appoint in specific subject areas (particularly the priority areas for curriculum and material development) "animateurs" whose function would be to generate debate, set up interest groups, and support collaborative projects. They would also attempt to initiate activities in subject areas where there is insufficient funding for collaborative projects.

6.12.3 The number of animateurs to be appointed and the subjects for which they would be responsible depend on the funding available and the subject priority areas for which collaborative development projects cannot be established. We recommend below (6.13) that regional centres be asked to adopt specific subject foci and seek to develop themselves as subject Resource Centres. The animateurs would logically become key staff members at the relevant subject centre.

6.13 **Subject Resource Centres**

6.13.1 We would support many aspects of the proposal in Paper 2, Appendix 3 for the establishment of what we have called Resource Centre Projects (and they call Open College Projects) - see 6.3.7 above. Underlying this proposal is a belief that the acquisition of existing learning materials from other institutions will usually offer a very cost-effective strategy for the development of open and distance learning opportunities. This is a view we endorse and which we discussed in Chapter 4.

- 6.13.2 We would not however suggest the formation of a different centre or group of centres to explore this suggestion. We would propose that each of the regional centres be asked to also adopt a particular subject area, preferably from the priority list provided in section 6.6.2. They would then seek to develop their role as a subject resource centre by seeking to undertake some or all of the following:
- a) collating information on all materials produced by Commonwealth institutions relating to their subject area
 - b) producing a catalogue and negotiating such arrangements as are possible with the owner of the materials for their use by other Commonwealth institutions
 - c) identify gaps in the provision of materials and liaise with institutions and publishers on the production of new packages
 - d) assist in the negotiations between consumer and supplier on the purchase and adaptation of such packages
- 6.13.3 Establishing the African regional centre as the resource centre specialising in technical, managerial and professional studies would create the so-called "Open Polytechnic Consortium" proposed in Paper 1 - see 6.3.6 above.
- 6.14 **Credit transfer systems**
- 6.14.1 We provided in Figure 5.1 a hierarchy of collaboration in open and distance education and highlighted the fact that there has been little progress in the area of credit transfer within the Commonwealth. (See also the fuller discussion in section 5.7 above.) The facility to transfer credits for completed work between institutions is a crucial one in an open learning system where programmes are modular, the learning programmes a learner may wish or need to follow can be offered by different institutions, and mobility is becoming an increasingly important factor in employment.
- 6.14.2 We would propose that the Commonwealth commission as a matter of urgency a detailed exploration of the potential for the development of a Commonwealth credit transfer system for open and distance education. This study could also usefully address at least some of the issues associated with assessing (and hence accrediting) the value of learning gained through experience rather than formal study. (The UK Learning through Experience Trust is already investigating some of these issues.)

6.15 The contribution of the new information technologies

- 6.15.1 Many Commonwealth countries have instituted programmes to explore the potential contribution of the new information technologies to open and distance education. The number of research and development projects underway in the U.K. alone is probably in excess of 200, and there would be relatively similar numbers in Canada and Australia. Most Commonwealth countries have at least a small number of projects.
- 6.15.2 Such work includes exploring the potential contribution of microcomputers, mainframe networks, electronic mail and computer conferencing systems, cable and satellite television, telephone and video conferencing and many others. It was simply not possible with the time and resources available to begin to explore the possibilities here or comparatively assess the proposals we received.
- 6.15.3 This is such a major topic that we propose the Commonwealth establish a New Technology Applications Group to oversee a major investigation of this field. This group should be drawn from a range of Commonwealth countries and comprise approximately ten individuals with significant expertise in the application of the new information technologies to education and training. Their remit should not only include the specification and establishment of the information network (see 6.10), but also for the generation of a strategy for the exploration of the contribution of new technologies to open and distance education.
- 6.15.4 We propose that the Group begin its work by overseeing a major investigation of the field by a research and development organisation selected by tender. This funded investigation should take six to nine months, and would require funding of the order of UK£60,000 to £70,000.
- 6.15.5 Following that study, the Group should be charged with overseeing such technology development projects as are agreed, and undertake to keep the field under review on an annual basis, providing recommendations to the Commonwealth as required. The Group would probably need to be paid for the costs of meeting every three months (more often in the first year) and fees for detailed reports if required. The cost of the Group would probably be about UK£30,000 per annum.

6.16 Towards a Commonwealth Open College

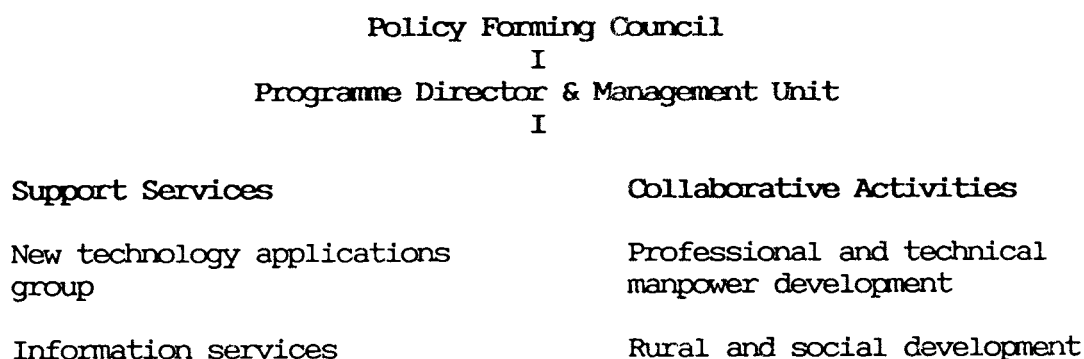
- 6.16.1 A number of countries, particularly small countries, have no distance-learning programmes at university level and some also have restricted conventional university provision. A Commonwealth Open College along the lines suggested in paper 2 would start by selecting existing courses which could be grouped to provide complete degree programmes. These programmes would then be offered to interested countries, with suitable arrangements for

accreditation. Where possible, the receiving countries would tutor, examine and accredit students themselves, with the college providing appropriate training and guidance. If this is not possible, the college would arrange appropriate tuition and accreditation either with those institutions that provided the materials or perhaps directly from the college.

- 6.16.2 Such a college could provide new opportunities for university-level education within the Commonwealth, and we do accept its long term feasibility. However we believe that the successful establishment of such a College requires that a large number of prior targets be first achieved.
- 6.16.3 These issues include the need to increase the number of trained open and distance education staff, the fostering of positive attitudes to collaboration, the development of regional bases for the college, the creation of a credit transfer system, and the development of common costing and charging mechanisms.
- 6.16.4 We have shaped our recommendations so that they address each of these individual issues in a manner that should contribute towards the eventual creation of a Commonwealth Open College. We would caution however against seeking to move too quickly to establish such a College before the necessary ground work has been laid. We believe that the sequence of proposals we have made should provide for a natural progression towards such a conclusion, with full commitment from the regions.

6.17 Management of the Commonwealth Open Learning Programme

- 6.17.1 Such a programme needs some overall management. It is not our place to attempt to define this mechanism, but it should involve a policy forming Council containing representatives of the funders - presumably the Commonwealth Governments, through nominees drawn from their education and training sectors, and a small planning and direction team which would provide the secretariat for the policy body and day-to-day management and service (eg accommodation, accounting, and personnel services). The structure might look like the chart overleaf:



Training of distance
educators

Research fund

Special studies e.g.
credit transfer

Language studies

+ other subject areas

Subject resource centres

- 6.16.2 Each of those areas listed would need to be resourced at the level of between two and five professional staff with support if it is to be capable of a significant contribution. In each case the programme element will have an enabling function, and its impact will depend on the extent to which countries and institutions respond to its initiatives and add their own contribution.