

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

PICTURES OF CHANGE:  
DISTANCE LEARNING AS AN INNOVATION IN HEALTH SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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The demand for health care educational programmes by open and distance learning has increased over recent years. There are a number of reasons for this and dominant among these are the economic and organisational reforms, within the health care sector, that have resulted in fundamental changes to health care management and professional practice. These changes have led to demands, from both NHS and private health care providers, for an ever more adaptable workforce requiring an increasingly flexible form of education.

This thesis tells the story of one health care education institution's response to these demands; the implementation of open and distance learning on an institute wide basis. The study followed a qualitative methodology and used a case study strategy within which data were collected by semi-structured/open-ended interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis. The participants were drawn from members of the institution who were involved in the innovation and included policy makers, academic managers, teachers and administrators. The focus of the study was the experience of change as it was happening. This was achieved by adopting the concept of lenses through which to view the innovation thereby gaining different perspectives, or pictures, of the change as it progressed. The lenses were, collaboration, structure, change of practice and sub-cultures.

The study produced four principal conclusions: The first is that the implementation of open and distance learning requires new patterns of working that are essentially collaborative. The second is related to the first and contends that open and distance learning requires an integrated closely coupled structure to meet learner needs. The third is that open and distance learning requires changes to individual practices that are consonant with a holistic, learner centred, service orientated approach to teaching and learning. The fourth conclusion is that sub-cultural effects on this kind of innovation can be mediated by working with the dominant culture and not by attempting to change it. Change in this context is collaborative, inclusive, incremental and long term. The thesis concludes by offering two guiding frameworks. The first offers guidance for the implementation of open and distance learning. The second, based on the four pictures of change, offers a set of four guiding principles for future research into the implementation of this increasingly important form of teaching and learning.

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# INTRODUCTION

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This thesis tells the story of change. It is the story of a programme of innovation that took place in my own organisation, the Institute of Health Sciences (the Institute) at West London University (WLU) (names of institutions changed), between April 1998 and April 1999. The programme of innovation, and the case in this study, was the introduction of open and distance learning on an institute wide basis. The focus of the study was the experience of change as it was happening and, in order to provide structure, these experiences were viewed through a series of four lenses. This approach allowed me to develop four particular perspectives, or pictures, of the change and, by so doing, address the four research questions that guided the study. These questions, in their turn, provided four broad aims. The first was to determine the extent to which collaboration was an effective strategy for this type of change. The second was to develop the most effective structure for the delivery and on-going management of open and distance learning. The third was to reach an understanding of the changes to practice required by open and distance learning, and the fourth, was to identify what effects the cultural and sub-cultural norms of the organisation might have on an innovation such as this.

The concept of open and distance learning is a contentious one, and this is explored more fully in chapter 2. A useful working definition, however, is to view open learning as a philosophy and distance learning as a process. For example, Field defines open learning as:

....greater accessibility, flexibility and student centredness;  
it implies placing the learner rather than provider at the core  
of educational practice (1996; p 143).

On the other hand, Keegan characterises distance learning by:

...the separating of teacher and learner and of the learner from the learning group with interpersonal face-to-face communication of conventional education being replaced by an apersonal mode of communication mediated by technology (1996; p 8).

At the heart of open and distance learning is the notion of bringing together, in a mutually beneficial interrelationship, the elements of openness, such as student centredness and accessibility, and the flexibility of when, where and how to study that is made possible through the process of distance learning.

The origins of this study, and therefore of this thesis, are linked to a range of major changes that have occurred in education and health care over recent years. For example, in education generally, there has been a rapid growth in both the provision and popularity of learning opportunities by open and distance learning. The reasons for this, according to Edwards (1994; p 160), can be viewed from three levels. First, at the level of educational practice, it is seen as a means of achieving greater access and equity by enabling students who would not otherwise be able to participate, to do so. Second, at the level of the institution, open and distance learning is often seen in terms of its marketability and, indeed, as King (1991; p 21) points out, the reasons why an institution might decide to enter this arena can often involve issues of programme or even institutional viability. Third, at governmental level, it is seen as a way of driving the economic rationalist imperatives associated with a post-modern society and the notion of lifelong learning, the so-called post-modern challenges (Usher et al 1997).

Such challenges have been felt across the full range of private and public sectors of the economy including health care. Major economic and organisational reforms, within the National Health Service (NHS), over a number of years, have resulted in fundamental changes in health care management and professional practice. In addition, there is a requirement for the periodic mandatory updating of all registered nurses (UKCC 1990). This brings with it a need for continuing, post-qualifying, educational opportunities. Such changes have led to demands from the NHS, private health care providers and individual

nurse and midwife practitioners, for an increasingly flexible form of educational provision.

Another key factor in this story is linked to the marketability of open and distance learning programmes. As institutions of nurse and midwifery education moved into higher education, the horizons of opportunity increased considerably. The globalisation of education, and what Jarvis (1996; p 25) refers to as the commodification of knowledge, have influenced how institutions plan to deliver their educational programmes. Space-time compression through the development of information and communication technologies makes it possible to study U.K. educational programmes anywhere in the world. Inevitably, nurse education, like any other part of higher education seeks to secure its share of the global knowledge market. Together, these major changes emphasise the importance of open and distance learning as a central part of the flexible response required of nurse and midwifery education institutions. This type of response is, increasingly, seen as necessary not only to meet the needs of employers and individual nurse and midwife practitioners, but also the aspirations of nurse and midwifery education in general as an emerging part of higher education.

It was against this background that the Institute of Health Sciences planned to introduce open and distance learning in October 1998. The co-ordination and management of the many complex and interrelated parts of the open and distance learning puzzle fell within my role as Distance Learning Co-ordinator (DLC). My choice of study was influenced by this early experience. Probably of most significance, was that it quickly became clear that what lay ahead was major change, not only in my own personal practice, but in the practice of all involved. I felt it would be an important contribution to the theory and practice of open and distance learning to carry out case study research that captured the individual and collective experiences of the participants as the innovation evolved and progressed.

This thesis is presented in seven chapters that represent the innovation as a journey over the period of a year. It plots the growing experience of the participants and, at the same time, provides a set of four sharply focussed pictures of the innovation seen through each lens. In chapter 1, the innovation is placed in context by reviewing the history of open and

distance learning and by providing detailed sketches of the Institute and WLU. Setting the historical and contemporary contexts is important because it provides a backdrop and an orientation for the study. It also provides a contextual analysis upon which to base, together with the literature review, the formulation of foreshadowed issues from which the research questions were subsequently developed.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature that is of particular relevance to the study. It is divided into two parts. In part one a definition of open and distance learning is sought and three issues that have fundamental implications for practice are discussed. These are locus of control, the independent learner and industrialisation. Questions regarding the practice of open and distance learning in higher education, the impact of information and communication technologies and policy trends in nurse and midwifery education are also explored in order to focus on the changing role of nurse and midwife teachers and universities in contemporary society. In part two, the complexities of organisational culture, and sub-cultures are analysed, and their possible influence on an innovation such as this. Finally, the research questions that guided the study are set out.

In chapter 3, a detailed explanation is given of the methodology used in the study. This includes a justification of case study as a strategy and the three-stage model upon which the research design was based. Also provided is a conceptual framework with an explanation of how this was developed from the research questions and analytic concepts. It is in this chapter that the lens metaphor is discussed and the notion of viewing the innovation from four particular perspectives.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 tell the story of the innovation from the perspective of each lens. These are, in chapter 4, the collaborative lens, in chapter 5, the structural lens and in chapter 6, the change of practice lens. The sub-cultural perspective is a theme that runs through all three chapters. In this way it was possible to collect four unique pictures of the innovation and it is the story of each that forms the basis of these chapters. The thesis is concluded, in chapter 7, by bringing the pictures together as a collage. This is achieved by constructing four concluding statements under which an analysis of the experience of change from each of the four perspectives is summarised. Finally, areas for further research and two related frameworks are offered. The first framework is a guide for the

implementation of open and distance learning and the second is a guide for carrying out research into its implementation using the concept of pictures of change.

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# CHAPTER 1

## *THE CONTEXT*

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The purpose of this chapter is to place this thesis in context. Its aim is to bring to the fore key issues that were influential in shaping the programme of innovation. To do this a brief historical perspective of the development of open and distance learning, both within the UK as well as internationally, is provided, before moving on to explore West London University (WLU) and the Institute of Health Sciences (the Institute) in more detail.

### **A Historical Perspective**

The date of the first advertised provision of open and distance learning is a little unclear although most of the literature places the predecessor of modern open and distance learning as being correspondence courses (Tait 1994; p 27, Keegan 1993; p 62, Veduin and Clark 1991; p 15). Within the correspondence course genre, Isaac Pitman is generally recognised as the first modern distance educator, offering correspondence courses in shorthand as early as 1840 (Veduin and Clark 1991; p15). In 1856, Charles Toussaint and Gustave Langerscheidt started language teaching by correspondence in Germany (Keegan 1993; p 67). Shortly after this the University of London played an important part in the history of open and distance learning by founding, in the 1880s, private correspondence colleges which prepared students for its external examination system.

The history of open and distance learning in the U.S.A. began in 1874 when the Illinois Wesleyan University offered undergraduate and graduate courses (Veduin and Clark 1991: p 16). In the Soviet Union it is generally accepted to have begun in the 1930s when large scale correspondence teaching universities were established to bring education to the hitherto largely uneducated population (ibid 1991; p 16). Following the Second World



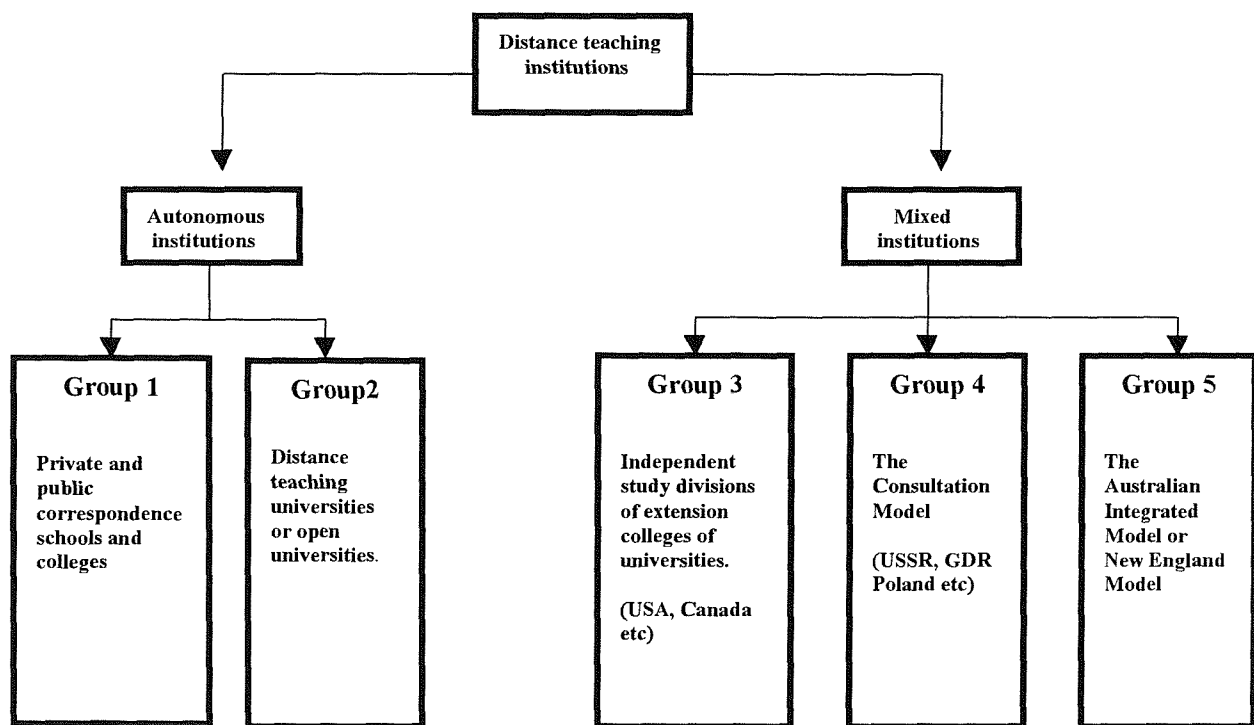
War this provision became more widespread across the majority of soviet states and followed a pattern known as the consultation model. This model, according to Keegan (1993; p 70), places an emphasis on formal class meetings as a central part of the programme of study along with the provision of text based learning materials. In his memoirs, Harold Wilson cites this system as influencing his conception of the Open University (OU (UK)) (Wilson 1986; p195).

Preceding the O.U. (UK) by a considerable margin, however, was the University of South Africa (UNISA), which in 1947 became a single-mode correspondence teaching university with the establishment of its Department of External Studies. It currently serves some 120,000 students and has among its alumni Nelson Mandela and Robert Mugabe.

Returning to the UK, by far the most significant development was the establishment, in 1969, of the Open University. It is significant because it marks the point at which correspondence education in the UK began to move from its marginalised base in a range of commercial organisations to open and distance learning as part of the mainstream of government education and training policy. Since then the OU (UK) has become a model which has been influential on a worldwide scale (Tait 1994; p29).

A great deal has happened in the field of open and distance learning during the three decades since the inception of the Open University. According to Keegan (1996; p 3) there has been remarkable change in the quality, the quantity, the status and the influence of open and distance learning. There is an increasing range of conventional universities, especially the so-called new universities, that offer open and distance learning programmes of study. This is also reflected in the further education and proprietary sectors. Keegan estimates that the total enrolment on such programmes at any one time, within the United Kingdom, is unlikely to be less than 500,000 (ibid; p 4). As far as nurse education is concerned Jack and Rushford (1990; p 45) surveyed 44 colleges of nursing and found that only one of these was not, at that time, involved in open and distance learning of some kind. Such figures, from across the range of education, suggest that at the turn of the millennium, open and distance learning is a form of education that is increasingly valued, albeit for different reasons, by educational institutions and learners alike.

An important consideration when setting the context in this way is to make the distinction between institutions such as the OU (UK) and smaller providers such as the Institute. A number of classifications of the various forms of open and distance learning institutions appear in the literature. For example a study carried out by Keegan (1993) provides a typology of distance teaching systems that makes a distinction between autonomous distance teaching institutions, for example the OU (UK), and distance subsections of conventional universities which he calls mixed institutions. He further sub-divides these two classifications into five groups based on how learning is supported, (see Figure 1.1).



**Fig 1.1 A typology of distance learning institutions (Keegan, D., 1993: p 64)**

Keegan's model is important because it reflects, very closely, the historical evolution of open and distance learning from correspondence courses to autonomous distance teaching institutions and then on to dual mode institutions. Of particular interest for the purposes of this study is group 5, the Australian, or New England model because of its emphasis on integration and its applicability to a dual mode approach. The central tenet of this approach is that the teachers of the university are responsible for writing the programmes,

and for teaching, supporting and assessing learners. Distance and face-to-face teaching are integrated. This means that the same teachers support and assess both sets of students with no distinction between the two. A similar integrated approach, adopted by the University of Sheffield, is described by Armstrong (1996; p 287).

In a similar way to Keegan, Hedge (1996; p 14), classifies different types of providers as 'DL entire institutions', such as the OU (UK), and 'DL subsections' such as, for example, the Institute. The relatively small size of these subsections, and the integrated nature of the tutorial support, enables them to enhance quality by frequently reviewing and updating their materials, and to increase the flexibility of their provision by engaging in multi-mode education. This means such institutions are able to offer taught, full time and part time programmes, programmes within which it is possible to select a mix of taught and distance modules, as well as programmes delivered totally by open and distance learning. This is in contrast to 'DL entire institutions' such as the OU (UK) which, because of economies of scale, are more dependent on long production runs and single mode programmes.

The point being made is an important one given the competitiveness of the current educational market and the rapidity of change in some academic and professional areas. Such rapid change must be reflected in the learning materials of open and distance learning programmes if they are not to appear very dated, very quickly. Clearly, the growing demand for pedagogically sound, up-to-date and effectively presented learning materials that are relevant to the requirements of specialised professional groups of practitioners is the challenge that educational institutions have to meet. According to Raggatt these markets will:

...in Open University terms be low volume or short-lived  
and will require a different production process (1993; p 25).

This pattern of increased flexibility brings into focus what Tait and Mills (1999; p 1) call the convergence of distance and conventional education in which a number of learning modes are available to learners not only within the institution but also within the programme of study they are undertaking. It is a degree of flexibility that, for the Institute, became increasingly important as a means of meeting the educational needs of health professionals.

# The Local Context

## West London University

As a note of clarification, the contextualisation of this account of WLU and the Institute is a representation of the situation as it was in April 1998 when the study began. WLU was created in 1992 from the merger of a number of colleges of higher education, further education and health care. It is located on two main campuses, Ealing in West London and Slough in Berkshire and, in April 1998, had some 20,000 full and part-time students registered on programmes ranging from NVQ to PhD. It is well positioned to serve the educational and skills needs of a range of communities and employers, stretching along the M4 corridor from Hammersmith in the East as far as Reading in the West. At the time of the study WLU was primarily a locally recruiting university. Over 60% of its total student population were drawn from the West London and Thames Valley areas, with a further 16% coming from Greater London.

Since its formation WLU has undergone a number of structural and management changes. Arguably most far reaching, by April 1998, was the introduction of a 'new learning environment' (NLE) based on the principles of open learning. Major restructuring of this kind was considered necessary, particularly in the 'new' universities, in order to meet the pressures on higher education, in terms of increasing student numbers set against a falling per capita resource (Lisewski 1994; p 13), and the increasing demands of the future. Lewis (1995; pp 32-36) describes such an innovation at his own university, the University of Humber and he argues that the central pillar of the NLE is:

...to achieve a realisation that if open learning is to help HE to respond successfully to the demands facing it, then its use will need to be on quite a different scale. (Lewis 1995; p 33)

In simple terms this meant incorporating open learning as part of the mainstream provision and not just as a philosophy to support distance learning. Such a philosophy was adopted by WLU because it pointed to increasing flexibility in what it could offer and how it could offer it. Open and distance learning formed an important element of this flexibility. This

open approach was central to the mission of the university, a mission it believed was distinctive. The university mission states that:

West London University supports mass participation in higher education as a contribution to equality and social justice. The University aims to become a student-driven institution, committed primarily to teaching and learning and playing a major part in the educational, cultural and economic life of the region. It will support these policies by developing and sustaining partnerships with other organisations and providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

(Source: West London University Strategic Plan ;1997/98 – 2001/02)

Two aspects of this mission, '*to support mass participation in higher education as a contribution to equality and social justice,*' and its commitment to '*playing a major part*

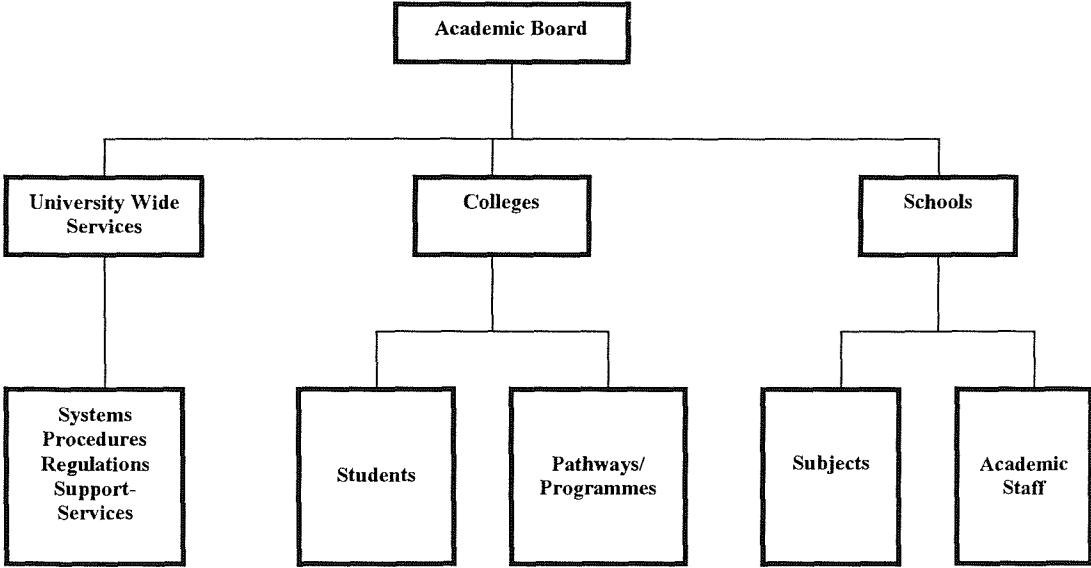
- **60% of the undergraduate student population are non-white, compared to 18% of students accepted by higher education institutions through UCAS.**
- **Over 70% of undergraduate students have entered through non A-level routes. Of those entering via UCAS, 45% come from a non A-level background compared to the national UCAS average of 14%.**
- **The student population has a higher proportion from non-professional/managerial/socio-economic groups than any other university save one.**
- **A HEFCE study of student profiles shows that WLU attracts a higher proportion of both young (under 21) and mature (over 21) new student entrants from relatively poor backgrounds, than the mean for the sector as a whole. In addition, WLU attracts a slightly higher proportion of mature students from the most affluent backgrounds.**
- **WLU attracts a high proportion of mature students among undergraduate entries (48% in 1998/99) which is more than double the national average of 22% for the sector.**

**Table 1.1 Widening access at WLU.**  
(Source: WLU Consultation Document: Towards an Academic Plan for 1999 and Beyond, Oct 1999)

*in the educational, cultural and economic life of the region,*' received wide support both from within and outside the university. Some examples of WLU's successes in widening participation are shown in Table 1.1.

Like all universities, WLU is a complex organisation made up of a formal structure of governance, a simplified representation of which, as it was during the period of the study, is set out in Figure 1.2. There were two main operational units of management, the schools and the colleges. The schools contained the academic subjects and their associated modules and it was here that module curriculum was generated, where teaching and learning occurred and where subject quality was maintained. Schools were headed by deans who were responsible for ensuring that the academic function of their school was adequately resourced.

The colleges, on the other hand, were responsible for the commissioning, design, development and maintenance of the quality and integrity of programmes that led to awards. Each college achieved this by putting in place the necessary administrative support and programme management mechanisms, such as programme committees, assessment boards and a college board of studies. In carrying out their responsibilities,



**Fig. 1.2 The organisational structure of West London University**

colleges and schools made use of the academic support, services and expertise provided by University Wide Services. As shown in Figure 1.3 overall responsibility for programmes of study rested with the Academic Board of the University.

## **The Institute of Health Sciences**

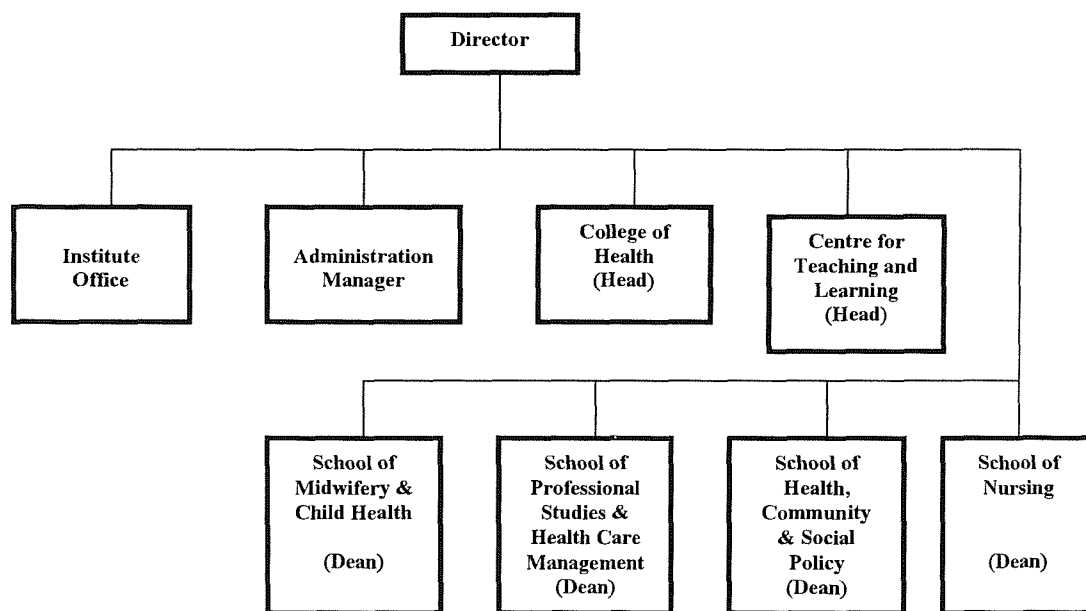
The Institute is one of the largest providers of nurse and midwifery education in the country and a major provider of nurse and midwifery education within the Inner London, North Thames and Oxfordshire and Anglia regions. At the time of the study it had 310 staff and provided pre-registration nurse and midwifery education to around 2,000 students who were mainly female (about 20% were male) between the ages of 18 and 25 years. These students attended a three year full-time programme, fifty per-cent of which took place in the Institute and fifty per-cent in practice areas in hospital and community settings.

The number of post-qualifying students was approximately 3,000, again the majority being female who ranged in age from 21 to 55 years. These students were, for the most part, attending a variety of part-time programmes, usually one day per week, designed to enhance their knowledge and skills. These programmes, known as ENB courses, of which the institute offered seventy-four, were purchased by individual NHS trusts as part of their programme of staff development. They were often short (15 to 30 weeks) concentrated periods of study related to their field of practice and were approved by the English National Board (ENB). Each programme was also accredited and could be used to contribute to a number of first degree awards offered by the Institute. A relatively small number of students, by comparison, were enrolled directly onto degree programmes at bachelor, masters and PhD levels. These students were usually self-funding.

The institute operated from a number of sites at Ealing and in Berkshire. At Ealing the Institute had exclusive use of a fourteen-storey building within which it was totally self contained in terms of facilities, especially classroom space. It had no need to integrate, in any physical sense, with the rest of the university. It was from this base that the Inner London and North Thames Consortia nurse and midwifery education contracts were serviced. The Institute provided educational programmes and modules for such centres of excellence as the Royal Brompton Hospital, The Royal Marsden Hospital, Moorfields Eye

Hospital, the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital and Northwick Park Hospital. In Berkshire the Institute was situated at the university campus in Slough and at a number of hospital sites. It was from these sites that the Oxfordshire and Anglia consortium contracts were delivered.

Although the Institute was an integral part of WLU it was very much an independent entity in that its functions were, for the most part, separate and distinct from the central university systems. For example, it had its own recruitment and assessment departments with their own regulations and procedures. These fell within the responsibility of the Institute Administration Manager. In addition, it had its own finance department and commercial and business management unit directly managed by the Institute Director within the Institute Office. The organisational structure of the institute given in Figure 1.3 shows another major distinction is that the Institute had its own schools and its own college. Indeed it was described as a university within a university, a situation that many within the Institute considered to be to their advantage and therefore wished to maintain.



**Fig. 1.3 The organisational structure of the Institute of Health Sciences**

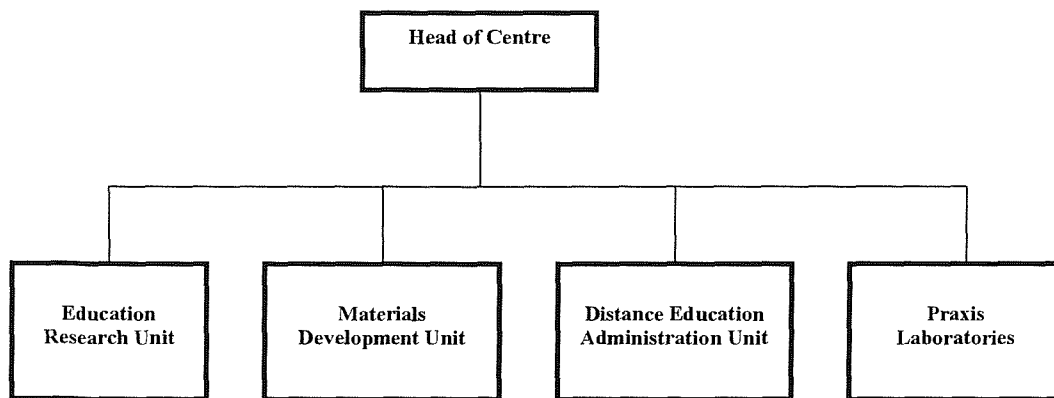


The reasons for this apparently separatist approach on the part of the Institute were generally presented as extremely pragmatic ones. In simple terms this arrangement had proved to be the most effective way of managing the contracts with the NHS consortia. It had also been a very effective way of meeting the demands of the professional nursing and midwifery statutory bodies, the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (ENB) and the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC). There was, however, a commonly held belief among staff of the Institute that to merge more fully with the University, especially to use its systems, would adversely affect the quality of the service offered to students and NHS Trusts.

The four schools that comprised the Institute were further sub-divided by subject groupings. This was an informal arrangement that had 'hung over' from a former subject based structure. Teachers naturally kept to what they knew best and the Deans of school found it convenient from a management point of view, to perpetuate it. These groupings were potentially powerful in that they assumed guardianship of their respective subject areas. Because of this, they were influential in decisions about module and programme content, teacher workloads and any innovation in which the subject played a part.

## **Open and Distance Learning at the Institute of Health Sciences**

The Institute first looked into the possibility of delivering health programmes by open and distance learning in the spring of 1997. Part of this initiative was to put in place a 'centre' with the remit to conduct research into all aspects of teaching and learning in health sciences. Its initial focus was open and distance learning and a target date of March 1998 had been agreed for the launch of the first open and distance learning programme. The organisational structure of The Centre for Teaching and Learning is given in Figure 1.4. An important part of the Centre's work was to look at the writing and development of open and distance learning materials; both paper and electronically based. Another equally important feature of its work was to consider the infrastructure necessary to support the development and delivery of open and distance learning. From this came the Distance Education Administrative Unit and the Materials Development Unit.

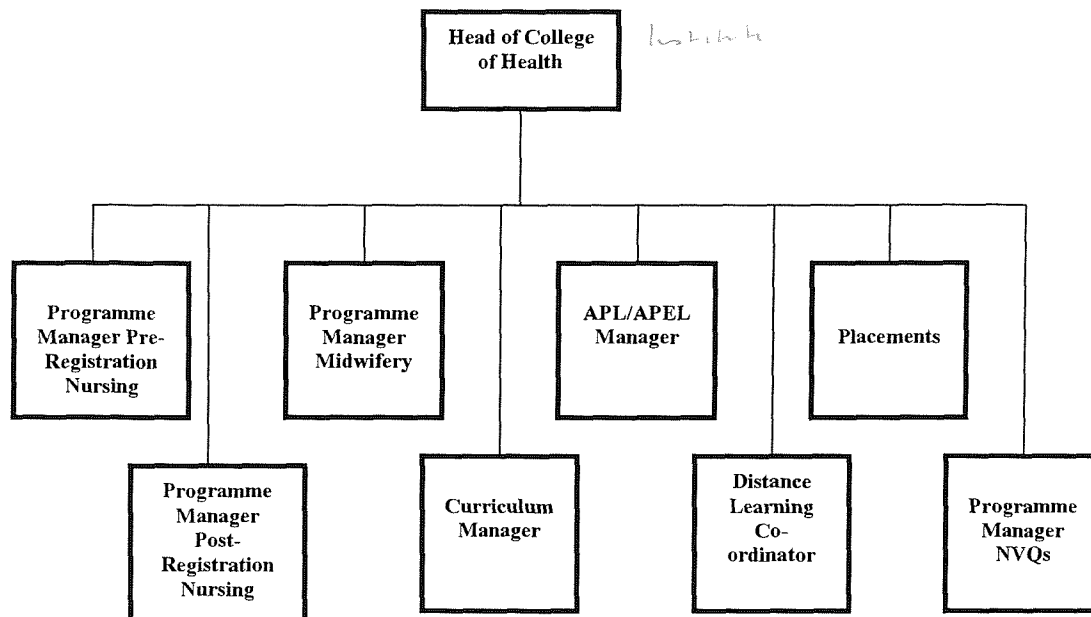


**Fig. 1.4 The organisational structure of the Centre for Teaching and Learning**

While this initial preparation was progressing it became clear that the target date of March 1998 was unlikely to be met unless the many strands of the innovation were effectively co-ordinated. As a result I was appointed as Distance Learning Co-ordinator (DLC) in January 1998 with responsibility for the co-ordination of open and distance learning programmes within the College of Health, (see Figure 1.5 for the organisational structure of the College). This represented an important distinction at the time. Locating the DLC in the College of Health and not in the Centre for Teaching and Learning was an attempt to emphasise that the College was responsible for the delivery of all programmes, including open and distance learning programmes, and the commissioning of all modules that contributed to those programmes. The Centre for Teaching and Learning, on the other hand, was responsible for supporting academic staff in the writing and development of open and distance learning materials for the modules. It did this through a programme of staff development workshops and project management by the Materials Development Unit within the Centre.

The initial focus of my new role fell into four main categories; the first was to act as a link between the College of Health and the Centre for Teaching and Learning. The second was to develop and implement a model of student support. The third involved clarifying and

putting in place the necessary administrative arrangements to support open and distance learning and the fourth was to provide support and advice to programme and



**Fig. 1.5 The organisational structure of the College of Health**

module leaders regarding the preparation of materials for the approval and validation of open and distance learning programmes, and their ongoing management and delivery.

The first open and distance learning modules were offered in March 1998 with three students being enrolled and a further six enrolling in July 1998. Both acted as pilots from which valuable information was obtained. These modules formed part of the third year of the BSc (Hons) in Health Promotion that was offered either as a 'top-up' degree pathway for health professionals who already held a university diploma qualification, or as an alternative mode of study for those learners already enrolled on the face-to-face programme.

In addition, a further development enabled the Institute to offer additional programmes by open and distance learning from October 1998. This was a collaboration, between the Institute and the Open Learning Foundation of the UK (OLF) (see Glossary), to produce health related modules and programmes by open and distance learning. As a result of this collaboration the Institute was able to offer, from October 1998, two open and distance learning programmes that had a mix of OLF and Institute modules and two programmes containing Institute modules only. See Table 1.2 for a list of the programmes.

- **BSc (Hons) Health Promotion (level 3 top-up) (Institute).**
- **BSc (Hons) Health Studies (levels 2 and 3) (Institute).**
- **BSc (Hons) Professional Studies-Nursing (level 3 top-up) (OLF and Institute)**
- **Dip HE/BSc (Hons) Professional Studies-Wound Care (OLF and Institute).**

**Table 1.2 Open and distance learning programmes offered in October 1998**

It is important to point out that programmes designed to ‘top-up’ health professionals from diploma to first degree level were what was required and needed at the time. Through the Institute’s comprehensive Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) scheme, learners with the appropriate academic credit could be offered the equivalent of one year of study (the third year of the taught programme) by open and distance learning. In reality it was expected that learners would take between two and three years to complete the degree by this mode.

In terms of infrastructure, that is to say the processes, procedures and supporting systems for open and distance learning, there was in place, by April 1998, only some rudimentary, hastily crafted general processes, support mechanisms and materials for teachers and

learners. The roles of teachers and administrative staff were unclear and ill defined, although this was not always realised at the time. Equally, many of the processes and systems required by open and distance learning created tensions within parts of the Institute when put in place along-side long established ways of doing things. At this early stage, the core group was made up of a number of disparate personalities, with a range of experience, attempting to introduce a major change to their practices and the practices of others. It is in this context that I, as leader of the innovation, focussed on a collaborative approach to the introduction of open and distance learning at the Institute.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a review of the historical and contemporary contexts in which this study was grounded. In doing so, the evolution of open and distance learning has been plotted from its beginnings as mainly correspondence courses, to the emergence of the autonomous distance learning institutions, such as the Open University, to conventional higher education organisations offering both face-to-face and distance programmes of study. Also discussed has been the increasing popularity of the convergence of face-to-face and distance programmes, making possible still more flexibility, by the integration of modes of study.

A principal aim of this chapter has been to set the scene for the study as a whole by giving a brief description of WLU and the Institute as it was in April 1998. Of particular interest is the separation, both in a physical and psychological sense, of the Institute from WLU. Also of note is the sub-cultural milieu of subject groupings, programme teams and schools within the Institute and the possible implications of this for cross-institutional innovation.

In the next chapter the study is placed in its theoretical context through a review of the relevant literature. Following this, the historical and contemporary contexts from this chapter, together with the review of the literature, are used to formulate the research questions that will serve to guide the study as a whole.

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## CHAPTER 2

### *A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE*

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This chapter has two main purposes. The first is to place the thesis in its theoretical context and the second is to identify, from the literature, key characteristics of open and distance learning and organisational culture that could impact on the programme of innovation. Its aim is quite specific and is to explore the likely effects of these characteristics on the practice of those involved and together with the contextualisation provided in chapter 1, to formulate questions to guide the study. My rationale for the inclusion and exclusion of literature has been guided by this aim. This review of the literature is, as a consequence, selective and draws on two main sources. The first includes literature that has enabled me to build a picture of how open and distance learning can influence the practices, environment and culture that constitute the world of work of academics, administrators and managers in the field of health sciences within a higher education setting. This literature is explored in this chapter. The second is from the equally important literature regarding the implementation of change and its effects, collaboration, structures and the practicalities of introducing open and distance learning. This literature is interwoven through later chapters so as to maintain the narrative, aid discussion and underpin the interpretation of data.

This thesis is about change. It is the story of how open and distance learning has been introduced in my own educational institution. It is a representation of how teaching, learning and the general support of learners were rethought, reshaped, repackaged, delivered and supported in new and innovative ways. Innovations of this kind are however, rarely straightforward. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that the nature of open and distance learning brings with it a need for teachers, policy-makers, administrators and learners to change the way they function and interrelate in their respective roles, and the second is the influence of the cultural milieu within which these changes take place.

In order to provide structure, the chapter is divided into two parts. In part one, open and distance learning itself is explored in order to define it in a way that has meaning and applicability in the context of this study. Second, the characteristics of open and distance learning are examined with particular emphasis on those areas most likely to bring change to the practice of teachers, policy-makers, administrators and indeed the organisation as a whole. Third, attention is given to the continuing debate surrounding the practice and ongoing development of open and distance learning in higher education, especially questions relating to quality, technology and the changing role of teachers and of universities. Finally, policy trends that brought about the emergence of nurse and midwifery education as a part of higher education are elaborated. In part two organisational culture is explored to establish an understanding of this concept as it relates to this study.

## **PART ONE**

### **The Nature of Open and Distance Learning**

Defining open and distance learning is not a straightforward undertaking. The extensive literature shows that open learning and distance learning are often entwined (Tait 1989; p 309, Kirkup and Jones 1996; p 272) but not necessarily synonymous (Rumble 1991; p 72, Keegan 1996; p 28). This point is emphasised by Rumble when he makes the distinction between open and distance learning observing that:

...the values of openness have nothing intrinsically to do with distance education (sic) which is morally ambivalent (1991; p 72).

#### **Distance Learning**

For Rumble, distance learning is simply a means of provision, it is neutral and can be open or closed. The many definitions of distance learning would support this view. For example Verduin and Clark suggest that distance learning has four defining elements (see Table 2.1). Such a definition places emphasis on distance learning as a process and although

mechanistic it does give a clue to the appeal of open and distance learning, particularly in adult education. This is its potential flexibility in terms of the control both learner and teacher have over when to engage with the teaching technology. It is this flexibility,

- **The separation of teacher and learner during at least a majority of the instructional process.**
- **The influence of an educational organisation, including the provision of student evaluation.**
- **The use of educational media to unite teacher and learner and carry course content.**
- **The provision of two-way communication between teacher, tutor or educational agency and learner.**

**Table 2.1 Four defining elements of distance learning  
(Veduin and Clark 1991; p 11)**

coupled with its separation from what Cooper (1996; p 257) calls the tyranny of the institution, that offers a way of meeting the increasingly diverse demands being placed on individual learners, potential learners and on educational institutions to meet those demands.

## **Openness**

Openness, on the other hand, is a rather more theoretical and philosophically based concept. Keegan (1996; p 280) suggests that openness supports student centredness, widened access and equity and that it is possible to have distance learning following either an open or closed process. Indeed the idea of a continuum of openness has been suggested by Clark and Robinson (1994; p 259), with open pedagogy at one extreme and closed at the other. They argue that distance, flexible and conventional learning can each fall at any point along the continuum depending on the dominant philosophy informing practice.



To have any real meaning, according to Hedge (1996; p16), openness must include choice, for the learner, over how, when, where and what to study. For Paul (1993; p 116) the dimensions of openness include; accessibility, flexibility, learner control over content and structure and choice of delivery methods. Such a construct is of central importance because the view taken of openness has an inevitable influence on all that follows in terms of programme design, learner support, learning strategies, locus of control and academic administrative policies and procedures.

## **Summary**

The literature suggests that the concept of open and distance learning has a number of dimensions. On the one hand there is the theoretical and philosophical concept of openness (and its antithesis, closure). It is here that values such as accessibility, flexibility and student centredness are expressed and aspired to. On the other hand, there is the more process-orientated distance learning. This is a means of educational delivery which, because it provides a way of placing the control of space and time in the hands of the learner, offers one method by which openness can be realised. However, it is a question of degree, and this brings the discussion back to openness and closure and the extent to which either of these fundamental concepts might be applied to a particular form of educational delivery. It has been argued (Lippiatt 1997; p 157) that the justification for distinguishing between forms of education has grown weaker over the past twenty to thirty years and he wonders if:

....the use of the relative term 'open' to an educational system continues to be justified; and whether the very significant amount of open and distance learning which students have long since undertaken in so-called traditional delivery has not been conveniently overlooked (ibid; p 157).

Of significance here is the increasing convergence of distance and conventional teaching and learning (Tait and Mills 1999; p 1) in which a clear demarcation between open, distance and traditional methods is now more blurred and increasingly less important.

# The Characteristics of Open and Distance Learning as Forces for Change

The literature provides insight into a number of issues concerning open and distance learning that arguably represent major forces for change at both individual and organisational levels. For the purposes of this analysis three have been identified, based on their significant implications for practice. These are questions about locus of control, issues surrounding the notion of the independent learner and the effects on the professional practice of teachers and administrators inherent in the industrial model so closely associated with open and distance learning.

## Locus of Control

The changes in practice that are part of the development and implementation of open and distance learning have a number of far reaching consequences. For example, the discourse-surrounding locus of control exposes many sensitive issues concerning the roles of teacher and learner. Traditionally, education has relied on the expertise of the teacher to deliver a canon of specialist knowledge within a system that is teacher centred, and teacher dominated, in terms of control. Discourses of open and distance learning challenge this traditional view. At one level, the control teachers have over their own specialist practice is weakened. For example, according to Henri and Kaye (1993; p 26), the pedagogic process in open and distance learning is rarely the sole endeavour of one teacher. The learning material is usually the work of several specialists working collaboratively. Henri and Kaye assert that:

...the person responsible for creating the course is thus placed in a situation where he must submit his work to be commented upon, criticised, restructured and transformed by the expertise of other specialists.....distance education can thus become the fruit of compromise, of happy or unhappy adjustments and of arbitrary decisions that are never desirable in a context of co-operation and collegiality (ibid; p 26).

This concern is, perhaps, representative of the cultural shift away from the single subject specialist toward collaborative teams that are, according to the literature, increasingly part of the production of open and distance learning materials.

At another level, and perhaps of greater significance, the very nature of open and distance learning and how learning packages are written and structured make it possible (Lewis 1995; p 33), to learn without constant recourse to the teacher. Thus the teacher's role and relationship with the learner changes, exchanging the transmission model of teaching for a constructivist, collaborative model of learning (Moran and Myringer 1997; p 62). Social constructivism, which lies at the heart of much distance learning, is based on a view of learning (Vygotsky 1962) that sees the learner constructing new conceptual frameworks through interactions with their environment, their fellow learners and the facilitative interventions of the teacher.

The particular appeal of social constructivist approaches to learning is their usefulness in linking theory to professional practice and their emphasis on the learner as an independent and equal partner in the learning process (Aldred 1996; p 85). Tait (1989; p 312), suggests this can happen only if the learner is actively supported to bring his or her own experience to bear and thus exercise some influence and control over the learning process.

Collaboration such as this is suggestive of a change in the traditional power relations of the educational transaction between teacher and learner and serves as a pointer to the extent of change necessary for many teachers, learners and others involved in open and distance learning.

But what of the teacher and the learner? As far as teachers are concerned Lewis (1995; p 34) paints a positive picture suggesting that open and distance learning will free them from, what he calls 'mere content delivery'. He argues that this will have the effect of enhancing their role rather than diminishing it. This enhanced role, as he sees it, will be more properly concerned with issues central to the future of higher education such as greater access and student autonomy. Lewis readily admits that many teachers don't see it this way. He reports on an extensive consultation exercise (Lewis 1995; p 34) at the University of Humberside, which for a 'new university' reveals very traditional concerns. These are mostly to do with issues like falling standards, stifled innovation leading to a reduction of learning methods and fears of de-skilling by removing teaching staff from the centre of a university education.

From the perspective of the learner, Edwards (1997; p 129) identifies two contrasting discourses in an attempt to clarify the positioning of the adult learner in open and conventional learning. These are the 'adult-as-student' and the 'adult-as-learner'. He sees the adult-as-student as being part of an institution with a sense of belonging that is important in establishing a status-conferring identity that provides a defensive boundary against conflicting demands on their time such as family, job and peer pressure. This is seen as important for enabling the student to successfully organise their studies, a major problem for many adult, part-time students.

For the adult-as-learner no such boundary exists. The focus is shifted from being a member of an institution to being an independent learner and the contrast, according to Edwards (1997; p 130), could not be more stark, with the learner:

...having to find his/her way through the complexity and ambivalence of the contemporary period (ibid; p 130).

Edwards sees, in the notion of adult-as-learner, a shift in emphasis within which greater responsibility is being placed back onto the individual to fight for their own space to learn. This can produce increased anxiety regarding the experience of open and distance learning as an adult but it is especially problematic when attempting to place a boundary around a learning space and having to defend it against other demands.

Thus, open and distance learning systems challenge the traditional locus of control in adult education. For the teacher it brings about a radical realignment of their role from a focus on the individual to one that emphasises the importance of the team, and from almost total control over the learning process to one of facilitator in a process that is learner centred. For the learner the focus shifts from being a member of a dynamic academic community within an institution to being an independent self directed learner. For both it can create conditions in which they each feel less certain about their respective roles and about their own identities.

## **The Independent Learner**

Open and distance learning is often viewed as being synonymous with independent learning and is, invariably, a feature of the rhetoric that promotes this mode of study. This inherent independence can be an advantage however, and Field (1994; p 6) identifies the privacy afforded by open and distance learning as being very attractive to some learners. He cites the importance, to some, of the myth of effortless achievement, the illusion of which is only possible because of the isolation afforded by open and distance learning. However, within open and distance learning systems there is a fundamental structural difference from so called conventional approaches, the importance of which, according to Peters (1996; p 51), cannot be overstated. Conventional teaching is predominantly oral whereas most open and distance learning is predominantly technically mediated (this includes paper based learning materials). For Peters the effects of this are profound:

It has destroyed the natural basis of social interaction and communication that so far has been and still is considered a most important pre-requisite of any education (ibid; p 52).

Such concerns about the independent nature of open and distance learning are common in the literature. For example, Kirkpatrick (1997; p 163), in writing about flexible learning in Australian higher education, warns that while independent learning can be seen as positive, teachers must guard against viewing it simply as a means by which learners are sent away to learn on their own.

A broader perspective is taken by Tait (1994; p 29) who sees the move toward increased independence in learning as part of the changing social trends which have, to some extent, contributed to the mainstreaming of open and distance learning in education. He cites Lord Young of Dartington's view that the move from bus to car and from the cinema to television is a reflection of the individualisation of society, and that the move toward open and distance learning, where home rather than the classroom is the place of study, as mirroring this shift.

The potential problem here is that individualisation is in danger of being confused with individualism. As Johnson (1998; p 4) points out, the two are not the same. Individualism suggests independence, freedom of action and emancipation whereas individualisation can

suggest enforced separateness, of being alone. Thus the literature reveals the importance of recognising that the danger of an uncritical adoption of a focus on the individual and independent learner, particularly as open and distance learning becomes more popular, could act to isolate and marginalise individuals. The primary concern of those involved in the delivery of open and distance learning, Aldred (1996; p 63) suggests, must be to reduce the effects of real, physical and psychological distance between the institution, teacher and learner

## **Industrialisation**

The final characteristic that has an impact on practice is the industrial, or Fordist, nature of open and distance learning. Henri and Kaye point out that:

...the innovation of distance education does not consist in presenting students with new content but rather in organising the delivery of education outside the constraints imposed by traditional systems. To achieve this, the preparation of courses is subjected to rational and systematic planning, as well as to an industrialised or partially industrialised production system (1993; p 27).

An industrialised system has been characterised by Raggatt (1993; p 23) as one producing a limited range of standardised products, mass production methods, automation, a segmented workforce responsible for fragmented and specialised tasks and centralised and bureaucratic hierarchical control. Cost effectiveness derives from long production runs and a consequent reduction in labour costs. The Open University, at least according to Raggatt (1993; p 23), is just such an organisation, mass-producing its courses with production runs of up to four or five years.

Otto Peters identifies a close similarity between distance education and Fordist methods (Peters 1983). In later work (Peters 1989; p 6) he argues that this not only relates to the production of courses but also the actual process of teaching and learning. What he means is that the interaction between teacher and learner through the medium of the learning material is often based on a stimulus-response methodology.

Thus open and distance learning has been labelled as a form of instructional industrialism (Evans and Nation 1989; p 245). This is because it is founded on theories of learning,

(behaviourist theories), that are favoured by educational technologists and which can treat learners and teachers as passive receivers and distributors of information. In open and distance learning, according to Peters (1993; p 100), the teaching process is broken down into discrete processes and is always mediated through some form of technology, be it paper or electronically based. Such mediated teaching, warn Henri and Kaye (1993; p 27), by definition, takes a formal shape. The subjective speech and comments of the teacher in front of a class of students are clearly eliminated. Because of the absence of this alternative subjective view of the objective conceptual structures contained in the learning materials, there is a danger that the learner will learn only facts and will fail to develop as they should.

Despite improved technology that has broken new ground in learning support, the difficulty open and distance learning continues to come up against, according to Henri and Kaye, is:

....of reproducing the dialogue that enables students to be critical and personal in their learning. Students should be able to enter into exchanges in order to understand, criticise, adapt and finally use the knowledge that has been given to them and which they have made their own (1993; p 28).

It is here that teachers involved in open and distance learning need to adapt their practice and develop new skills and a depth and breadth to the support they are able to give, particularly in the feedback learners receive. For example Price (1997) argues that what is important about the support offered to distance learners is the way in which the teacher focuses upon the facilitation of learning by the learner rather than information delivery by the teacher.

To return to the Fordist nature of production that has dominated much, if not all, open and distance learning over the past 35 years. Jarvis (1996; p 48) argues that when considering open and distance learning it is necessary to situate it in contemporary society. When doing this it becomes clear that a Fordist model is ill equipped to respond to the changing requirements of both individuals and employers. Edwards (1994; p 162) argues that in contemporary society Fordist strategies are running out of steam and that flexibility is now the watchword in terms of labour processes, methods of production, products and patterns

of consumption. This requires a post-Fordist form of work organisation, based on a flexible customised design to fill the gap left by mass production. To do this Sharratt (1997; p124) suggests 'batch production' rather than 'mass production' is what is needed, where small runs provide a flexibility that is difficult to achieve with mass systems of production.

## **Open and Distance Learning and Higher Education**

### **(Issues of quality and the technological revolution)**

My purpose here is to move this review of the literature on from the characteristics associated with traditional applications of open and distance learning to the implications associated with the technological revolution in higher education. Over the past few years the place and contribution of open and distance learning and the use of technology in higher education have become increasing topics for discussion. Such discourses, in the literature, are important to this thesis because they are likely to have influenced the perceptions of the range of people involved in the case being studied. Central to the debate, on the one hand, is the notion of openness and whether or not such a philosophy has a place in higher education. On the other hand, there is the question of quality and whether distance learning, as a process of delivery, can have built into it the rigour of 'conventional' programmes of study and offer an experience for distance learners equivalent to their on-campus contemporaries.

Daniel (1997; p 4) argues that the rapid development of open and distance learning, and associated technologies, over recent years appears to have threatened quality and the perception of quality for two main reasons. First, open and distance learning still tends to be associated with the early postal correspondence courses that had low status and a reputation for poor quality. Second, he contends that applying technology to higher education challenges traditional notions of quality more profoundly than applications of technology in other fields.



These two related, but possibly antagonistic, elements of technology and traditional notions of quality might be said to have brought higher education in the UK into crisis. This crisis has its origins in the university's traditional monopoly over the ownership of knowledge; a monopoly based on the linear process of knowledge creation, ownership and transmission (Mc Nair 1997;p 29). This 'ivory tower' view of higher education has,

- **The shift from an elite to a mass system of higher education provision.**
- **The blurring of boundaries between institutional sectors by the disappearance of the binary divide.**
- **The transformation in the nature and size of the institutions within which teacher's work and the changing working relationships this entails.**
- **The reduced emphasis upon the work of individual teachers in favour of work produced in teams.**
- **The rapidly changing technological, economic, political and social contexts within which educational institutions operate.**

**Table 2.2 Five interrelated processes of change in higher education  
(adapted from Campion 1996; p 148)**

according to Campion (1996; p 148), been systematically weakened by five interrelated processes. As a consequence, the traditional idea of what represents quality in higher education is placed increasingly at odds with the prevailing reality. These interrelated processes are given in Table 2.2.

Inescapably bound up with these interrelated processes are the far-reaching effects of the information and communication technological revolution. These effects are succinctly described by Campion:

We are being swirled around within unpredictable, rapid and powerful transformations which have implications of incomprehensible proportions for all sections of society, including education (1996; p 148).

Such technologies, and the accompanying changes pressing in on higher education, have brought with them what some have described as the post-modern challenge to education (McNair 1997; p 29, Usher *et al* 1997; p xvi). This challenge highlights changes in the perception of learning and knowledge and indeed the very purpose of education. Edwards (1994; p 166), referring to the work of Lyotard (1984), sees the rationalist and humanist discourses of knowledge regarding the pursuit of truth, liberty and humanity being replaced by the post-modern condition. This, by contrast, emphasises the efficient performance, or performativity, of the system as the primary purpose of education. The change in the nature of knowledge that this implies is important because it could suggest that the institution of the university is at risk of losing its traditional place in society.

McNair (1997; pp 29-36) identifies four post-modern challenges to the traditional concept of higher education. These are the knowledge based economy, the learning organisation, globalisation and lifelong learning. Essentially, the ramifications of these challenges are that higher education must come to terms with, and respond to, the need for a lifelong demand for an increasingly complex and competitive knowledge market on an individual, organisational and global scale. It is a market based on technology and operates within a context that sees knowledge creation, ownership and transmission as being situated as much outside the university as within. Like McNair, Drucker (1993) contends that educational institutions will no longer hold a monopoly on education and argues that:

....subjects may be of rather less importance than students' capacity to continue learning and their motivation to do so. Post-capitalist society requires lifelong learning (ibid; p 201).

Indeed, universities have, increasingly, become partners with the corporate sector to make provision in the workplace, in the home and in schools. It is argued (Evans and Nation 1996; p 171) that it would be impossible to open up education in this way without making connections to open and distance learning.

Two fundamental elements arise from this analysis. The first is that two very old corner stones of the university have been weakened; the notions of academic community and personal knowledge. The second is the apparent inadequacy of the traditional university model to meet the challenges facing it. These challenges are not insignificant and to many represent a shift in the balance of power away from teachers and the idea of the university as the centre of learning to the wider community and the consumer of education. At the centre of this shift are part-time adult learners, who, because of their specific needs, especially if they are distance learners, require a move toward a more learner centred, service orientated provision (Sewart 1993; p 7). For some in higher education, change of this kind is a frightening and unsettling prospect. Baldwin for example, suggests that such a transition is synonymous with a process of colonisation, which he exhorts:

....may bring with it all the destructiveness of any colonising movement – a wholesale usurpation of customs, structure, values and perceptions (1994; p 125).

Such challenges, according to Daniel (1996:p 6), call for university renewal based on technology. Bates (1995; p 17) sees technology as an opportunity to teach differently and in a way that can meet the fundamental needs of a new and rapidly changing society. However, Bates recognises that part of the problem in effecting change lies in the explosive nature of the technological revolution in education. He demonstrates this by plotting the development of new technologies in teaching up to 1980 and since. See Table 2.3.

Change of this magnitude has brought with it the rapid and powerful transformations described by Campion (1996; p 148) above. Teachers across higher education, including nursing and midwifery, have found themselves going through a process of de-skilling and re-skilling, emerging as facilitators of learning (Bates 1995; p 233) rather than providers of information. For Bates such a facilitating role will increasingly concentrate on

developing the skills of navigating knowledge sources, and the skills required to process and analyse information.

Development	Years in operation	
Teacher	3000	} Prior to 1980
Book	500	
Postal service	150	
Radio	60	
Film	50	
Television	20	
Audio cassettes		} Since 1980
Video		
Telephone teaching		
Computer-based learning		
Viewdata		
Teletext		
Video discs		
E-mail		
Computer conferencing		
Internet		
Computer-based multimedia		
Remote interactive data-bases		
Virtual reality		

**Table 2.3 The rate of technological change in education  
(Adapted from Bates (1995; p 29))**

For Laurillard (1993; p 4) such rapid change represents an unprecedented challenge to the traditions and values of the profession of university teaching. It is as a response to this changing world that Laurillard (1993) seeks to find ways of redefining the role of the academic teacher to meet the demands of technology. She argues that, in the context of technology based learning, of which open and distance learning can be one form, there is a need to rebuild the organisational infrastructure of the university in ways that will find a

‘fit’ between the academic values that need to be preserved and the new conditions of teaching and learning (ibid; p 4). To do this she returns to first principles and describes the essence of academic learning as:

....different from other kinds of learning in everyday life because it is not directly experienced, and is necessarily mediated by the teacher. Undergraduates are not learning about the world directly, but about others’ descriptions of the world, hence the term ‘mediated’ (ibid; p 5).

It is to the question of how teachers are to perform this mediating role that she addresses herself. Central to her approach is what Daniel (1996; p 106) calls an ‘idealistic commitment to take responsibility for the students learning’. Crucially, she sees the teacher as remaining at the heart of a learning process that recognises the special character of academic knowledge central to which is a dialogue between teacher and learner. Table 2.4 sets out the four key elements of the teacher’s mediating role.

*Discursive* – teachers and students must agree learning goals, make their conceptions accessible to each other, and give mutual feedback.

*Adaptive* – the teacher should alter the focus of the dialogue in the light of the emerging relationship between their own and the students conception.

*Interactive* – the student must act to achieve the task goal and the teacher must provide feedback so that something in the world changes as a result of the students action.

*Reflective* – the teacher must help students link feedback on their actions to the topic goals at every level.

**Table 2.4 Key elements of a teachers mediating role. (Adapted from Laurillard 1993; p 94)**

What is clear, from the work of Laurillard, Bates and Daniel is that the role of the teacher and approaches to teaching and learning are changing and will continue to change. Indeed the character and configuration of higher educational providers have already changed to

include open and distance learning in many conventional universities. Perhaps most revolutionary is the concept of the e-university, in which collaboration between universities creates a network of a number of existing campuses electronically. What appears certain is that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is the prospect of the home and the workplace becoming more significant as sites of education. This does not mean the sudden demise of the university but rather recognition that economic, political and social changes are occurring that require alternatives to campus-based education (Evans and Nation 1996; p 168). At the heart of this changing context is open and distance learning. It is a form of pedagogy that can function on or off campus and has the potential to provide learning opportunities across the full range of educational points of access including the home and the workplace, the primary sites, according to Evans and Nation (1996; p 175), of the lifelong learner.

## **Policy Trends in Nurse and Midwifery Education**

In this section I briefly trace the policy decisions that led to the integration of nurse and midwifery education into higher education to locate the case study in its socio-political context. Integral to these policy decisions was the changing relationship between the hospitals (Trusts) and nurse and midwifery education providers and consequently the role of each in the educational transaction. Central to this changing relationship has been employer led demand for more flexible educational programmes. This has meant a cultural shift for all concerned, especially nurse and midwifery education.

The election of a conservative government in 1979 brought in its wake the greatest change to the social policy of this country since the introduction of the welfare state in 1947. Major reforms were introduced within local government, housing, education and the National Health Service (NHS). As far as the NHS is concerned the vehicle for change was the White Paper, *Working for Patients* (DOH, 1989a) and the reforms it advocated were enacted through the *NHS and Community Care Act (1990)*. This introduced now familiar, but then strange, terminology to the provision of health care, for example; internal market, purchasers, providers, G.P. fund-holding and so on.

Historically the education and training of nurses was the responsibility of District Health Authorities (DHA) and according to Humphreys (1996a; p 656) followed an essentially 'in-house' model. This meant, at one level, that the staff of schools of nursing and midwifery were employed by the DHA, directors of nurse education were accountable to nursing service managers and the pre-registration students were themselves employees of the DHA. At another level it revealed often very close working relationships between the hospital and 'their' school. Indeed the term 'school' was often used as an all-encompassing descriptor to include the clinical areas as well as the institution that represented the place of study. Central to this was an education system based on an apprenticeship model, with minimal theoretical input and with students forming an essential, and inexpensive, part of the workforce. In this way nurse education was viewed as an integral part of the NHS (Gough 1992; p 90).

The recent history of nurse and midwifery education reform is complex. It can perhaps best be categorised as an ongoing tension between the professions wanting control over the education of their members, and a central government more concerned (perhaps understandably) with reforming the monolithic NHS, of which the education of nurses and midwives was but a small part. The professional rhetoric surrounding nurse and midwifery education reform attributes its genesis to the desire of the professions to enhance educational standards by breaking with the traditional employer controlled apprenticeship model and placing education under the control of educationalists. Thus emerged Project 2000, in the case of nurse education, with its more theoretical base, and its supernumerary and bursaried students. In addition, and central to the reform, students worked towards a diploma of higher education that, by definition, required a closer working relationship between nurse and midwifery education institutions and universities.

This professional control over education was to be short lived and effectively came to end with the publication of a tenth working paper relating to *Working for Patients* (DOH 1989a). *Working Paper 10* (DOH 1989b) proposed a devolved approach in which Regional Health Authorities (RHA) working in consultation with employers (NHS Trusts) would have the main funding role for both pre and post registration nurse and midwifery education. What this meant for nurse education was nothing short of a dramatic reversal of

fortune (Gough 1992; p 91, Burke 1994; p 381, Humphries 1996a; p 664). The balance of control had moved away from the professions and back to the employer.

The outcomes of *Working Paper 10* have been enormously significant for nurse and midwifery education. Humphreys (1996b, 1289) points out, for instance, that with the new NHS Trusts split off from DHAs and education funds routed through RHAs the position of district colleges of nursing and midwifery became anomalous. DHAs found themselves faced with a conflict of interest by providing education services, funded by Region, for NHS Trusts from which they were purchasing health services. The solution lay in the close links already established between colleges of nursing and midwifery and higher education institutions required by Project 2000. By 1995 all RHAs had decided that colleges of nursing and midwifery should be integrated into universities, a process completed by April 1996. This meant that colleges of nursing and midwifery were now detached organisationally, financially and legally from the service providers whose workforce they educated. In effect this created a new market, distinct from the internal market of the NHS, but arguably created as a consequence of it, in which the providers of nurse and midwifery education became increasingly located outside the NHS (Humphreys and Quinn 1994; p 7).

Since *Working Paper 10* was published, RHA's have been abolished forcing the DOH to rethink how the funding of nurse and midwifery education would be managed. Total devolution to NHS Trusts was ruled out because of the need to maintain at least a regional view of workforce planning (DOH 1994; p 18). In its place employer consortia, responsible to a Regional Education and Development Group (REDG), became the favoured option and was implemented by April 1996 (EL (95) 27 1995; para. 15).

Consortia are responsible for purchasing all non-medical education and training which includes nursing and midwifery. They comprise representation from NHS Trusts, purchasing authorities, GP fund-holders and social service authorities. They function as operational budget holders which means they not only have influence over student numbers but also quality, admission policies and fitness for purpose (Humphreys 1996b; p 1289). It is through this mechanism that decisions regarding the supply of qualified nurses and midwives are taken as close to the point of service delivery as possible. This is a



principle that was central to the NHS reforms, thus ensuring that such decisions are responsive to local needs and to the changing requirements of the employer (DOH 1991).

Of crucial importance to this thesis are the concrete aspects of the various changes which were introduced into the NHS and impinged directly on the provision of nurse and midwifery education. From these policy developments, two principal foci of discussion can be located in the literature. First there is the debate surrounding professionalism versus managerialism and how this influenced the market and second, the relationship between service providers, the Trusts, and nurse and midwifery education institutions.

As indicated above, *Working Paper 10* constituted a shift in the balance of control over nurse and midwifery education away from the professions toward the employer. This was achieved through the simple device of placing the purchasing power with the consortia thus giving them effective control over the money supply of educational institutions and therefore, their solvency (Bailey and Humphreys 1994; p 98). Furthermore, Humphreys (1996a; p 665) points out that *Working Paper 10* implicitly questioned the ability of the National Boards to 'maintain professional competencies', a point which was achieved simply by contrasting standards with competencies, leaving the former with the professional bodies but giving responsibility for the latter to the employers. This was seen as significant because it forced the professionally dominated statutory bodies to keep in touch and in line with the needs of the employers rather than attending just to the desires and aspirations of the professions. This led Burke (1994; p 38) to warn of the general concern among the professions that managers would not be content with simply negotiating student numbers but would soon dictate course content as well.

Thus the introduction of *Working Paper 10* provided a means by which the education and training of nurses, midwives and other professions allied to medicine, could be influenced so that the operational and strategic needs of the employer (the Trusts) would be met. Indeed, Baily and Humphreys (1994; p 98) argue that purchasing through consortia gave the Trusts much greater influence over education than is typical of other types of employer whose education is conducted by higher education institutions.

The relationship between the purchasers and providers of nurse education is principally concerned with how professionalism and managerialism manifest themselves. At the heart

of the debate is what Salvage (1990) calls 'new nursing'. Essentially this is a view of the nurse, which is based on the values of adult education, holism and humanism (Hewison and Wildman 1996; p 757). Yet this new nurse had to operate in a context dominated by managerialist principles. There is a tension here. At a time when nursing as a profession had achieved an educational base in higher education in which the merits of research, reflection and life-long learning were becoming a reality, the requirements of the purchasers were, according to Humphreys (1994; p 151), being seen increasingly in terms of their utility value alone.

For example, work carried out by Humphreys (1996c) identifies that NHS Trust chief executives saw the reformed NHS as a competitive environment in which corporate Trusts operated as businesses. A key element of this new world was what they considered to be *their* version of the 'new nurse'. They saw nurses making up a flexible, adaptable workforce, a different type of practitioner who was able to fit better into the skill mix changes that would inevitably prove necessary in the new NHS.

This view of the purpose of education contrasted sharply with the professional imperative to provide an education that conformed to standards and norms set by the profession and which prepared the nurse and midwife to be autonomous, thinking practitioners, and responsible and accountable professionals. Bailey and Humphreys (1994; p 100) recognise that in order to reconcile this difference a profound shift was required of nurse and midwifery education. In time this shift would see nurse and midwifery educators move from their traditional position as 'guardians of the professions' to education professionals in contemporary higher education working constructively with their clients, students and learners.

The context of the NHS remains dynamic, not least because of a change to a 'New Labour' government. Nurse and midwifery education, along with the education of the professions allied to medicine, has continued to be the subject of scrutiny. During this period professional concerns about managerial influences on education have, seemingly, been redefined. This redefinition now stresses the link between the education of nurses and midwives to the effective provision of health care in its widest sense. This is seen as an important principle both by the government and the professions and is clearly highlighted in the UKCC report *Fitness for Practice* (UKCC; 1999) and in recent

government publications, for example *Making a Difference* (DOH; 1999) and the new government white paper *The NHS Plan* presented to Parliament in July 2000 (DOH; 2000).

This white paper advocates measures to widen and ease access to professional education programmes and to offer more flexible 'stepping off points'. It also stresses the importance of collaboration between both education providers and NHS consortia to ensure best use of resources as well as to promote inter and multi professional education to break down long established barriers and hierarchies. It emphasises the need to extend the roles of nurses and midwives and other health care professionals and for a still more adaptable workforce that will require innovative forms of educational provision such as accredited workplace based systems of learning (DOH 2000; p 85). Such post modern imperatives, and the initiatives necessary to tackle them, are clearly mirrored across the wider higher education sector, an increasingly important part of which is the flexibility possible through open and distance learning (Bates 1995; p 25).

## **Summary**

From the discussion so far it is possible to see that open and distance learning is not necessarily a panacea for the problems facing society and higher education in general and nurse and midwifery education in particular. From the point of view of the learner there are considerable advantages to do with openness of what, when, where and how to study. There are also potential difficulties associated with independence, control over the boundary of their study time and the levels and quality of the support they receive.

For the provider of education, advantage is to be found in its apparent potential for squaring the circle of meeting the demand for increased student numbers with a diminishing resource. These advantages are offset by issues of learner support, changes to the locus of control and the threat to the unique experience of a traditional university education. Central to this analysis is the issue of access to higher education and the part open and distance learning, and increasingly the convergence of such innovations with conventional teaching and learning, plays in widening that access. Of particular significance is the changing face of higher education as it struggles to adapt to the

information and communication technological revolution and the implications this has for the role of teacher, learner and the institution of the university.

It is as part of this melting pot of change that nurse and midwifery education now finds itself. These are, without doubt, exciting, dynamic and demanding times for this relatively new member of the higher education community. It must grapple with its own changing situation and, at the same time, be influenced by changes that affect the sector as whole. In the context of open and distance learning Brown (1997; p 183) suggests that such changes involve inescapable issues concerned with culture, roles and values.

## **PART TWO**

### **Organisational Culture**

Part one of this chapter has identified a number of fundamental aspects of open and distance learning and information and communication technology that can bring change to individual and collective practices. However, the scope of this type of innovation involves the altogether deeper considerations of culture, referred to by Brown above. For example Moran argues that:

...university distance learning methods and information technologies are converging with classroom strategies to create what will be a substantially different and exciting educational environment. In so doing they present intriguing challenges to deeply embedded norms and values to organisational systems, structures and cultures  
(1997; p 171).

Those aspects of organisational culture that could influence the innovation will be the focus of this part of the chapter.

# Defining Organisational Culture

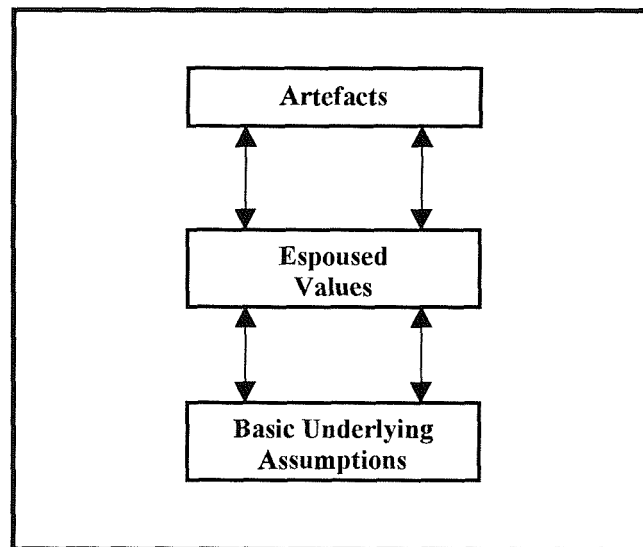
Finding a common definition of organisational culture is problematic because of the number and variety to be found in the literature. As an example of the range of definitions on offer Robbins (1990; p 438) cites a selection varying from 'the dominant values espoused by an organisation' and 'the way things are done around here' to 'the philosophy that guides an organisation's policy toward employees and customers'. These overtly functional definitions contrast sharply with that put forward by Ogbonna (1993) who defines culture as:

....the intertwining of the individual into a community and the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one known group from another. It is the values, norms, beliefs and customs that an individual holds in common with members of the social unit or group (ibid; p 42).

This view of culture clearly places it at a much deeper level of functioning. Indeed, levels of culture are a significant element of the debate and are a notion elaborated by Schein (1997; p 17) who identifies three such levels that have a reciprocal influence on each other (see Figure 2.1). At the most superficial level the artefacts of the organisation can be found, the visible structures and processes. At the middle level are located the organisation's espoused values, strategies, goals and philosophies and at the deepest level of all lie the basic underlying assumptions which Schein describes as the taken for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings within an organisation's social structure. They tend to be those assumptions that individuals do not confront or debate and hence are extremely difficult to change (ibid; p 22).

But what is organisational culture? For an answer to this it is necessary to examine the metaphor itself. The use of metaphor, that is seeing one thing in terms of another, has long been employed as an aid to understanding organisations. Perhaps the two most commonly used, and best known, are machine and organism. The image of an organisation as a well-oiled machine conjures up images of efficiency and effectiveness. More to the point perhaps, machines can usually be fixed when they go wrong and even whole parts replaced for new if necessary. Seeing an organisation in terms of an organism underpins

systems theory with its focus on interaction with the environment, modifications to boundaries and even adapting complete systems to new ways of working for the good of the whole. The notion of culture, however, suggests something altogether deeper and more complex.



**Fig 2.1 Levels of culture (adapted from Schein 1997; p 17)**

Organisational culture is described as a social construction (Krefting and Frost 1985; p 155) borrowed from anthropology that the literature conceptualises in a number of ways. Four such conceptualisations are identified as being of particular relevance to this thesis. The first involves slotting institutions into pre-defined categories based on their functional, cultural type (Trowler 1998; p 24). An example of this, in the context of higher education, are Bergquist's 'four cultures of the academy' that he identifies as 'collegial, managerial, negotiating and developmental (1992; pp 4-5).

The second conceptualisation views culture as a kind of social glue that holds an organisation together (Smircich 1983; p 344; Siehl 1985; p 344; Meyerson and Martin 1987; p 624; Schein 1997; p 303). This glue (another metaphor) can take many forms and

operate at any level. It is apparent at the level of beliefs, values and basic assumptions, but also at the more superficial levels of process and structures and by symbolic devices such as myths, rituals, stories and legends (Masland 1985; p 159, Smircich 1983; p 344) and folk heroes (Masland 1985; p 161, Morgan 1997; p 150).

The third conceptualisation sees culture as a way of providing a framework for solving problems and interpreting events in everyday life. According to Krefting and Frost (1985; p 155) culture acts as a ready made source of referencing thus reducing, to a more acceptable level, the number of variables with which individuals must deal. In this way it serves to lessen anxiety and reduces ambiguity in what can be a hostile world. Culture in this sense is unconscious; it is part of what Morgan (1997; p 143) describes as the mindset, vision, images, beliefs and shared meanings of the group.

Finally, culture is seen as a product of an organisation's history, of its accumulated experiences and of the lessons learnt in trying to survive. This experiential learning helps to develop what is valued and what is assumed. The organisation learns from what works for it. The lessons learnt are embedded in the culture, which in turn reinforces the successful pattern, which in turn strengthens the culture and its norms, and so the cycle continues.

Viewing culture in this way is fundamental to this discussion in that it internalises the concept of culture and brings into focus the notion, put forward by Smircich (1983; p 347) that culture is not something an organisation *has* but is something an organisation *is*. This provides a significant shift in understanding because it moves away from the instrumental view of the machine metaphor and the adaptive view derived from the organism metaphor, to one by which organisations are seen as particular forms of human expression and consciousness. The inference to be drawn from this is that managing and changing the culture of an organisation, or even aspects of it, is far more complex than might at first seem.

Such conceptualisations of organisational culture suggest that, in general, they provide a context in which particular strategies of work are developed, sustained and preferred over time. In this sense cultures comprise beliefs, values, habits and assumed ways of doing

things among communities that have had to deal with similar demands and constraints over a number of years. Culture, therefore, carries the community's, or group's, historically generated and collectively shared solutions to new and inexperienced members.

## **Subcultures**

It is important to be cautious when studying organisational culture because the literature can give an impression of integration and portray organisations as homogenous and consensual with a single dominant culture. An alternative perspective, and one which perhaps better reflects the reality of higher education, is proposed by Martin et al (1985; p 101) and casts organisations as umbrellas for collections of sub-cultures. It emphasises differentiation, not integration, with organisations being seen in terms of heterogeneity, lack of consensus and being made up of nested sub-cultures. In a similar way Nord (1985; p 194) rejects the glue metaphor, referred to earlier, as a rather static conception of culture that under emphasises the intrinsic tension existing between the various sub-cultures of an organisation. Instead he uses magnetism as a more informative metaphor, thereby accommodating the possibility of repulsion of the parts as well as attraction.

In the context of higher education, Trowler (1998; p 30), refers to a mix of influences that make up the culture of an institution. He argues that individuals may identify primarily with the organisation as a whole, with some sub-unit of it or with their wider professional group. Added to this are the cultural characteristics of gender, class, ethnic group and so on. Thus, higher education institutions, Trowler argues, have very permeable cultural boundaries that result in a dynamic mix of individuals and groupings. Becher (1989; p 33) refers to this as the 'intricate Byzantine world of academia' in which tribal tensions range across sub-cultural borders based on disciplinary boundaries (Tierney 1996; p 9).

A more conciliatory view is put forward by Robbins (1990; p441) who contends that sub-cultures in large organisations generally tend to share core values but also have additional values unique to members of the sub-culture. This is borne out by Costello (1993) in his study of organisational cultures and distance learning. Using the Open University (UK) as his source of data he identifies three broad sub-cultures. These are the creative areas, the operations and administrative divisions and the regions, the latter being mainly



responsible for learning support. Costello (1993; p 5) found significant cultural differences between each of them but also found that all were substantially influenced by the overarching culture of the university as a whole.

The work of Costello is of interest for another reason that has important implications for this thesis. He argues that the common conception of educational organisations as being loosely coupled (Weick 1976) is not appropriate for the Open University (UK) with its emphasis on the delivery of open and distance learning. Weick defines loose coupling as:

...conveying the image that coupled events are responsive, *but* (italics in original) that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness (1976; p3).

Costello (1993; p 9) argues that loose coupling enables so-called conventional universities to carry out their business most effectively. However, this form of structural relationship does not easily transfer to the complexities of open and distance learning in which the creative, administrative and learning support areas must communicate and function closely, and synchronously, if the learner's needs are to be effectively met. He goes on to argue (ibid; p 10) that, in contrast to other universities, the OU (UK) is highly interdependent particularly at the level of the three main sub-cultures.

An important lesson that can be extrapolated from Costello's work is that it is the interdependence between the key components of any distance learning unit, be it at the OU or a small unit within a conventional university, that is arguably the key to its success. Costello argues that in the field of distance learning the sub-cultures must communicate and share mental models for the whole to operate effectively (ibid; p 10). For this to be realised he suggests that sub-cultures need to function within a closely coupled system while maintaining their own unique identity.

## **Can Organisational Culture be Changed?**

Organisations change physically and culturally, all the time. When they can no longer change they will, almost inevitably, cease to exist. They change for a variety of reasons

and it is probably accurately summed up by Robbins (1990; p 442) as an organisation's effort to remain effective. In this sense effectiveness is seen as being contingent on the requirement that an organisation's culture is aligned to its strategy, environment and technology. Robbins argues that it is the mark of a successful organisation that it invariably achieves a good external fit between its culture, its strategy and its environment, and a good internal fit between its culture and the technology it uses. It therefore follows that change within an organisation can be prompted by any number of variations in the environment in which it operates and with the technology it uses. What remains central however are the complex dynamics of the organisation's culture, its collective response to these changes and how this response is managed.

But how is culture changed? Tunstall writing about major cultural transition at AT&T gives a clue to how it might be possible:

....culture within the corporation is difficult to pin down, nearly impossible to quantify or measure and remarkably resistant to change.....but the culture can be positively influenced by consistent, thoughtful managerial action (1983; p 17).

There are a number of strategies in the literature that reflect the eclectic mix of perspectives held about the nature of culture and its management within organisations (Silverweig and Allen 1976; Tunstall 1983; Siehl 1985; Hendley and Hope 1994). A dominant theme is change achieved through managerial, top-down, intervention that sees culture as 'simply another lever available for management to pull' (Trowler 1998; p 29). Of particular interest to this thesis, however, is the work of Schein (1997) on learning cultures and learning leaders. Its relevance lies in Schein's argument that the learning leader does not, and cannot, know all the answers and that in order to build a learning culture:

....they must teach others to accept that they do not know (and that) the learning task is then a shared, collaborative, responsibility (Schein 1997; p 367).

Underpinning this is Schein's view (ibid; p 375) that what is really happening, especially where change is targeted at a specific area of the organisation (for example a sub-culture),

is not culture change as such, but the creation of a new culture within the overarching, unchanged, culture. The effects of this are not only that such an approach challenges existing ways of doing things within the sub-culture but it may also have implications for the organisation's culture as a whole. It is important to bear in mind that these existing ways of doing things, these cultural assumptions, are the product of past success. As a result they tend to be taken for granted and strongly held.

The implication of this, for Schein, is that learning leaders must recognise that they have a role in not only creating culture, but also a responsibility for embedding and developing that culture. They must, therefore, adopt strategies that not only ensure the commitment and inclusion of members but that are also sensitive enough to recognise and deal with the anxieties that will result from the cultural identity of members being in flux or challenged. Learning leadership, according to Schein, is concerned primarily with the management of complexity, contradictions and the emotional investment that members have in what they do and the organisation within which they do it. It is about admitting uncertainty as individuals and as a group and being willing to experiment and accept errors as ways of learning. It is without doubt concerned with:

...making it possible for learning leaders to admit that their vision is not clear and that the whole organisation will have to learn together (Schein 1997; p 383).

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to place this thesis in its theoretical context and to identify from the literature, together with the historical and contemporary contexts explored in chapter 1, a number of foreshadowed issues upon which to base the research questions. To achieve this it has been necessary to divide it into two related parts. The first part has explored open and distance learning, what it is, its characteristics and the impact these characteristics can have on an educational institution and its members. An important element of this is the debate surrounding the increasing use and continuing development of open and distance learning in higher education. This includes the central, and contentious, question of quality and the use of information and communication technologies. Very

much connected with questions of quality and technology, and also discussed in part one, are the changes to the practice of academics and administrators, that the introduction of open and distance learning brings and the effects these changes have. This chapter has also focussed on the place of nurse and midwifery education in this rapidly changing context so providing a further background for the case study.

The contention of this chapter is that the implementation of open and distance learning can never be simply a question of changing administrative procedures and the daily practice of teachers, although these are important elements of the change process. It goes much deeper than that. Such change can represent challenges to practices that are deeply held by individuals and constitute part of the basic assumptions and belief systems of the organisation and its sub-cultures. A possible consequence of this is that even if at first these challenges affect only a few core people in a very specific area, they may cause cultural ripples disproportionate to the size of the change.

Because of this cultural dimension the literature on the cultural aspects of organisations and change has been reviewed in Part two. The primary purpose of this has been to place the implementation of open and distance learning into the realities of the cultural milieu. This is important because without such insight it is difficult to establish effective contextualisation. For example, Schein argues that the essence of the organisational learning process is to:

...give organisational culture its due. Can we as individual members of organisations and occupations as managers, teachers, researchers, and, sometimes, leaders recognize how deeply our own perceptions, thoughts, and feelings are culturally determined (ibid; p 392)?

The significance of this, for this thesis, lies in its recognition that culture can be managed and changed positively through collaborative learning, an important consideration when implementing an innovation such as this.

# The Research Questions

Taking chapters 1 and 2 together, and basing the selection on the work of Yanow (1990) which is discussed more fully in chapter 3, a number of foreshadowed issues have been identified that are particularly relevant to this area of study. First, there are the changes to practice necessary for the successful introduction of open and distance learning. Second, is the potential influence of organisational sub-cultures on the programme of innovation and, given this influence, whether a collaborative approach to the management of the change is the most appropriate. Finally, there is the question of what would be the most effective organisational structure for the ongoing management of open and distance learning within the Institute. From these foreshadowed issues, four questions were constructed, each focussing on the experience of change at the Institute of Health Sciences. These are:

- In what ways does a collaborative approach to the introduction of open and distance learning operate in my institution?
- What form of academic and administrative structure is required to support open and distance learning?
- How do individual practices change when open and distance learning is introduced?
- What cultural and sub-cultural reactions take place when an innovation such as open and distance learning is implemented?

The next chapter will explore the methodological approach taken to address these four questions.

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# CHAPTER 3

## *METHODOLOGY*

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The purpose of this Chapter is to explain, discuss and justify the methods used in this study. The study focused on social practices at a time of innovation and change and was directed by the assumption that all human action is meaningful only if it is interpreted and understood within the context of those social practices (Usher 1996 (a); p18). As such it was rooted firmly in the qualitative paradigm in that it followed an interpretative, naturalistic path to illuminating the case. In the first half, this chapter presents a justification for the use of a qualitative approach, why case study was selected as the most appropriate strategy and the research design. The second half focuses upon the importance of a reflexive account, the place of the self in qualitative research and the trustworthiness and ethical integrity of the study.

### **A Qualitative Approach**

The innovation was introduced within an organisational and cultural setting that both shaped behaviour and provided a frame of reference that helped individuals to make sense of the changes taking place. As such, the innovation, and the individual's interpretation of it, were context and culturally bound. Therefore, to understand the individual's interpretations of their changing context it was necessary for me, as the researcher, to carry out my own interpretations of their already interpreted world. It was a process of double sense making (Usher 1996 (a); p 19) in which the participants and I were involved together.

A significant characteristic of this double sense making was that it took place against a background of assumptions, beliefs, practices, norms and traditions that formed the

working culture of the Institute of Health Sciences. Because an important focus of this study was how organisational culture could shape behaviour, and the place of culture in the interpretation of that behaviour, my understanding of the notion of double sense making was of methodological importance. It enabled me to recognise how actions were immersed in, and inseparable from, the network of culturally conditioned beliefs, practices and assumptions that were integral to the Institute. It was, therefore, important for me to recognise that while participants in the research may have been conscious of the intentions of their actions they might not always have been aware of the cultural background within which the action had meaning. As Usher (1996 (a); p 20) points out; 'individual actions viewed in isolation from the context in which they occur have little meaning'. I saw my role, therefore, as not only to represent the world of the participant as they saw it but also to place their experiences within an organisational context about which they might have been largely unaware. To achieve such a level of interpretation of the participant's experiences and the degree of flexibility necessary to reflect the multi-focal nature of the research questions, I selected a qualitative approach because, according to Denzin and Lincoln it would allow me to:

... study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (1994; p 2).

As mentioned above, the questions that guided this study cover a number of foci from collaboration, cultural and sub-cultural effects on change, to organisational structures and change of practice. In order to address these disparate, but interrelated, areas of interest I decided the most appropriate strategy was case study.

# The Case Study

## Why case study?

As alluded to above, case study was selected as a strategy because it provided a structure for telling the story of the implementation of open and distance learning by using data from a number of sources. As a form of naturalistic enquiry, it has become increasingly common in education over the past twenty or thirty years (Hammersley et al 1998; p 1). The popularity of case study, according to Yin (1994; p 3), rests on it being a form of study that allows an investigator to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events. Of particular importance for me was that I could immerse myself in the culture and sub-cultures of the Institute (Levine 1980; p 201) and learn what the realities of life at the Institute *meant* to people (Walker 1978; p 38). It therefore provided an ideal means by which to explore the ongoing processes of the innovation over a period of time. Also important was the eclectic nature of case study (Yin 1994; p 8) and its ability, as a strategy, to deal with a variety of data including documents, interviews and observations.

## The strengths and weaknesses of case study

Beside those obvious strengths outlined above, I was influenced by the work of Adelman et al (1976; p 59) who identify a number of strengths of case study research that had particular relevance to the purposes of this study. These strengths are set out in Table 3.1. As for weaknesses, Yin (1994; p 9-10) identifies four principle examples. The first is its perceived lack of rigor as a research strategy. This he puts down to poor technique and research design that allow the conclusions of the study to be influenced by equivocal evidence or biased views. The second concern is that case studies provide little basis for scientific generalisation because they are so often studies of a single case. Both these are important issues and will be discussed later in the chapter.

The third weakness, according to Yin, is that case studies that are associated with ethnography or participant observation take too long to complete and result in massive, unreadable documents. My own experience, gained during this study, was that prolonged involvement with the culture and environment in which the study was conducted was an



- Case study is ‘strong in reality’ and as such a reader of a case study is able to employ the ordinary processes of judgement by which people tacitly understand life and social actions around them.
- Case study can contribute to an archive of descriptive material that can be reinterpreted by subsequent practitioners and researchers whose purposes may be different.
- Case studies are a ‘step to action’. They begin in the world of action and contribute to it. Insights drawn from a case study can be interpreted and put to use within the organisation for staff development, other innovations, institutional review and policy making.
- Case studies, as reports, are more publicly accessible, in terms of language and presentation, than other types of research. Case studies may, therefore, contribute toward the democratisation of decision making.

**Table 3.1 Strengths of case study research  
(Adelman et al 1976; p 59)**

important determinant of the credibility of the data. This again, will be discussed more fully later. Finally, Yin suggests that a major weakness of case study is that almost everyone thinks they have the ability to do case studies when, in fact, they are very difficult to do well. I must confess I labour under no such illusion. I found that every step I took was a step toward discovering the complexities of this type of research. Nevertheless it is an experience I enjoyed, particularly the dual challenge of doing case study research and, at the same time, meeting the academic standards required of a doctor of education thesis.

## **What is the case?**

When attempting to define the case I turned to a number of texts for assistance. For example Stake (1994; p 236) sees case study as not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied. In other words what is important is that case study draws attention

to the question of what can be learnt from a single case. For Adelman et al (1976; p 48) a 'bounded case' is a given within which issues are indicated, discovered and studied so that a 'tolerably' full understanding of the case is possible. They suggest that a 'bounded case' has:

...a common sense obviousness e.g. an individual teacher,  
a single school or perhaps an innovatory programme (ibid; p 49).

This view is clarified further by Hammersley et al (1998; p 3) who differentiate between the case and the focus of the research. Focus in this sense is the general set of phenomena about which the study draws conclusions. Information to illuminate the focus, or foci, is gained by studying the case.

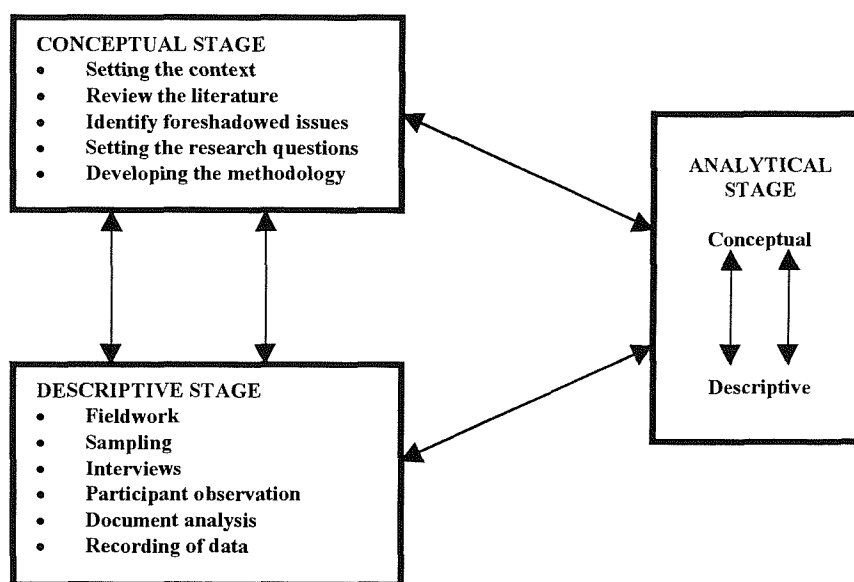
Based on this premise, the case in this study is the implementation of open and distance learning at the Institute of Health Sciences. The foci are the research questions, given in Chapter 2. By gaining information about the introduction of open and distance learning (the case) from a variety of sources and by using a mix of methods, I was able to illuminate the research questions (the foci) of the study.

## **The Design of the Study**

When designing this study I was influenced by the work of Wideen (1994; p 181) and the notion of seeing the research process as integrated stages. From this I constructed a model that involves three such stages, the conceptual, the descriptive and the analytical, each of which interacts one with the other (see Figure 3.1). My intention in making the design explicit is to show the sequence that connects the empirical data with the initial research questions and ultimately, the conclusions. Thus, at one level, it provided me with an 'action plan for getting from here to there' (Yin 1994; p 19), while at another, it gives essential information to the reader upon which to base judgements of efficacy and

integrity. As such, for Prosser and Schwartz, the overarching concern of research design is with:

...enhancing the trustworthiness of findings and the scope and clarity of the constructs developed. Research design translates epistemological principles into pragmatic decisions and explains the choices we make (1998; p 118).



**Fig 3.1 A three stage integrated model of research design  
(Adapted from Wideen et al 1994; p 181)**

## The Conceptual Stage

This stage involved two elements, setting the historical and contemporary contexts and the review of the literature, which comprise chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis. It was through this process that a number of foreshadowed issues were identified from the analysis of both contexts and from the characteristics of open and distance learning that emerged from the review of the literature. An important function of the conceptual stage, therefore, was to

develop, from these foreshadowed issues, the research questions set out at the end of chapter 2, and to design the most effective methodology for addressing them.

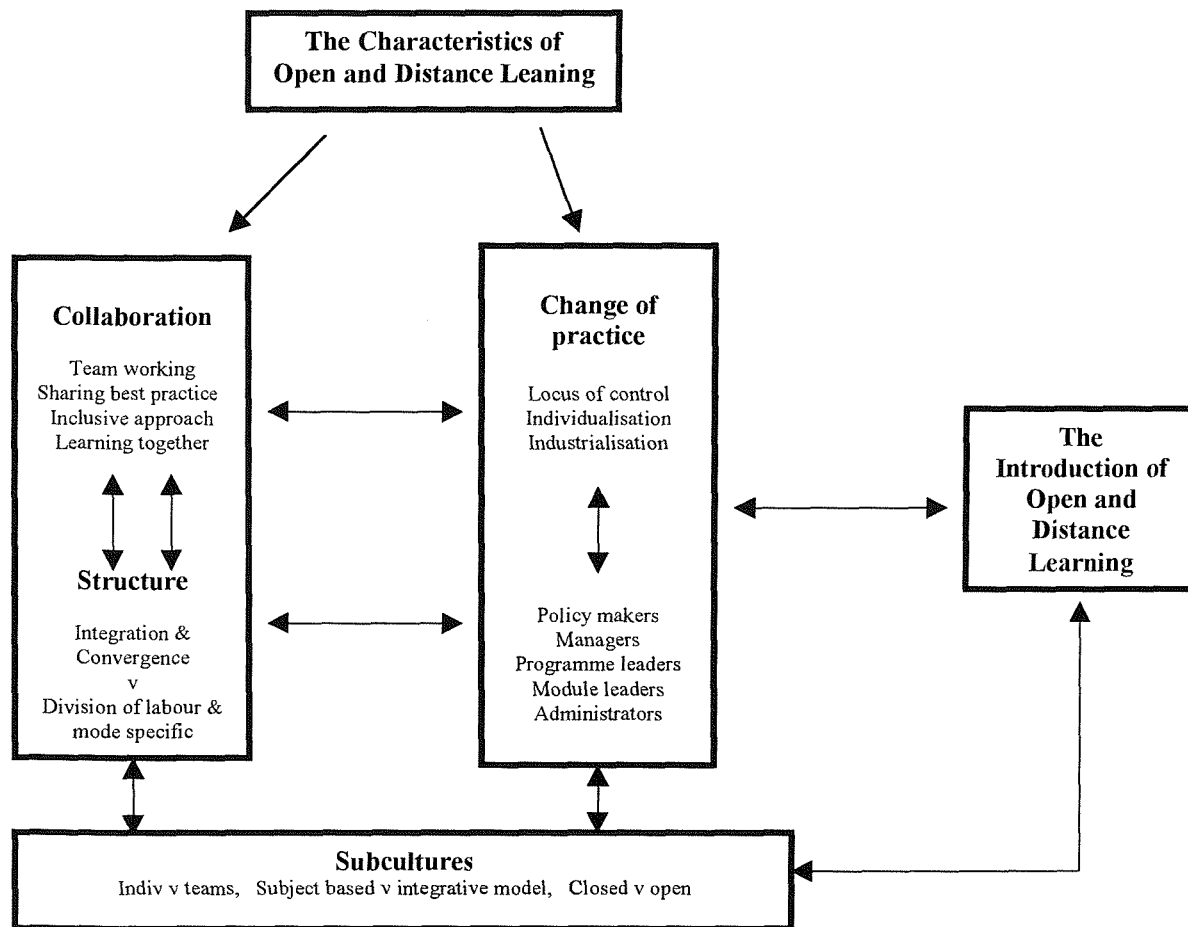
From these questions I identified a set of four 'analytic concepts' which served two important purposes. First they acted as signposts for the areas about which to collect data and second, they provided coding 'bins' within which to group data during the analysis stage. The four analytic concepts were, a) collaboration, b) sub-cultures, c) structure and, d) change of practice.

The identification of foreshadowed issues, and the analytic concepts, was a process that caused me some concern because of the obvious danger of imposing my biases on the selection. In order to reduce this possibility I based the selection on the work of Yanow (1990; p 213-226) and her valuable insights into the implementation of public policy. Yanow puts forward a model for the analysis of implementation research based on four analytic concepts that she likens to lenses. These are; human relations, political, structure and systems. For the purposes of this study I adapted Yanow's approach and used the notion of lenses, or perspectives, as a way of focusing on particular aspects of the implementation of open and distance learning. The lenses I selected were, therefore, based both on the foreshadowed issues and also on the contextualisation of Yanow's lenses. For example, *human relations* became *collaboration*, *political* became *sub-culture*, *structure* remained as *structure*, and finally *systems* became *change of practice*.

The initial conceptual framework is set out in diagrammatic form in Figure 3.2. It shows the relationship between the characteristics of open and distance learning, identified from the literature, and the four analytic concepts or lenses. The story of the innovation was constructed by gathering data, by interview, observation and documentary analysis, about the key areas of interest listed under each lens. These key areas of interest were also gained from the analysis of the literature and contexts and were selected based on their potentially influential effect on the programme of innovation. In addition, the change of practice box identifies categories of participants who would have to change their practice if the innovation were to be successful.

Considered overall, the exercise of piecing together the various elements of the conceptual framework, based as it was on the literature, provided important initial information upon

which to base sampling decisions and semi-structured/open-ended interview questions. It also served as a focus for my observations and document analysis.



**Fig. 3.2 A conceptual framework for the guidance of the study**

# The Descriptive Stage

The descriptive stage involved decisions about sampling, the collection and recording of data, including writing initial analytic notes in my field diary. The principle methods of data collection were semi-structured/open-ended interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis. The primary purpose of this stage was to enable me to obtain sufficiently rich data upon which to base interpretations that were recognised and accepted by those participating in the study.

## Sampling

Sampling was directed at gaining information about the four analytic concepts, or lenses; collaboration, structure, subcultures and change of practice. In this sense, the sampling strategy was conceptually driven (Miles and Huberman 1994; p 29), purposeful (Patton 1990: p 169) and related directly to the research questions. My aim was to interpret the implementation of open and distance learning by viewing it through each of the four lenses, or perspectives, mentioned above. Each picture could then be constructed, using interviews, participant observation and documents, to develop a representation of the experiences of the participants at different levels of functioning, at different times and in different places.

## The research participants

In order to gain a representative view of the innovation, data were collected from participants drawn from a number of different levels of the Institute. These information rich sources were people who occupied a range of roles that were involved in the innovation in some way, or were influential in the change process or, whose practice could reasonable be expected to change, as a result of the innovation. The participants were selected from the following categories: Policy makers, academic managers, programme leaders, module leaders, administration, materials development and support staff. A detailed profile of participants is given in appendix A. In addition to this purposeful approach to the selection of participants, opportunistic sampling was also used to follow

new strands of interest of direct relevance to the study. Figure 3.3 sets out the relationships between the participants.

### **Time sampling**

Data were collected between April 1998 and May 1999. This period formed the main focus of activity and included a variety of principal events. For example, systems development, materials development, programme development, programme validation and staff development took place mainly between April 1998 and October 1998. The delivery of the four programmes through at least one semester occurred between October 1998 and February 1999. And finally the period between February 1999 and May 1999 was used to review and reflect. I should point out that the events included in each time period were not as discrete as they might seem, all were dynamic and continuous and did not respect or adhere to time frames. However, these time frames were important because I wanted to capture data, particularly by participant observation, as the innovation was unfolding and not rely solely on experiences recalled in retrospect.

### **Event sampling**

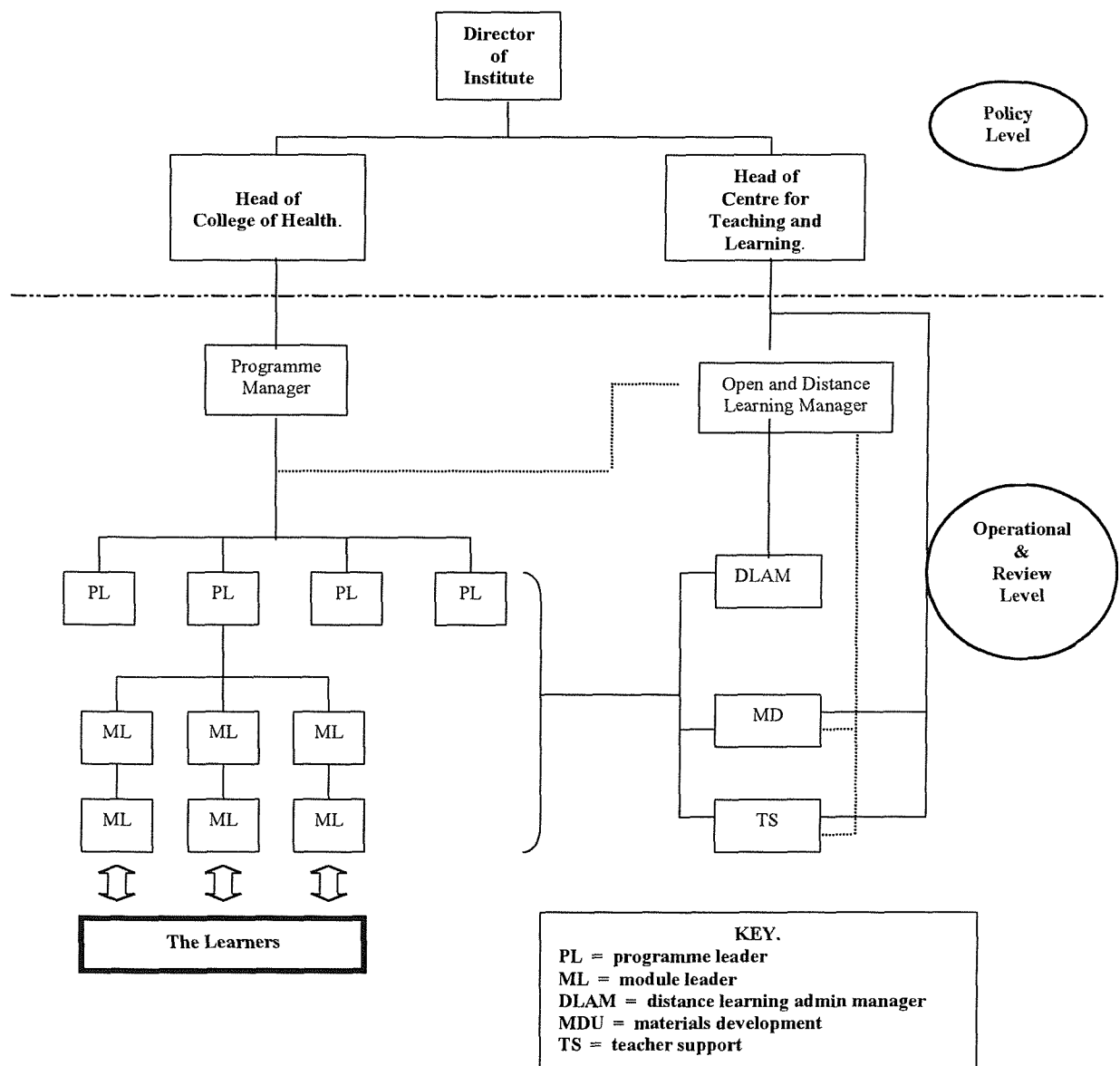
A number of key events were sampled during the time periods mentioned above. These fell mainly into three categories, policy events, operational events, and review events. These events provided opportunities to observe the story of the innovation across the full range of management, administrative and academic functions within the Institute.

#### ***Policy events***

Policy events included Institute Board meetings, College Executive meetings, Commercial and Marketing meetings, and Recruitment Committee meetings. I attended all of these as a member and obtained valuable data on the perceptions of the wider institute community regarding open and distance learning. Of particular interest was how these perceptions changed over time and how these related to the views and experiences of those actually involved in the practice of open and distance learning.

#### ***Operational events***

Operational events were sampled for the wealth of data they could provide about practical issues and changes in practice being experienced daily by those involved in the innovation. These events included all Institute Distance Learning Group (core group) meetings, staff development workshops, programme team meetings of all



**Fig 3.3 The relationship between the research participants**

four programmes (three per programme during the year) a selection of programme induction days (two during the year), programme assessment board meetings (one during the year) and distance education forum meetings.



### *Review events*

Review events were concerned with evaluating the innovation. Much of this took place as an ongoing process either as part of programme team meetings or at policy event meetings. However, a specific review event was programmed following the close of the first semester at which processes were reviewed and information to learners was improved and updated. It was, as well, an opportunity to draw breath and collectively reflect. This event provided valuable data about changes of practice and how these had an effect on programmes, modules and consequently the information provided to learners.

## **Data Collection**

As already mentioned, data were collected in three ways, by interview, participant observation and from documents and records. Figure 3.4 provides a time plan for the collection of data and identifies the principal sources.

### **The interviews**

A major source of data was from the fifteen participants using a combined semi-structured/open-ended interview approach. This combination was used to avoid over constraining the participants yet, at the same time, acknowledge the necessity of addressing specific areas of interest within the four lenses. Robson (1993; p 159) describes open-ended interviews as having no pre-specified set order of questioning with little or no direction from the interviewer. Given the need to address certain theoretically derived issues I decided this was too loose for my purposes. Yin (1994; p 84) on the other hand, suggests a form of structuring in which the open-ended interviewer can ask questions about the opinions, insights and perspectives of participants and about particular events. This appealed to me because it suggests a degree of pre-planning and at the same time allows the researcher the freedom to follow unanticipated strands of interest that may arise.

My goal was to gain from the participants their views, experiences, perceptions of, and attitudes to, the introduction of open and distance learning at pre-determined points of the process and from the perspective of each of the four lenses. To achieve this, interview guides were used. In addition, I also asked questions, extra to the interview guide, to

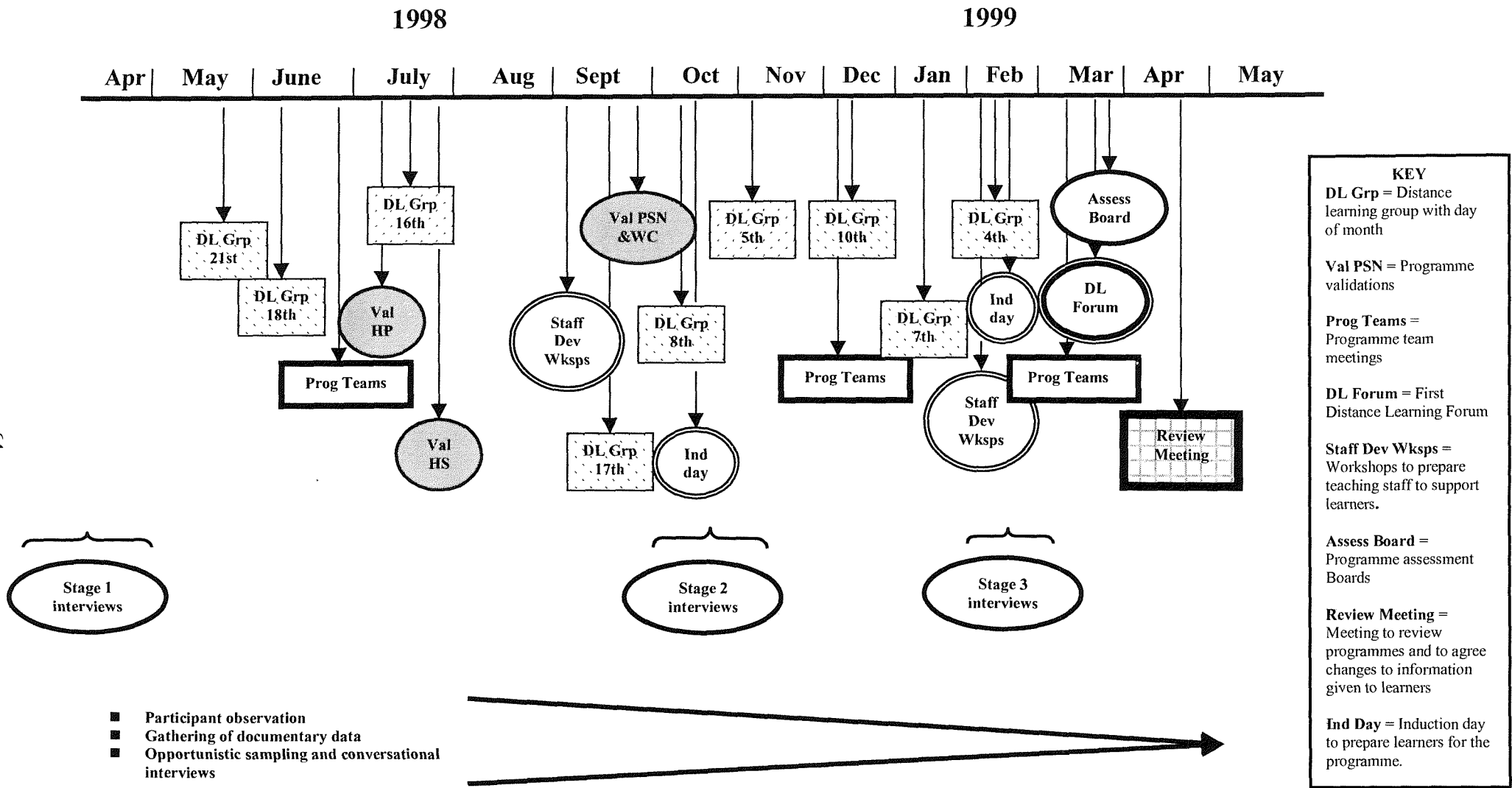


Fig. 3. 4 A time plan for the collection of data

confirm or disconfirm, or to gain views, opinions and perceptions of instances of interest identified from observations or documentary analysis. The semi-structured/open-ended interviews were carried out at three specific stages.

### **The first stage interviews**

The first stage interviews involved three senior managers (policy makers) during April 1998. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of their individual perceptions of open and distance learning and of the innovation about to be introduced. These interviews were based on the interview guide in appendix B.

### **The second stage interviews**

The second stage interviews were carried out with twelve participants who were operationally involved in the innovation and took place during late September and early October 1998. This timing was important because it formed the culmination of a great deal of hard work in preparing for the delivery of the first programmes that were to start on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1998. These interviews were based on the interview guide in appendix C.

### **The third stage interviews**

The third stage interviews were carried out at the end of the first semester in February 1999 and involved the twelve participants interviewed at stage two. Their purpose was to allow participants to reflect on their experiences at that stage and to express their feelings following the first full semester in which open and distance learning programmes had been offered. This marked the completion of a cycle of preparation, delivery and reflection. The interview guide given in appendix D guided the third stage interviews.

### **My interview approach**

My approach was very conversational and was concerned with gaining personal accounts. What was important, for me, was the idiosyncratic nature of a participant's perceptions and understandings that I could then represent as their part of the story. To achieve this I asked participants, prior to the second and third stage interviews, to reflect on their experiences between April 1998 to October 1998 and between October 1998 and March 1999 respectively and to make brief notes or prompts which they could refer to. To help

them participants were provided with a reflective guide prior to each interview (an example is given in appendix E).

This seemed to work well and certainly helped them to recall their experiences in a more reflective way. It also allowed us to cover a lot of ground more quickly and in more detail than might otherwise have been the case. My main concern with this approach, however, was that it could have made the interview too focussed on what I considered to be important and in danger of obtaining too uniform a response from the participants. I did however, make every attempt to ensure that the categories were broad enough to act only as an aide memoir rather than anything more directive. In the event, the individuality of the responses reassured me that my aim had been largely met.

### **The interview process**

The interviews themselves were pre-booked with each participant and I always travelled to the university site at which they worked. We usually met in a quiet room, sometimes a meeting room and sometimes a teaching room. It was important that we would not be disturbed and so I booked the room in advance. I also thought it important to meet on ground that favoured the participant. As all offices are shared with a number of others, a neutral venue seemed the most appropriate alternative. This also brings into question my own position and how my role within the institute might have affected the responses from participants, for example the participants telling me what they thought I wanted to know, or perhaps attempting to influence events for their own purposes. This is difficult to judge but in an attempt to reduce this I encouraged group involvement in this major change so that we worked in a collegiate, collaborative way. I promoted the sharing of opinions and truths about what we were doing and attempted to make the interviews, while still maintaining confidentiality, a part of this open process.

I tape recorded all interviews, after first asking for permission to do so, by using, as unobtrusively as possible, a small hand held recorder. I started the interview by asking them to introduce themselves with a short autobiographical account and to state how much experience they had of open and distance learning. I then asked the participant to tell their own story of their involvement in the innovation so far, using their notes as a guide if necessary. The interview was primarily their opportunity to talk. I prompted only to

encourage or to keep them on track. Some interviews, however became a two-way exchange with both the participant and myself contributing to the discussion. This only happened if the participant responded in a way that made it appropriate and which added to the quality of the data that was emerging. When all the areas on their prompt sheet and my interview schedule had been discussed to the satisfaction of both, I brought the interview to an end. The interviews generally lasted between one and two hours.

In addition, I used informal conversational interviews (Patton 1990; p 281) in an opportunistic way to pursue areas of interest that emerged from observations. As an approach, combined with participant observation, the conversational interview was a powerful tool in helping me to gain a better understanding of the meanings participants ascribed to what was happening.

## **Participant observation**

A significant source of data was participant observation, a primary data collection role in ethnographic studies and it proved to be important in this study.

Participant observation is defined as:

....a special mode of observation in which you are not merely a passive observer. Instead, you may assume a variety of roles within a case-study situation and may actually participate in the events being studied (Yin 1994; p 87).

Participant observation was important for two principal reasons. The first was that it provided a way of collecting authentic accounts and verifying ideas through empirical observation (McKernon 1991; p 63). The second was that it could help gain access to events and groups that might otherwise be inaccessible and to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone 'inside' the case-study (Yin 1994; p 88).

Participant observation extended over a period of one year between April 1998 and April 1999 during which time my role as participant observer was tied up with my 'insider' role of Distance Learning Co-ordinator, and later, Open and Distance Learning Manager. In this respect I experienced some conceptual difficulty in situating my 'insider' role with the 'outsider' component of the traditional participant observer. In many ways being an

insider helped, especially with regard to access and becoming one of the group. After all I was one of the group and I was the leader of the programme of innovation. In truth, my role changed as the study progressed. It ranged from leader of the innovation and member of a task-group, to colleague, manager, programme leader and researcher.

On reflection, what I was most aware of was a fear of losing my way as a researcher by becoming too 'at home' and so lose my critical perspective. My field notes reveal a number of references to my anxiety about forgetting my researcher role, and of not seeing the meaning of events and actions. This emphasised the need to be reflexive and to recognise that I was part of, rather than apart from, the world constructed through this study (Usher 1993; p 46) and to represent this by writing a reflexive account. In response to this I decided to take an open stance. I therefore informed everyone involved in the study about its aims and purpose and that it was to form my doctor of education thesis.

During the period of participant observation I was present at, and participated in, a number of formal, pre-arranged events. For example, I attended programme team meetings of all four programmes, I chaired Institute Distance Learning Group (core group) meetings and I attended College Executive and Institute Board meetings. I ran staff development workshops on supporting distance learners and facilitated Institute Distance Education Forum meetings. I also attended all programme validations of open and distance learning programmes and I had a number of informal and impromptu discussions with all levels of staff.

I also undertook opportunistic observations of instances of interest that were directly concerned with the questions guiding the study. However, I did have to guard against collecting masses of data that would later prove unhelpful and confusing. I found that even though I was constantly 'in the field' I had to consciously switch on and off my researcher role depending on the situation. At first this was extremely difficult because I was afraid I would miss something important. I quickly learned that pre-planning the week's, or day's, likely observation opportunities, depending on where my work diary placed me, (I still had a job to do), was a safeguard against collecting data of little use and reassurance that I couldn't be everywhere at once.

## **Document analysis**

The third major source of data was a variety of documents emanating from the Institute, the University, external agencies and resulting from the programme of innovation itself. The documents used as data included, notes and minutes of Institute Distance Learning Group (core group) meetings, Assessment Board meetings, College Executive and Institute Board meetings, Commercial and Marketing meetings, the Institute Bulletin, internal memos and other correspondence. Data were also obtained from documents that were produced as part of the innovation. These included module study guides, programme handbooks, the booklet 'Studying at a Distance' the module learning packages, procedural documents and evaluation documents.

Documentary analysis was included because of the usefulness of documents in developing an understanding of the context in which the innovation was introduced (Marshall et al 1995; 85). Equally important, according to Tayler and Bogdan (1984; p 120), is that documents lend insight into the perspectives, assumptions, concerns and activities of those involved and who produced them. However, the main focus of documentary data in this multi-method study was as a secondary, or supplementary, data source (Robson 1993; p 274). In this sense its primary function was for triangulation purposes.

## **The Management and Recording of Data**

### **Interview data**

All semi-structured/open-ended interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim into word-processed format (an example of a transcript is provided in appendix G). These transcripts, and notes I made during and immediately after the interviews, formed the basic interview data for analysis. I also found it invaluable to listen to the tapes as I was analysing the transcriptions. This refreshed my memory of not just what was said but how it was said. In this way I attempted to breathe some life into the emotionless pages of transcribed text. For clarity, quotations from interviews included in the text of this thesis are identified by a letter code representing the role of the interviewee e.g. PL for programme leader, ML for module leader. This is followed by a letter code for the programme e.g. HP for BSc (Hons) Health Promotion; and a numerical code indicating the

sequence position of the interview; 1 for April 1998, 2 for September 1998 and 3 for February 1999. Therefore a statement from an interview with the programme leader of the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion in September 1998 will be followed by the code (PL HP 2). A key to the coding system is given in appendix H.

Information from conversational interviews was written in note form at the time in a notebook and later transcribed into my field diary as part of the account of the day's observations. Conversational interview data are not coded in the thesis text in the same way as the semi-structured/open-ended interviews. This is because they form part of the detail of an observation and are included to explain or clarify my interpretation of an event or the illumination of behaviour in a particular setting.

## **The field diary**

From April 1998 to April 1999 I kept a field diary of my activities. Notes of my participant observation included anecdotal comments about interviews and descriptive notes of meetings and events. These notes were triangulated against data collected from other sources such as semi-structured/open-ended interviews and document analysis. The structure of the diary entries was based on the work of Burgess (1984) and involved making substantive, methodological and analytic notes.

I normally recorded brief notes at the time of the observation or conversation, or at least very soon after, in a notebook and then transcribed them into my field diary the same evening whenever possible. This transcription formed the *substantive notes* (SN). SN's were detailed accounts of the periods of observation and included, when necessary, direct verbatim quotes from participants.

*Methodological notes* (MN) were used to record my reflections on activities in the field. I did this by asking myself questions about my approach and the circumstances of the observation. The purpose was to identify problems with my technique as an observer, with the setting or with my interpretation of what I had observed, or thought I had observed. I also used MN's to make a note to pursue a particular issue further and to self critically record my personal reaction and feelings about a situation or aspect of behaviour. This was an important way of noting my own personal biases that might have affected how I



selected data for analysis, and therefore, for possible inclusion in the story of this innovation.

*Analytic notes* (AN) were ideas derived inductively from the data as the study progressed. They formed the preliminary analysis from which themes emerged. I usually made AN's as marginal remarks (Miles and Huberman 1994; p 66) which formed a process of initial coding. As the study proceeded I developed a system of placing AN's in the left hand margin and MN's in the right. The MN's often added a certain clarity to the AN's and proved useful in attempts to question, and knock over, my initial interpretation of events and helped identify alternative explanations. I found it useful to add a fourth type of note to those of Burgess, these were *reflexive notes* (RN). These notes acknowledged my part in the observation, occurrence or conversation and formed the basis for the constitutive reflexivity and introspection mentioned later in this chapter.

## **The Analytical Stage**

This stage was not discrete in chronological terms. Analysis was ongoing throughout the study and formed part of all three stages and, as such, it was the activity of analysis that brought the conceptual and descriptive elements of the study together. An essential part of the analytical process was the interaction, negotiation and re-negotiation of accounts, and my interpretations of them, with participants. My aim was to engage participants in discussion in order to capture their view of reality so that my interpretations would be based on what was relevant and meaningful to them.

### **Data Analysis**

My approach to the analysis of data was based on the work of Huberman and Miles (1994; pp 28-441) and involved identifying and coding patterns, or themes, identified from the data as part of an ongoing process of analysis. As such analysis began with my first field notes and continued as an iterative, cyclical, process of data collection and analysis between the participants and myself.

To begin with I identified four initial codes that were based on the analytic concepts identified from the foreshadowed issues. These codes were: *Col* (collaboration); *Str* (structure); *CP* (change of practice) and *Sc* (sub-cultures). Developing these initial codes gave me a set of 'bins' to which I could allocate all data including interview transcripts, field notes and documents. At this stage I was not concerned with the detail of the text only the general topic to which the text or instance referred. As the data collection phase progressed I began to group data from these bins into meaningful themes that offered some tentative explanation of what was happening (as mentioned earlier, part of this process involved writing analytic notes in my field diary). From these early attempts at explanation and sense making I identified a series of thematic codes to which I subdivided the data and within which initial connections were made between data from different sources. During this process I was able to note ambiguities, contradictions, or alternative explanations and to seek clarification, or confirmation, from participants. This meant sharing my initial interpretations with them and seeking their views.

In all, forty thematic codes emerged from the data (see appendix I). When developing these codes I was constantly aware of the sheer volume of data with which I was dealing. This represented a considerable problem in terms of handling, organising, sorting and coding. Given the time and word constraints associated with this study I decided to keep the number of thematic codes to a workable minimum which meant limiting the process of reducing the data. In defence of my position I cite the iterative approach I diligently employed that has resulted in a story that is both recognisable and real to the participants.

The final stage of the process involved a form of 'grand analysis'. This took place once all data collection was completed. I returned to my analytic notes and coded data and reassessed them in an overarching way. I stood back and took a 'grand' view of the whole. My purpose was to make connections where I had not previously done so and to construct interpretative statements by putting into words the essence of the data within each theme. I considered it particularly important at this stage, to expose my interpretations to the scrutiny of the participants and, based on these discussions, changes were made wherever it was agreed necessary. This iterative cycle was continued until the elements of a developed picture, or perspective, of each theme had emerged and could be represented as

part of the integrated story of this innovation. A schematic view of the process of analysis is given in Figure 3.5.

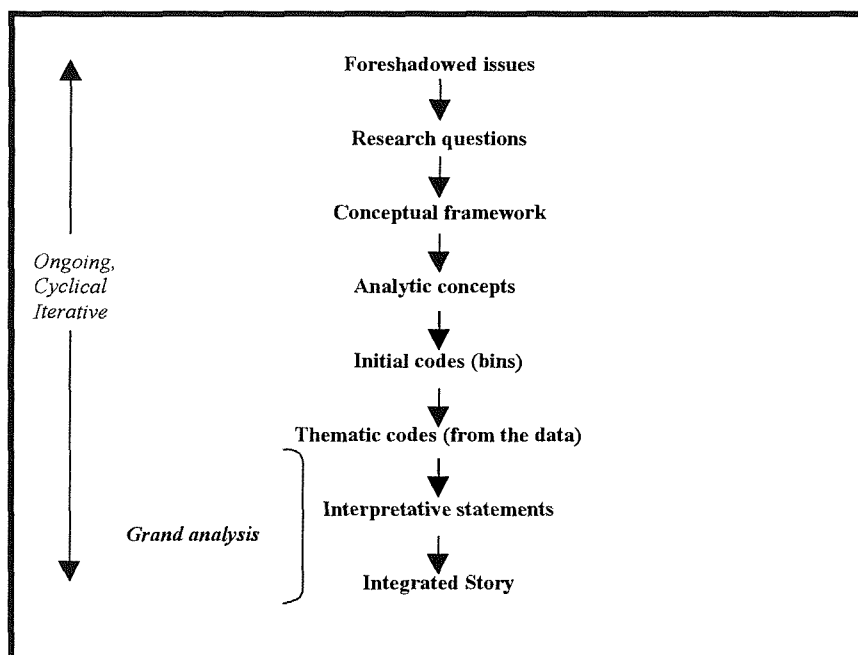


Fig. 3.5 The process of analysis

## The Trustworthiness of the Data

Issues of reliability and validity raised in connection with the quantitative paradigm are equally relevant in qualitative research though how one achieves them is often different. Lincoln and Guba (1985; pp 294-301) for example argue that the conventional concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity associated with quantitative data are inappropriate when dealing with qualitative data. Instead they propose the alternative constructs of; credibility, transferability, and confirmability which, they say, reflect more faithfully the assumptions behind the qualitative paradigm. These alternative constructs were used in this study and are set out in Table 3.2 together with the tactics

employed to achieve each of them. These are cross-referenced to the phase of the study in which the tactic was used.

Construct	Case-study tactic	Phase of research in which tactic used
<p><b>Credibility</b> <i>(construct validity)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Data and method triangulation</b></li> <li>• <b>Prolonged involvement</b></li> <li>• <b>Persistent observation</b></li> <li>• <b>Peer debriefing</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Data collection</b></li> <li>• <b>Data analysis</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Transferability</b> <i>(generalisability)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Thick description</b></li> <li>• <b>Naturalistic generalisation</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Research design</b></li> <li>• <b>Representation</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Confirmability</b> <i>(objectivity)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Constitutive introspection</b></li> <li>• <b>Constituent reflexivity</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Throughout the research</b></li> </ul>

**Table. 3.2 Tactics for ensuring the trustworthiness of data**  
 Adapted from Yin (1994; p 33)

The application of each construct to this study will now be discussed.

## Credibility

My goal here is to demonstrate that the study was carried out in a way that ensured that the case has been accurately described. Credibility is the parallel construct to construct validity and I used a number of techniques, identified by Robson (1993; p 402) to enhance the credibility of data. These include *prolonged involvement, persistent observation, triangulation and peer debriefing*.

*Prolonged involvement* refers to the investment of sufficient time to learn the 'culture', test for misinformation, build trust and go through the iterative procedures central to the design of this study. I spent a year collecting the data, which was preceded by a period of preparation in which access was negotiated at all levels and relationships established. An important point here is to recognise that I was a member of staff with several years experience of working at various levels within the organisation. I had therefore, an understanding of the social environment in which the study was carried out and had established a good working relationship with the participants over a prolonged period of time. Even so, such familiarity with the setting and the participants did have its disadvantages. I had previously been the line manager of most of those concerned, I knew their strengths and weaknesses and they knew mine. There were those who found my 'hands off', facilitative, management style difficult. Equally there were those who I knew would tell me anything they thought I wanted to know. In many ways this validates the importance of the principles underpinning prolonged involvement. Knowing and recognising these potential pitfalls enabled me to achieve a balance between being wise before the event and the dangers associated with premature cognitive closure.

With regard to *persistent observation* I was able to observe a range of situations over a prolonged period, from April 1998 to April 1999, so as to identify aspects and issues particularly relevant to the study. These were followed up either by interview or by seeking confirmation from other sources of data.

*Triangulation* according to Miles and Huberman involves:

...seeing and hearing multiple instances of it (the finding) from different sources, using different methods, and by squaring the findings with others with which it should coincide (1994; p 438).

As mentioned earlier, three principle methods to collect data were used; these were semi-structured/open-ended interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis. This combination was adopted as a predetermined strategy best suited to the task of addressing the research questions. By making comparisons between these sources of data triangulation forms an important part of the research design. The intention was, therefore,

to use the process of triangulation as an integral way of arriving at a valid interpretation of the data.

*Peer debriefing* (Robson 1993; p 402), involved exposing my analysis and interpretations to participants and colleagues on a continuous basis in order to confirm my understanding of situations that occurred. All interview transcripts and other data such as observation records, and my interpretations of them, were discussed with the participants to ensure that I had represented their meanings, understandings and experiences accurately, as they perceived them. I saw this as central to the credibility of the data because, as Walker (1978; p 45) points out, in case study research the researcher must attempt to capture and portray the world as it appears to the people in it. In this type of study what *seems* true is often more important than what *is* true.

## **Transferability**

This construct corresponds to external validity and generalisability and is important because a common concern about the use of case study is that it provides little basis for scientific generalisation (Yin 1994; p10). This, according to Walker (1978; p 34), is often seen as a fundamental problem of design associated with the study of a single case. Others, however, (for example Stake 1994), view attempts at generalisation, in the conventional sense, as diminishing what is the essence of case study research, the uniqueness of the case. He argues that cases are context bound as well as being social phenomena, and are likely to be the product of multiple causal processes that are specific to that context. As Stake warns:

Damage occurs when the commitment to generalise or create theory runs so strong that the researcher's attention is drawn away from features important to understanding the case itself  
(1994; p 238).

This inevitably raised questions in my mind about what Walker (1978; p 34) calls the usefulness of case study. A primary reason for carrying out this research was its potential for action and learning from that action. It is intended as an experiential exemplar from which others, in similar situations, might benefit. A search for a compromise led me back to the work of Stake (1978 & 1994) and the adoption of the notion of naturalistic

generalisation as the most appropriate form for this study. Stake differentiates between formal (scholarly, scientific) generalisation and naturalistic generalisation in the formation of knowledge and argues that:

Naturalistic generalisations develop within a person as a result of experience. They form the tacit knowledge of how things are, why they are, how people feel about them and how these things are likely to be later or in other places with which this person is familiar. They seldom take the form of predictions but lead regularly to expectation. They guide action, in fact they are inseparable from action (1978; p 6).

The key to the concept of naturalistic generalisation is that it is the readers of case study reports who must themselves determine whether the findings are applicable to their own circumstances and contexts. In this sense generalising ceases to be a problem for the researcher. It is the reader who must ask, what is there in this study that I can apply to my own situation? I therefore see that my responsibility as researcher is to represent the study in a way that captures the attention by providing a description that is sufficiently 'thick' to allow the reader to assess the degree of similarity between the case and their own context. In this way I have not avoided the question of generalisation but, as Stake (1994; p 243) suggests, I leave it to others to 'take my case and to use it in other situations and at times yet to come'.

## **Confirmability**

Confirmability is concerned with judgements and claims about the adequacy and transparency of the research process and the relationship of the role of researcher to that process. Best suited to rendering explicit the nature of this relationship is, according to Prosser (1998; p 104), the reflexive account.

### **Reflexivity and the self in the research**

The question of my subjectivity is central to this thesis because I am undeniably an integral part of the change that it describes. The story is as much my own as it is the story of others and the practices that have changed have also been my practices. Therefore, my understanding of the subjective nature of qualitative enquiry was important for the trustworthiness of the data. This level of understanding was greatly aided by the work of

Henwood et al (1993; p 24) who argue that because of the social nature of naturalistic research the research process inevitably shapes the object of enquiry. Also influential were Denzin and Lincoln who argue that as part of this social process the researcher and the researched are inevitably interdependent and suggest that:

...any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed (1994; p 12).

My own particular lenses are, therefore, of central importance to the trustworthiness of the data and I now tell my own story of how, over the years, these were ground and shaped to focus and perceive as they did.

### **My own story**

I came to open and distance learning late in my career. Indeed, this was my first experience of it. When I was asked to take it on I was daunted but felt it would be a challenge. As I read and discovered more about this fascinating mode of teaching and learning I realised that much about it reflected my own beliefs and values about education and management. I come from a working class family in which the ethos of self-improvement was strong. However, the school system to which I was exposed was traditional and in common with many of my peers I left, aged fifteen, with no qualifications. Many took up apprenticeships while I joined the Army. As a result all my further and higher education qualifications have been obtained as an adult, part-time, student while, at the same time, managing a full time job. This imposed many restrictions on when and where I could study especially when I was still in the Army and serving overseas. My attempts to obtain academic qualifications were, as a consequence, intermittent and often disrupted. On reflection, I suppose it is hardly surprising that the more I discovered about open and distance learning, and its potential for widening access and opportunity, the more I felt I wanted to be involved.

I am aware that my approach to management and the beliefs I bring to it were shaped by my formative development in the Army. Central to this was the importance of the team, a clear understanding of each member's role, their interdependency, and a commitment to what the team was trying to achieve. I retired from the Army some sixteen years ago and



inevitably left that rigorously regimented system behind but I have tried to retain from it what was good. For example, I believe that individuals acting collaboratively within a well-defined, but not confining, structure are enabled to act more effectively but also more creatively as individuals. The importance of the team for me is the support it gives and the opportunity for learning through sharing, reflection and discussion. I have always seen my role as manager to provide leadership and direction, in a strategic sense, but also to facilitate team building and manage the benefits, and difficulties, of collaboration. Looking back over the years I spent in the National Health Service and, more recently, in higher education, I have, almost unconsciously, used these basic values in my everyday work.

### **Confirmability through reflexivity**

Because of my close relationship with this study, and its participants, confirmability through reflexivity was a priority for me. My formative experiences, my commitment to collaboration and the sharing of best practice reveal the origins of the reflexive account that forms this thesis. My approach to constructing this account was, in turn, greatly influenced by the work of Peshkin (1988), Woolgar (1988) and Delamont (1992). At its heart is an understanding that reflexivity is more than simply an awareness of my subjectivity. Delamont (1992; p 8) refers to it as ‘a social scientific variety of self consciousness’. By this I took her to mean that in order to ensure the confirmability and validity of this study I had to acknowledge the interactions between the various forms of data and myself. Therefore, to carry out valid and confirmable research, I consistently, and self-consciously, described in my field notes and subsequently in this thesis, the interrelationships between myself, the participants, other sources of data, and the research process as a whole.

The processes that I favoured to underpin these interrelationships were important and, as I mentioned above, reflected my commitment to collaboration. These processes were constitutive introspection and constituent reflexivity. I coined the term ‘constitutive introspection’ from the work of Peshkin (1988; p 17) who argues that an awareness of one’s subjectivity (introspection) is not a bolted-on exercise satisfied by a one-off biographical account but one that should be present throughout the course of the study (constitutive). This was important to me because my dual roles of manager and researcher

and my closeness to the study might, according to Peshkin, have released personal characteristics that:

...(could) filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement (ibid; p 17).

To help understand my own biases, I attempted to make them obvious by adding constitutive introspective remarks to my field diary as reflexive notes (RN) when I wrote my field notes at the end of each day. By this means I made an honest, self-conscious, attempt to make *myself* aware of how I had arrived at *my* interpretations.

Closely related to this is my interest in the collaborative aspects of the notion of constituent reflexivity (Woolgar 1988). At its centre lies the principle of discursive construction (Usher 1996 (b); p 42) in which the representation, and what is being represented, cannot be separated because they are mutually interactive. Such a process requires a back-and-forth approach between the researcher and the participants (Woolgar 1988; p 22). This, for me, was very appealing as it provided the opportunity to test *my* biases by exposing them to the research participants. I did this at the same time as the peer debriefing I mentioned earlier. While the method for both was the same, the outcome was different. Whereas peer debriefing allowed me to check with the participants that I had represented their experiences and understandings accurately from their point of view, constitutive reflexivity provided me with an opportunity to ask myself *why* I had interpreted data in that way, especially if my perceptions and understandings differed from theirs. Once again my scribbles, that emerged from this ongoing process of analysis, formed reflexive field notes to be used later when writing up this thesis.

## Ethics

The rights of all involved in this study were an important consideration and I was careful to ensure that I explained and discussed participant's rights on an individual basis prior to their involvement. Such rights included the right to refuse to participate, the right not to

answer questions, the right to exit from the study at any time, the right to have access to the data, the right to confidentiality and the right to be informed of the ultimate disposal of any data. These rights have informed the ethical principles that guided me during the conduct of the study. These principles are set out in appendix J.

In practice I found I had to make choices and compromises between the idealistic application of these principles and the pragmatism necessary to achieve the goals of the study. Having said that, I was acutely aware that despite such compromises I still had a responsibility to act in ethically acceptable ways that took due account of the interests of the participants involved.

An example of such a compromise can be found in the overarching concept of 'informed consent'. As indicated earlier in this chapter I considered it an important precept of this study that it should be as open as possible and I have tried to reflect this in the ethical principles in appendix J. Each participant was provided with written and verbal details of the study, including acknowledgement of its academic purpose (my EdD thesis) and the ethical principles that set out their rights and guided my actions. At the start of the study participants were asked to consent to their inclusion in the study and, in addition, they were asked to give their consent prior to each interview. I considered this important because I wanted to emphasise that because the study was to form my EdD thesis it would eventually be in the public domain and that individuals, and indeed the Institute, might be recognised despite my efforts to conceal real names and identities.

In the event none of those invited to participate chose to exercise their right not to take part or to withdraw from the study. Equally the Director raised no objections to my conducting the study at the Institute. Indeed, the hope was that positive change in teaching and learning practices would be the outcome, thus benefiting all. However, it is important to point out that such conscientious application of the ethical principles was not always possible in every situation. For example, when first undertaking participant observation of meetings I diligently explained that part of my purpose for being there was to observe, to take notes and to collect data for my research. I was, perhaps, being over conscientious and in danger of testing the patience of the respective chairs, to repeat this at every subsequent meeting. As a consequence potential ethical problems arose because, in some

cases, not all members were present at the first meeting and, in others, membership of some committees and groups changed during the year. The result was that not all members of these committees and groups were aware of my researcher role or that they were participating in a research study. The ethical implications of this troubled me but the practicalities of the situation held sway. Indeed, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995; p 266) reassuringly point out that to attempt to apply ethical principles to every individual involved is not always possible, at least not without making the research highly disruptive.

Another consideration of note was my own position at the Institute and how this affected the relationship between the participants and myself in an ethical way. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995; p 273) point out that there is a danger that researchers investigate those who are less powerful than themselves, and for this reason are able to establish a research bargain that advantages them and disadvantages those they study. I attempted to counter any power differential by the open nature of the study. This enabled participants to contribute their views and challenge my interpretations. In practice this was aided by the collaborative nature of the core group where many aspects of interpretation were discussed. Participants were also given opportunity to question and to challenge on an individual basis. These two measures proved to be some of the most rewarding aspects of this study for me and, I hope, for the participants themselves.

My experience of conducting case-study research has emphasised the importance of the judicious application of ethical principles. However, the practice of such principles has been more complex than at first anticipated. As such I had to make a number of judgements about how best to relate to the participants in the field and how to construct a thesis that represents their world in a way that protects their interests while at the same time achieving the goals I set out for myself as the researcher. Burgess synthesises these ethical dilemmas when he argues that:

...fieldworkers are constantly engaged in taking decisions about ethical issues...they are involved in arriving at some form of compromise, whereby the impossibility of seeking informed consent from everyone, of telling the truth all the time and of protecting everyone's interests is acknowledged (1984; p 197).

I acknowledge such a compromise in this thesis but trust that this has not adversely affected colleagues or prejudiced the ethical principles of this study.

## Conclusion

This chapter has set out the methodology adopted in this study. I have justified the use of the qualitative paradigm and, in particular, a case study strategy with its eclectic approach to methods of data collection. These methods include open-ended interviews, participant observation with accompanying conversational interviews, and document analysis all of which were selected as being the most suitable to address the research questions that guided the study.

The three-stage integrated model used as a framework for the design of the research was presented, particularly its emphasis on the link between the methodology and the research questions. Also explained was how these questions were formed from the foreshadowed issues that developed from the review of the literature and the analysis of the historical and contemporary contexts. An important aspect of this chapter was how the conceptual framework was constructed and how the four analytic concepts were identified against which data were grouped and analysed. The analysis of the data has been an important element of this chapter. I have explained how, by grouping the data against the analytic concepts I was able to generate initial and thematic codes from which interpretative statements were subsequently written. It was these interpretative statements that formed the building blocks of this story. Equally important have been the measures used to ensure the trustworthiness, meaningfulness and ethical integrity of the study and these, therefore, have been addressed in some detail.

I turn now to what is arguably the most challenging component of case study, telling the story. Yin (1994; p 127) recognises that this phase puts the greatest demands on the case-study researcher. It is, however, the phase of greatest opportunity in terms of making a significant contribution to knowledge and professional practice. As discussed earlier, in order to tell the story of the implementation of open and distance learning the metaphor of the lens has been used through which it is possible to view a particular perspective, or picture, of the innovation. For example, collaboration is represented as a 'landscape', structure as an 'anatomical drawing' and change of practice as a 'portrait'. To use an old adage, 'every picture tells a story' and it is by collecting together the stories of these pictures that a better understanding of the innovation, as a whole, is made possible. The

picture seen through the sub-cultural lens, befitting its embedded nature, is represented as being integral to each of the other three stories and is told as a linking theme throughout. The next chapter illuminates the first of these pictures, collaboration, 'a landscape'.

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# CHAPTER 4

## *COLLABORATION* *(a landscape)*

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### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ways a collaborative approach to the introduction of open and distance learning operated at the Institute. As discussed in chapter 2, there is a view that open and distance learning can benefit from an operational structure that is ‘closely coupled’ (Costello 1993; p 9). The question is; to what extent does a closely coupled system take account of human relationships and the willingness and ability of the participants to work together effectively? As explained in chapter 3, I have looked at the implementation of open and distance learning through a series of ‘lenses’. In this chapter I tell the story of the implementation of open and distance learning as I viewed it through the collaborative lens.

I see collaboration as a landscape. Most obvious to the eye are its green fields. The detail of its steep hills, its lanes and byways, in which it is easy to loose ones way, remains obscured by distance. The fresh air of its uplands and the conflicts and tensions that are acted out by those whose place it is, are features that remain invisible to the eye and must be experienced first hand to grasp their essential characteristics. I attempted to capture the detail of this complex panorama by using a wide angled lens because of the need to include more than the relatively narrow concept of ‘working together’, if a representative picture was to emerge. The introduction of open and distance learning had far-reaching and fundamental implications for practice and therefore, issues of communication, inclusiveness, ownership and identification with the innovation formed important features of the landscape.

Of equal importance to the finished composition were its hidden aspects, alluded to above, which were made more complex by the context in which they were situated. Interview and observational data from this study suggest that there were a number of tensions with which efforts to collaborate had to grapple. I have identified these tensions as individual v community, boundary defence v right to roam and top down v bottom up. As will be explained, these tensions reflect what Becher (1989; p33) describes as the intricate, Byzantine (see chapter 2 this thesis) world of academia in which (similar to a landscape) nothing is as simple as it seems. But first, the beginning, the green fields.

## **Green Fields** **(Coming together to do a job)**

### **A View of Collaboration**

From the very start I realised that change of this kind would require collaboration. A short while after being asked to take the role of Distance Learning Co-ordinator I met with the Director of the Institute to discuss the way forward. My field notes for that day describe the meeting in some detail and my entry ends with three words ‘FORM A GROUP!’ (Field notes 11 March 1998).

At the time, my reasoning for favouring a collaborative approach was largely intuitive. By this I mean I realised that the change upon which we were about to embark would impact across all levels of the organisation and I reasoned such cross institutional innovation could best be achieved through the involvement of a variety of key people. This intuitive reaction was clearly influenced by a preference of management style garnered over many years in a variety of settings. For me, collaboration questions the logic of applying contemporary organisational management texts (for example Beckland and Pritchard 1992, Kotter 1996), that advocate culture manipulation by visionary leaders and a top-down management approach, to an organisation as sub-culturally diverse as a university. As Fuller argues, in the context of higher education, such managerialist approaches are ‘chronologically new but paradigmatically old’ (1993; p ix).



There are also lessons to be learnt from other sectors of education. For example there has been a strong emphasis on collaborative working in school improvement programmes and research by Lieberman (1986; 5) found that, in many cases, successful change efforts employed some form of collaboration between the participating parties. Lieberman argues that a central plank of the successful organisation is the degree to which it is people centred and that successful organisations, and successful schools, are described by using phrases central to the collaborative ethic. Phrases like:

...energising the grass roots, empowerment, more egalitarian arrangements, more autonomy, more flexibility, better dialogue, stronger interpersonal ties, greater understanding of the culture of the organisation, and sensitivity to the effects of collaboration on motivation and experimentation (Ibid. 1986; p5).

Work such as this, together with that of Schein (1997) outlined in chapter 2, influenced my thinking about collaboration in the context of the Institute.

## **Forming the Core Group**

Forming the group became a priority for two principal reasons. First, time was short. There was only a matter of six months before the first open and distance learning programmes were scheduled to start. Second, the systems that needed to be put in place would require the sharing of expertise. It was clear from the pilot programme of the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion, that insufficient attention had been given to linkages between academic and administrative functions and the overall co-ordination of the innovation. As a result, learners, teachers and administrative staff had felt unsupported and insecure. These linkages were clearly important and would require cross-role, cross-subject group and cross-school collaboration to develop seamless and effective systems.

At the time, the primary role of the core group was to agree a strategy and a time plan for the innovation, to be a catalyst for ideas and to co-ordinate the development and implementation of processes and systems. The membership of the core group, therefore, included participants who had, or would have, involvement, at a practical level, in open and distance learning (Field notes 13 March 1998).

## **Gaining the support of senior managers**

An important initial task was to gain the support of the Institute Director and the Heads of the College of Health and Centre for Teaching and Learning, for the formation of the Institute Distance Learning Group (core group). The importance attached to this early step reflects the central, and powerful, position occupied by these participants in the hierarchical management structure of the Institute. The response of all three was generally supportive. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the nature of their support reflected their respective positions and responsibilities. For example, the Director agreed that a collaborative approach was a good thing given the scope of the change but was concerned that it shouldn't slow things down. She explained that from her experience collaborative decision making 'can be a slow process' (Field notes 13 March 1998).

The two Heads had very different and, it has to be said, surprising reactions. As mentioned in Chapter 1, my role, at that time, was located in the College of Health, open and distance learning, on the other hand, was located in the Centre for Teaching and Learning. It is significant for this story that both Heads were anxious to lay claim to this innovation project. The Head of the College of Health was, at first, a little reluctant to give her blessing because 'the thought of adding another meeting to an already long list of official committees and boards does not appeal' (Field notes 16 March 1998). However, once it was explained this was a 'change project' and the core group would meet only as long as was necessary she changed her view. What appealed to her was the idea that a 'project' could be 'commissioned' by the College of Health. The group could then be a 'task group' of the college 'reporting regularly to the College Executive' (Field notes 16 March 1998).

The Head of the Centre for Teaching and Learning was very enthusiastic about the idea of collaboration and the formation of the group. She was 'relieved that someone was getting to grips with it'. However, she also provided the names of members of the Centre for Teaching and Learning who she wanted included in the group adding that 'any project that the centre puts its name to should include input from Centre members' (Field notes 18 March 1998). The core group was able to resist this by arguing the need for a broad based membership that avoided over representation from any particular area of the Institute.

These experiences with senior management appear, on the face of it, to reflect their own particular priorities and anxieties. The Director was concerned that targets were met, the Head of the College of Health gave priority to clear lines of reporting while the Head of the Centre for Teaching and Learning was concerned with boundaries of ownership. All appeared to be supportive of the idea of collaboration. These reactions, however, highlight an area of potential conflict between the respective Heads that could, perhaps, be likened to the overlap of areas of interest among academic disciplines, that Becher (1990; p 334), refers to as 'boundary dispute' leading to conflicting interpretations over areas of responsibility. Equally possible, is the notion that these responses could be suggestive not so much of confusion over areas of responsibility, but of a hierarchical model of management within which 'front-of-stage' articulation supports the notion of collaboration while 'back-stage' dealings are centred more on power related considerations (Becher 1988; p 317).

### **The core group**

The core group first met on 21 May 1998. Its membership comprised participants who would have a significant role to play in the development of open and distance learning over the next six months. Present were the leaders of each of the proposed open and distance learning programmes, module leaders, representatives from the library, information and communication technology support, materials development, administration and the publicity and advertising department.

The first meeting was very productive and generated lively discussion, as all the meetings would do. There were three main priorities. To agree terms of reference, to identify and prioritise the issues to be addressed and to agree a system of communication. In order to identify the issues, brain storming was used for which Freeman's (1997; p 6) categories for the support of distance learning were adopted as a guide. The Terms of reference are given in table 4.1 and the issues to be addressed in Table 4.2. An important guiding principle was the adoption of a system of task groups (Hackman 1990; p 490) that would

**The Institute Distance Learning Group**

**Terms of Reference**

- **Plan and co-ordinate the preparations necessary for the October 1998 start of the open and distance learning provision.**
- **Develop the necessary systems required to provide open and distance learning programmes on which learners feel well supported.**
- **Develop and implement an infrastructure that will effectively manage open and distance learning on an on-going basis.**
- **Disseminate information about the developments of open and distance learning and facilitate best practice on an institute and university wide basis.**

**Assumptions that will underpin the Work of the Group**

- **That the relationship between all group members is equal.**
- **That during the life of the project any group member may raise questions about any aspect of the project particularly the direction the project may be taking.**
- **That the exchange of relevant information between group members is seen as essential to the success of the project**
- **That the spirit of the group is one of co-operation and a commitment to best practice in the delivery of open and distance learning.**

**Table 4.1 Terms of reference and common assumptions of the core group**

address particular issues and report progress regularly to the core group. Membership of the task groups was drawn from across the Institute calling on people with particular expertise. A member of the core group would lead each task group. The core group also

agreed that communication of its work was important and this would be achieved through cascading information via the Institute Bulletin, the University Journal, subject group meetings, school meetings, Institute Board and College Executive meetings and by holding staff development workshops.

Advising, enrolling & inducing learners	Providing programme learning resources & materials.	Supporting learners.	Appointing, inducing, training & monitoring staff.	Assessing learners.	Monitoring & evaluating.	Administrative systems & quality mechanisms.
Pre-enrolment information & advice.	Learning materials	Learner support model.	Staff development programme.	Assessment systems	Evaluation system .	Administrative systems in place for tracking learners through each programme.
Enrolment systems.	Programme information e.g. handbooks, on-line systems	Learner peer groups.	Information booklets for staff.	Written guidance for learners and staff.	Communication system for dispersal of evaluative information	Quality assurance monitoring processes in place.
	Storage and dispatch systems	Help- desk.	Procedural document for staff guidance.			

**Table 4.2 Identification of key issues for implementation purposes**

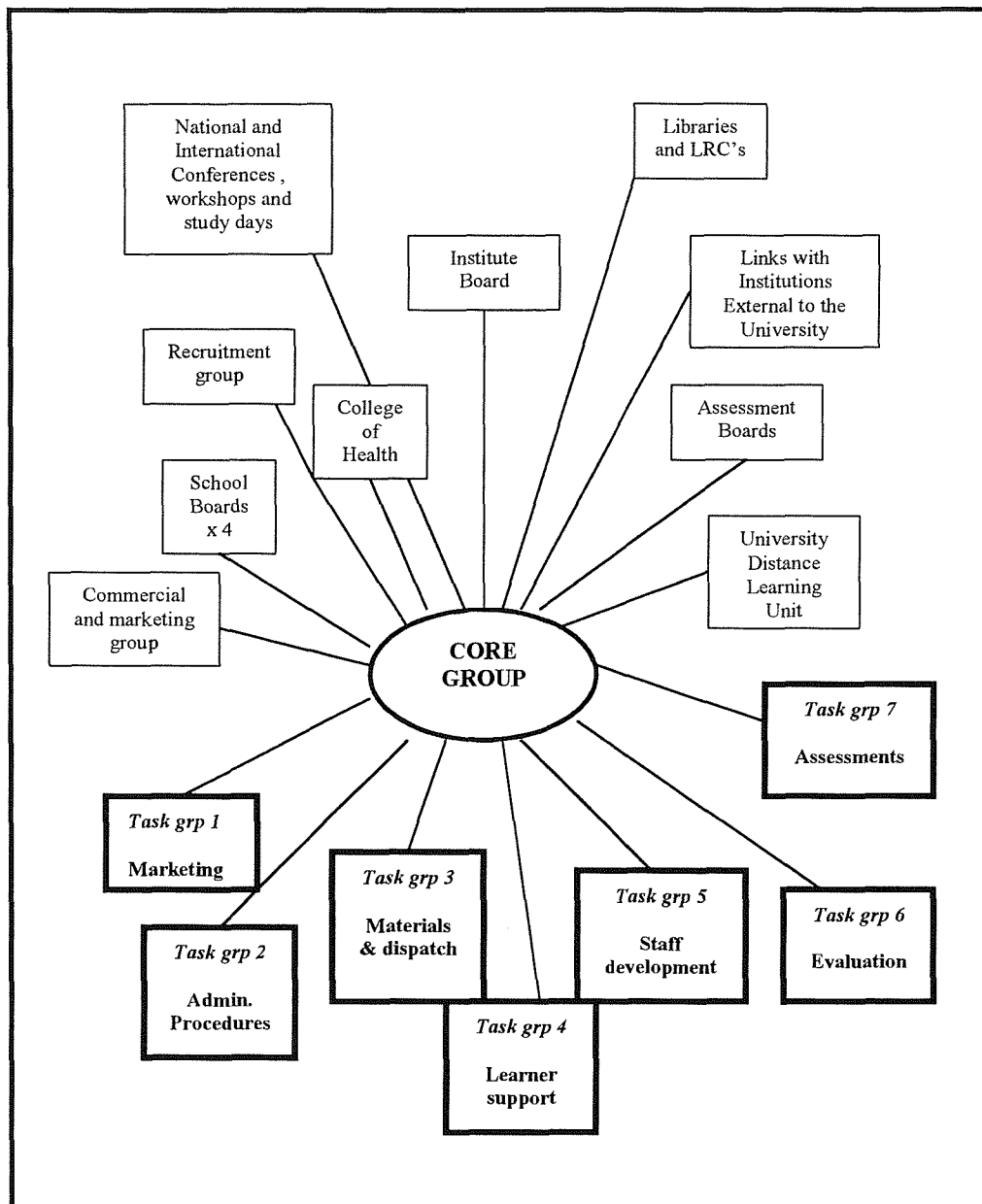
And so the group comprised a mix of personalities with a range of skills from a number of schools and departments of the Institute. Each member had an interest in developing distance learning and a commitment to working together. Time would show that the participants would learn a great deal about open and distance learning but also about each other and how this green field of opportunity was used to work together. The journey through the collaborative landscape would, however, reveal a number of conflicts and tensions as they walked its lanes and climbed its hills trying to reach the uplands of truly effective collaboration

## **Hills to Climb (conflicts and tensions)**

Seven task groups were formed, each one being allocated an area identified from the key issues brainstormed by the core group. These areas were; marketing, administrative procedures, materials and dispatch, learner support, staff development, assessments and evaluation. To support their work it was essential that it took place within a web of collaboration subscribed to at all levels. (Figure 4.1 shows the core group and its collaborative links). However, as indicated earlier, a number of tensions were to emerge.

### **Individual v Community**

There appeared to be a real willingness to come together to work on this innovation. Of the 15 invitations sent, all were accepted. Levine (1980; p 17) suggests that the 'profitability' of an innovation is an important precondition for its successful implementation. By 'profitability' Levine means whether or not the innovation will bring security, prestige, peer approval, growth, efficiency or improvement in the quality of life. Interview and documentary data suggest that the potential 'profitability' of open and distance learning was an influencing factor in this case. For example, the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion, the BSc (Hons) Health Studies and the BSc (Hons) Professional Studies-Nursing (Wound Care) were programmes potentially marketable on a national basis by adapting them to open and distance learning. As well as this, the NHS Trusts were requesting more flexible modes of study that would reduce the amount of time staff spent away from the work place (Commercial and Marketing Committee minutes 18 March 1998). In addition, many of those interviewed felt strongly that open and distance learning was important in meeting the mission of the university to widen access and increase opportunity, particularly for qualified nurses and midwives who might have families to care for as well as busy jobs.



**Fig 4.1 A Web of Collaboration:**  
**The relationship between the core group, the task groups and other key agencies inside and outside the Institute**

As for the notion of collaboration itself, those interviewed in October 1998 spoke of their individual enthusiasm for working together. Although many had been part of team working before, for example, module and course development, few had been involved in

any form of joint effort to implement an innovation on this scale. The closest the majority had come to it was expressed by one participant as:

....being asked for comments about something....I suppose it was more like consultation not collaboration (ML PSN 2).

A common feeling expressed by many was the lack of opportunity for real debate and collective involvement in important issues. Although there were school meetings these were generally poorly attended and had mostly been relegated to information giving sessions on a top-down basis. Participants expressed emotions ranging from concern, anger and at times benign acceptance of a status quo that was managerially dominated. For example, one senior programme leader, when talking about issues of quality, almost in despair, said; 'I really don't know anymore how I can influence such things' (PL HS 2).

Responses from participants in October 1998, at which time the group had been working together for six months, reveal what they as individuals were gaining from the experience. Most dominant were the feelings of mutual support that being part of a collaborative venture brought. For others, it filled a gap. One participant expressed it so:

I feel we can debate issues and that they will be taken up.  
I think about issues in a different way because I know how  
and why they have come about. I am part of that and I like it  
(ML HP 2).

This response is important and exemplifies the collaborative approach. By working with others this participant learnt, over time, the building blocks of the open and distance learning process and as a consequence felt some ownership of it. Butterworth (1990; p 216) in his study of the dynamics of the Detroit String Quartet, identifies three principal elements that should be present to enhance motivation and satisfaction at work. These are meaningfulness, responsibility and knowledge of results. Butterworth suggests that the closer the collaboration the more likely these are to be present. In the response quoted above it is possible to see these elements taking form.

However, despite the obvious need for collaboration and an apparent enthusiasm for it among many participants, there is evidence to suggest that the managerial culture,



dominant in the Institute, supported individuality rather than collaboration. Responses to interviews across a range of participants and time scales reveal concerns about people holding things back or being slow or reluctant to contribute. While participants found that working in small groups, where specific issues were tackled, was challenging and rewarding, it was in the large core group, at which issues were applied to programmes of study and examples of practice and application were shared, that difficulties arose. One participant attributed this to 'insecurity and competitiveness among teachers' (PL HS 2).

Examples from my own observations show teachers being defensive about their programmes or modules rather than overtly competitive. For example, at one meeting, learner support was being discussed in relation to the BSc (Hons) Health Studies. Strong criticism was levelled at the efforts of the programme leader by the leader of the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion (Field notes 17 September 1998). The basis of the critical remarks was the number of face-to-face tutorials the Health Studies learners would receive. The programme leader of the BSc Health Promotion wanted uniformity across all programmes regarding face-to-face contact. The feeling of the core group as a whole was that this should be left to individual programme teams but that a minimum number per module should be set as a quality criterion. Conversational interviews later revealed a subtext to this incident that suggests that both programme leaders reluctantly found themselves to be in competition with each other for students and that one programme having more face-to-face contact than another might tip the balance in favour of that programme. This was despite each programme having very clear student profiles that differed in substantially important ways.

As a manager I found this disturbing, yet not altogether surprising once I had reflected on the style of management dominant in the Institute at that time. To me, the idea of competitiveness among members of the group was of particular interest when collaboration was the aim. In an attempt to understand the phenomena I returned to the data and also asked additional questions of a number of participants. The resulting data suggest that there were subtle, yet pervasive, feelings of insecurity among teachers. This insecurity tended to centre on issues of academic credibility and practical competence among nurse teachers. Many were struggling to acquire the skills required in higher education (Gerrish 1992; p 228; Crotty 1993; p 419; Carlisle et al 1996; p 766)) yet meet

increasing pressures on their time demanded by NHS Trusts. One manifestation of this was the considerable concern expressed by a number of participants about job security which was linked directly to the marketability of their modules and programmes.

This level of insecurity appears to have been compounded by the general trend in the Institute, and in higher education in general (Duke 1992; p 17), to use the language of managerial corporatism. Terms such as business plans, corporate strategy, consumerism, commercial teams, customer care, inputs, outputs, audit and the profitability of programmes of study were being used at an increasing rate. An example of this, and one referred to by a number of participants, was contained in the five-year strategic plan for the Institute, current at the time, that lists as one of its main objectives the need to 'encourage individuals and groups to become more entrepreneurial'.

The importance of language in supporting, and changing, social structures and the link between language and culture is discussed by Trowler (1998; pp 138-139). He points out that linguistic change can occur as a result of conscious determination by social actors. In the case of the Institute, interview, observational and documentary data suggest that a decision had been taken, either consciously or otherwise, by senior management, to use the managerial/corporate language of the market place that reflected changing social structures within the higher education sector as a whole. However, Trowler (ibid; p 138) goes on to warn that the consequences of using language in this way are not always those which were intended. In this case it appears to have resulted in varying levels of insecurity and unnecessary competitiveness among teachers, especially if their programmes were perceived to appeal to similar professional groups (as is the case with Health Promotion and Health Studies). One programme leader described this as:

....constantly having to chase after student numbers if my programme is to survive. If it goes I go. Distance learning will definitely help. I will be able to market the programme and attract students from a wider distance (Field notes 12 August 1998).

Such Darwinian struggles for the survival of the fittest are referred to by Becher (1989; p 142) in relation to the Research Assessment Exercise, but an analogy can be drawn here. This is not a research university. At the time of the study, the main source of revenue was

from teaching and learning and so recruitment to modules and programmes became a dominant part of a teacher's *raison d'être* and constituted territory to be defended.

This emphasis on teaching is, for Bergquist (1992; p 80), an important indicator of a managerial culture. He argues that academic staff who work in institutions dominated by a managerial culture find their intellectual identity primarily through teaching rather than through independent research and scholarship or interaction with fellow academic colleagues. The characteristics of a managerial culture in universities in the United States are described by Bergquist as:

... a culture that finds meaning primarily in the organization, implementation, and evaluation of work that is directed toward specified goals and purposes; that values fiscal responsibility and effective supervisory skills; that holds untested assumptions about the capacity of the institution to define and measure its goals and objectives clearly; and that conceives of the institution's enterprise as the inculcation of specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes in students so that they might become successful and responsible citizens (1992; p5).

Another notable feature of a managerial culture is the introduction of measures that aim to reduce academic costs by introducing curricula based on independent learning through resource based and electronic modes of study and by a range of other initiatives aimed at increasing efficiency (Bergquist 1992; p 76). Of importance, in the context of this study, was the possible link, in the minds of teachers, between open and distance learning and financial efficiency. Data from a number of interviews and observations suggest a dichotomy of effects emerging from the overtly managerial style present in the Institute at that time. On the one hand, participants were enthusiastic about distance learning and the collaboration necessary for its development and introduction. On the other hand, the managerial culture that formed the working context seems to have had the insidious and generalised effect of increasing uncertainty. It did this by linking open and distance learning to cost saving measures, and of putting pressure on teachers to justify their existence through the single means available to them, their teaching and learning activities and associated student numbers.

Teaching and learning activities in the Institute were usually individual in nature. Very few of those interviewed spoke of team teaching or team development of modules. For example, all but one of the module learning packages in existence in February 1999 had been written by individuals working alone. Such data appear to suggest that in the Institute a managerial dominated, business focussed, academic environment, and its accompanying uncertainties, encouraged individualism rather than collaboration. Hargreaves (1994; p 171) argues that individualism is a consequence of complex organisational conditions and constraints and describes it as a 'heresy of educational change' (ibid; p164). It would appear that attempts to collaborate within such organisational constraints presented teachers, and other staff, with a conflict of interest. Participants were keen to come together to work as a team. However, the individualism and competitiveness, that Kotter (1996; p 56) suggests are a function of the dominance of a managerial/entrepreneurial climate, produced difficulties that had not been foreseen.

## **Boundary Defence v Right to Roam**

When reflecting on the organisational complexities and constraints mentioned above, it is helpful to take a closer look at one form these might take particularly the notion of internal borders, or boundaries (Tierney 1991; p 9), and their maintenance or defence (Becher 1990; p 334). Of central importance is the question; in what ways do boundaries and their defence influence the process of collaboration in the context of open and distance learning? What I have called the 'right to roam' is not only necessary for collaboration but is central to the public nature of open and distance learning (Henri and Kaye 1993; p 26) (see chapter 2 this thesis). Interview and observational data suggest that intra-organisational boundaries did exist within the Institute of Health Sciences and that this had an important effect on an individual's right to roam, and therefore, on collaboration.

Boundaries are important at a number of levels. For example, Tierney (1991; p 9) makes the point that they not only form the outer limits of the organisation as a whole but also of its sub-units within. As such they define and reflect the ideological and cultural identity of the organisation and its subcultures. At another level, and arguably the most pertinent to this study, Tierney argues that, in the cut and thrust of higher education, boundaries are created to distinguish some activities and not others, and to make particular individuals prominent and others not. He contends that such cultural and sub-cultural artefacts can, in

themselves, prevent the creation of the conditions necessary for empowerment (ibid; p 9). Data from this study suggest that a significant resistant force to collaboration, arguably one means to empowerment, resulted from the tensions and conflicts acted out at these intra-organisational frontiers. This 'boundary conflict' is now told through the stories of two of the principal combatants, Linda and Mary.

### **Linda's story**

Linda was an experienced member of academic staff and a member of the Health and Community subject group. Prior to moving into full time education in 1989, she was a practising Health Visitor and Midwife. She taught on a number of programmes and her principal role was programme leader of the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion. The Health and Community subject group was located in the School of Health, Community and Social Studies within the Institute. The 'home' of the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion was also with the Health and Community subject group which considered its main base to be at the West London campus.

The BSc (Hons) Health Promotion was developed and validated during 1991. This coincided with the formation of the Institute from a number of schools and colleges of nursing and midwifery in the West London area. It was during this period that the subject group was formed under the leadership of Geoff who also worked closely with Linda on the BSc programme development. To use Linda's own words, the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion became the 'flagship degree' of the newly formed Institute struggling for credibility in its new higher education environment. It therefore assumed a position of central importance to both the subject group and the Institute.

These were difficult times. There were, for example, a number of redundancies as the many merging components were rationalised. Stories were told by Linda, and others, of how Geoff had to 'fight' to establish the Health and Community subject group against an increasing body of opinion, within the Institute and across nursing at the time, that this subject area should be integrated within nursing studies. The fact that he won his fight and that the group went on to develop a number of courses as well as the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion was, to Linda, testament to Geoff's commitment to his subject and to the subject group. In addition to this Geoff went on to gain a PhD and to publish widely,

attainments perceived as the true credentials of an academic which many in the group, new to higher education, wished to emulate.

It was within this sub-cultural context that Linda told the story of the development of the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion and its conversion from a 'taught' programme to open and distance learning. There were immense difficulties to be overcome. For example, she spoke of 'basically being told this was going to happen'. Of having to write the learning materials 'with no experience, no time and no help'. She recalled how 'angry' she felt at having to put her masters dissertation 'on hold' but, having the 'interests of the subject group in my mind' she took the work away on holiday and wrote it in her own time. She described this period as 'very stressful' of feeling 'very tired and unsupported'. However, despite this particularly difficult transition she was satisfied the programme had retained the high standards previously associated with the taught version including its open learning principles.

### **Mary's story**

Mary was programme leader of the BSc (Hons) Health Studies and like Linda her background was in Health Visiting and Midwifery and she was also a member of the Health and Community subject group. The BSc (Hons) Health Studies was developed soon after Berkshire College of Nursing and Midwifery merged with the Institute of Health Sciences in 1995. In one way this degree programme was an artefact of the merger. It came into being at a time of transition when Berkshire had its own, temporary, mirror subject groups and although teachers from the West London campus were part of the development and led a number of modules, it was viewed very much as a Berkshire programme.

Another important part of Mary's story was that the BSc (Hons) Health Studies was commissioned by the College of Undergraduate Studies for full time delivery to undergraduate students. The implication of this was that it was validated, administered and accountable for programme quality to a 'body' situated outside the Institute of Health Sciences. In 1998 it was decided to convert levels 2 and 3 of the programme to part-time open and distance learning so that it would appeal to health professionals who were

eligible for advanced standing on the basis of previous certificated learning. Even so, it remained within the College of Undergraduate Studies.

Mary began to experience problems almost from the beginning. At first, module leaders based at West London, who were colleagues from the same subject group, refused to attend meetings unless they were held at the West London campus. Mary decided to alternate between the two sites to be fair to both groups. She described how at the meetings held at West London colleagues were so confrontational and disruptive that she almost gave up the leadership of the programme on more than one occasion. At one meeting she was told that it was bad enough that the programme should be Berkshire based but now that it was in the College of Undergraduate Studies 'quality would be a joke'.

This comment about Berkshire reveals perceptions held by those at the West London campus about this relatively recent addition to the Institute. A number of participants, from across the West London campus, referred to Berkshire and its staff in ways that suggest a 'status gradient' upon which the two parts of the Institute occupy opposing positions. West London being at the top and Berkshire at the bottom. Examples of this are common in the data. One participant saw Berkshire as 'less dynamic' another 'parochial' and yet another expressed concern that colleagues at Berkshire 'need to get up to our speed' (Field notes 10.9.98; 16.10.98 and 17.2.99 respectively).

The quest for status is, according to Becher (1990; p 339) a pervasive one in higher education, not only between individuals and institutions but also between disciplinary and other groups within institutions. Returning to Tierney's argument that boundaries are erected as a means of enhancing or reducing the prominence of some aspects of an organisation and individuals within it, he goes on to suggest that parts of organisations, and the people within them, occupy positions relative to the organisational boundary that are representational of their status. Data from this study support this view and suggest that Berkshire, and its subject groups, was 'closer to the margins' compared to West London which was 'closer in' to the centre of things. It appears from the data that the 'closer to the margins' a group, or individual, found themselves, the 'less visible' they were and the less influence they were able to bring to important aspects of decision making. Such

marginalisation appears to have had a profound effect on Mary and her programme, both in terms of her ability to argue effectively for its legitimacy within the Institute and also to convince others of its quality.

It was the questioning of the quality of the programme that upset Mary the most particularly as the majority of the modules in the Undergraduate programme, and all the modules in the open and distance learning version, were led and taught by Institute staff. However, it was the relatively closed nature of the programme in comparison to the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion that appears to have given rise to most of the problems. This was particularly reflected in the assessment and the less open approach to assignment 'hand-in' dates and issues to do with progression. Problems around these issues arose when a number of health promotion modules were included as options within the BSc (Hons) Health Studies open and distance learning programme.

The regulations of the College of Undergraduate Studies did not allow for an open approach to assessments. Linda felt very strongly about this and, in my interview with her (PL HP 3), she mentioned issues to do with the BSc (Hons) Health Studies seven times within the space of half an hour at no prompting from myself. She spoke of being 'forced to adjust the assessment structures so that it suited the Undergraduate College' of it being 'bad enough that this programme (Health Studies) has been taken from us but to have to change the assessment in our modules (Health Promotion) is too much'. Later she argues that 'this is a Health and Community module if the Undergraduate College want it they can have it our way' and then later: 'I will change it, I will fight this. I can't allow students to have low quality foisted upon them'.

The worst moment for Mary, however, came not at a programme meeting but at an 'Institute Strategy Day'. These were held three times a year and all staff attended. They served a number of functions from general communication to discussion about strategy. They were occasions when colleagues met to discuss issues important to them and to the Institute as a whole. Mary had been told that the Director of the Institute would be announcing that the decision had been taken at the Academic Board that the BSc (Hons) Health Studies would, after a lot of discussion and negotiation, be coming under the control of the Institute of Health Sciences in October 1998. Mary was delighted. She



believed this would put an end to her problems. Mary listened to the announcement and was 'appalled' and 'deeply upset' to hear the director add that there was a lot of work to be done if the programme was to be 'brought up to our standards'. Mary realised her problems were not yet over.

### **Walking the boundaries (a discussion)**

These two interrelated stories reveal important data about the nature of subject grouping within the Institute and the boundaries that existed around and within them. Linda's story reveals the saga (Masland 1985; p 159, Smircich 1983; p 344) of the origins of the subject group and how this corresponded with the evolution of the Institute itself. Also from Linda, and the stories of others, emerges a picture of Geoff as a 'cultural hero' an important central figure to the evolving group. Masland describes the cultural hero as:

... a role model, *they* set standards, and preserve what makes the organisation unique. People tell stories about heroes and the examples they set (1990; p 161).

Sagas and heroic myths like those recounted by Linda form powerful foundations of a group's identity, purpose and cohesion (Becher 1989; p 28). These are intensified still further if the saga recalls, as in this case, a traumatic birth or transformation (Masland 1985; p 159). A feature of particular importance is that for the Health and Community subject group, the saga was related exclusively to the West London campus and had, as its main artefact, the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion and the principles of open learning upon which its delivery was loosely based.

These 'tribes of academe' (Becher 1989) exert powerful control over their boundaries and in particular they:

... define their own identities and defend their own patches of intellectual ground by employing a variety of devices geared to the exclusion of illegal immigrants (ibid; p 24).

According to Becher, to be admitted a potential immigrant must show an appropriate level of ability but also loyalty to the group and adherence to its rules and norms. Mary found

herself, and her programme, at the boundary unable to cross without appropriate credentials. The problem was that Mary made the journey unaware that she was transgressing the rules and norms of the group and indeed, bearing in mind what the Director of the Institute said at the strategy day, of the Institute as well. Of equal importance is the notion of individuals being more or less visible, based on their status within the group and their perceived position to the boundary. This is particularly powerful when collaboration is the aim.

Mary had roamed outside the boundary of her subject group and of the Institute and led a programme validated by another College within the University that had very different ways of doing things. Linda, and Geoff, looked upon the open nature of their face-to-face programme as a 'status conferring' innovation and wished it to be carried over to their open and distance learning modules within the BSc (Hons) Health Studies. The fact that this was not possible under the regulations applicable to undergraduate programmes meant an inevitable clash of cultures. This, in a way, is illustrative of the public nature of open and distance learning argued by Henri and Kaye (1993; p 26) (see chapter 2). As a mode of study it demands flexibility, the sharing of modules and the adoption of a team approach to the planning and development of modules and programmes. This means that individuals must cross not only programme boundaries but also subject and institutional boundaries. The 'right to roam' is a cornerstone of an effective open and distance learning environment. The analysis of data discussed so far suggests that the Institute was not ready for this and Linda and Mary were caught in the cultural cross fire.

### **Top-down v Bottom-up**

As argued above, a sense of community and the 'right to roam' are fundamental principles of open and distance learning. Both, however, can represent powerful challenges to a hierarchical, managerial culture. Data from this study suggest that the process of collaboration brought into focus a continuing struggle in which the inclination for a top-down hierarchical management style was contested by a bottom-up pressure to claim some control over the innovation agenda.

## **A top-down management style**

To many participants a top-down management style within the Institute was not surprising. The reasons for this appear to reflect the hierarchical traditions of Nursing and Midwifery in particular as much as the move toward more managerial approaches in higher education in general (Trowler 1998 p; 101). For example one participant described the situation as:

....very 'nursey-nursey'. Sometimes....it is like it was on the wards. I could be back there sometimes, honestly. You come on duty on time and go off when you're told to (ML PSN 2).

Another put it slightly differently:

It is getting better, but there is a sense of control from above. Some of the senior people can be very 'Matron-like' in their approach to us (ML PSN 2).

The hierarchical nature of the nursing and midwifery professions was built on a system of student nurses, junior nurses, senior nurses, staff nurses, sisters, assistant matrons and matrons. Although now gone forever, it still has a powerful effect on the perceptions of those in health care, including education, despite numerous management changes within the NHS over the last thirty years (Salmon 1966, Briggs 1972, Griffiths 1983). According to Akinsanya (1990; p 74) it was 'a solid management principle which no time can efface'.

The influence of social and professional experience on the culture of organisations is well recognised (Alveson 1993; p70). Such 'presage', according to Trowler (1998; p 146), is an extremely important but neglected aspect of the cultural configuration of higher education institutions. Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that interview data show, at one level at least, an underlying inclination toward a certain degree of passivity among teachers within the institute, a trend observed by others in higher education in general (McMurty 1991; p 216, Selway 1995; p 31). A number of participants attributed this to the considerable amount of management dominated change that had occurred within the Institute over the previous three years. This constantly changing managerial culture appears to have given rise to an environment in which blame was used to control and approval and consent were

required for quite minor degrees of responsibility. The net effect was for teachers and other staff to:

...keep our heads down...what's the point? Nothing we say makes any difference. We are here just to do as we are told. Its best just to go along with it..... Yes it hurts, it's a great shame we feel the way we do. Many of the teaching staff have so much to offer but have lost interest.(ML PSN 3).

Such 'psychological withdrawal' (Miller 1997; p 99) is likened by Trowler (1998; p101) to being 'caught in the bright light of policy change from the top', a metaphor that invokes a picture of an inactive and powerless teacher. While this might have been the case at the beginning of the programme of innovation, data discussed below suggest that there was a growing determination among academic and other colleagues to take control, through collaboration, of the implementation of open and distance learning within the Institute.

Perhaps the most striking observation to emerge from this study is the interplay of two essential elements that appear to have acted as a balance between the top-down versus bottom-up tension. The first element is the significant influence the personal and professional values of the participants had on their individual and collective interpretation of top-down dictats. The second element is the unique and supportive context provided by the collaborative group in which these personal and professional values were discussed and applied.

### **Personal and professional values**

Despite an apparently collective passivity to an overt top-down management style there is evidence that suggests strong individual resistance to it. One particular example involves one participant single handedly blocking the inclusion of a number of Open Learning Foundation (OLF) modules in a new open and distance learning programme under development (see chapter 1). There was considerable pressure to accept these modules. The project was due to be given the blessing of the Secretary of State for Health over tea at the House of Commons on a date only weeks away. Never the less, the participant steadfastly refused on the grounds that the modules were not at the required level, something that the OLF itself did not dispute. He took the problem to his Dean and to the Head of the College of Health. The result was, despite only a few weeks remaining before

the target date for completion, he and colleagues from his subject group, were allowed to re-write sections of the material at the appropriate level. When I asked him about this he said:

...I couldn't allow this...it went against all I hold to be important. And anyway where would that leave distance learning? After all the work we had done in the group for them to put it at risk for their own purposes made me angry. I couldn't let it happen (ML PSN 2).

The importance of personal and professional values and their related actions, or agency, represents, according to Trowler (1998; p 141), the power of the individual teacher to influence policy during its implementation. The importance of presage in shaping these attitudes and values is significant particularly when considering the strong sense of professionalism to be found in nurses and midwives. At a collective level Nursing has an inclination for organising itself hierarchically yet, at an individual level, there is a strong sense of professional responsibility and personal accountability. For Trowler (1998; p 142) these values, attitudes and recurrent practices that permeate everyday life are the most important aspects of culture. The data from this study support the contention that they can have an influential effect on how change is interpreted and how an innovation is implemented

### **A unique and supportive context**

There is evidence from a range of data that individual participants gained support and strength from membership of the collaborative group. Some of this could be attributed to the structural authority the group had in terms of its inclusion in the committee structure of the Institute and its direct line of communication to the Institute Board. There was, however, despite the group being an aggregate of strong-minded individuals, a sense of cohesion as well as of personal and collective empowerment. This seems to have resulted from a shared sense of direction, a shared sense of responsibility, a personal investment in the project and a short but substantial history of getting things done. All are group characteristics that Butterworth (1990; p 214-219) found to be key ingredients for success in his study of the dynamics of the Detroit String Quartet.

The disparate individuals that made up the core group sought help, gave help and shared their experiences. Despite tensions from within, as well as from without, a sense of collective effort was commented on and valued. Such a collaborative approach to organisational development is likened by Bergquist (1992; p 168) to a new glue that binds people together. The data from this study can, perhaps, serve to remind us of the important role played by interpersonal relationships, group decision making and effective communication.

## **The Uplands (a conclusion)**

To return to the research question that has given direction to this chapter:

*In what ways does a collaborative approach to the introduction of open and distance learning operate in my institution?*

The journey through the collaborative landscape in order to address this question was a challenging experience for myself and for those who accompanied me. For myself these challenges were associated with the duality of leading a programme of innovation such as this and at the same time carrying out research into aspects of it. Nowhere is this better reflected than in the section on top-down v bottom-up tensions because so much of it involved events in which I was personally involved. For those who accompanied me there were many difficulties and many triumphs. Of particular note was the emergence of three sets of interrelated tensions that were directly linked to the act of collaboration. These were; individual v community; boundary defence v the right to roam and top-down v bottom-up.

Individually, each set of tensions occupies a particular level of analysis. For example, individual v community is concerned with the individual teacher and their willingness and ability to come together as a team, within a context that increasingly promoted individualism. Boundary defence v the right to roam emerges as the central theme. It reflects the willingness, flexibility and strength of the group to accept that a right to roam, both physically and intellectually, across programme, subject, institute and university

boundaries is an essential prerequisite to the successful adoption of open and distance learning. Top-down v bottom-up is about the ability of senior managers, at the institutional level, in a strongly managerial culture, to empower a group to make autonomous decisions and to form and recommend policy for implementation. It is also about the group taking responsibility for their collective decisions and actions. The result is that by unpacking these three tensions it is possible to make plain the nature of the change to personal and collective practices necessary, at all three levels, for the effective implementation of open and distance learning. Table 4.3 summarises the conditions influencing collaboration within each level of analysis.

*Organisational Level of Analysis*

*The Collaborative Lens*

<b>Individual</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Institution</b>
Incentives and personal profitability.	Trust, shared sense of direction, openness, support & equity.	Management style, structure & culture.
Individual job and role security.	Issues of status and marginalisation.	Corporate/organisational language.
Minimal competitiveness & self interest.	Effective communication at all levels.	Devolvement of legitimacy & empowerment to group and individual levels.
Feels included and contribution valued.	Open boundaries.	
Individual empowerment and responsibility.	Rules, norms and beliefs consistent with innovation.	
Individual 'right to roam'.	Group empowerment and accountability.	
	Group 'right to roam'.	

**Table 4.3 Conditions influencing collaboration at three organisational levels of analysis**

The central theme suggested by the data is that the participants, for the most part, wanted to collaborate. There were, however, organisational and sub-cultural constraints that worked against this. These constraints are important in the context of open and distance learning. As discussed above, open and distance learning is a public enterprise. It is a form of education that requires a closely coupled, team approach spanning administration, programme development, writing, editing, materials production, distribution, marketing and student support. By its very nature open and distance learning is essentially collaborative.

It is important to point out that many of the issues, problems and challenges that have emerged in this chapter, in the guise of tensions, are such because they were focussed on during the process of change. It was very much a fermentation period. Lessons were being learnt by everyone, including myself. For example, an important realisation was that through the unique and supportive context offered by a collaborative approach, it was possible to work with the dominant managerial culture and not to attempt to change it. From this developed the link between collaboration as a means to implementation, and collaboration as an essential, ongoing strategy for the management of open and distance learning. The result was a subtle and important change to the central vehicle of collaboration, the core group. The Institute Distance Learning Group (core group) was disbanded following its February 1999 meeting and the first Distance Learning Forum was held in March 1999.

The Distance Learning Forum is held once each semester and is open to anyone from across the university with an interest in open and distance learning. Its main purpose is to share best practice and to discuss issues and ideas relevant to open and distance learning. My reason for including this information here is to underline the importance of maintaining a real presence of collaboration. The type of work that required a core group and intensive task groups was relatively short lived. What appears to be important is to introduce a form of collaboration that fits easily with administrative, teaching and senior management values and norms. Equally important is that it provides an environment in which marginalised individuals and groups are brought into the centre, and through which everyone feels continuing ownership of the common ground of open and distance



learning. The story now turns to another challenge, the organisational structure necessary for its continuing co-ordination and management.



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# CHAPTER 5

## ***STRUCTURE*** *(an anatomical drawing)*

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### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to tell the story of how the most appropriate structural form for the support of open and distance learning was developed at the Institute of Health Sciences. Once again, the notion of close coupling plays a central part. This relates to the proposition that a high level of interrelationship between the various parts of a structure is necessary if open and distance learning is to be managed effectively (see chapter 2).

In a number of important ways this is my own story. I was closely involved in all that follows and the decisions taken affected me and my role directly just as they affected others. I must point out at the very beginning that my preference was, and still is, for clarity of roles and close working relationships. My own life and professional experiences have undoubtedly influenced this stance, notably in the Army and the National Health Service (see chapter 3). I was, therefore, conscious of my inclination to search out data to support this approach because it was what worked best for me. However, I also searched for instances and events that would support the opposing view. Nevertheless, the balance of experience within the Institute during the period of this study, and indeed much of the literature, supported the need to change to a more integrated structure. To gain an understanding of how this integration was realised, I tell the story of the innovation as I viewed it through the structural lens.

The picture I see is of an anatomical drawing. This might seem a strange choice but according to the Oxford Dictionary an anatomical drawing is a representation, in a picture, of physical structure. As with all such representations it can only hint at what lies beneath.

Organisational structures are similar. According to Gray (1982; p 147) structure is a description of what people do and how they relate. The structural chart (anatomical drawing) is a simplified description of jobs, roles and relationships. As such Gray (ibid; p 147) contends that all organisational charts are little more than idealised representations (or pictures). Therefore, to understand the structural form that we developed to support open and distance learning at the Institute it is necessary to explore not only what people did but also how these roles and associated systems interrelated.

This brings to the fore an important question that emerged early in the innovation: Is it appropriate to 'fit' the management and administration of open and distance learning into the existing (conventional) structures of the Institute? It is a question that goes to the heart of Gray's (1982; p 147) warning that structure, if it is to be effective, cannot be imposed, it can only derive from what people do. Data from interviews, observations and a range of documents, suggest that the conventional structures in place at the beginning of the innovation put pressure on roles, relationships and systems because they did not reflect what people actually did when involved with open and distance learning. The challenge, for me, in writing this chapter, was to tell the story of individual and collective experiences of these pressures and how a structure was developed that was a more accurate representation of what was done in practice.

## **Technically Sound but a Poor Likeness**

### **Confused roles, divided loyalties**

When I consider the data now, in retrospect, it seems clear that we were being pulled, by a series of events, toward an integrated structure. In chapter 1, I describe how, when first appointed to the post of Distance Learning Co-ordinator, I found myself in the College of Health responsible for the academic delivery of open and distance learning. All other functions concerned with this mode of study were located in the Centre for Teaching and Learning. This separation of key roles and functions became increasingly problematic.

For example, it quickly became apparent that the quality of a distance learner's experience was dependent on a more holistic systems approach. Data from conversational interviews

with distance learners suggested that they often did not differentiate between academic and administrative matters when making judgements about their experience of the programme (Field notes 10 June 1998). My problem was that the key production and administrative elements of the distance learning experience lay within the Centre for Teaching and Learning and outside my managerial remit.

Data from interviews, observations and documents, suggest that the location, and thereby the general expectation, of my role was based on the Institute's past experience of face-to-face teaching and learning. It was a cultural, taken-for-granted, approach that had worked effectively for a range of programmes over a number of years. The administrative procedures originally put in place, although designed for distance learners, were 'grafted' on to systems intended for quite a different mode of study. These systems were situated within departments, such as recruitment and assessments, that were detached physically and intellectually from the distance learning function, and from each other, and whose experience to date had been solely with face-to-face students. There is a range of data to suggest that this created a number of problems that, the literature reveals, have been shared by others in the distance learning community. For example Sharratt makes the point that:

University systems are generally premised on the assumption that students attend university. As a taken-for-granted it is neither recognised nor questioned, but it causes all sorts of problems for courses that do not fit into that criterion (1997; p 128).

As mentioned in chapter 4, important data from the pilot distance learning project revealed a number of issues that appeared to result from the conventional, loosely coupled system (Weick 1976; p 3), within which open and distance learning found itself in the early days of this study. For example when distance learners telephoned with problems or questions of an administrative nature they were often passed from one department to another before receiving an acceptable answer (Field notes 10 June 1998).

Problems also arose when learners enrolled onto open and distance learning programmes, especially if they could not attend the programme induction day and complete the various administrative tasks on campus. This gave rise to a number of difficulties such as the late

delivery of learning materials and poor fees collection. While both were disrupting to the learning experience, the latter was particularly frustrating because access to university on-line facilities was denied to some learners because they were either not registered as students of the university or were erroneously listed as debtors (Field notes 5 May 1998). Interview data suggest that administrative errors such as these appear to have given rise to a loss of confidence in the system in general. One example of this can be found in the number of academic staff expressing concerns about the 'tracking' of learners through their various programmes of study. One participant explained that:

...one of my big worries was that distance learning students would get lost somewhere in the system and that we would never find them again (ML PSN 2).

Other difficulties suggest that there was inadequate overall co-ordination of the relationship between the academic and administrative functions, possibly due to the anomalous positioning of the co-ordinator role. For example, poor linkages and communication along the chain of administration from materials development to their eventual dispatch proved inadequate and resulted in major disruption to the timely delivery of learning materials to learners. Many of these linkages were dependent on departments, mentioned above, that routinely worked as isolated, administrative islands not easily given to an integrated, holistic and closely coupled approach. This was a particular frustration to the distance learning administrator who pointed out that:

...we knew what was required and when it was required but the management of the process and the people involved conspired not to produce the required things on the required dates (admin 2).

My field notes at the time refer to the fractured nature of the organisation of these important links. Data from observations reveal that there was little effective communication between the various parties and each said the others did not understand their particular difficulties (Field notes 5 June 1998). The distance learning administration

manager expressed his concern and spoke of the need to be clear about roles and how they related:

Clarity is essential so that everyone knows what they are supposed to do from first enquiry through the recruitment process to enrolment to the dispatch of materials to ongoing tutorial and administrative support to assessments to the help desk and onward to the periodic review of the learning materials (admin 2).

The answer to such difficulties appeared to lie in the development of a more closely coupled structure that could provide a more effective, efficient and robust service.

## **Discussion**

The examples discussed here are perhaps sufficient to demonstrate that the Institute's initial reliance on placing the administration of open and distance learning within traditional departments was problematic. This made the task of co-ordinating the key elements of open and distance learning; materials development, production, recruitment and enrolment, dispatch, student support, assessments and student records, difficult. Particularly problematic was that my own role of Distance Learning Co-ordinator was managerially distanced from the Centre for Teaching and Learning which was the main centre of focus for open and distance learning. Many of the difficulties experienced appear to have been as a consequence of this split. While the structure was technically sound, based as it was on previous experience of what worked; it was a poor likeness to what was now necessary. As a result, roles were confused and loyalties divided.

According to Veduin and Clark (1991; p 166) structures must be designed and used to assure the performance of a programme. The analysis of data, discussed so far, suggest that the structure for the support of open and distance learning, in place at the time, could not achieve this criterion. The core group needed to take stock and give careful thought to what was required, in terms of resources, facilities and structure, to do it successfully. Most important, the core group needed the freedom to be creative within what has already been described (see chapter 4) as a managerially dominated, hierarchical and, to a very large extent, conservative environment. Creativity in this context is important. Becher and Kogan (1992; p 97) argue that in the case of open and distance learning, structures must be

capable of supporting much more flexibility in the way programmes of study are developed and accessed by learners. They suggest that such structures;

... appear almost to transcend traditional notions of structure, much as some modern painting, poetry or music would seem to do (ibid; p 97).

Given the culturally embedded nature of the traditional approach to administration in the Institute, such a radical step was required in this case. To do this the core group had to work with the dominant management, administrative and academic sub-cultures, not to change them but to add a dimension that would re-define the relationship between open and distance learning and the academic and administrative departments of the Institute.

## **Just Lines On The Page (re-drawing the picture)**

The core group took as their starting point two mutually complementary concepts. The convergence of distance and conventional learning (Tait and Mills 1999; p 25) (see chapter 1, this thesis) and close coupling of administrative systems (Costello 1993; p 10) (see chapter 2, this thesis). The approach taken to both will now be outlined and the story told of how they were used to construct an integrated structure.

### **Convergence**

The Institute made an early decision to convert a number of face-to-face programmes into open and distance learning. This resulted in all four open and distance learning bachelor degree programmes being made available by dual mode. This effectively meant that the same teacher supported both modes and programme teams, internal and external examiners and programme assessment boards each dealt with both modes within their own programme. In addition, where modules required attendance at group tutorials or workshops, these were shared by learners in both modes of study. This dual mode approach is not unique. It has its exemplars in Australia where they have operated a

similar system, only on a larger scale, for many years (Daniel 1999; p 296). In this country a similar model, for example, was adopted at the University of Sheffield, Department of Education (Armstrong 1996: p 78).

As previously discussed (see chapter 1), this approach increased the flexibility of programmes by making available to learners a choice of modes when they initially selected their programme of study but also as they progressed through it. Learners could choose to change from one mode to another within the same programme depending on their individual needs and personal circumstances. A range of data indicate that to achieve this degree of flexibility a robust and integrated, closely coupled, administrative support system needed to be in place. This finding is supported by the Australian experience which, according to Daniel, suggests that any such attempt at flexible dual mode delivery must be 'underpinned by a solid infrastructural support' (ibid; p 296).

## **Close Coupling**

In chapter 2, the concept of close coupling is discussed in relation to the complexities of open and distance learning (Costello 1993; p 9). Based on the early experiences mentioned above, the core group agreed that an integrated, closely coupled structure would be the most effective to support a flexible, dual mode approach to open and distance learning (Fieldnotes 10 July 1998). In many ways this was inevitable given the problems that had emerged with using systems and structures designed for conventional on-campus students. The core group was learning from experience, a process Becher and Kogan (1992; p 97) refer to as almost evolutionary. They suggest that:

...different curricular patterns call for different types of academic structure, often modifying the way in which an institution's basic units are defined ( 1992; p 97).

A great deal of work was accomplished between July and October 1998 in order to put the new structure in place in time for the 1998/99 academic year. This included negotiations between myself and the Head of the Centre for Teaching and Learning, the Head of the College of Health and the Director of the Institute. Agreement was reached on 4 September 1998 that a centralised Distance Learning Unit would be formed within the Centre for Teaching and Learning. This decision was based on the perceived importance

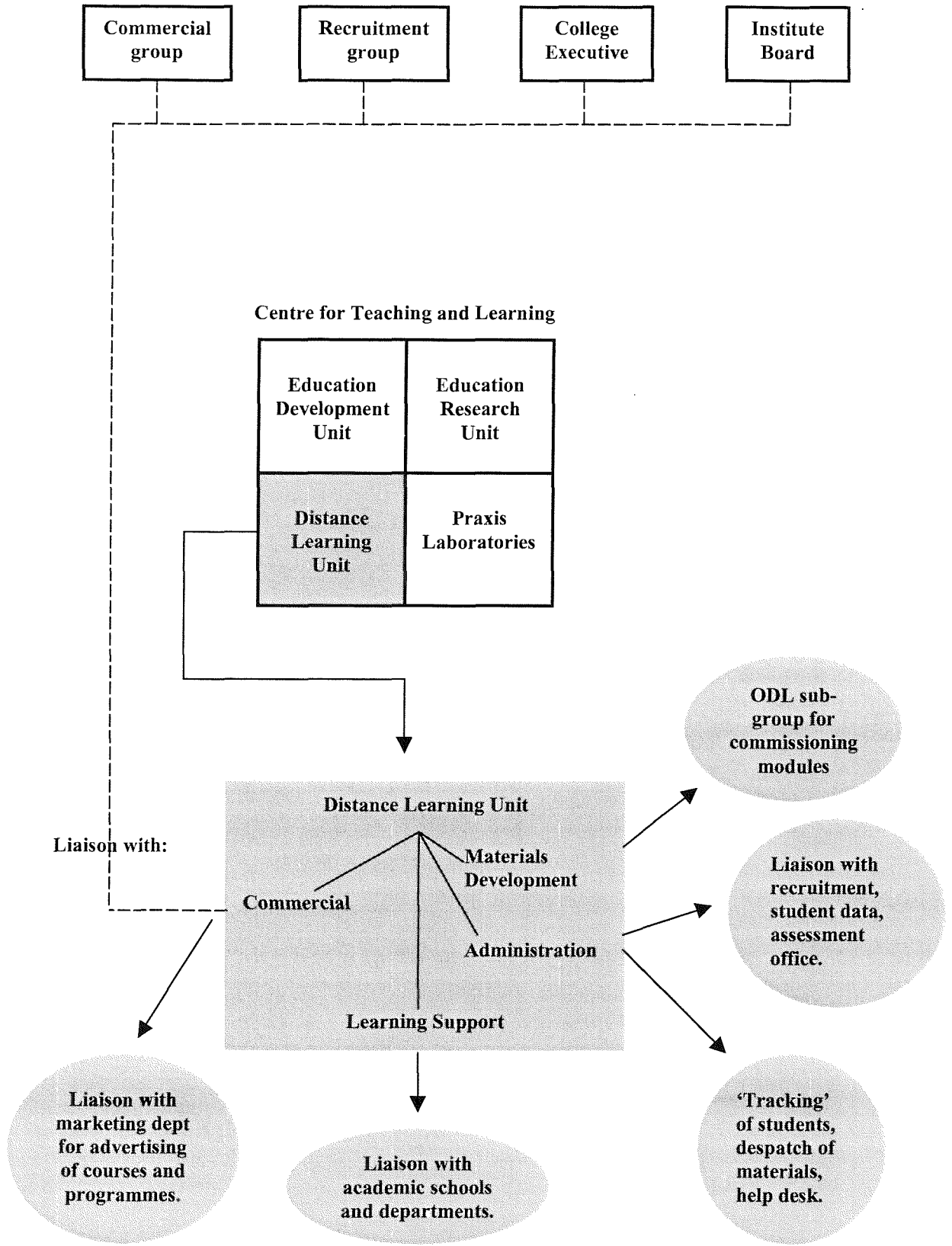


of situating the unit on 'managerially neutral ground' and at the same time being readily accessible to teachers. I was given the title of Open and Distance Learning Manager, which was intended to indicate overall responsibility for open and distance learning. The entry in my field-diary that day was optimistic:

This has happened very quickly. I think there is a genuine desire to move open and distance learning forward, which is reassuring. I also think it is recognised that our conventional systems are too inflexible to meet the needs of our learners and to respond to commercial demands (Field notes 4 September 1998).

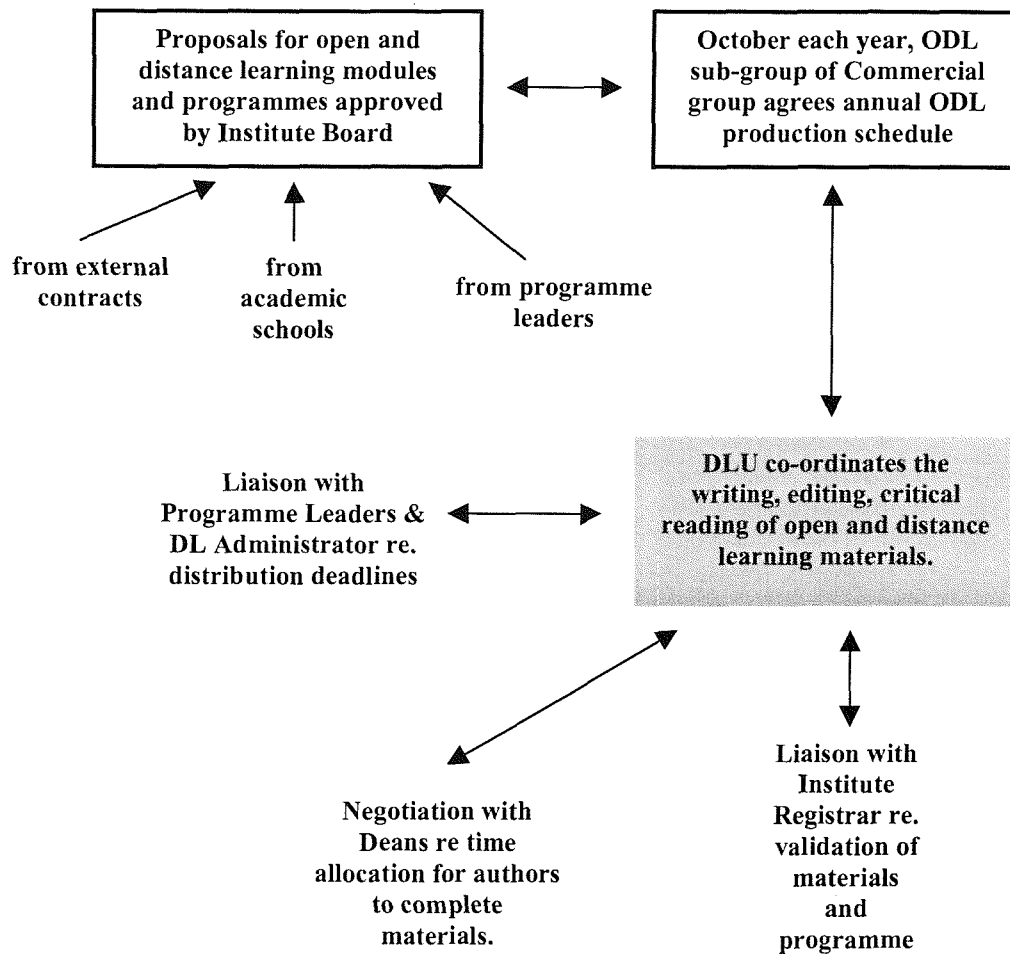
The new Distance Learning Unit within the Centre for Teaching and Learning is set out in Figure 5.1. It shows the four component units of the restructured Centre with the Distance Learning Unit enlarged to demonstrate its integrated functions. It also indicates the external liaison roles of the Unit which, at a meeting between myself and the Head of the College of Health, were considered to be essential for the effective management of open and distance learning (Field notes 14 September 1998). This was a positive development because it meant open and distance learning would be represented on the key committees of the Institute and be involved in mainstream decision making.

Of particular significance is that interview data indicate that there were strong feelings expressed by teachers, and senior academic managers, that the management of academic matters in relation to open and distance learning should remain in the schools and academic departments. In the event this was agreed despite the Head of the Centre for Teaching and Learning proposing that they should be managed by the Distance Learning Unit (Field notes 10 July 1998). The outcome was that control over the writing and development of open and distance learning modules and programmes, while being project managed by the Distance Learning Unit, would remain with subject groups within schools. This is important because there is, according to Becher and Kogan (1992; p 116), a tendency in contemporary society, to play down the primacy of academic professional roles in favour of other service orientated norms. They argue that the nature of the academic task requires a substantial measure of autonomy over content, style and outcome of programmes of study (*ibid*; p 111). Subject groups and Deans of School, in this study, saw this as an important principle with regard to subject quality. Such an arrangement is supported by the experiences of the University of Sheffield (Sharratt 1997: p 126) and



**Fig 5.1 The Distance Learning Unit and its integrated functions**

at the Open University where, Costello (1993) points out, the academic departments remain loosely coupled outside the closely coupled administrative support functions. As an example of this relationship the role of the Distance Learning Unit in the production of learning materials is demonstrated in Figure 5.2.



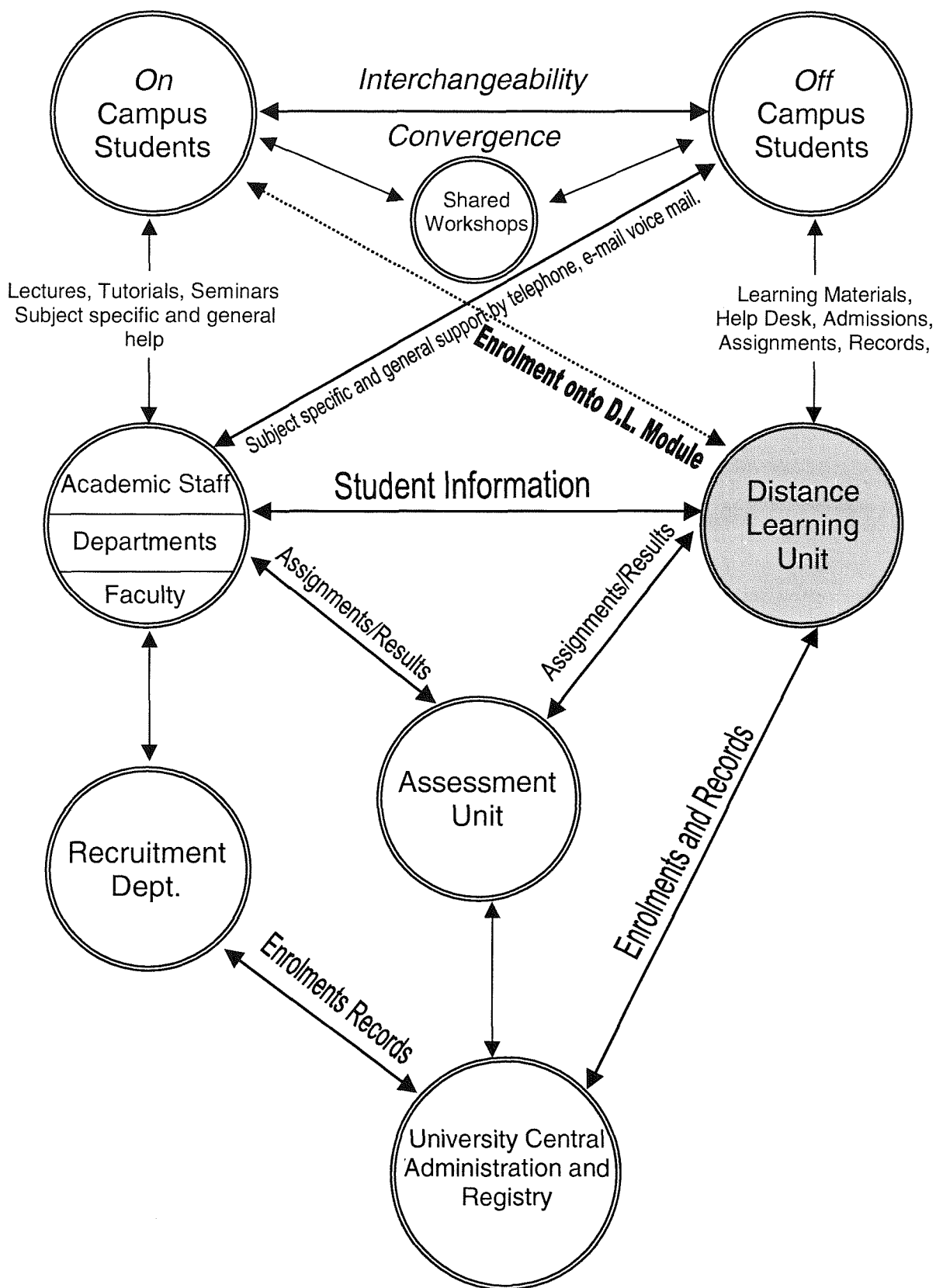
**Fig 5.2 The development and production of open and distance learning materials**

An important theme that has emerged from the data suggests that the real significance of the Distance Learning Unit was that it enabled the development of an effectively supported convergent system. This means that open and distance learning and face-to-face teaching could be supported administratively using a combination of loosely coupled conventional systems and the closely coupled structure of the Distance Learning Unit. The approach adopted by the Institute was based on an adaptation of the Australian integrated model (Keegan 1996; pp 140-142)(see chapter 1 this thesis). This structural model was selected because of its ability to support academic staff in their dual role of supporting both face-to-face students and distance learners. The importance of this can be found in the comment of one participant:

We need a separate system of administrative support that provides the same as for taught students. We need to be able to manage distance learning students with very separate needs effectively so that we can cope with both modes at the same time. Otherwise academic staff will treat distance learning as an add-on to be fitted in if they have the time and distance learners will suffer (PL HS 2).

The closely coupled structure is shown in Figure 5.3. Its aim was twofold. First it supported teachers administratively in terms of the production and distribution of learning materials, student records, statistical management information and student support services, including a student 'help-desk'. Second, it made a converged system possible by providing an administrative interface between conventional and open and distance learning systems and, thereby, facilitated the smooth transition of learners and academics from one to the other.

A central feature of the closely coupled approach was the help-desk. This was operated by the distance learning administrator and its aim was to provide a reliable, quick, central service which learners could call with any issues and problems they had. This was introduced following comments in learner evaluations that, when using conventional systems, they had often been passed from office to office before receiving a satisfactory response. A similar 'help-desk' service is provided at the University of Sunderland about



**Fig 5.3 A closely coupled structure for the management of a convergent model of open and distance learning**

which Robertson writes:

I would contend that good support is not necessarily elaborate, but it is reliable. For distance students a telephone helpline or e-mail system that produces a fast service to the learner is much better than a workshop session that not all students can attend (1997; p 119)

Certainly experience gained during this study supports this view. The help-desk has proved to be a well-used and indispensable service for students and teachers alike. An important condition, based on the data from this study, suggests that a service such as a help-desk, certainly within the Institute, would not be possible without a closely coupled administrative structure to support it. The integrated nature of the structure made it possible to obtain information quickly and easily and to respond to learners with prompt, accurate, and often reassuring, information and advice. The story now turns to how the structure was brought alive and how it evolved to be a closer representation of the reality of those who worked within it.

## **Bringing the Picture to Life (an exercise in light and shade)**

So far in this chapter, the story has focussed on why and how the structure to support open and distance learning was changed to reflect, more accurately, what was done in practice. Clearly such change had an inevitable affect on roles, relationships and ways of doing things. In this section, how these changes were accepted by those involved will be discussed by focusing on three interrelated factors. The first is the need for individual and functional role clarity. The second is the individual and collective understanding of where roles fit within the whole, in other words, a sense of context. The third factor is the degree of fit between the norms, attitudes, values and beliefs of participants and the new structure.

## **Role clarity**

The data provide a number of examples of participants attempting to find and establish their individual roles within the new structure. Those I interviewed, both before and after its introduction, expressed a need for clarification of what their role would be. They also wanted to know with whom, and with what departments, they would need to relate in order to fulfil their responsibilities. Lack of clarity early on appears to have been a major problem and the cause of considerable anxiety. This is perhaps best summed up in a memorandum sent to me by the Distance Learning Administration Manager in which he wrote:

In conversation today with a number of colleagues, it seems that there is a great deal of uncertainty as to who is responsible for what. Perhaps we have an opportunity to disperse some of the fog in the new structure  
(Memorandum dated 24 September 1998).

An example of this 'fog' can be found in the experience of David from Materials Development who at the time was still situated within the Centre for Teaching and Learning but outside the Distance Learning Unit. My field notes refer to his level of uncertainty. He repeatedly suggested that he did not know what was going on. In one entry I comment that:

I think he is stressed and is failing to cope with the conflicting demands being made of him (Field notes 28 September 1998).

In his own words he describes himself as being 'near the edge' mainly because he was finding it 'impossible to obtain any sense of direction'. He felt increasingly 'useless and redundant'. The implications of this for any structure are considerable, but particularly a closely coupled one. The role of this participant was of central importance to the development of learning materials and therefore to the structure as a whole. The danger here, according to Hirschhorn (1990), is that high levels of anxiety can increase the 'fog'

that is causing the problem in the first place. Equally important in a closely coupled structure is that:

...when people depend on one another to do effective work, when they must collaborate, one person's anxiety may trigger an anxiety chain (Hirschhorn 1990; p 42).

The data from the interview with David suggest that his anxiety was, to a large extent, due to a poor understanding of his place in the structure as a whole. The situation described by David illustrates the importance of the concept of role in assisting individuals to engage with a micro-world of meaning from which one can derive a sense of who one is (Goffman 1961; p 26). This is important because according to Hirschhorn (1990; p 55), 'when a person's place in a structure is unclear there is a lack of context for taking a role'.

### **A sense of context**

It is at this point (and there were many others) that my field notes make reference to the need to separate my manager and researcher roles. As a manager I had a responsibility to help find a solution to this problem. As a researcher I continued to observe, to record and to interpret what was happening. While working as a manager, with materials development and the core group and task groups, I became aware we were bringing life to the lines on the paper by teasing out and filling in the detail (metaphorical light and shade). Because the structure was based on closely coupled principles it became apparent to us that its essential characteristics lay as much in role interrelationships as in the roles themselves. From these discussions the concept of 'role maps' was developed.

An important aspect of a role map is that it should show, and describe, the key sequential points of a role and identify dependent relationships with other roles at these key points. Individual participants were responsible for drawing their own role map; they controlled them and could change them when circumstances and role relationships changed. When constructing their map, or when changing it, participants were required to discuss key point relationships with others whose roles appeared on their map. This approach offered a means by which roles were 'found' by individuals but also role interrelationships were identified and the importance of others in the structure reinforced. Constructing a role map



was, for some, a difficult undertaking. Some participants met with suspicion and reticence particularly when discussing roles with those outside the closely coupled structure. Hirschhorn (1990; p 195) suggests that any such attempt at integration 'sorely tests social defences by forcing people to confront the world of the other'. Clearly such overtly integrative behaviour was not an easy option. The first role map to be drawn was for David's materials development role and is set out in Figure 5.4 as an example.

David's apparent isolation in the new structure and the subsequent work on the development of 'role maps' is important. The analysis of such data suggests that, in an integrated closely coupled structure, having a broad understanding of the roles of others, and one's own place in relation to them, is an important determinant of an individual's sense of inclusion and consequent effectiveness.

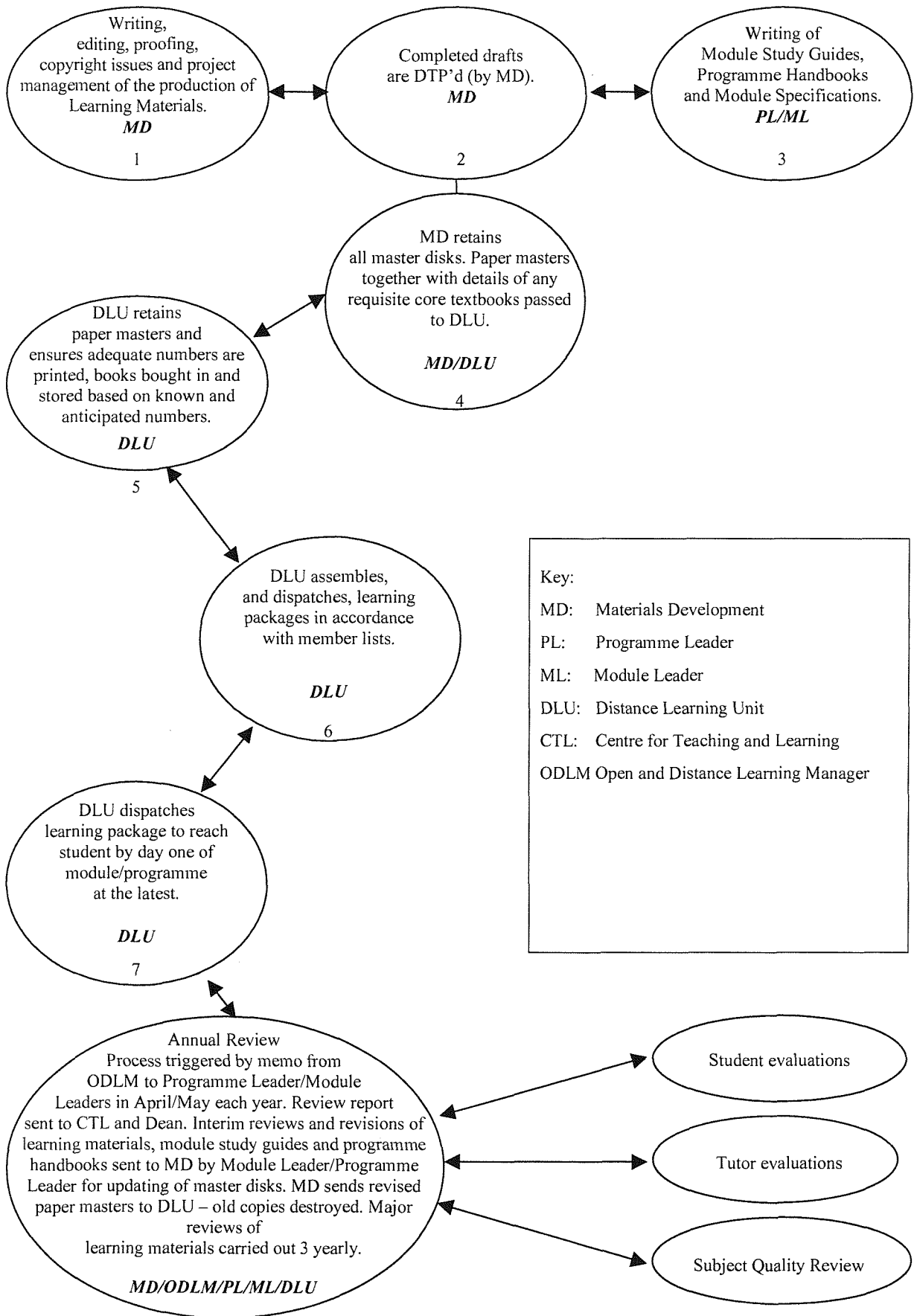
### **The degree of 'fit'**

A further important consideration is the challenge a new structure can bring to accepted cultural and sub-cultural norms, values and beliefs. Culturally determined ways of doing things constrain and condition behaviour, give it regularity and, to some extent, predictability. There is evidence from this study to suggest the new, closely coupled, structure altered this predictability.

It is in this context that the data provide an example of the importance of 'fit'. This involves the programme manager element of my role that immediately became incongruous when I moved out of the College of Health (although I did not see the significance of this at the time). The Programme Manager for post registration programmes, who until now, had not participated in the innovation began to express her concern that the programme management of open and distance learning should rest with her. She continued to argue this in a number of meetings and was supported by the majority of programme and module leaders and by February 1999 (semester 2) this change was put in place.

The importance of this bid for control over the management of the programmes should not be overlooked. The structure, as it had been devised, challenged accepted practices and deeply held beliefs about the quality management of programmes. The programme

**Fig. 5.4 A role map of the materials development role**



manager, programme leaders and module leaders (many of whom were not directly involved in open and distance learning) spoke of the need for consistency across programmes and how this was an important determinant of quality in a dual mode system. For them, the most effective way to ensure this was to have one programme manager for all post registration programmes irrespective of mode (Field notes October 1998 to February 1999). For me this is significant. What was sought here, I had previously argued for in respect of the programme leader, module leader and administrator roles. Yet I was somehow blind to the parallel need for this to apply to the programme manager role.

When I reflect on this, it is clear the reason was that I wished to retain control over this area of academic quality during the early stage of the innovation. This provides an important lesson. The degree of cultural compatibility (Levine 1980; p 17), or fit, between a new structure and dominant attitudes, norms, values and beliefs is of fundamental importance in a restructuring such as this. Trowler (1998; p 139) argues that when there is coherence, teachers are likely to find the new environment (structure) congenial. Where there is incongruity they will find it less so. In these circumstances teachers will resist and often adopt reconstructing strategies, as happened in this case. Another important lesson is identified by Becher (1988; p 318), who suggests that in the higher education tradition change is always subject to ratification from below and that the task of academic management is more subtle and more demanding than in many other organisations (ibid; p 325).

## **Conclusion**

The story of the drawing and re-drawing of the anatomical structural form that this chapter represents has involved a great many people sharing their experiences with me. I have also sifted through my own experiences because, as with all the pictures in this thesis, I have been very much involved in its development. In the collection, analysis and subsequent representation of the data in this chapter, I have been guided by the research question

given below:

*What form of academic and administrative structure is required to support open and distance learning?*

A number of important themes emerged from the data. The first was the necessity for the structure to reflect what is actually done in practice. For this to be possible a clear institutional stance regarding open and distance learning was essential. The Institute decided early on to implement a converged system. This brought to the fore the

***Organisational Level of Analysis***

***The Structural Lens***

<b>Individual</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Institution</b>
Structure reflects what is done in practice.	Clarity of dept's place in structure	Strategic decision regarding philosophy and approach to open and distance learning.
Involvement in development of structure.	Optimum inter-dept communication & liaison	Support for collaborative and creative approach.
Compatibility with individual norms, values & beliefs.	Dept/disciplinary/sub-cultural norms and beliefs accommodated	Cultural norms, values and beliefs of Institute accommodated.
Role clarity.	Effective relationships between closely coupled and loosely coupled components.	
Clear sense of context & interrelationships.	Function/ dept role mapping	
Individual role-mapping		

**Table. 5.1 Conditions influencing the development of the structure at three organisational levels of analysis**

appropriateness of close coupling. Three significant factors can be identified, from the data, regarding this structural concept. The first is that close coupling provided a structural form that, because of the degree of interrelationship between roles, is well suited to support the effective management of the interface between distance and face-to-face modes of study. The second is that the delivery of open and distance learning is based on a structural principle that I have called 'link-dependency'.

Link-dependency means that the structure is made up of a number of interrelated processes and each process, and therefore the structure as a whole, is only as good as its weakest link. For a process to be effective each link, and associated roles, must be identified and its boundary carefully managed. From this notion of interdependency, emerged the concept of role maps that helped bring role clarity and a sense of context to those involved. The third significant factor is the need for teachers, and the subject groups within which they work, to remain loosely coupled. This preserves the principles of independence and right to roam upon which subject quality relies. As in chapter 4, it is possible to group the conditions influencing the development of the structure within three levels of analysis; the individual, the group and the institution. Table 5.1 summarises these conditions.

Those involved in this study, developed, implemented and evaluated a structure that accommodated a closely/loosely coupled synergy that now, some two years later, with the benefit of increasingly sophisticated information and communication technologies, finds itself more and more in the mainstream. This work has enabled the best of open and distance and face-to-face teaching and learning to come together more rapidly and with greater confidence. For my colleagues and myself, the period since April 1998 when the study began has brought great change that has represented an important step toward the future. Now the story of this innovation turns to perhaps the greatest change of all, changes to personal practice.

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# CHAPTER 6

## *CHANGE OF PRACTICE* *(a portrait)*

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### Introduction

This chapter tells the story of how the individual practices of teachers, administrators and managers changed as a necessary part of this innovation. The link between practice and innovation is made by Levine (1980; p 4) who defines innovation as any departure from traditional practices through either reform, implying new, or change, implying different. Certainly, within the Institute, the introduction of open and distance learning brought both reform and change to practices across the organisation at individual, group and management levels. The aim of this chapter is to explore what changes took place, why they were necessary and what conditions influenced their adoption. To do this I will tell the story as I viewed the innovation through the change of practice lens.

The picture I see is of a portrait, selected because of its intimate association with the person whose portrait it is, just as practice is intimately associated with the person whose practice it is. As a concept, practice can be considered from a number of perspectives. For example, in chapter 5, the importance of role in determining who we are and our place in the organisation is discussed. One view of practice is that it is one means by which we enact roles, how we bring them to life and how we act and interact with others (Oatley 1990; p 75). Another perspective sees practice as disciplined performance and responsible professional activity (Becher and Kogan 1992; p 55). This view of professional practice is more formal and 'governed'. At the heart of this, for the teacher and academic institution, is the importance of a 'good name' and a need to preserve and enhance individual and collective reputations (Becher and Kogan 1992; p 111). The significance of this public

face of professional practice is concern for how others see us, just as a portrait is created to be seen and is, as a consequence, open to scrutiny and assessment by others.

The public view is, however, only part of the story. Usher et al (1997; p 60) offer another perspective on practice based on Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' in which practices are described as embodied skills. This perspective questions the logic that the only professional practice is that which is prescribed, disciplined and governed by external regulation (Thompson 1991; p 12). Usher et al (1997) argue that habitus provides us with a tacit understanding and a sensibility about how to act in the practice setting. For the practitioner, habitus is an internalised and incorporated culture and:

....sustains practice without express regulation, through tradition  
as a mode of transmitting expectations, routine and tacit knowledge  
(Usher et al 1997; p 61).

Thus professional practice can be described as a mix of externally governed and internal, culturally determined, ways of doing things. It enables us to fulfil our various roles within our respective fields and can be metaphorically represented as individual, group and organisational portraits. Others will see these portraits and make judgements about quality, worth and value and they will come to their own opinion as to what the portrait represents. Once completed, however, portraits are difficult, though not impossible, to change. As with practice such change takes time, patience and care.

For the purposes of this chapter the potential scope of the changes to practice that were necessary at all levels is too extensive to be given adequate acknowledgement within the limitations of the word allowance of this thesis. This chapter, therefore, focuses on three key areas identified from the literature which form part of the conceptual framework of the research (see chapter 3). These are locus of control, the independent learner, and industrialisation.

## **Locus of Control (agreeing the pose)**

### **A partnership between teacher and learner**

In chapter 2, the constructivist principles of open and distance learning are discussed and, in particular, how they challenge the traditional linear, transmission model of education. Chapters 4 and 5 provide examples of the scope of the change resulting from this challenge and its effects on traditional perceptions of control. These examples include the public and collaborative nature of writing, developing and delivering open and distance learning and the need to share best practice encapsulated in the principle of the 'right to roam' (see chapter 4). In addition, structural change brought subtle shifts in responsibility and highlighted the need for clarity of roles (see chapter 5) and their interrelationships in a closely coupled system.

From a pedagogical point of view, the challenge to traditional forms of higher education has its epicentre in a shift in the relationship between teacher and learner. Chapter 2 provides a discussion of how this relationship is increasingly seen as problematic because it is based on an unequal distribution of power with the needs of the learner invariably being defined by the teacher. It is a relationship with its roots based predominantly in an institutionally managed and teacher focused model (Fallows et al 1997; p 140). Interview and observational data from this study identify that a major change with which teachers and administrators had to deal was to provide service orientated support based on a 'learner centred vision of education' (Nunan 1993; p 1).

An important aspect of this 'vision' is the expectations both learners and teachers have of the purpose of their relationship. Responses from teachers suggest that there was some disparity between these expectations that required adjustment and compromise from both. For example, learner demand on the time of teachers was problematic, especially early in a programme. This was usually because learners needed reassurance and support when using the still unfamiliar learning materials. However, because the 'rules' of contact were left 'open', teachers found it increasingly difficult to manage open and distance learning



along side their other commitments, including face to face modules. As one programme leader put it:

I found it took a lot of time and also it was actually time that was outside working hours. The problem was finding the time for them. In the end I set aside a Wednesday evening when I stayed at work late (PL HP 3).

The same participant found that even though she attempted to reclaim control by publishing an identified 'slot' for telephone or real-time e-mail tutorials many students expected 'me to drop everything when they phoned me.' She described it as difficult at times because 'some are fairly persistent you know' (PL HP 3).

Of importance here is what Armstrong (1996; p 87) calls 'the negotiation of house rules'. It appears that in their concern to be as open as possible, what was taken for granted as a way of working in a face-to-face learning situation had to be reclaimed by teachers when dealing with distance learners. An important lesson that the research participants, and I as manager, learnt from this was that no system could be so open as to operate without rules and still remain effective. This is reinforced by Armstrong who points out that this early stage in the relationship between teacher and learner can be:

.... a testing period of readjustment for all concerned. In a distance learning situation the readjustments involved may be greater than those involved in more traditional settings (ibid; p 87).

Teacher perceptions of the expectations held by learners of the purpose of the interaction are also important. One participant described them as 'different' (PL HS 3). In her communications with learners she found that the nature of the interaction had changed in a qualitative way. She explained that:

.... they don't expect to take it (knowledge) from you. They look to me for guidance and they are thinking about how they are going to use it for themselves and in their practice. It is very different (PL HS 3).

Others had similar experiences, particularly regarding the independent learning that is a feature of the constructivist approach used in the learning materials. One module leader suggested that distance learners:

.... seem to work harder. They expect to do more by comparison.  
Taught students do expect to be fed (ML PSN 3).

Over time, this participant, and others, recognised subtle differences between distance and face-to-face learners that appeared to have implications for the traditional relationship between learner and teacher and, as a consequence, on the locus of control within that relationship. When communicating with teachers and administrators, distance learners did not want to be 'spoon fed' but they did want reassurance that they were going in the right direction. Evidence from this study suggests that change such as this to individual attitudes and practices, while not always straightforward, was generally successful. This might be because this was not a 'big bang' change but an incremental one based on collaborative principles (see chapter 4). Trowler (1998; p 23) characterises incremental change as an attempt to garner understanding, support and ownership among staff. An example of this taking form can be identified from the experiential learning of one participant who suggested that:

.... good communication between teacher and student is vitally important. I could not have managed otherwise. Teacher and student must change the way they do things if this is going to happen. Teachers must be alert to difficulties and actively seek signs through early indicators built into the module otherwise time slips away. This is as much the learner's responsibility as the teacher's. They must take responsibility for their own learning and communicating with the teacher not just sit there waiting to be contacted. It is more of an equal partnership (PL HS 3).

Certainly the experiences gained during this innovation do not reflect the argument that the 'vernacular theories' held by teachers of how teaching and learning best occur are intrinsically static and resistant to change (Ramsden 1993; p 90). An example of the willingness to change and the extent to which change had occurred can be found in data

provided by the same programme leader who recalled:

Programme meetings were taken up far more with issues about learning whereas before the dialogue was mostly about teaching. I think this change of emphasis is brought about by distance learning. It is about how people learn rather than how we teach (PL HS 2).

Such accounts are, according to Stephens (1996; p 50), tied up with the notion of learner autonomy and reflect the facilitative emphasis of constructivist theories (Aldred 1996; p 68; Moran 1997; p 171). Such examples from the data suggest that, in this study, changes to practice regarding locus of control were increasingly seen as an enhancement of practice rather than wholesale change. For the most part participants found that dealing with distance learners involved differences in approach that were a matter of emphasis rather than root and branch change. Difficulties that did arise were often due to managing distance and face-to-face learners in parallel. One programme leader put it this way:

I teach both distance and face to face learners. There are differences, of course there are. But the process is basically the same. Providing guidance and facilitating learning. What is different is that distance learners know what they want; are more sure about what they want from you. I have learnt to listen more and to make decisions jointly (PL PSN 3).

It is, perhaps, reasonable to suggest that such a view demonstrates a narrowing of the gap between perceptions of the role of the teacher in open and distance learning and in face-to-face teaching. This is a view shared by others in the literature (for example Fallows and Robinson 1997; p 144; Moran and Myringer 1999; p 63). Such data seem to indicate that experience with the one can affect practice with the other so that no matter what the mode of teaching and learning, the approach is increasingly client focussed and the learner is seen as a more equal partner in the educational process.

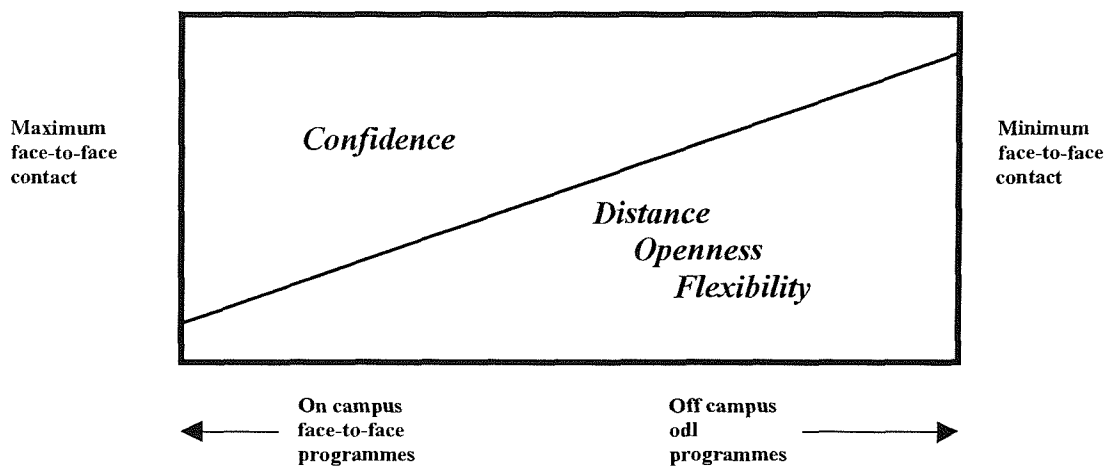
## **The Independent Learner (a canvas on a wall of its own)**

### **Independence, letting go and a question of confidence**

The support of learners in more flexible ways, through the introduction of a negotiated, individualised, learner centred approach to teaching and learning, are fundamental principles upon which the Institute attempted to base the implementation of open and distance learning. This brings to the fore the relationship between locus of control and the notion of the independent, self-directed learner. An aim of the core group was to foster independence, rather than dependence, in distance learners and by so doing, challenge cultural norms and taken for granted practices (*habitus*) about the relationship between teacher and learner. To do this successfully, teachers had to develop the confidence to let go of the traditional locus of control they were accustomed to in more traditional forms of education. However, increasing learner independence, letting go and maintaining an acceptable level of confidence did, at times, prove problematic.

An important finding from this study is that the data indicate an inverse relationship between teacher confidence and the introduction of distance between teacher and learner and the corresponding need to function in an increasingly open and flexible way (Figure 6.1 demonstrates this phenomenon). It is perhaps not surprising that such a fundamental change to individual practice should increase anxiety and reduce confidence, particularly in the early stages of a teacher's experiences of this mode of teaching and learning. Of particular interest, however, is the interaction between teacher and learner and in what ways this anxiety and reduced confidence manifested itself and how teachers, individually and collectively, dealt with it.

Much of the anxiety and loss of confidence experienced by teachers appears to have been due to three main factors. The first was a lack of structure for communication between teacher and learner. Second was the highly individual nature of the support required by learners, and the third was, the challenge to cultural norms posed by the loss of fixed assessment dates and the introduction of more flexible time scales for modules. The



**Fig 6.1 The inverse relationship between teacher confidence and the essential characteristics of open and distance learning**

concerns of participant teachers about the quality, appropriateness, purpose and frequency of communication with learners was common in the data. Teachers voiced their anxiety in a number of ways from; ‘I wish we’d never got into this’ (ML HS 2) to expressions of concern at not knowing how learners were progressing:

...I wonder how they are getting on and I’m not always sure that what they are saying to me on the phone is actually what is happening (ML PSN 3).

This reveals a basic insecurity that is a prominent theme in the data. It is an insecurity that appears to have its roots in the taken for granted ‘habitus’ that the progression of a learner is dependent on the direct, contiguous interventions of a teacher. Closely related to this is

the belief among teachers that the structures in place for managing the interface between the learner and the institution should reflect this. The reactions of one teacher, however, was toward the opposite extreme:

...in many ways I suppose this is a facet of distance learning isn't it? Students have got control over their learning and if they don't want to contact us that's up to them (ML PSN 2).

Such a *laissez faire* attitude was rare. More common was a real anxiety to provide a rich experience for the learner. For one programme leader this meant that communication was a two-way responsibility:

I was expecting to put a lot of emphasis on needing to give students feedback...but what I now also feel is that it is equally as important that the teacher receives feedback from the student (PL HS 3).

This emphasises an often-understated truism of open and distance learning. The learner and the teacher are equidistant from each other and both need the reassurance of contact and communication, the former to progress, the latter to facilitate progression. This two-way partnership, according to Aldred (1996; p 69), should be finely balanced so as to provide the flexibility and opportunities for self-direction which distance learners value so much and also a level of direction and stability necessary for purposive, goal-orientated work. An important aspect of this is the pacing of learners through a programme of study. An attractive feature of open and distance learning, for some learners, is that it allows individual rates of progress. This was a concern to a number of participants who were confused and uncertain about the efficacy of a more open and flexible approach to the completion of modules. One programme leader used the analogy of an orchestra to explain her dilemma:

Its almost like a conductor making sure everyone is following the music at the same pace and timing and playing the same tune. Whereas if you split the orchestra up so they are all in different rooms of the same building, they can't see the conductor and they can't hear each other. The best the conductor can hope to do is to help them play their individual piece to the best of their ability. Finishing together becomes less important than playing well on an individual basis (PL HS 3).

Such an emphasis on the independent learner is contested territory in the literature with many arguing for complete autonomy for the learner (for example: Wedemeyer 1973; p 76, Moore 1977; p 21; Roche 1988; p 60)). On the other hand, Daniel and Shale (1979) suggest that the more freedom a learner has the less likely they are to complete the programme of study. These authors recommend a balance between interaction, direction and independence in a similar way to Aldred, mentioned above. At the heart of this is the crucial importance of strategies to avoid a feeling of isolation in the distance learner who already tends to feel low involvement with the social system of the institution. Keegan (1996; p 99) makes the point that learners want to know how they are doing in relation both to their peers and to the requirements of the programme. The analysis of data discussed so far in this chapter appears to indicate that an important change for teachers was to acknowledge this different emphasis and to find ways of creating, and enhancing, opportunities for interaction in their modules and programmes.

Approaches to this challenge, within the Institute, verged on the 'ad hocery and serendipity' referred to by Ball (1994; p 16) in his interpretation of how policy is formulated and implemented. Some programme teams provided group tutorials, both face-to-face and by e-conferencing. Others had face-to-face workshops and in one case 'master-classes' (Field notes and minutes of Programme Team meetings, Oct 98 to Feb 99). All programmes facilitated peer support groups based on the voluntary exchange of personal contact details, mirroring the system operated at the Open University (Hall et al 1993; p 30).

The link between the great majority of these measures was the need for learners to attend the institution, individually or as a group. For some, this was impossible. For others it was thought 'unhelpful and de-motivating' (PL HS 2), a feature also found among distance learners at the University of Sheffield who considered the lack of the whole social dimension to be one of the attractions of open and distance learning (Aldred 1996; p 68). There were those, however, who needed the contact, and many teachers found that learners used these attended sessions as opportunities to discuss concerns such as administrative and pastoral issues rather than pedagogic matters to do with the module itself (Field notes 18 February 1999). Similar data from Hall et al's study (*ibid*; p 33) was

interpreted as a search, by distance learners, for the academic socialisation of university life that was missing in open and distance learning.

In response to these concerns, and once again acting in my manager role, I was anxious to raise the issue of communication between learner and teacher at the Institute Distance Learning Forum held in March 1999. After a great deal of discussion it was agreed that while the various approaches adopted were valuable in their own right, particularly the opportunity for socialisation, a more structured method of feedback and communication was, perhaps, required to complement the less structured, ad hoc, arrangements already in place. This, to a large extent, mirrored the scheduled and non-scheduled arrangements for interaction found to be operating at the Open University (Hall et al 1993; p 27).

The core group agreed that one way to encourage and facilitate contact between teacher and learner, and at the same time enhance its purpose, was to make the assessment the focus of each scheduled contact. In this way each interaction could focus on the individual needs of the learner with the teacher helping to clarify confusions, set goals, explore alternative perspectives and, through discussion, facilitate critical thinking. In addition, assessment 'hand-in' dates were fixed in order to provide the purposive, goal orientated element referred to by Aldred (op cit). However, flexibility toward the granting of extensions to these fixed dates was considered an important principle, as was the opportunity for learners to opt to complete a module over two semesters rather than one.

This raft of measures, primarily aimed at reassuring teachers of the quality of the open and distance learning framework, prompted one participant to comment wryly that, 'we are not so much open as slightly ajar' (IDE meeting 5 Nov 1998). Even though the time-scale for the introduction of this initiative fell outside the time sampling period of this study, the decisions that led to it fell within it, therefore Figure 6.2 provides an example of a contact schedule taken from a programme handbook prepared for the 1999/2000 academic year.

As the schedule indicates, from the beginning of the 1999/2000 academic year, learners were required to complete an early assessment task, in week five of the module. This assessment task was related to their final module assessment and provided an opportunity



<b>Module Week No</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Date</b>
	<b>Module Study Guide will be sent to you on:</b>	<b>10.09.99</b>
	<b>The module learning material will be sent to you on:</b>	<b>24.09.99</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>The module starts week beginning:</b>	<b>11.10.99</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>First group tutorial:</b>	<b>21.10.99</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>First individual tutorial by telephone/e-mail during week beginning:</b>	<b>25.10.99</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>First assessment task:</b>	<b>12.11.99</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Second telephone tutorial re. written and verbal feedback on assessment task by:</b>	<b>26.11.99</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Second group tutorial:</b>	<b>09.12.99</b>
<b>Christmas break 20.12.99 to 10.01.2000</b>		
<b>12</b>	<b>Third individual tutorial by telephone/e-mail during week beginning:</b>	<b>17.01.2000</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Final assessment submitted on:</b>	<b>11.02.2000</b>

**Fig 6.2 An example of a module contact schedule**

for them to reflect critically on their own knowledge and practice in relation to the assessment and in discussion with their teacher. Such discussions were intended to provide enhanced academic socialisation and a framework for dialogue by which both learner and teacher could firstly, gauge progress, second, allay mutual anxiety and third, build confidence and trust. The three conditions that, the data from this study suggest, must be in place if the locus of control in open and distance learning is to be altered and the delicate balance between learner independence and learner isolation achieved.

## **Industrialisation (not the original but a genuine reproduction)**

### **A few steps further**

In chapter 2, the 'industrial' nature of open and distance learning is discussed, and the implications of this for the practice of those involved. Attempts, in the literature, to understand the industrialisation of education are conflicting and tend to range along a continuum. At one extreme is a purely 'Fordist' view in which open and distance learning is polarised from the rest of higher education because of its overt reliance on industrial philosophy and processes (Rumble 1995; p 12). At the other extreme is the notion that higher education in general has taken on more and more industrial practices and management styles in order to cope with the demands now facing it, and that open and distance learning has merely taken it a 'few steps further down the road' (Sewart 1993; p 6).

It is to the effects of taking these 'few steps further', in which the original raw materials of teaching and learning are 'manufactured' into 'genuine reproductions' in the form of learning packages, that I now turn. The analysis of data from interviews, observation and documents indicates the emergence of a broad range of issues that either affected individual practices directly or altered perceptions, views or expectations and in so doing,

brought about change. Of these issues, three were found to be of particular importance. These were utilitarianism, division of labour and quality.

## **Utilitarianism**

Perhaps one of the most important issues of this innovation was the tension between the concerns of policy makers (senior managers) to maximise the utility of open and distance learning, in terms of increasing revenue, and the efforts of teachers and administrators to maximise the learner centred nature of support. For example, the expectation that open and distance learning could increase learner numbers and improve retention at reduced cost was a feature of much of the motivation, on the part of policy makers, to introduce open and distance learning.

At my first meeting with the Director of the Institute in March 1998 she expressed her hope that open and distance learning would 'bring in more students' and that 'we need to recoup the investment we have made' (Field notes 13 March 1998). The issue of retention was significant and was identified as such at the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject review in February 1999. The report highlights the disappointing attrition rates for the BSc (Hons) Health Promotion, due mainly to the demands of work and family on the predominantly female learners, and commends 'the adoption of a more flexible approach utilising a level three distance learning route' as a strategy to reverse this trend (QAA 1999; p 7).

In many ways these data reveal a fundamental tension. As the director indicated, considerable investment had been made into the development and production of learning materials. It is well recognised that for institutions that opt to produce their own learning materials, open and distance learning ceases to be a cheap option (Fallows and Robinson 1997; p 141). Here lies the rub. Much of the initial concern expressed at Institute executive and commercial meetings was that the initial cost of production should be recovered through recruitment.

A paper presented to the commercial meeting by the Head of the Centre for Teaching and Learning identified that the production costs, in 1998, per distance learning module was £5,800.00. At that time eighteen modules had been completed or were in production,

making a total expenditure of £104,040.00. Based on a module fee of £325, recruitment to open and distance learning modules would need to exceed 320 learners if this investment were to be recovered. Reasonable estimates suggested that, based on module fees alone, and not counting HEFCE funding, this initial figure would take in the region of three years to recoup. However, this still did not take account of the real-time costs of the academic and administrative support of learners.

Because of this prediction, which turned out to be pretty accurate, the emphasis placed on the direction and purpose of open and distance learning changed in subtle, but important, ways. It involved altering the focus from open and distance learning as a mode of teaching and learning, central to which was the use of learning materials, to a commercial activity central to which was the marketability of learning materials. As a result a great deal of energy and resources, were put into the marketing of learning materials, and our expertise on a consultative basis, to other faculties of health within UK universities. This brings to the fore the central tension between the production of materials, the recovery of costs and the support of learners. It had the inevitable result of diverting teacher and administrative time away from direct learner support, a situation not uncommon in the wider distance learning community (Paul 1993; p 123, Lippiatt 1997; p 157). However it is the altered focus itself that is important, as Sewart argues:

...it is easy to see the course materials as the major product of distance education. After all they stand as the most obvious difference between a distance education system and a traditional one. They are tangible and might be perceived as the end result of an industrialised process (1993; p 10).

The lesson learnt from these early experiences of the cost of open and distance learning is that it is easy to overestimate its ability to increase revenue and easy to underestimate the real-time costs involved in the production of materials and the support of learners. The net effect is a tension that, for Sewart, is a function of the industrialised nature of open and distance learning. On the one hand there is the reliance on the principles of manufacturing that underpin the production of materials and on the other the ethos of a service industry that informs the support of learners. The potential danger for the Institute was that in our concern to recover costs, we were in danger of promoting the former at the expense of the

latter. As Sewart reminds us, 'the objective of the institution is not the production of highly acclaimed course materials, it is the production of successful students' (ibid; p 10).

## **Division of labour**

The industrialised process with which open and distance learning is traditionally associated is, according to Rumble (1995; p 15), marked by de-skilling and an increasing division of labour. Reasons for this vary, but mainly centre on the increased efficiency possible from dividing the process into its component parts. For example writing, editing, desk-top publishing, printing, publishing, dispatch, learner support and so forth. Indeed it is possible for each component to be undertaken by a different person, thus breaking up the 'complete work process' that characterises traditional face-to-face classroom teaching (Peters 1983; p 100). In a similar way Raggatt (1993; p 27), using the Open University as an example, refers to the highly specialist nature of course team members who 'flit in and out' and whose work is sequential rather than integrated.

A major concern of the core group was to avoid reducing individual roles to the lowest common denominator of specialism and the 'flitting in and out' referred to by Raggatt. The core group wanted to develop specialist skills while enabling participants to retain a holistic perspective. Data from interviews with participants suggest that teachers had a wholly different experience from that described by Raggatt, above. The basis of this difference appears to have been the importance the Institute placed on collaboration, integration and the convergence of face-to-face and distance modes of study.

Nevertheless, a form of industrialisation was a necessary part of the management of open and distance learning at the Institute. This is reflected in the importance the core group placed on developing a structure, and defining roles, that enabled the close coupling of the disparate elements of the process so that they could be effectively managed. As part of this 'industrialised' approach, the production of learning materials was broken down into clearly identified tasks that could be 'project managed' and 'production reports' completed against which progress could be judged and targets achieved (see Figure 6.3). There were similar processes for editing, desktop publishing, printing and distribution. Clearly when teachers were part of this 'production line' process they were exposed to the fragmentation, structure and discipline of an industrialised system with its managed

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## Production Report 16 December 1998

Module ID : BHP (2)

Module title: **The Basis of Health Promotion**

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Receive 1 <sup>st</sup> draft from Author	19-Apr-98
Dispatch 1 <sup>st</sup> draft to Editor	26 -Apr-98
Receive 1 <sup>st</sup> edit from Editor	17- May-98
Dispatch 1 <sup>st</sup> edit to Author	19-May-98
Receive 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft from Author	09-Jun-98
Dispatch 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft to Editor	11-Jun-98
Receive 2 <sup>nd</sup> edit from Editor	25-Jun- 98
Dispatch 2 <sup>nd</sup> edit to Author	27-Jun-98
Receive final draft from Author	11-Jun-98

*The latest date for the 1<sup>st</sup> draft to be received if the learning materials are to be completed in time for student enrolment.*

*Also dispatch to Critical Reviewer at this stage*

Dispatch final draft to DTP	13-Jun-98
Receive 1 <sup>st</sup> working copy from DTP	27-Jul-98
Dispatch 1 <sup>st</sup> working copy to Proof Reader	29-Jul-98
Receive 1 <sup>st</sup> corrected copy from Proof Reader	10-Aug-98
Dispatch 1 <sup>st</sup> corrected copy to Author	12 -Aug-98
Receive 2 <sup>nd</sup> working copy from Author	19 -Aug-98
Dispatch 2 <sup>nd</sup> working copy to DTP	21-Aug-98
Receive final working copy from DTP	28-Aug-98
Dispatch final working copy to Proof Reader	30-Aug-98
Receive final corrected copy from Proof Reader	06-Sep-98
Dispatch final corrected copy to DTP	08-Sep-98
Receive final copy from DTP	15-Sep 98

Dispatch final copy to Author	17-Sep- 98
Receive master from Author	24-sep-98
Dispatch master to DLU	26-Sep-98

*Once the Master has been sent to DLU it will take up to 3 weeks before the materials are dispatched to learners*

**Fig 6.3 An example of a production report for writing an open and distance learning module**

targets and deadlines. However, teachers did not see this as reducing their role:

.... its not what I have been used to but its not that different from writing for publication. Anyway, it's my module. I have an interest in getting it finished. Targets are helpful. (ML PSN 2).

There is little doubt that the collaborative approach taken in this innovation helped participants to gain insight into the roles of others. The use of role-maps with accompanying presentations at regular events such as the Institute Distance Learning Forum promoted integration and the sharing of best practice. One module leader found this:

.... really helpful. I know more about what happens in distance learning than I do in the taught situation and I've been doing that for years (ML HP 3).

At another level such broadened individual perspectives had a particularly important knock-on effect, as one programme leader explained:

We discuss (at the programme team meeting) everything and anything that comes to light in terms of managing the programme. Workload issues, dispatch of materials, the writing of materials, support systems, administration, recruitment, assessments. Often issues that never come up at taught programme meetings (PL HS 2).

Asked why she thought this important her reply was that she and colleagues found that distance learners responded better to teachers who were able to offer advice about a range of issues and who 'seemed to know what was going on'. This reflects my conversational interviews with learners, referred to in chapter 5, that suggested they took a holistic view when making judgements about an open and distance learning programme and the quality of the service they received. Such a finding is supported by the work of Sewart (1993; p 7) who likens a distance learning system to a service industry. He argues that each learner relates to the physical system, procedures and overall strategy of the organisation through the people providing the service, whoever they are. For Sewart this is important because each time the learner comes into contact with the organisation, there is a 'moment of truth' at which they receive a good, bad or indifferent impression of the service. He argues that

in a learner's experience of a distance learning programme there will be a number of 'moments of truth' and the cumulative effect of these determines whether the learner is dissatisfied (drops out) or is satisfied (completes the programme).

As argued in previous chapters, the dual mode, convergent system that the Institute adopted required considerable collaboration between individuals as well as the effective integration of the various parts of the system. Such requirements suggest that, in this particular context, division of labour, and its associated de-skilling, was rendered unlikely, unnecessary and undesirable. Indeed, the analysis of a range of data indicates that a significant change to the practices of participants was the adoption of a more integrated and holistic approach to their work. In the context of open and distance learning at the Institute this appears to have increased the likelihood of creating a more positive, and satisfying, experience for the learner.

## **Quality**

Quality is an essential consideration in any educational environment and reflects the importance attributed to 'reputation' and a 'good name' in the higher education sector, referred to in the introduction to this chapter. This concern is reflected in the issues surrounding the relationship between open and distance learning and higher education, discussed in chapter 2. In particular the discussion outlines how constant change within the sector, and the world in which it functions, has brought heightened concerns about quality. These concerns are especially focussed on increasing student numbers and a falling unit of resource. At the level of the institution such changes gave rise to the adoption of a more managerial, market-orientated, philosophy as a means of survival in an increasingly competitive environment. The adoption of the language of the corporate market place, referred to in chapter 4, represents a powerful artefact of this changing culture.

At the level of central government attempts to promote economy, efficiency and effectiveness within the sector has resulted in an increased use of audit and regulation. For example, the Research Assessment Exercise and Subject Review, the outcomes of which are ultimately linked to funding and reputation, are powerful managerial tools for ensuring standards and quality. Of particular relevance to this thesis was the publication of



*Guidelines on the Quality Assurance of Distance Learning* by the Quality Assurance Agency in April 1999.

The analysis of data gained during this innovation suggests that this concern for quality is, in many ways, more intense when open and distance learning is involved. The data provide a number of examples of how the Institute introduced overt and explicit measures to assure the quality of open and distance learning programmes to which face-to-face programmes were not normally exposed. For example, full text copies of all learning materials were provided for validation panels in addition to the normal curriculum documentation. Quality criteria were written for each component of the open and distance learning system against which internal audit was carried out. Structural plans and role-maps were produced and used to ensure effective integration (see chapter 5). Attendance at staff development events was mandatory for all teachers and administrators involved in open and distance learning. An evaluation strategy was developed specifically for open and distance learning modules and programmes. Institute Distance Learning Forum meetings were held at which quality matters were discussed and best practice shared (see chapter 4). Finally a strategic decision was taken to offer dual mode, converged, programmes so that quality could be equitably managed across modes.

In many ways these data not only demonstrate a desire to ensure the highest standards possible but also a 'nervousness' about open and distance learning among teachers, administrators and managers, that did not appear to exist in face-to-face programmes. Some thought this was because it was 'new', others were not so sure and thought that the problem lay in the way it was fundamentally different from face-to-face teaching and learning. This difference appeared to be centred on concerns about distance, openness, flexibility and on the industrial paraphernalia of open and distance learning necessary for the smooth operation of the system and to provide an effective service to the learner.

The manifestations of these concerns for quality took two forms. On the one hand teachers tended to 'retreat to the familiar' in an effort to retain control and so attempt to maintain quality. For example, as outlined earlier in this chapter, they argued for the retention of face-to-face opportunities, structured timetables for contact and fixed module start and end points. On the other hand, there was a clear learner centred service orientation developing

among teachers and administrators. The importance of this, for a learner's perception of their experience, has already been discussed and can be seen to be taking shape in the comments of one overworked administrator:

.... having enough people is really important. Otherwise it is difficult to give a good service. What distresses me is that because of time pressures and volume of work I am not able to give the level of service which I feel the job deserves and which I feel I should give ( Admin 3).

At the heart of these concerns was a clear tension between relying on the status quo as a means of maintaining quality and the concept of providing a service that was learner centred. To achieve the latter would require a change in the locus of control and an acknowledgement of the role of the independent, goal orientated learner. Underpinning this was the realisation that distance learners needed a different level of service than their face-to-face contemporaries and that providing it was more difficult, more resource intensive and required greater cultural change than at first thought.

It seems reasonable to suggest, based on the data reported in this thesis, that open and distance learning requires a different view of what constitutes quality. A view that moves outside the box concerned predominantly with teaching and learning to one based on the 'whole experience' a learner has with the institution. This 'whole experience' includes the quality of the learning materials but also the full range of interactions the learner has with the institution. It is an approach that is holistic, service orientated and learner centred.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have told the story of perhaps the most fundamentally important, and potentially difficult, aspect of this innovation; change to individual practices. The question that guided this perspective was:

*How do individual practices change when open and distance learning is introduced?*

In order to achieve a clear picture I have focussed on three closely related themes, identified from the literature. These are, locus of control, the independent learner and industrialisation. As in the previous two chapters the conditions influencing changes to practice can be grouped within three levels of analysis; the individual, the group and the institution. Table 6.1 provides a summary of these conditions.

With regard to locus of control the data suggest a clear shift in the relationship between teacher and learner. Central to this was the emergence of a more equal partnership in which both took responsibility for aspects of the learning process. A vital element for the success of this relationship was the need for good two-way communication upon which progression could be measured and facilitated.

Closely linked with changes to locus of control, and the need for communication and feedback, is the notion of the independent learner. Attempts to change practice to achieve independence for the learner revealed a crisis of confidence in teachers. It appeared, at least initially, that the greater the distance, openness and flexibility, the greater the loss of confidence. This resulted in teachers 'retreating to the familiar' in an attempt to retain control and maintain what they perceived as quality.

The industrial nature of open and distance learning with its reputation for reducing costs and increasing revenue brought a tension between the utility of the learning materials and the importance of providing service orientated, learner centred support. Also of relevance was the avoidance of the division of labour and 'specialisation' associated with the industrial process. Experience gained during this study highlights the importance of collaboration and integration and their place in enhancing the interaction with learners. In so doing it establishes two fundamental principles underpinning this innovation. The first is the significance of the mutual awareness of roles and their interrelationships. The second is the importance of specialist teachers and administrators capable of acting holistically when dealing with learners. The analysis of data from interviews with teachers and administrators appears to emphasise that it is the experience provided by such interactions, that act as Sewart's 'moments of truth' and from which learners derive a

*Organisational level of analysis*

*The  
Change of  
Practice  
Lens*

Individual	Group	Institution
<p>Acceptance of team approach.</p> <p>Learner centred vision of teaching and learning.</p> <p>Realistic expectations of partnership between teacher and learner.</p> <p>Mutual responsibility for success of partnership between teacher and learner.</p> <p>Degree of fit with issues of distance, openness and flexibility</p> <p>Clear structure for communication between teacher and learner</p> <p>Compatibility between personal values of teacher/ administrator &amp; learner centred, service orientated approach.</p>	<p>Collaborative approach to development, delivery &amp; learner support.</p> <p>Role clarity, integration &amp; the sharing of best practice.</p> <p>A holistic approach at programme &amp; module team level.</p> <p>An emphasis on learning rather than teaching.</p> <p>Achieving a balance between teacher centred approach &amp; a learner centred, service orientation as a means of achieving best practice.</p>	<p>Incremental change that preserves confidence and commitment.</p> <p>Realistic assessment of costs associated with odl.</p> <p>Equitable approach to assessment of quality between modes of study.</p> <p>Adequate human and technical resources to achieve a standard of learner centred, service orientated provision that is at least equitable to other modes of teaching and learning.</p>

**Table 6.1 Conditions influencing change of practice at three organisational levels of analysis**

sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service, programme or institution. As such they are a vital determinant of perceived quality. This, in no small way, brings into sharp focus the contribution such changes to practice, achieved by individuals and groups across the Institute, made to the success of this innovation.

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# CHAPTER 7

## *CONCLUSION* *(a collage)*

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The purpose of this chapter is to bring together the pictures that represent the analysis of this innovation. These pictures were developed from a set of four analytic concepts that, in turn, were based on the four research questions guiding this study. The analytic concepts are; collaboration, structure, change of practice and sub-cultures. As indicated in chapter 3 issues concerning sub-cultural effects on the innovation are embedded in the stories told in chapters 4, 5 and 6, and form a background to the picture each chapter represents. One of the aims here is to separate out the sub-cultural perspective while at the same time drawing overall conclusions about the experience of this innovation.

There are two important principles underpinning this thesis that require restating here. The first is that it is primarily concerned with the experience of change rather than its management. Issues of management are posed mainly in a reflexive way, to show how the collective experiences of the core group contributed to decision making and how, as a manager, I was involved in that process. The second is that while each picture has its own meaning it is a meaning based on the analysis and interpretation of data from a particular perspective. By bringing these pictures together in the form of a collage my intention is to give a 'whole view' of the innovation that provides a basis for a number of overall conclusions.

### **Collecting the pictures together**

For the participants and myself, this study has been an exciting, challenging and demanding journey. When we started we had little knowledge of open and distance

learning and, in many ways, this is the story of how we found our way. The chapters through which the story is told provide a two-dimensional view of the innovation as it unfolded. First, there is the horizontal chronology of events that trace our progress over the year in which the study is based. For example, in chapter 4 can be found accounts of the early discussions with policy makers, of initial planning, of forming the core group and of the first tentative attempts at working collaboratively. The story then moves on, in chapter 5, to plot the development of the core group and describes how we grappled with the technicalities of a closely coupled, integrated, pragmatic structure within which open and distance learning could be effectively managed.

Finally, in chapter 6, the growing experience of the participants is captured in the reflections of teachers and administrators who provide accounts of real dilemmas regarding the support of distance learners arising from issues about locus of control, the independent learner and industrialisation. The second dimension in each chapter provides a vertical, in-depth, analysis of the analytic concepts. The key strategy here was the adoption of Yannow's concept of lenses, which effectively enabled me to bring the four pictures of change into clearer focus while moving others into the background.

The pictures collected together for this collage derive from the analysis and discussion of the data presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6. From these analyses four concluding statements are presented and under each one is summarised my interpretation of the individual and collective experiences of the participants, generated from the data. It is these summaries that form the collage. The concluding statements (see Table 7.1) also form general hypotheses, which could serve as a starting point for further, more focussed, research in this area of innovation in teaching and learning. I now discuss each concluding statement in turn.

- The implementation of open and distance learning requires new patterns of working that are essentially collaborative. The creation of a supportive environment in which a shared sense of direction, group cohesion, mutual responsibility, personal investment and individual and collective achievement is a vital motivating factor. Equally important is that those involved are empowered to reflect on and change individual and collective practices and tackle new problems and circumstances together.
- Open and distance learning requires an integrated academic and administrative structure that enables an effective synergy between closely coupled and loosely coupled systems and is pragmatically based on what is done in practice.
- Open and distance learning requires changes to individual practices that are consonant with a holistic, learner centred and service orientated approach.
- Cultural and sub-cultural reactions to an innovation such as open and distance learning are characterised by a number of tensions. These are; top-down v bottom-up, collaboration v individualism, boundary defence v right-to-roam and retreat to the familiar v creative change. Such effects can be mediated by working with the dominant culture and not by attempting to change it. Change, in this context, is collaborative, inclusive, incremental and long term.

**Table. 7.1 Four concluding statements**

***The implementation of open distance learning requires new patterns of working that are essentially collaborative. The creation of a supportive environment in which a shared sense of direction, group cohesion, mutual responsibility, personal investment and of individual and collective achievement is a vital motivating factor. Equally important is that those involved are empowered to reflect on and change individual and collective practices and tackle new problems and circumstances together.***

As a concept, collaboration is symbolic of the strong interrelationship between all the pictures in this collage. It is a recurring theme that threads through each picture. In the context of this study, collaboration is relevant at two levels. First, it proved essential for achieving a successful innovation and second, it is a key principle underpinning the ongoing management of open and distance learning.

In chapter 4, it is argued that change of this complexity within a university culture required collaboration and not culture manipulation by leaders exercising a top-down



management style. In support of this stance reference is made to the work of Lieberman (1986, see chapter 4) and her experiences of collaboration in school improvement programmes and to Schein (1997, see chapter 2)) and his advocacy of learning cultures and learning leaders. Both these influences emphasise, and value, the individual participant in the experience of change, as being central to the collaborative ethic. On reflection, it is impossible to imagine the innovation being so successful without the pivotal role played by collaboration.

However, as discussed in chapter 4, there were a number of cultural and sub-cultural pressures that consistently operated against collaboration. At one level, the dominant managerial, hierarchical culture with its language of the market place created and perpetuated an insecure environment (Trowler 1998; p 138-139). This tended to promote competitiveness and individualism (Kotter 1996; p 56) and reinforced a certain passivity among teachers. At the sub-cultural level there is evidence that subject groups within the Institute constructed boundaries around their areas of expertise and practice (Tierney (1991; p 9) and were capable of vigorously defending them (Becher 1989; p 24). The effects of a boundary orientation within such a competitive environment included restrictions on the freedom of physical and intellectual movement, that I have called the 'right to roam', and the marginalisation of individuals (Tierney (1991; p 9). Both were clearly detrimental to achieving effective collaboration.

Nevertheless, the willingness and determination to collaborate was strong and the importance of the unique supportive context provided by collaboration played a major part in its success. Central to this was the shared sense of direction, cohesion, responsibility, personal investment and sense of achievement that collaboration brought to the group. These are characteristics that Butterworth (1990; p 214-219) identifies as key ingredients for success and which Bergquist (1992; p 168) likens to a glue that is capable of holding a group together even under the most difficult conditions.

The complexity of the innovation notwithstanding, a major focus of this study was that open and distance learning is not only a public enterprise but also one built on a learner centred approach to teaching and learning. An important finding of this study is that both these fundamental principles flourish best in a collaborative environment. Equally

important is that, in the case of this innovation, there were two positive influences on such an environment. These were, the level of integration necessary to operate a closely coupled structure and the level of service orientation necessary for effective learner centred support. Such experiences strongly suggest that open and distance learning is essentially collaborative. Approaches to its introduction, in this context, are characterised by participants constructing new patterns of working as they interact and communicate closely with others. Such approaches are concerned with creating a supportive environment in which a shared sense of direction, group cohesion, mutual responsibility, personal investment and a sense of individual and shared achievement are, collectively, a vital motivating factor. Equally important is those involved are empowered to reflect on and change individual and collective practices and tackle new problems and circumstances together.

***Open and distance learning requires an integrated academic and administrative structure that enables an effective synergy between closely coupled and loosely coupled systems and is pragmatically based on what is done in practice.***

While collaboration is symbolic of the degree of interrelationship between all the analytic concepts, structure represents the ‘lynch-pin’ that supported the innovation and brought it to life. It was through the structural form that a platform for collaboration was provided and a context was created within which change to personal and collective practices was given meaning. The story told in chapter 5 shows how the Institute’s initial reliance on its conventional, loosely coupled (Weick 1976; p 3) administrative departments was unable to provide the service orientated, learner centred approach needed for open and distance learning programmes. It quickly became clear that the management of open and distance learning could not simply be ‘shoe-horned’ into existing systems but had to derive from what was done in practice (Gray 1982; p 147). It also indicated how, when designing a more appropriate structure, two mutually complementary concepts influenced the direction taken. These were the convergence of distance and conventional learning (Tait and Mills 1999; p 25) and the close coupling of support systems.

The notion of a closely coupled system is based on the work of Costello (1993) (see chapters 2 and 5 of this thesis). His premise is that all support areas of an open and distance learning system must communicate and function closely and synchronously, if

the needs of the learners are to be met. The Institute's early experiences of operating open and distance learning within a system primarily organised to support conventional teaching and learning (chapter 5) supports this premise. Furthermore, it led the core group to the conclusion that to achieve the degree of flexibility necessary to implement true convergence, and still meet the needs of learners, a robust, integrated, closely coupled, service orientated, learner centred support system needed to be in place. Such a conclusion is supported by the experience of Australian universities (Daniel 1999; p 296).

However, the effects of this structural change on individuals are important and the data suggest three interrelated factors influenced how it was accepted. These were the need for individual and functional role clarity, a sense of context based on an individual and collective understanding of where a role was located in the structure as a whole, and the degree of fit between the norms, attitudes, values and beliefs of participants and the new structure. The work of Hirschhorn (1990) was influential in reaching an understanding of the emerging data that suggested a lack of role clarity could lead to increased stress and anxiety. Such feelings were important because they could have resulted in roles not being 'found' and 'taken' by individuals. The real significance here, however, is that such role confusion can, in itself, increase the anxiety of those colleagues dependent on a related role being found and accepted. This, for the core group, clearly highlighted the importance of role, and the interrelationships between roles and, from this realisation, the concept of 'role maps' emerged.

Role maps played a central part in the success of this innovation because they provided a means by which roles were found, interrelationships identified and the importance of the self in relation to others, reinforced (see chapter 5). Equally as important to the introduction of the new structure, and to the success of the innovation as a whole, was the degree of compatibility, or fit, between the new structure and the cultural and sub-cultural attitudes, norms, values and beliefs dominant in the Institute. The concept of 'degree of fit' provides an important lesson and is based on the extent to which cultural compatibility (Levine 1980; p 17), or cultural coherence (Trowler 1998; p 139), was taken into account when introducing change of this kind. It became increasingly clear that an awareness of cultural and sub-cultural sensitivities, an acknowledgement of the 'degree of fit' and a

willingness to compromise, were important determinants of whether the innovation was successfully implemented or not.

Experiences reported in this thesis suggest that, in the context of a convergent approach to teaching and learning, a supporting structure based on closely coupled principles is important for three pragmatic reasons. First, at a practical level, it proved essential for the effective co-ordination and delivery of open and distance learning. Second, such a structure provided the means (the Distance Learning Unit) to achieve a synergy between the close coupling necessary for open and distance learning and the loosely coupled conventional systems of face-to-face programmes. By this means the movement of learners and teachers from one mode to the other could be effectively co-ordinated. Third, because of the closely coupled principles upon which the operation of the Distance Learning Unit was based, it was possible to provide the holistic, learner centred, service orientated support that Sewart (1993 p; 7) (see chapter 6 this thesis) argues is one of the critical determinants of learner satisfaction in open and distance learning. To achieve this level of support, the analysis of experiences shared by participants suggest that, open and distance learning requires an integrated structure that enables an effective synergy between closely coupled and loosely coupled systems and is pragmatically based on what is done in practice.

***Open and distance learning requires changes to individual practices that are consonant with a holistic, learner centred and service orientated approach.***

Viewing the innovation from the perspective of changes to practice revealed a number of important issues about open and distance learning and its implementation at two related levels. At a contextual level, there was the move to mass higher education, the associated widening of access and the increased flexibility of provision demanded by learners and employers alike. This significant change at the heart of higher education brought with it different management styles and approaches and the shift in terms of the ownership of knowledge discussed in chapter 2. The direction of this shift was from a monopoly on knowledge production and ownership traditionally held by universities to a more open, competitive, knowledge market based on the increasingly sophisticated use of information and communication technologies (McNair 1997; pp29-36) (see chapter 2 this thesis).

The significance of this is that adult education became a packaged commodity in the education market place and the adult learner was the increasingly discerning consumer at its centre. An important, and perhaps contentious, characteristic of this market was the 'shareholding' principles to which it aspired. This meant that the learner, for the period of their studentship, was seen as an active, and equal, partner in their own educational experience. The analysis of data discussed in this thesis suggests that, by its very nature, open and distance learning exemplifies this fundamental change in the way higher education interfaces with the world in general and its students and learners in particular. Indeed, the necessary logistical, administrative and support systems that are part of the open and distance learning experience have been described as a service industry (Sewart 1993), a concept that has been a developing theme throughout this thesis. The Institute's experiences of developing an appropriate structure to meet the diverse needs of individuals and of tackling the delicate complexities of supporting them from a distance, confirms the necessity of adopting a more inclusive, learner centred, service orientated approach toward the consumer of our services, the learner.

At the level of practice and closely related to the wider context, were the three factors identified from the literature as being forces for change to individual and collective practices (see chapter 2). These were locus of control, the independent learner and industrialisation. Integral to these were other influences such as the collaborative and public nature of this mode of teaching and learning and the structural changes that were necessary to support it. Each of these factors brought changes to practice that, over time, located the learner as an individual with needs that were best met through a partnership between the learner and a distance learning team acting collaboratively. Findings from this study that suggest practice was becoming more collaborative, learner focussed and service-orientated are discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6 and are summarised as a set of indicators in Table 7.2.

Based on these findings, my contention is that changes in higher education in general, and within the field of health sciences and the Institute in particular, point to a need for a more inclusive approach to the support of learners based on the notion of partnership. I therefore

conclude that open and distance learning requires changes to individual practices that are consonant with a holistic, learner centred and service orientated approach.

- **A change in the emphasis of the educational transaction from one of teaching to one of learning.**
- **A more facilitative and guiding role for teachers based on two-way communication rather than a directive one based on one-way communication.**
- **The adoption of more collaborative, integrated, internal relationships that transcend boundaries within an organisation and allow for a more holistic approach to meeting the needs of learners.**
- **An acceptance of the concept of the autonomous, independent distance learner who accepts mutual responsibility for their learning in partnership with the teacher.**
- **The adoption of a closely coupled structure that promotes an integrated and synchronous administrative methodology with meeting the needs of the learner as its primary focus.**
- **The construction of role-maps that promote clarity of roles and their interrelationships.**
- **The establishment of a forum by teachers and administrators for mutual support and the sharing of best practice.**

**Table 7.2 Indicators of a more collaborative, learner focussed and service orientated approach to the practice of open and distance learning**

***Cultural and sub-cultural reactions to an innovation such as open and distance learning are characterised by a number of tensions. These are top-down v bottom-up, collaboration v individualism, boundary defence v right-to-roam and retreat to the familiar v creative change. Such effects can be mediated by working with the dominant culture and not by attempting to change it. Change, in this context, is collaborative, inclusive, incremental and long term.***

The importance of the cultural and sub-cultural perspective is that it provides a contextual backdrop to the pictures discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6. As such the cultural and sub-cultural response to this innovation, in the form of stories and artefacts, form an important part of the concluding statements that make up this collage. My purpose here is not to retell stories already told but to complete the full picture by reviewing how, by working with the dominant cultures, it was possible to move the innovation on.

There were a number of significant cultural and sub-cultural reactions to this innovation. For example attempts to collaborate within an organisation dominated by a top-down managerial, hierarchical culture brought initial competitiveness, insecurity and passivity. At the sub-cultural level, boundary defence and the marginalisation of groups and individuals were responses to the essentially public and collaborative nature of open and distance learning. Pressures on traditional, taken for granted, norms concerning locus of control, quality and how, and where, learning best took place brought resistance and a tendency to retreat to the familiar. These reactions provide an important insight into the strongly held values, attitudes and practices of teachers and administrative staff at the Institute during the period of this study. It was these experiences that emphasised the need to work with the dominant culture and sub-cultures rather than trying to change them (see chapter 4).

Central to this approach are the notions of incremental change (Trowler 1998; p 23, see chapter 6 this thesis) and collaborative learning (Schein 1997; p 367, see chapter 2 this thesis). These important principles have been a feature of all the pictures that make up this collage. The incremental approach to change ensured understanding, support and ownership while collaborative learning involved inclusiveness, shared responsibility, empowerment, a willingness to experiment, sharing of best practice and a unique and

supportive context in which to make mistakes and learn from them together. The collaborative core group and task groups (see chapter 4), staff development workshops and the Institute Distance Learning Forum were the principal vehicles within which progress was discussed, best practice shared and support given. These were important because they helped open boundaries rather than break them down and enabled individuals to change their practices through interaction with their peers rather than have change imposed from above. The collaborative nature of these meetings also provided a means by which sub-cultural sensitivities and anxieties could be discussed and ways forward agreed. It was these experiences that led me to the conclusion that cultural and sub-cultural effects on the innovation can be mediated by working with the dominant culture and not by attempting to change it. Change, in this context, is collaborative, inclusive, incremental and long term.

In conclusion, from the pictures of change that form this collage, and the stories told in chapters 4, 5 and 6, I have constructed two guiding frameworks. The first is for the implementation of open and distance learning as an innovation and, the second is for carrying out further research into its implementation.

### **A framework for implementation**

This framework derives from the conditions for change presented in the conclusions of chapters 4, 5 and 6 and is based on the conceptual framework that guided this study which is set out in chapter 3. The framework provides a set of conditions, at three organisational levels of analysis that, it is suggested, should be addressed if implementation is to take place. Others, implementing open and distance learning programmes within their own context, might find this framework of benefit. The framework is given in Figure 7.1.

### **A framework for further research**

‘Always a little further’ is a possibility that, according to Delamont (1992; p 183), should inform the conclusion of any piece of scholarly writing. For me, such further journeys are situated at two levels. The first relates to my contribution to those who might wish to undertake similar research in their own institutions. The second relates to Delamont’s



## Collaboration

Individual	Group	Institution
<i>Incentives and personal profitability</i>	<i>Trust, shared sense of direction, openness, support &amp; equity.</i>	<i>Management style, structure &amp; culture.</i>
<i>Individual job and role security.</i>	<i>Issues of status &amp; marginalisation.</i>	<i>Corporate/ organisational language.</i>
<i>Minimal competitiveness self interest.</i>	<i>Effective communication at all levels.</i>	<i>Devolvement of legitimacy &amp; empowerment to group and individual levels.</i>
<i>Feels included and contribution valued.</i>	<i>Boundary defence.</i>	
<i>Individual empowerment &amp; responsibility.</i>	<i>Rules, norms and beliefs consistent with innovation.</i>	
<i>Individual 'right to roam'.</i>	<i>Group empowerment &amp; accountability.</i>	
	<i>Group 'right to roam'</i>	

## Change of Practice

Individual	Group	Institution
<i>Acceptance of team approach.</i>	<i>Collaborative approach to development, delivery &amp; learner support.</i>	<i>Incremental change that preserves confidence &amp; commitment</i>
<i>Learner centred vision of teaching &amp; learning.</i>	<i>Role clarity, integration &amp; the sharing of best practice.</i>	<i>Realistic assessment of costs associated with odl.</i>
<i>Realistic expectations of partnership between teacher &amp; learner.</i>	<i>A holistic approach at programme &amp; module team level.</i>	<i>Equitable approach to assessment of quality between modes of study.</i>
<i>Mutual responsibility for success of partnership.</i>	<i>An emphasis on learning rather than teaching.</i>	<i>Adequate human and technical resources to achieve a standard of learner centred, service orientated provision that is at least equitable to other modes of study.</i>
<i>'Degree of fit' with issues of distance, openness and flexibility.</i>	<i>Achievement of a balance between a teacher centred approach &amp; a learner centred service orientation as a means of achieving best practice.</i>	
<i>Clear structure for communication between teacher &amp; learner.</i>		
<i>Compatibility between personal values of teacher &amp; administrator &amp; learner centred, service orientated approach.</i>		

## Structure

Individual	Group	Institution
<i>Structure reflects what is done.</i>	<i>Clarity of dept's place in structure.</i>	<i>Strategic decision regarding philosophy and approach to open and distance learning.</i>
<i>Involved in development of structure.</i>	<i>Optimum inter-department communication &amp; liaison.</i>	<i>Support for collaborative and creative approach.</i>
<i>Compatibility with individual norms, values &amp; beliefs.</i>	<i>Dept/disciplinary/ sub-cultural norms, values &amp; beliefs accommodated.</i>	<i>Cultural norms, values and beliefs of Institute accommodated</i>
<i>Role clarity.</i>	<i>Effective relationships between closely coupled and loosely coupled components.</i>	
<i>Clear sense of context &amp; interrelationships.</i>		
<i>Individual role mapping.</i>	<i>Function/dept role mapping.</i>	

## Subcultures

*Top-down v. Bottom-up: Collaboration v. Individualism: Boundary defence v. Right-to-roam: Retreat to the familiar v. Creative change*

**Fig 7.1 A framework for the implementation of open and distance learning**

advice that ‘every project should bear within it the seeds of the next’ (ibid; p 186). Where to next, is a question to which I will return.

I have based the framework for further research into the implementation of open and distance learning on the four pictures of change I collected using Yannow’s lenses (1990; p 214). The framework (see Figure 7.2) is intended as a guide and derives from the conceptual framework that has guided this study (see chapter 3) and the discussion in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Essentially, it outlines what have proved to be the key foci when studying the implementation of open and distance learning.

- **The collaborative picture:** *Looks at how collaboration is facilitated by an organisation’s senior management. Also important is how individuals and groups interact to make collaboration possible. A guiding principle is that open and distance learning is, essentially, a public and collaborative activity. Group and individual relationships are important to this picture and issues of power, boundaries, marginalisation, competitiveness and self-interest are dominant influences.*
- **The structural picture:** *Looks at existing structures in the organisation and their compatibility with the demands of open and distance learning. This picture focuses on determining the type of structural form necessary to support odl that is grounded in the context and practices of the organisation. The psychology of role, defining individual and functional roles, and articulating their interrelationship, are of pivotal importance to this picture.*
- **The change of practice picture:** *Looks at current practices in the organisation and how these ‘fit’ with the specific demands of open and distance learning. It focuses on when, why and how practices change and how individuals and groups manage these changes. The organisation’s strategy and philosophical stance toward open and distance learning are seen as important influencing factors for this picture. Also important are issues of resourcing, quality and change management.*
- **The sub-cultural picture:** *Looks at the values, norms, beliefs and recurrent practices of groups within the organisation. It focuses on the responses of groups, and individuals within groups, to change of this kind, why these responses occur and what effects they have on the innovation. The management of culture and sub-cultures and how sub-cultural norms, values and beliefs are accommodated within the implementation strategy are of particular importance to this picture.*

**Fig 7.2 Pictures of change: A framework for research into the implementation of open and distance learning**

## Reflections and moving on

Writing this thesis, and carrying out the research study which it represents, has been a major undertaking. It has involved me in the dual complexities of managing an innovation while at the same time carrying out research into aspects of it. This has been its true value because it has been research in action in a very real sense. As researcher/manager I have learnt a great deal. I have looked at my world in new ways, I have questioned the status quo and, in particular, I have questioned my own practice.

In doing so I have learnt a great deal about my personal and professional self. As a manager I have gained insight into how I actually practice the skills of management, particularly how I relate and interact with others as individuals and as members of cohesive groups. Most important, I have discovered how others see me. As a researcher, it has provided me with experience and skills I never before possessed, or if I did, they were woefully under-used.

As I reflect, I am very much aware of my methodological decision that this thesis should cover a broad canvas in order to study as much of the innovation as possible. To achieve this I looked at four research questions, or foci. As I progressed, however, I questioned, on more than one occasion, the wisdom of this. In moments of uncertainty, I thought far better to look at one focus in depth, rather than four and risk superficiality. I now think differently. A well structured, multi-focal, study of a complete innovation can provide a wealth of rich data from which it is possible to establish relationships that might otherwise be absent, or simply overlooked, in a uni-focal study.

Experiences gained from such an approach have enabled me to pose questions for further, and more in-depth, studies and the concluding statements set out earlier in this chapter contain the already germinating seeds. I am also very much aware that this thesis views the innovation from the perspective of teachers and administrators and not learners. This is not an oversight but the result of a hard taken decision that was based on the realities of time and word allowance to meet the requirements of this thesis. Further study into the world of the learner within the Institute is undoubtedly necessary. Particularly important are evaluative studies that will allow them to show their pictures, and tell their stories, of

their time as partners in a learner centred, service orientated educational experience that is the very essence of open and distance learning.

Finally, this has been an exciting and thoroughly enjoyable way of learning about the experience of innovation, and about open and distance learning, in the context of the Institute of Health Sciences, its culture and sub-cultures. Most of all it is the pictures of the 'changing self', taken as the study progressed that, for me, are the ultimate fascination and reward. Part of this 'changed self' is to acknowledge that this is only the beginning, that qualitative research is addictive and that there are more pictures to collect and more stories to tell. And so, I move on.

# Participant Profile

## Policy-makers (n 3)

These included the Director of the Institute who had an important policy making role but who also exercised considerable influence over the legitimacy of the project. Two other influential policy makers and members of the Institute executive were the Head of the College of Health and the other Head of the Centre for Teaching and Learning.

## The Programme Manager (n 1)

The programme manager for post-qualifying programmes although not directly involved was, nevertheless, influential in a number of ways. She was a well-known and respected senior member of staff whose area of responsibility was post-qualifying modules and programmes. This was the area within which open and distance learning programmes were located for management purposes. She had direct responsibility for a range of services that were potentially problematic and in any event would have to change to accommodate open and distance learning. These included recruitment, enrolment and assessments.

## The Programme Leaders (n 3)

These were probably the most important participants in terms of operational influence. The leader of each of the four programmes was deeply involved in the open and distance learning experience. It was they who had to deal with the majority of problems at a practical level. It was they who had to take the lead in converting their programmes to this mode of study and they who worked with teachers and learners on a day to day basis. The leaders of all four open and distance learning programmes were interviewed on a number of occasions.

## **The Module Leaders (n 5)**

The module leaders were, in a number of important respects, at the leading edge of this innovation. For example, it was they who had to develop new writing skills to convert their module into distance learning materials. It was the module leader who experienced arguably the most fundamental change to their practice, the way they teach, and it was the module leader who had the responsibility of supporting learners to learn in ways that, for the majority, were new. In all I interviewed a total of five module leaders. The selection was mainly based on those modules that were ready to be launched in October 1998. I was also concerned that the module leaders I selected were representative of a range of modules that crossed all four programmes. My intention was not to engage in comparisons between programmes but to elucidate the experiences of one participant in more than one programme environment. My reasoning was that this could illuminate programme idiosyncrasies that might be of value in developing best practice.

## **The Administrator (n 1)**

One senior administrator, the Distance Learning Administration Manager (DLAM), was appointed to assist with the implementation of the administrative processes necessary for the support of the innovation. I included this colleague because of the central position he occupied in the structural framework of the innovation and would be able to provide data from the perspective of administrative learner support

## **Materials Production and Support (n 2)**

Materials production and support involved two key participants. The first was responsible for project management of the writing and production of all learning materials. The second supported teachers during the writing of their module in distance learning format. These were key roles in the process of change and were included for their perspective of their own changed practice, their part in the collaborative approach to change, their place in an integrated structure and their experiences of supporting others during, what for many, was a demanding part of the change process.

# Interview Guide for First Stage Interviews (Policy-makers)

## Aim

The aim of this interview is to gain an understanding of the perceptions of senior managers of open and distance learning in general and the innovation about to be introduced in particular.

## Areas to be explored

- Views of ODL as a form of programme delivery.
- Why do they want ODL to be introduced? What is their primary motivation for wanting ODL introduced?
- The advantages they attach to its introduction.
- The disadvantages.
- Their estimates of student numbers being attracted to this mode of study.
- How do they see ODL developing in the future? Do they have a grand-view of the future place of ODL in the Institute? What will be its place in the organisation as a whole?
- Issues that concern them about ODL and what attracts them to ODL, particularly from the point of view of their own areas of responsibility.
- Their views as to the types of structures necessary to support ODL. Will the current structures be appropriate? Will something new be necessary?
- Their views of the demands and pressures that ODL will place on teachers and administrative staff. How do they want to see these tackled?
- Explore with them what they see as being the most significant problems of introducing this type of change. How will they support that process?

# Interview Guide for Second Stage Interviews

## Aim

The aim of this interview is to gain from participants their views, experiences, perceptions of, and attitudes to, the introduction of ODL at a point when a lot of the preparatory work has been completed and the programmes are about to start.

## Introductory statement

We have now been working together on the various components of ODL since March/April to meet the target date of October 1998. What I would like you to do is to tell me your story of the past 6-7 months, using any notes you have made based on the reflective guide I provided.

## Areas to be explored

- Self introduction ; short autobiography
- How long a teacher?
- How long involved in ODL, any previous experience?
- What has been role in this project?
- What preparation for role?
- Will practice change? If so how? Why?
- Feelings about that?
- Feelings about the collaborative approach we have adopted.
- Has it helped? Has it hindered?
- Explore perceptions, opinions of the systems we have put in place. What was decision making process? How were views taken on board?
- Quality mechanisms, student support and feedback, the student's learning experience, any anxieties, views, concerns, suggestions?



- Views of the project held by colleagues. Explore how they think ODL will be accepted. Any hostility, obstructive behaviour, difficulties of any kind. Any positive support? Explore the reasons attributed to such behaviours.
- Future development of ODL project. What they would like to see.

# Interview Guide for the Third Stage Interviews

## Aim

The aim of this interview is to gain from participants their views, experiences, perceptions of, and attitudes to, ODL following its introduction and at the end of one full semester of delivering the four open and distance learning programmes.

## Introductory statement

We have now been offering ODL programmes for one semester. You have been very much involved in that work. I'd like you to continue to tell your story from October 1998 until the present time. Recount your experiences, perceptions, views and feelings of ODL, your role, your practice and the how other have reacted to it. Use the notes you have made based on the reflective guide.

If you get stuck I'll prompt you but otherwise I will just listen.

## Areas to be explored

- Their experience as a programme leader, module leader, administrator or support staff.
- Their practice, has this changed in any way in relation to distance learning? If it has try to reflect on how it has and why. What different skills have they had to learn?
- Explore their relationship with learners and how they communicate with them.
- Explore their role as a teacher and how they support learning, has this changed?
- How do they feel about changing their practice? Does it come easily to them? What are their feelings about working with open and distance learning?
- Explore any concerns they might have if so what are they, why do they have them and how can they be overcome?
- Explore with them the collaborative approach we have taken to introduce this innovation. Has working as a team been easy or difficult? What benefits have they

personally gained from this experience? Could it/should it have been done any other way?

- The administrative systems. Do they help? If so, think about why, if they don't, think about why they don't and how things might be improved.
- The organisational structure as it applies to ODL. Has it helped them in their work? Does it facilitate flexibility for the learner?
- The views of others. How have colleagues reacted to distance learning?

## **A Reflective Guide for Participants (Second Stage Interviews)**

### **Introduction**

You have generously agreed to be interviewed as a participant in my case-study research for my Doctor of Education thesis. As you know its focus is on the introduction of open and distance learning (ODL) within the Institute. I am particularly interested in your views, perceptions and understanding of what has happened, is happening or will happen. I will be interviewing you on two occasions, once in September/October 1998 and again in February/March 1999.

The interviews will be very conversational. Their aim is to enable you to tell *your own* story of *your* experience of the introduction of ODL. For the most part, I will let you tell your story in your own way. I will only say something in order to pursue an area of particular interest or to prompt you if you 'dry up'. I will be tape-recording the interview but please be reassured that your account will remain strictly confidential.

### **The First Interview (September/October 1998)**

I would like you to prepare for this interview by reflecting on the period from March/April 1998 to September/October 1998 and by writing your reflections in note form so that you can refer to them at the interview. The period I have identified above is the time during which we devised, and put in place, most of the basic systems for supporting ODL. It was also the time you prepared yourself to carry out your own particular role. It was, very much, a period of preparation. I would like you to reflect on this period, think about what happened and the part you and your colleagues played. I have listed below a number of aspects that you might consider. This is not an exhaustive list and you will, no doubt, think of additional issues please note these down and bring them with you to the interview.

- Reflect on your own experience of the change so far, note down your own story. Who you are, why you are involved and the part you have played. Note your frustrations and disappointments, your concerns and your moments of satisfaction and pleasure. To do this you might bear in mind:
- Your role in ODL
- Your previous experience of ODL
- Your experience as a teacher, administrator, etc.
- Whether you think your practice will have to change to meet the demands of ODL?
- If you do, what is it about ODL that makes you think that?
- The collaborative approach we have adopted to introduce ODL. Has it helped? Has it hindered?
- Think about the systems we have put in place. How were decisions taken to adopt a particular approach? In what ways were your own views heard? Do you have any concerns about what we are doing? Think about issues such as student support, the student experience and other quality mechanisms. Based on what you have experienced so far what views do you have about how we intend to deal with these?
- Think about the views of the ODL project held by your colleagues who are not involved. Have you encountered any hostility, overt concerns or obstructive behaviour? If you have, why do you think that is? Have you received support from colleagues, again why do you think that is?
- What has worked well and why, and what has not and why/
- How you would like to see the ODL project developing in the future and what will your part in it be?

## **A Reflective Guide for Participants (Third Stage Interviews)**

### **Introduction**

You have generously agreed to be interviewed as a participant in my case-study research for my Doctor of Education thesis. As you know its focus is on the introduction of open and distance learning within the Institute. I am particularly interested in your views, perceptions and understanding of what has happened, is happening or will happen. I will be interviewing you in February/March 1999 and will already have made a firm date with you.

The interview will be very conversational. Its aim is to enable you to tell *your own* story of *your* experience of the introduction of ODL. For the most part, I will let you tell your story in your own way. I will only say something in order to pursue an area of particular interest or to prompt you if you 'dry up'. I will be tape-recording the interview but please be reassured that your account will remain strictly confidential.

### **The Second Interview (February/March 1999)**

During the second interview I would like you to continue telling the story of your involvement with ODL. This time you will have actually gained experience of supporting learners at a distance and operating in your role within the ODL framework. Your views, perceptions, frustrations, anger, triumphs, moments of pride, despair are all important. I really want to know how you feel about open and distance learning.

In preparation for this interview you may like to refer back to the transcript of your first interview and pick the story up from there. Again, try to think in terms of:

- Your experience as a programme leader, module leader, administrator or support staff.

- Your practice, has this changed in any way in relation to distance learning? If it has try to reflect on how it has and why. What different skills have you had to learn? Think about your relationship with learners and how you communicate with them. Think about your role as a teacher/administrator and how you support learning/learners. Has this changed? How do you feel about it? Does it come easily to you? Do you enjoy working with distance learning? Do you have any concerns, if so what are they and how can they be overcome?
- The collaborative approach we have taken to introduce this innovation. Has working as a team been easy or difficult? What benefits have you personally gained from this experience? Could it/should it have been done any other way?
- The administrative systems with which you work. Do they help? If they do think about why they work for you, if the don't think about why they don't and how things might be improved.
- The organisational structure as it applies to ODL. Has it helped you in your work? Does it facilitate flexibility for the learner?
- The views of others. How have colleagues reacted to your role in distance learning?

### Example of an Interview transcript

#### Interview - PL HS 3

**(Interviewer in Italics)**

One of the most significant differences that I've noticed has been that students are not responding to deadline dates to the hand-ins of an assignment and particularly the final assignment. Normally the final assignment hand-in date, that deadline date, students adhere to almost totally and I've noticed that the Distance Learning students they respond in such a way that they think it's flexible to some extent. It does cause.... it's not just my module that I've noticed that because other module leaders have also said they've had difficulty and I think my own personal feelings are that it is more difficult to accept because you tend to think now the student here is trying it on. But of course it may not be, it may be just generally the student hasn't picked up the vibes regarding the 'no flexibility' issue about deadline dates. It's clearly spelt out to them at the induction date how important it is. There are clear directions and instructions in the different material they've been given. But I think it must be perhaps something to do with the fact that they are not in an attendance mode and picking up the general vibes from other students that this is something that doesn't change and is set. But the feeling is that this student is trying it on and it does create a little bit of antagonism and I sense it with other module leaders as well.

*Towards the student?*

Yes. Yes. Because traditionally we think that forgiven that doesn't change, you know you move on a lot of things but that you don't move on but we assume that everybody else is understanding of that. Almost hidden move, hidden agenda and sort of thing. And when in a normal traditional way a student starts to questions that, you usually associate with a student who is trying it on or being difficult in some way. So you respond in the same way with a Distance Learning student but because of the larger numbers of them which are doing that, I think it must be something different. I think it's something else and that it is that they are just not picking up the vibes in the same way that attendant students are.

*So have you attempted to make a change there somehow? What do you think is necessary to.... people to change in your practice or the practice of your team?*

I discussed it with other module leaders and come up with the feeling that they are in agreement, they tend to be expressing the same feeling that it's a common feeling that's created because of this situation. We discussed whether or not perhaps.... obviously in retrospect, what we would now do to change for the next intake is, we would spell it out much more positively and we would make a much stronger emphasis on this both spelling it out more clearly..... well it's not a lack of clarity, it's an increase of emphasis I think.



*Yes. Do you feel you need to repeat it more often?*

Yes.

*At the time I mean, not....*

Yes. We discussed whether or not perhaps just a pleasant letter that goes out, "Dear Student...." in that it recognises that it's to all students, it's not just to an individual. I wouldn't want a student to feel that it was... they in particular were being picked. But that it might be just a general quite laid back, "Dear Student, just to remind you that... can't move on that".

*Is it causing anxiety among teachers?*

Yes. Low key. Yes it does. Because I think that the knock-on effect is that you do feel that..... that's a sense of achievement that all students have planned in time to hand in the ????? on deadline date. You've got your message over and everything is going quite well and it's quite reassuring. It's almost like an accomplishment of a process and a procedure. You separate it from the quality of the work. You tend to think well at least I've been successful in enabling your student just to hand in on that date. And that's one area of semi-success with the module.

*But this is, what you're describing, is a change from your normal practice that you have to accommodate for the ????????????*

Yes definitely think about ways around and to..... I mean it maybe that we would change what we do a little bit in terms of practices and increasing emphasis on this issue. It might be also that we become more accustomed to the fact that Distance Learning students who assume that there's a lot of flexibility in the programme also made that assumption and that we have each time there's an intake and each time the module stops, we have to express that you know, we've got to take it. But it's another one of our jobs really. And I think that's probably been the most recent troubling one. Practice in terms of planning ahead more, but that might be because Distance Learning's relatively new to me still so I am still on my first intake of students on the programme and next year, next academic year it will be much more accustomed practice. But I'm still designing things in preparation for the first time it happens. The other aspect that's a bit connecting is there was.... I was expecting to put a lot of emphasis on needing to give students feedback from what I'd read about Distance Learning and identified that that was important. But what I now also feel is that equally as important is that the teacher receives feedback from the student. And just that they need to know and have signs of their progress and their achievements along the way. I think teachers need indication early on and frequent stages throughout the module of how the student is progressing. One positive aspect to that is that there is an early assignment, very small assignment early on. That's proved to be very very, for me personally, very good, because I have been able to pick out quite quickly those students that are not going to have any trouble with achieving the learning outcomes and achieving a reasonable pass rate on an assignment. And it's obvious quite early on those that are going to have difficulty and even by week 5, to have that feedback is very good. The other thing with a face-to-face when they're in contact, if you do provide students with information, that's observed by others and it's almost ????????????? something formal so there's no way

the student's going to manoeuvre around and say all right I received it so I didn't know, kind of issue. Whereas with Distance Learning students there's no way really you get any immediate feedback as to whether the student's received it, what they've received they've understood it, whether they are going to be able to make use of it or not. Those kind of things. And there are so many ways that you just took for granted whereby you received immediate feedback on how confident the student was and at what stage they were. And that was very very.....

*So how have you tackled that?*

To an extent I've tried to stage certain activities like sending out a general information sheet on questions and answers, general questions that students have asked about module learning on and an all-round answer sheet. And I timed it so that it's two weeks before the workshop. So when the workshop started, first thing that we did was discuss how useful that piece of information was. And I received feedback from those that attended the workshop but that still didn't help me with those that were not attending workshops and I think to some extent they could well have received that information and found it really really useful or they may not. I may not ever know and perhaps I don't ever need to know. But it does take a bit of adjusting to, you know accepting that maybe you don't need to know. What has been obvious, at the end of just doing the first module, and I'm now starting to run the second module, and that is much more obvious variations and individuality, learning styles and patterns of progress, and that's really very very rewarding because to some extent you had a blandness about face-to-face teaching in that they were conforming pretty much to a much more narrow view of what was expected of them and the downside I've just mentioned, quite a few aspects of that flexibility, that individuality, the positive aspect of that is that you see some students racing on, two modules per semester, and obviously feeling very very satisfied at their rate of progress and other students, for their own personal reasons, deciding to take it slower and feeling very satisfied that they are able to take a much slower pace. But in styles of learning as well it's become obvious to me that some students are taking a very different route to others in terms of their learning style. And that's really very pleasing and it doesn't change a practice. I don't feel I'm responsible for them learning that way.

*Yes, I was going to say, how much control do you have over someone's learning when they are learning it distance? In the same way as we, I suppose arguably, have quite a lot of control over a group, in terms of casing and so on. And do you think there's a difference between..... I mean after all the control, but.....*

Oh enormous. Enormous. Well I mean control's a good word because you were in control, and that was reassuring with face-to-face teaching. With distance learning it is very different. I've thought about it a lot and worried about the group finishing together because they seem to be at different stages. It's almost like the conductor making sure everyone is following the music at the same pace and timing and playing the same tune. Whereas if you split the orchestra up so they are all in different rooms of the same building they can't see the conductor and they can't hear each other. The best the conductor can hope to do is to help them play their individual piece to the best of their ability. Finishing together becomes less important than playing well on an individual basis.

I find thinking that through is reassuring actually.

*So a sort of central control is no longer appropriate. So what is?*

But it's obvious now. Before it wasn't obvious because it was the norm, but what is obvious now is that that central control, it would.... I would imagine if I were to transport some of the students that are on this Distance Learning module, if I were to transport them on their next module into a taught face-to-face, I could see them switch off from learning considerably and I look back now and I can almost see a picture of examples of when I was in the classroom doing face-to-face teaching and I can recognise now what could have been..... well what were, switched off people. And that's been obvious in the workshops and the workshops are, I found, very very much more positive than I'd expected to. They come with a lot of their own ideas and they come with a sense of ownership of that. It's subtle but they come owning their own ideas.

*Yes, I was going to say, so what you're saying then is that they obviously have taken responsibility for their own learning more now than at taught.*

Yes.

*More obviously now.*

Yes.

*Are their expectations of you greater?*

Different. Different expectations but they don't.... they still come to the workshop looking for guidance, looking for greater depth of knowledge than they own at the time themselves and.... that's what I feel they should receive. But they don't come expecting the whole of.... it's difficult to explain.... but they don't come expecting to take it from you and not change it, and not do anything to it, but accept it as a gift and place it in an assignment. What they do is they look to you for the same, the guidance, the increased information, and they're thinking how they are going to use it for themselves, which is very different and it's quite pleasing, it's quite an achievement.

*I was going to say, how do you feel about that effect on your role because you'll always have to give an individualised approach to each student, and they're not quite seeing you as the font of all knowledge are they?*

Not quite.

*Or are they, I don't know?*

No they're not. No they're not but I think personally, but I think it depends on your own personal style and your own experiences, but I feel personally that I am more comfortable with a discussion about where it can be found rather than a discussion of what it is, but that varies from student to student still. In terms of taking responsibility, I think I just still feel very much aware that not all can, and not all would like to, but things happen along the way and they'd have problems taking responsibility, and that you can't assume that because they would like to, they are always going to be able to. And that I find quite rewarding really, that problem solving, when it crops up along the way, and being able to offer a joint

decision-making, solutions where you don't have to provide the solution for the student but together you are going to be able to say what reasonable student can offer but, at the end of the day the problem's with them and they would be able to solve it. Which again is a different way..... I mean in a traditional taught module, things crop up and students have difficulties and.... but again in that situation, it's exactly the same, in a traditional face-to-face they would come probably to you and say this has happened, over to you. What do you expect me ... you know, what can I do about it now within all the realms of rules and regulations that the organisation have. And those rules and regulations have got much softer edges for Distance Learning students and the down side of that is they don't take them as seriously as taught students perhaps in the submission of an assignment date. But the positive aspect of it is that they are softer rules and regulations so they seem them as open to negotiation and they will have an opportunity to say what they would like to happen should problems arise and it's much more for shifting power and it's much more equal relationship. But it's a very limited number of students that I've experienced so far.

*Yes. Sure. What particular difficulties, not with students necessarily, but generally, have you experienced any particular difficulties in implementing Distance Learning into your programme, your module? Or what things have gone particularly well even? How has it gone really?*

I think on the whole....

*Because you have actually put it in practice haven't you?*

Yes. I think on the whole, really quite assertively. In terms of looking at a schedule where students are, they're all progressing. They've had out of twenty students, they've had about three that haven't been able to continue. Two because the standard of work wasn't high enough and what I'm quite reassured about is that there's nothing within the system that we've implemented that hasn't been able to alert us to that. So they haven't gone on along way into the programme before it came clear to them and to us that this was going to be a problem. There are..... there is one student who wasn't able to be able to manage his own..... manage to study at the same time as full time work and he had very clearly underestimated the demands of his work in that he had quite a lot of flexibility at work in terms of times and he was working long hours and some of that time was spent obviously with work and in retrospect I feel that entry criteria looking at, not just..... at the moment in terms of entry criteria it's the achievement of the necessary academic qualifications on an application form and there is usually an ????? ..... there is always an opportunity to talk to the student beforehand and a discussion about the Distance Learning and there are opportunities for the students to learn a little bit more about it and assess whether or not they would like to go and take it on especially at the induction day which is two weeks before the module programme starts, so it's only.... it's generally enough for them to back out. But I think I need to satisfy myself and not just take their word for it if they have assessed their work and can manage Distance Learning and I think I could quite easily come up with certain criteria that would perhaps be a disadvantage for a student should they want to work full time and go home to Distance Learning. That was really as a result of the one student who didn't submit an assignment and wasn't going to be able to submit an assignment should we change to carrying out one module over two semesters instead of one. The rest of the students have adjusted their rate to fit their needs and we've managed to do that quite well with them.

*On a scale of one to ten, has this change been difficult or easy? How difficult is it down a scale of one to ten?*

Ten being the most difficult?

*For you personally.*

Yes. With the programme leader I think probably 4.

*So why has it been relatively straightforward and easy then in your view.*

Commitment from module leaders. Feedback from module leaders that it is a relatively positive experience. Being a module leader myself as well as programme leader and getting quite a lot of positive feelings about running the module. This is at this stage. I think if you'd asked me that question three weeks after the programme started, when it was still very fresh in my mind, the difficulty of getting Distance Learning material finished and out to students.....

*Is this last October?*

Yes. I think I would have probably said 9 because that stance of getting it started, getting..... making sure that students had the necessary materials in time.

*That was a problem at that time was it?*

Yes it was. But it's probably not going to be your probably..... although sets of circumstances are not likely to repeat themselves again, so it isn't something that I need to think to myself, right for the next intake next October 1999, I've got to avoid this, this and this happening. Because there hasn't been a problem..... a greater problem as I've expected with students transferring..... completing one module and then going on to the next. That's been smoother than I'd expected.

*Well what was different last October then that would be for this coming October?*

It was just the lack of support from other units within the Institute.

*So what's changed?*

That support is there now, the Distance Learning Unit.

*Right. At the Distance Learning Unit.*

Yes.

*So wasn't that there last.....*

No.

*Why not?*

Well he had been told by his boss that he shouldn't give support to this programme.

*Why?*

Because of difficulties between managers at a higher level as to who was responsible for the production of Distance Learning material for this programme. It was falling outside Wolfson Institute at that time.

*Yes so the programme was with the Undergraduate College.*

Yes.

*And not with the Institute ???????? of the issue so.... right that has .....*

Been resolved.

*Been resolved yes. So now what sort of support is important then to prevent the sort of occurrences last.....*

Well it was the production.... it was really .....role of production, ensuring that the Distance Learning material was copied, set out, packed up and posted. It was a purely physical, repetitive, time-consuming job. Plus also we were using the Distance Learning material for the first time and the schedule of authorship and the production of it had run over.

*For those sort of initial difficulties.*

Yes. Because I mean even if that were to be a problem in the future, at least the worse that could happen is that the student would get a module Distance Learning package that hadn't been updated say. Problem though it is, and that could be well be something that could happen. The updating of Distance Learning material, be that the module study guide or whatever, a hidden general time for the new academic year. But theoretically early preparation for that should avoid it and remind us two authors early on, which is..... I'm very pleased about it being taken care of by yourself as Senior Manager because again it places myself, I think, in a difficult position because as programme leader, organising the day to day running of a programme is accepted as part of my role but saying to an author, start making changes or start doing this work or doing that work, this tends to be seen as impinging on the Centre for Teaching and Learning area because there's ..... and the Senior Manger there who have those strong feelings about what their role is and also what the role of a programme leader is, which isn't to delve to strongly into, what an author does with the production of the.....

*The author being?*

The writer of the material.

*Yes. Right. How then do you feed your, you know from your evaluations, say there is something fundamentally wrong in a module that's come to light.... would that be.....*

That has to be, and always has been really, back to the module leader and they do have to take responsibility for that, just as they would have to take responsibility for changing their notes or changing the way they run a module in a taught, face-to-face situation. They've got to take responsibility for changing whatever is in a Distance Learning.

*That's right. But did you imply earlier then there might be resistance to that from the Centre of Teaching and Learning?*

Yes. I think there would to some extent because, at the end of the day, there may well be cost implications because they want to make their work..... that's quite a major amount of work that's required to do and I need paying for that or I need time for that in terms of my workload so as soon as you start getting involved where there are workload hours implication or there is financial implication then the programme leader has got..... I feel, on very sticky ground because they've got no managerial responsibility.

*But that will come under the Distance Learning Manager's control wouldn't it?*

Well, I mean have you as Distance Learning Manager, taken that up?

*Well it's a programme manager type issue isn't it? You know it's quality matters but I take your point yes. Have you noticed..... I mean how have you noticed or what do you think are the views of academic staff in general towards Distance Learning now? Now that things have been going a little while. Have you noticed a difference in ..... or have you not noticed or you don't sort of.....*

The general feeling is that, I think, those module leaders that are involved in Distance Learning, because the environment as a whole is just what it is, people tend to keep things quiet, they tend to just quietly go along. There isn't an accepted forum for discussion at module leader level. Module leaders, tutors, lecturers, whatever their titles, they don't feel comfortable at discussing.....

*Why do you think that is?*

Because there is a degree of insecurity and there is a quiet competitiveness also. Then there are at different times feeling that some lecturers don't do their... as much as others. There is a general feeling that there may be inequalities. Those lecturers who do develop their practice much more are sometimes viewed negatively because they are seen to be progressing. They may be also involved in PhD work and that isn't viewed positively necessarily by their colleagues. I don't think this is particularly unusual but that environment is very much pushing a lecturer into being brandished more an individual practitioner.

*So as regards Distance Learning, having said all that, where do you think Distance Learning fits in there, what sort of teacher do you think or academic, within your experience, becomes a Distance Learning tutor?*

Well it's very difficult because some of the ones that you think would be quite involved with Distance Learning aren't, and those that you don't expect to be sometimes are.

*So what ??????????????[overtalking] have they got*

They are on the whole more individual, more independent in terms of their work practice and more comfortable about being more of a loner. And if anything, the production of the Distance Learning material and running a module, it encourages..... or it discourages collaboration and collaborative work amongst the lecturers.

*So what's the antidote to that isolation?*

Well it's positive probably for some individuals....

*Yes right, OK.*

because it probably feels that, I would imagine that that's something that is quite pleasant, that they are happy to be more isolated, or not necessarily happy but they are comfortable with whereas some lecturers are certainly not comfortable with it and they are comfortable with acting in a single way rather than as part of a team. The downside of that is that you won't become quite isolated I think with your subject area and if you've got other ways within your practice of receiving positive feedback that what you're teaching is up-to-date, is appropriate and whatever, then that's fine but if you don't have that, you know, for example one colleague, he's doing PhD work, he's got quite positive feedback in lots of different ways; publishing, he's asked frequently to review articles or books, so he's got quite a lot of positive feedback that he is where he should be with his subject. Now if you don't have that because of time constraint, but you're still a module leader and you're still responsible for delivering up-to-date information that has subject credibility, and you're not working with colleagues and you're not being able to share the latest information of recent changes or recent publications etcetera.

*But the???????????? are subject groups aren't they? ???? they're not....*

But there isn't, that I'm aware of, that much opportunity to discuss the development of the subject area....

*But is that acutely at Distance Learning or is that the situation in the Institute anyway?*

What is more peculiar to Distance Learning is that because you've been the author of a Distance Learning material, you've received sole single authorship so it's been only one man's product....

*Do you think that's a good thing?*

No. I think that's quite negative. I think the way you would normally arrange a taught face-to-face module you'd have guest speakers or you would have someone who you knew you could call upon who had specialist subject knowledge for that and it would just be a two hour session perhaps, whereas if you're producing some Distance Learning material as author, you've got to research and you've got to research and you've got to find that but



not only have you got to do it first time because it's in that package, but you've then got to keep it up to date and that's a problem.

*Would you like that change? To see that system changed to a sort of teamwork  
?????[overtalking] module, like a module team?*

I've experienced being sole author for one module Distance Learning material and I'm presently experiencing a joint. It's not equal half and half ?????????? material but it is more than one person's ideas going in to that and it's very very much more positive because you've got more than one person looking at the connection of different parts of the whole and the disadvantage to that is it takes quite a lot longer and there's a time issue. So there's a time issue with the production initially of the Distance Learning material but then there's a time issue in terms of every update that takes place, there are more people involved so there's longer it would take to make any changes to it etcetera. But I think it's something that we should really really think seriously about, accepting that it should take longer and critical review by external is very important. It may not be that comfortable to have someone critically reviewing the material you've written but when it comes to delivering the module, once that process has been through, I think you would feel much more secure about using the material.

## Interview Quotation Coding System

### Interviewee role identifier

**PL** *programme leader*

**ML** *module leader*

**admin** *administrator*

**MD** *materials development*

### Programme identifier

**HP** *BSc (Hons) Health Promotion*

**HS** *BSc (Hons) Health Studies*

**PSN** *BSc (Hons) Professional Studies-Nursing*

**WC** *BSc (Hons) Professional Studies-Nursing (Wound Care)*

### Interview sequence identifier

**1** *First stage interviews with policy makers in April 1998*

**2** *Second stage interviews with participants in September/October 1998*

**3** *Third stage interviews with participants in February/March 1999*

## List of Thematic Codes

Master code	General Category	Descriptive Code
<i>COLLABORATION</i>		
COL	Collaborative Process	COL - PROC
COL	Collaboration Positive Aspects	COL - POS
COL	Collaboration Negative Aspects	COL - NEG
COL	Collaboration Timing	COL - TIM
COL	Collaborative Methods	COL - METH
COL	Collaborative Team Approach	COL - TEAM
COL	Collaborative Learning	COL - LEARN
COL	Sharing Best Practice	COL - BP
COL	Critical Events	COL - CRIT
COL	External Events	COL - EXT
COL	Profitability	COL - PROF
COL	Cultural Influences	COL - CUL
COL	Managerial Influences	COL - MAN
<i>STRUCTURE</i>		
STR	Conventional Structure e.g.	STR - CONV
STR	Appropriateness of Conventional Structure	STR - APP CONV
STR	User Salience	STR - USSAL+/-
STR	Critical Events	STR - CRIT
STR	Administrative Issues	STR - ADMIN
STR	Managerial Influences	STR - MAN
STR	Cultural Influences	STR - CUL
STR	Role Clarity	STR - ROL
STR	Learner Centred	STR - LCEN
<i>CHANGE OF PRACTICE</i>		
CP	Locus of Control	CP - LCON
CP	Teaching and Learning	CP - TL
CP	Administrative Changes	CP - ADM
CP	Resources	CP - RES
CP	Managerial Influences	CP - MAN
CP	Management Changes	CP - MANCH

Master Code	General Category	Descriptive Code
CP	Independent Learner	CP – INDL
CP	Learner Centred Approach	CP – LCEN
CP	Service Orientation	CP – SERV
CP	Holistic View	CP – HOL
CP	Quality Issues	CP – QUAL
CP	Communication Issues	CP – COMM
CP	Timing	CP – TIM
CP	Staff Development	CP - DEV
CP	Teacher/Administrator Support Issues	CP – SUPP
CP	Readiness to Adopt Changes	CP – READ

### *SUB-CULTURES*

SC	Saga	SC – SAG
SC	Hero	SC – HER
SC	Myth Making	SC – MYTH
SC	Rules	SC – RUL
SC	Norms and Recurrent Practices	SC – NOR
SC	Individual v Teams	SC – IND
SC	Subject Based v Collaboration	SC – SUB
SC	Dominant Culture e.g.	SC – DOM
SC	Closed Approach Favoured	SC – CLO
SC	Open Approach Favoured	SC – OPE
SC	Negative Response to ODL	SC – NEG
SC	Positive Response to ODL	SC – POS
SC	Boundary Dispute e.g.	SC – BOUN
SC	Boundary Defence e.g.	SC – BDEF
SC	Marginalisation e.g.	SC - MARG

### Ethical Principles That Guide the Study

- **Negotiation of access.** Care will be taken to ensure that the relevant persons, committees and authorities have been consulted and informed and that the necessary permission and approval has been obtained.
- **Involvement of participants.** An open approach will be adopted and all who have a stake in the innovation will be encouraged to contribute in a positive way.
- **Negotiation with those involved.** It is recognised that not everyone will want to be involved. The conduct of the study will take account of the wishes of others.
- **Reporting of progress.** The study will be kept visible and transparent and remain open to suggestions so that unforeseen and unseen ramifications can be taken account of. All involved will have the opportunity to lodge a protest against any part of the study.
- **Permission to observe.** Explicit permission will be obtained at the outset of the study to undertake participant observation.
- **Permission to examine documents.** Explicit permission will be obtained before examining any document that is not in the public domain.
- **Negotiation of interpretations.** Participants will be given the opportunity to challenge the researcher's interpretation of their contribution or of an occurrence or event.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** Total confidentiality of information and the identity of participants is not always possible. With this in mind the following will apply:

### ***Information***

The study will only include information that is in the public domain and within the law. Anything of a personal or compromising nature will not be revealed. Before using any potentially sensitive information the permission of the originator will be obtained.

### ***Identity***

The names of participants in this study will not be revealed. When they are quoted in the text participants will be identified only by a code indicating their role. Where this precaution still leads to their identity being assumed then their permission will be sought. Before the name of any organisation is used permission will be obtained.

- **Ensure the right of any participant to withdraw from the study.** All participants in the study will be informed of their right to withdraw at any time.
- **Maintenance of intellectual property rights.** Provided that those involved are satisfied with the fairness, accuracy and relevance of the accounts which pertain to them, and that the accounts do not unnecessarily expose or embarrass those involved and that the spirit of these ethical guidelines have been followed then accounts should not be subject to veto or be sheltered by prohibitions of confidentiality.

(Adapted from Robson 1993; p 33-34 and McNiff et al 1996; p 34-35)

# Glossary

**APL/APEL** Accreditation of Prior Learning and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning. The former refers to learning acquired in formal educational contexts with a qualification awarded for successful completion. The latter refers to experiential learning in work or other contexts and normally requires a portfolio of evidence to support a claim for academic credit.

**NHS Consortia** A grouping of National Health Service Trusts responsible for purchasing non-medical education and training from higher education and other institutions. In the context of this thesis this refers to pre-registration and post-registration nurse and midwifery education. The formal arrangement is normally through a five year contract.

**Correspondence Courses** The term used for a form of distance learning that is print based and dependent on postal communication as the only form of correspondence. It is used here in Keegan's (1996; p 35) sense in which the term tends to be associated with some of the less successful aspects of distance learning and contributes to the still questioned status of distance learning in some areas of higher education.

**Core Group** A shortened title for the Institute Distance Learning Group. It was the group responsible for the management and co-ordination of the implementation of open and distance learning in the Institute. As such task groups were responsible to the core group.

**Distance Learning** Used here to denote a form of teaching and learning defined by Keegan (1996; p 8) as 'the separating of teacher and learner and the learner from the learning group with the interpersonal face-to-face communication of conventional education being replaced by an apersonal mode of communication mediated by technology'.

**ENB** The English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (ENB) is the central professional regulating body with a statutory responsibility to the UKCC for the quality and standards of pre and post registration education of nurses, midwives and health visitors in England.

**HEFCE** Higher Education Funding Council for England.

**Learner** The term used in this thesis to denote someone studying at a distance. The use of the term is based on the distinction between the adult-as-student and the adult-as-learner proposed by Edwards (1997; p 129). Adult-as-learner suggests independence and the challenge associated with being an autonomous distance learner.

**Module** A distinct, separately assessed learning unit of fifteen weeks that can form part of a programme that leads to an award. Some modules have 'stand-alone' status and can be taken individually. The modular curriculum format is intended to promote choice and flexibility, allowing learners/students to select their learning pathway from the choice available within a validated programme.

**New Learning Environment (NLE)** A strategy of teaching and learning implemented at WLU that favoured a curriculum structure based on the principles of open learning. The strategy was dependent on an increase in technological support and a reduction in face-to-face contact. Student centredness, openness and flexibility were core values of this approach.

**Open Learning** A philosophical approach to teaching and learning defined by Field (1996; p 143) as 'greater accessibility, flexibility and student centredness. It implies placing the student rather than provider at the core of educational practice.

**OLF** The Open Learning Foundation of the United Kingdom is a consortium of educational providers with the aim of promoting open and distance learning by supporting each other in the production and delivery of open and distance learning modules and programmes.



**Post-Registration Nurse and Midwifery Education** Refers to educational programmes designed to meet the needs of registered nurses and midwives. These programmes can be short in-service training events, ENB approved clinical programmes or conjointly validated (ENB and HE Institution) first and higher degree programmes that have a particular relevance to the professional role of the nurse/midwife.

**Pre-Registration Nurse and Midwifery Education** Refers to conjointly validated three year educational programmes that entitle the successful student to apply for entry to the professional register maintained by the UKCC.

**Programme** A validated course of study that comprises a number of modules, either fixed or optional. Programmes are normally made up of a predetermined number of academic credits and levels. The levels are; 1, 2 3 and M and each level constitutes 120 credits. To obtain a bachelor degree, for example, a learner must attain 120 credits at levels 1, 2 and 3 to receive the university award.

**Student** Used here to denote someone studying by 'conventional' face-to-face mode (see learner).

**Subject Group** Used here in Evan's (1995) sense and is the institutional enactment of disciplines in the shape of 'departments'. These subject groups were formed within schools and were responsible for the teaching quality of their subject area.

**Task Group** Used here in Hackman's (1990; p 490) sense, task groups were formed to complete a finite piece of work that normal organisational systems could not readily handle. Task groups typically have clear and specific objectives and their status is temporary, being disbanded once the task is completed. At the Institute task groups were responsible to the core group.

**UKCC** The United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting is the central statutory body responsible to central government for the standards and professional practice of Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors. It exercises this

responsibility through four national boards (see ENB) and by maintaining a register of all qualified practitioners.

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