

Costing distance education

PREFACE

For more than a decade we in the Commonwealth Secretariat have taken an active interest in distance education and in its use as a tool to grapple with educational problems of supply, of demand and of access. Over this period distance-teaching programmes have expanded dramatically; we have been able to respond in a small way by producing directories and handbooks on distance education and on its techniques.

Recently too, we have put new emphasis in our work on higher education. At a time when tertiary institutions have been constrained by limited budgets, distance education has aroused interest as a technique which may increase access to higher education even while costs are held down. That interest has sometimes led to the creation of entirely new institutions: open universities and colleges. But it has also led to the creation of distance-teaching departments within broader based universities and colleges, which are the concern of this handbook. Many governments and universities have felt that there were practical advantages in running distance-education courses and conventional courses side by side. The advantages are both educational and financial; distance teaching may, in this mode, be integrated more closely with conventional teaching and overhead costs may be kept down by the shared use of buildings, staff and services.

The book addresses a simple practical issue which flows from a decision to develop distance-teaching programmes in this way. Where a college or university is teaching in two modes, it becomes necessary to allocate its resources and expenditure between the two. But there is no easy and transparently equitable way of making that allocation; the administration of distance education is a different sort of activity from the administration of conventional education, with different forms of outlay and different ways of costing. This handbook demonstrates techniques for costing distance education and for allocating costs in institutions which are teaching in more than one mode. The book is based on the practical experience of the author, Greville Rumble, Planning Officer to the British Open University, who also has extensive consultancy experience in other open universities. We hope that it will be of value to many Commonwealth

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colleges and universities.

The need for the book was identified by a meeting of specialists convened in Cambridge in January 1985 by the Education Programme of the Secretariat. It is a pleasure to acknowledge their guidance, and that of the Commonwealth Standing Committee on Student Mobility which originally suggested that the meeting should be held. We are also grateful to Patrick Guiton, Director of External Studies at Murdoch University in Australia and to Richard Lewis, Assistant Chief Officer of the Council for National Academic Awards in Britain, who commented on the manuscript in its draft form.

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