

2 : ORGANISATION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education makes heavy administrative demands: the organisation of it is a different kind of activity from the running of a school. Any institution involved in distance education needs to work out how to provide the services which its students need and these, in turn, are different in kind from the services which a school or college provides to its students. As we saw, some distance teaching programmes are organised by specialist distance-teaching colleges, while some are organised as an extra activity by colleges of education or university departments. If you are considering the use of distance teaching, you may be thinking about setting up your own institution, or of working with one which already exists. But, in either case, you will need to consider the functions which a distance-teaching institution undertakes. We can identify eight of them. The way they are organised will, of course, vary from place to place; one or more functions may be undertaken outside the institution itself. And in few cases will each function be organised by a separate department. But it remains useful to start by distinguishing them.

They are:

1. Policy-making and control It is always necessary to have some structure through which policy is determined and a person or group of people to control the working of an institution and its internal and external relationships.
2. Materials development Distance teaching depends on materials developed centrally, whether these are printed or broadcast. We look in detail at

the development of materials in chapter 3.

3. Materials production By 'production' we mean the technical or physical, as opposed to the educational, making of materials. Even if a college uses outside printers, or an outside broadcast agency, it will be concerned to ensure that its materials are produced efficiently and effectively and on time. We look at this in chapter 4.
4. Materials distribution Institutions will vary in the way they distribute materials, but will retain a responsibility for seeing that materials reach each student when he needs them. Chapter 5 discusses this.
5. Tutoring and counselling The same organisation may be responsible both for developing materials and for tutoring and counselling, or where two bodies are co-operating, these activities may be divided between them. In either case, tutoring and counselling students at a distance, or tutoring the same students in one of their face-to-face sessions is a specialist job, which we discuss in Chapter 6.
6. Record systems Information is the key to successful distance education. We need to know about our students, about our materials, about our finances. As the flow of information through the system is central to all its work we consider record systems in this chapter.
7. Evaluation The word is used in more than one sense in education: we may talk about evaluation of the work of individual students or about the evaluation of an institution and its work as a whole, or of particular courses which it offers. Although there are problems in assessing the work of individual distant students, which we touch upon, the main theme of chapter 7 is on the evaluation of distance education programmes.
8. Finance Any organisation needs to keep control of its finances; the finance and costing of distance education is different from that of ordinary education and we look at the implications of this

in chapter 8.

Clearly, the eight functions are not of equal importance, and the amount of time devoted to each varies according to the structure of the distance-teaching institution. If you have a fully reliable university printing section at your command, then the production of materials will play a smaller role in your own activities than it will if you have to set up a printing department and print your own materials. Similarly, the right organisational structure will depend upon your constitutional status. If you are semi-autonomous then policy making is a more important job than it is if you are a service unit within a college of education. But, one way or another, we need to provide for all eight functions. In this discussion, we look at the functions from the standpoint of a distance-teaching institution. The discussion is, however, intended to be useful for people in other kinds of institution, such as those in a college of education which proposes to work with a distance-teaching college. We start with policy making, control and relationships.

Policy-making, control, relationships

The organisation of a distance-teaching institution differs from that of an ordinary college. It has different functions, with the production and distribution of materials often playing a large part in its work. This in turn means that it needs a bigger administrative section than an ordinary college. Even where it employs academic staff, whose titles may be similar to those in a college of education, their jobs are different. And, in many cases, it has to organise some kind of field support for its students - organising study centres, or occasional residential sessions, or field supervision of their work.

As a result, both the internal and external structure of a distance teaching institution will look different from that of a teachers' college or university department. Figures 1, 2 and 3 set out the organisation of the University of Lagos Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU), the National Teachers' Institute of Nigeria (NTI) and the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC).

COSU was set up to provide degree level courses for teachers in Nigeria. It was established as part of the Centre for Continuing Education of the University of Lagos. As Figure 1 shows the Unit had three sections: one concerned with administration, one with the production of print and broadcast media, and one concerned with academic planning and the development of teaching materials. As it was part of the University, arrangements for controlling its finances and for evaluation and the examination of students rested with the University generally. COSU did not have its own academic staff. Instead University staff could be seconded to it for limited periods of time to write courses while it could also call upon University staff members to write courses while still based within their own departments. To help co-operation between COSU and academic departments it was represented on each faculty board.

In contrast, the National Teachers' Institute was set up as an autonomous institution. As it was not under the control of a university it was appropriate to set up a council to supervise its activities and, as Figure 2 shows, it was organised internally into five departments. NTI employed its own academic staff whose main work was in the writing of courses and who all worked within one department. As NTI's materials were to be used throughout Nigeria the development and supervision of field services were also a key activity for it and this formed the work of a separate department.

Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre was different from either of the Nigerian examples because its concern was not primarily with teacher training but with distance teaching generally. While the Centre was under the control of the Ministry of Education (see Figure 3) its work was guided by an inter-ministerial management committee. Within the organisation, it had a service agency section whose major task was to co-operate with other institutions with which LDTC was working. It was therefore through the service agency that the Centre worked with the National Teacher Training College on the development of materials for teacher education.

There are, of course, other organisational models and variations on these three. We can conclude that there are four issues which should determine the structure

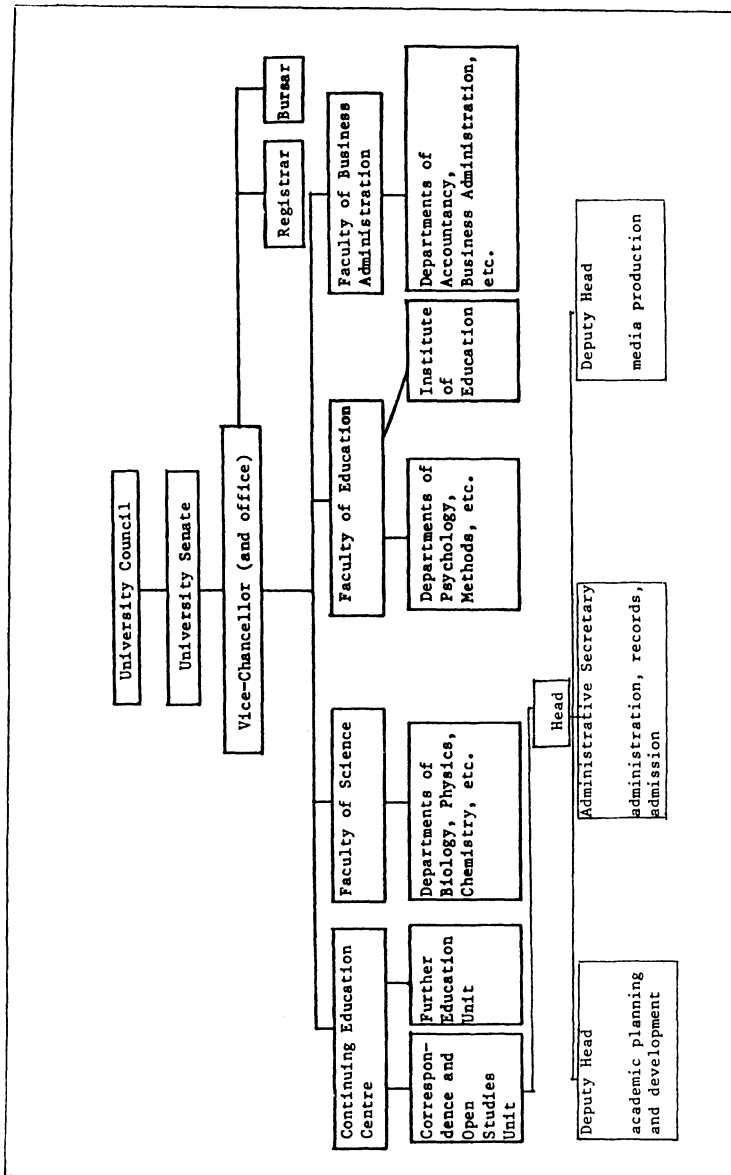
for a distance teaching organisation.

First, it needs some machinery for reaching decisions on policy which reflects both external and internal interests. A distance-teaching organisation, even if it is only a small department of a college or university, is likely to have many working links with agencies outside itself. It will often therefore need to have a policy-making body which reflects the importance of those links. At the same time, its own staff will be specialists in an unusual area and their views need to be taken into account on policy issues: the internal structure should reflect this as well.

Next, the external relationships needed by a distance-teaching unit will affect its organisation. At NTI the arrangements to ensure that materials were used throughout Nigeria were so important to it that a single department was created with just that function. One of the difficulties with the COSU model was that the Unit fell under the control of a single university but, for its field work, needed to operate with a large number of other institutions.

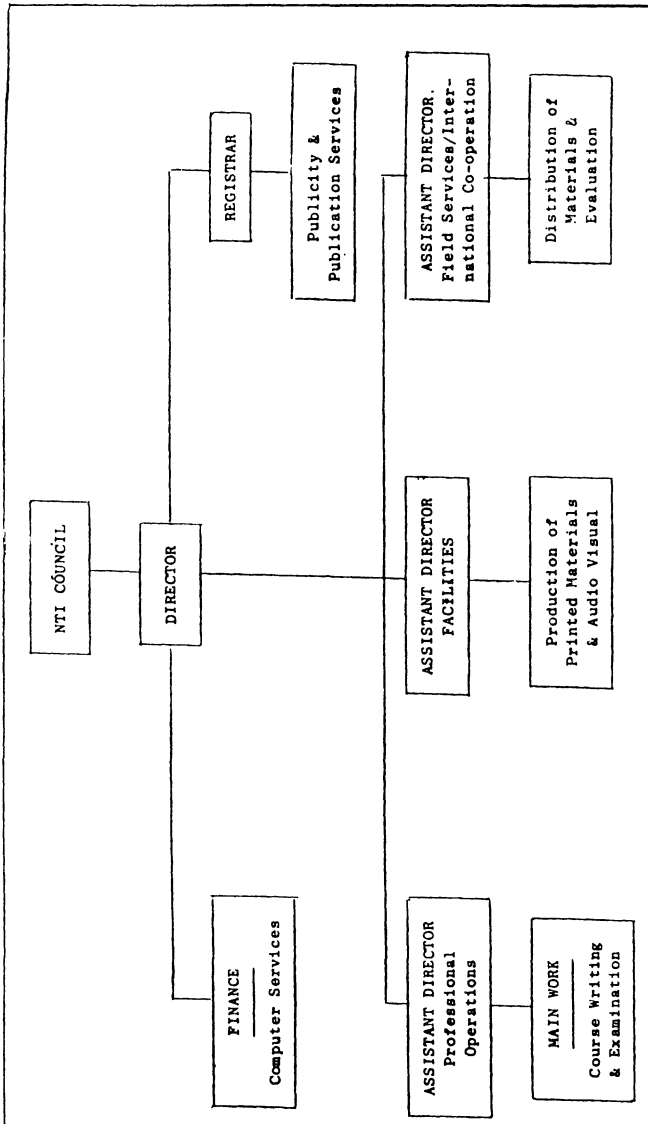
Third, the external relationships of a distance-teaching unit are also affected by decisions about which activities should be done internally and which externally. At LDTC, for example, it was decided to produce radio programmes within the organisation; this made it appropriate to have an educational radio section. Where an organisation relies entirely on a broadcasting station for its radio work, it will not need a radio section, although it will have to decide where responsibility for co-operating with that radio station should rest. Generally, the more autonomous an institution, and the more it controls its own production, distribution and teaching systems, the less important will be its links with other agencies, but the more complicated will be its own internal structure. On the other hand, the more it depends on outside agencies, the more will the relationships with those agencies determine its internal structure.

The fourth internal issue concerns the role of academic and administrative staff. While, in a traditional college, these functions are quite distinct, in a distance-teaching institution they are likely to overlap. An academic staff member may necessarily be



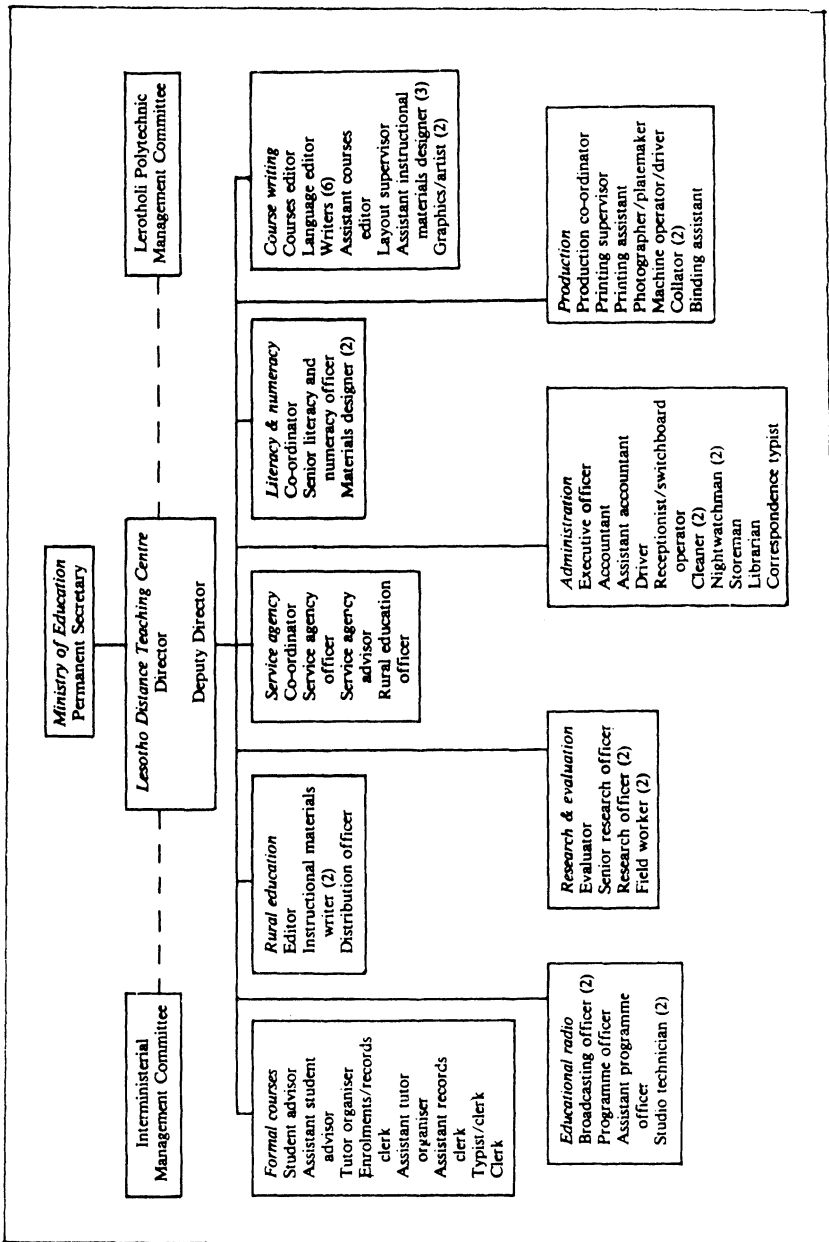
Source: adapted from International Extension College, Administration of Distance-teaching Institutions

Figure 1: Former organisation of Correspondence and Open Studies Unit, University of Lagos



Source: Paper prepared for Workshop by Director NTI

Figure 2: Organisation of National Teachers' Institute, Nigeria



Source: P Murphy Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (IEC)

Figure 3: Organisation of Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre

involved in the printing and production of his course. A student advisor will be concerned with both administrative and educational questions. And, as we will see in Chapter 3, an editor in a distance-teaching college has a role which is both administrative and academic.

Despite that overlap, many distance-teaching institutions are divided broadly into separate sections, one academic and one or more administrative. At NTI, for example, the academic staff were mainly in the professional operations section. At COSU the problem did not, in a sense, arise as the academics were based within their own subject departments. Similarly, LDTC depended to a considerable extent on outside writers so that there was not a separate academic section in which they were based.

Information and record systems

No matter how they are organised, the staff of a distance-teaching organisation cannot do their work unless they have adequate information. The record system is the nerve centre of any distance-teaching institution and the records needed are different from those required for face-to-face education. We need three sets of records: about students, about tutors, and about course materials.

1. Student records

A tutor in an ordinary college may remember all about his students and need to keep few records about them, although his bursar will want to keep some financial records as a minimum and examination organisers will also need some. But in distance teaching, we may be dealing with hundreds or thousands of students and adequate records of the following kinds are crucial.

1.1 Background and enrolment: when did the student enrol and for what courses; basic information about his age, sex, occupation, address and educational background. It may be possible to get the student to complete an enrolment form which then becomes the organisation's basic record. Figure 4 shows a card designed in this way. The front of the card

Do not fold this form
Registration No.

ENROLMENT FORM

Please complete in BLOCK LETTERS

Mr Mrs Miss		Surname	First Names	Date of Birth	
Address			Telephone No	Occupation	
For some courses it would help us to know if you have any relevant qualifications. Examinations passed (if NONE, please write NONE) School Certificate, CSF or 'O' level, higher certificate 'A' level)				Date	Grade (if known)
Other qualifications				Examining board (if known)	
Course title		Course number		Course fee	Any exam date
1				£	
2				£	
3				£	
World of Science kit				£	
If previously enrolled with NEC please give student number		<input type="checkbox"/> *I wish to pay full fees now and enclose cheque/PO's <input type="checkbox"/> *I wish to pay by instalments and enclose deposit of £ _____ and agree to pay monthly instalments of £ _____ <input type="checkbox"/> *I have completed the enclosed bankers order form <input type="checkbox"/> *I have no bank account and wish to pay monthly by PO's		Total cash fee Deposit as per instalment table	
For Office use only		Signature			

*Tick or delete as appropriate

Please make cheques and PO's payable to NEC Trust Ltd

Jan / Feb / Mar / Apr / May / Jun / Jul / Aug / Sep / Oct / Nov / Dec

Plate

Special instructions

Course	Course	Course	Course
Tutor	Tutor	Tutor	Tutor
DT	DT	DT	DT
1 A	1 A	1 A	1 A
2 B	2 B	2 B	2 B
3 C	3 C	3 C	3 C
4 D	4 D	4 D	4 D
5 E	5 E	5 E	5 E
6 F	6 F	6 F	6 F
7 G	7 G	7 G	7 G
8 H	8 H	8 H	8 H
9 I	9 I	9 I	9 I
10 J	10 J	10 J	10 J
11 K	11 K	11 K	11 K
12 L	12 L	12 L	12 L
13 M	13 M	13 M	13 M
14 N	14 N	14 N	14 N
15 O	15 O	15 O	15 O
16 P	16 P	16 P	16 P
17 Q	17 Q	17 Q	17 Q
18 R	18 R	18 R	18 R
19 S	19 S	19 S	19 S
20 T	20 T	20 T	20 T

Figure 4: National Extension College enrolment card

forms a permanent record. On the back, the College can record the mark given for a diagnostic test (DT) and for each of 20 assignments, in four different courses.

1.2 Student progress: when was course material sent to him, when did he send work for marking, what marks did he get. It may be possible to combine the record of a student's progress through several separate courses on a single card. Often, however, we need also to keep information about attendance at residential courses so that we need a separate card for each correspondence course.

1.3 Student payments: where students pay fees, we need to keep track of their payments, and when any further instalments are due.

1.4 Student problems: beyond the raw statistical data, tutors need to know what problems students encounter in their work. While information in the previous categories can often be kept on cards, it may be necessary to have individual files for correspondence with each student.

1.5 Student attendance: where face-to-face sessions are provided it is necessary to know which students attended them, or need to attend them.

1.6 Student results: for the sake of the individual student, and for monitoring our own work, we need to know how far students succeed or fail in their courses or examinations, and about drop-out rates.

There are two major difficulties in developing a system of records for these purposes. First, the basic information about a student's enrolment and progress is needed by a number of different people for different purposes. A record showing this may be needed by tutors to check on the progress of an individual student, by despatch clerks to send lesson instalments, and by finance clerks. The records of all students on a particular course may be needed to deal with information about a residential course, or to check how

students have worked generally on a particular correspondence course. Second, where some activities are decentralised, as when residential courses or the supervision of trainees in the classroom is done locally but correspondence administered centrally, it is difficult to determine which records should be kept locally and which centrally. Where all records are on a computer, these problems can be solved without too much difficulty. Where they are not, it may be helpful to establish a routine so that different sections deal with records at different times of the day or week. For example, the accounts department might deal with new enrolments only in the morning and tutors and despatch department in the afternoon. Where some records are decentralised, it will usually be necessary to maintain a master set which contains at least the basic statistical data. If, for example, local tutors keep detailed records about each student's work, they should still pass on to the centre pre-determined data about student marks and attendance which are needed to monitor student progress and ensure that the right materials are sent to him at the right time.

2. Tutor needs

The next set of records concern tutors. As there are fewer tutors than students, this is a smaller set but we need information on the following:

- 2.1 Recruitment, background, address : who the tutors are, what their specialisms are and how they were recruited. From this information, too, we can tell the students something about their individual tutor - something which can make studying at a distance a less impersonal activity.
- 2.2 Activity as a tutor : we need to know how many students a tutor can look after and which are allocated to him. We also need to monitor the work of a tutor so as to ensure that his marking is done on time and that it is of the right quality.
- 2.3 Pay : if tutors are paid for each script, we need to keep records to show how much they have earned and how and when they are paid.

- 2.4 Absence : if a tutor is going to be away from his normal address for any unusual length of time, we need to use that information to ensure that someone else looks after his students in his absence.
- 2.5 Tutors' problems : as with students, tutors will have various individual difficulties and it is necessary to keep together the information on these and on the ways they have been solved.

3. Records of teaching materials

Both these sets of records are about people: the third set is about materials. In its production of materials, a distance-teaching organisation is more like a factory than a school and needs records to control the production and use of its materials.

- 3.1 Planning, writing and production : as each course is written, it is necessary to know the stage it has reached, from first thoughts to the printing of the last volume, and when it ought to reach each stage. Without this information, we cannot be sure that it will be available to students at the right time. Figure 5 shows a progress chart designed to control the development of a course. While this refers to a printed course, a parallel system of records, although often a simpler one, is needed for the production of broadcasts.
- 3.2 Storage and stock control : once the course is printed, it is necessary to keep track of the numbers of copies used, and the numbers still available, so that reprints or revisions can be arranged in good time.
- 3.3 Despatch : we need to know when materials are sent to students; the record here may be kept with the general student records.
- 3.4 Student learning and evaluation : no course is perfect, but if records about

PROGRESS CONTROL CHART

COURSE TITLE.....AUDIENCE.....LEVEL.....LENGTH.....

Process	Responsibility	Target date												Actual date														
		Unit No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
Course proposal drafted	Tutor																											
Research on audience/need	Evaluation																											
Proposal costed	Treasurer																											
Proposal approved	Course cttee																											
Authors found	Course tutor																											
Sample unit drafted	Author																											
Sample unit approved	Course cttee																											
1st draft written	Author																											
Draft to editor	Editor																											
Draft to typing	Typist																											
Illustrations commissioned	Artist																											
Typing ready for checking	Editor/author																											
Typing checked	Editor/author																											
Illustrations checked	Editor/author																											
Corrections to typing	Typist																											
Corrections to illustans	Artist																											
Corrections checked	Editor																											
To paste-up	Paste-up																											
To editor for checking	Editor -																											
To printers	Printers																											
Printed	Printers																											
Advance copies sent out	Editor																											

Figure 5: Course production progress chart

each course are kept from the time it is first launched, any new edition can incorporate improvements based on the first students' reaction to it.

Although we have talked about three sets of information, the actual records kept need to relate to each other. While information about an individual student's work on his course belongs, for example, on his record, student opinions on that course generally are needed on the records for the course. Similarly, while it may be convenient to keep records of students' fees separate from those on their academic progress, you may want to ensure by linking the two record systems that students have paid the right instalment of fees before they are sent the next part of the course.

The exact system of records for any institution will depend on its teaching programme and on its constitutional status. If, for example, you are working in a correspondence department of a university, then you will need to consider which records you need to keep for yourself, and which can be kept with those regular university records which are common to all departments.

Staffing

We saw that some staff in a distance teaching organisation have no exact parallels with their counterparts in an ordinary college. On the other hand, some are doing jobs which are very similar. We can distinguish between six groups of staff.

First, administrative and supervisory staff combine educational and administrative functions. Even if your distance-teaching unit is a very small one, with a staff of perhaps only half a dozen, the head of the unit has interests which straddle education and administration. He needs to bring an educational opinion into decisions about the work of the unit, while being enough of an administrator to guide its administrative work as well.

Then, second, the unit will have some staff who are more clearly educational. If it has its own full-time course writers and subject specialists, their background will be similar to that of teacher-educators generally. They will, however, need to acquire skills

in course development which are rather different from those that they bring to the job on appointment.

Next, the office staff will be doing jobs which are, to some extent, peculiar to distance teaching, but are very close to those of any other comparable enterprise. There are few unusual skills required from our clerical, secretarial, financial or transport staff.

Some institutions have a fourth category of staff: those working on research and evaluation. In the organisation chart for LDTC in Figure 3, you will see that there is a separate research section. A section of this kind will need close links with the educational staff, as its findings will need to feed into the process of course development, but it may also make regular demands on the administrative sections of the college.

Fifth, if print and radio are to be supported by face-to-face study, or distance teaching for trainee teachers is to be linked with supervision of their work in the classroom, some kind of field organisation is necessary. In some cases field support will be provided by other agencies. But, in others, it will be necessary for the distance-teaching unit to have its own field staff and people in the office to supervise them.

Finally, some technical production staff may be needed. For printed materials, these may include printers and graphic artists. If radio programmes are to be made, they may include studio recordists or producers.

How are the specialist staff to be trained in skills which are new to them?

In practice, much training in distance-teaching institutions has been done on the job. As multi-media distance teaching is a relatively new educational technique, most of those professionally engaged in it have learned how to do it as they go along. In drawing up a plan for staff development and training, therefore, we can begin by seeing what can be done on the spot through in-service training.

In order to help with this process we can also use a number of materials which have been developed for the training of distance-teaching staff. These include

manuals and correspondence courses on course-writing, on administration and on research. They are listed in Appendix 1.

Next, occasional formal workshops can be used to train staff. Many institutions have run course writing workshops in order to train new writers, and sometimes editors, in their work. This is difficult for small organisations which have only one or two people at a time to be trained in a particular job. The distance-teaching institutions in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland overcame this problem by organising joint workshops for the three countries at which staff members could be trained together.

Those workshops normally lasted for only two or three days but other training sessions, usually organised on a regional or international basis, have been organised for longer periods. In Africa, the inaugural meeting of the African Association for Correspondence Education took the form of a two-week seminar-cum-workshop which provided some training for participants. Longer courses on distance education and courses on media production have been organised in a number of countries. In Britain, the International Extension College with the University of London Institute of Education organises an annual short course of three to four months on distance education. From time to time a similar course has been organised in Australia, calling on the long experience of correspondence education there. Courses on educational broadcasting have also been run in Australia and, by the British Council and the Open University, in Britain.

There is a certain irony about bringing people together in order to study the techniques of distance education. Those who want to learn more about it by reading books are directed to Appendix 2.

Summary

We can summarise this chapter in the following guidelines:

1. A distance-teaching institution has eight functions, although some of these may be carried out on its behalf by another body. They are: policy making and control, developing materials,

producing materials, distributing materials, tutoring and counselling, keeping records, evaluation and finance.

2. It needs a bigger and more educationally oriented administration than a face-to-face college.
3. While there are various models for its administration, the choice between them will depend on:
 - 3.1 internal and external relationships;
 - 3.2 decisions about activities done within the college and outside;
 - 3.3 the overlapping roles of educational and administrative staff.
4. A distance-teaching institution will need to keep records on its students, its tutors and its courses.
 - 4.1 Records on students will cover: background and enrolment; progress; payments (if fees are charged); problems; attendance at courses; examination results.
 - 4.2 Records on tutors will cover: recruitment, background and address; quantity and quality of work; pay; absence on leave; problems.
 - 4.3 Records on courses will cover: production stages; stock control; despatch to students; student reactions.
5. Five groups of staff may be employed: administrative and supervisory; educational; office and transport; research; field workers.
6. Training is possible on-the-job; through using training materials; by attendance at short workshops; by attendance at courses.