

### 3.2 Open and Distance Education : Vision and Strategy (1996)

#### *Abstract*

*This document attempts to outline the IGNOUs strategic and development plans for the 1997-2002 planning cycle (the Ninth Plan). It identifies the central purposes of the institution (the vision) and the effect of its efforts over the last ten years (the impact). The document briefly examines the external environment which influences higher education policies and programmes, the likely demand for higher education facilities and the possible response from the system to these demands.*

*As we enter the new millennium, two major factors are likely to influence the course of developments in education; one involving a Paradigm shift affecting the function of educational institutions, and the ways in which they function and the other, representing a quantum jump in the numbers and variety programmes and-learner groups drawn from diverse sections of the population irrespective of their age, gender, occupation, and so on. These new directions call for a comprehensive review of the traditional strategies and formulation of more innovative and flexible approaches.*

*The document tries to establish the role of the open learning system in the broader perspective of the changing role of higher education in the country, with the IGNOU playing a lead role, not just as a provider of educational programmes, but as a promoter, coordinator and system leader in the establishment and- development of an open university network, supported and strengthened by major national resources bases comprising technology, human resources and research and development initiatives. An important component of this document is the identification of new directions for development and the ordering of their priorities.*

*An attempt has also been made in this papers to identify the programmes and activities to be undertaken during the ninth plan period to give a practical shape to the directions of development and to enable the open learning system to play its assigned role. Plans of action do require both moral and material support for their execution; moral support in accepting the role and potential of the open learning system, and material support in implementing the programme.*

## **I - VISION AND STRATEGY**

### **THE VISION**

#### **1.1 The Open University System was initiated**

- as an instrument of democratising education and to augment opportunities for higher education.
- to widen access to, and promote a flexible, innovative and cost-effective system of education.

#### **1.2. The IGNOU was established in 1985 with these objectives. Its mission includes**

- Introduction and promotion of open university and distance education system in the educational pattern of the country.
- Widening access to higher education for large segments of the population, particularly the disadvantaged groups.
- Ensuring relevance to programmes of education by relating them to the needs of economic development, employment and empowerment of the people of India.

#### **The Strategic Goals**

#### **1.3. The strategic goals that the IGNOU sets for itself during the ninth plan (1997-2002) are:**

- i) To **expand higher education facilities** and widen access to education that will empower increasing diversity of people.
- ii) To **ensure relevance** for educational programmes by diversifying the course provisions and developing high-quality, multi-media open learning curriculum, designed to meet the academic, technical and vocational needs of diverse student groups.
- iii) To **reach out to large numbers** of learner groups, especially those who have no opportunities to pursue good quality higher education programme, and enable them to acquire knowledge, skills and competence to become productive participants in development.
- iv) To **foster and lead developments in knowledge related technologies** relevant to large scale distance education.
- v) To establish and operationalise a major open **education network** comprising IGNOU, the State Open Universities and other distance education institutions to extend the outreach of distance education programmes to all parts of the country.
- vi) To **establish and develop large networks**, especially in the spheres of communication (broadcasting teleconferencing) and of computers, etc., of physical and intellectual resources for technological support in the delivery of high-quality educational programmes.

- vii) To **organise research and development** activities through projects, fellowships and other programmes in distance education, its methodologies and practices.
- viii) **To** undertake an active role in the process of globalisation of education by increasing world-wide access to Indian open education programmes by promoting enrolment in Indian institutions and the use of their learning packages by institutions and students outside the country.
- ix) To **establish and develop a significant national resource base** for the growth and development of the open learning system in the country in such areas as electronic media production and diffusion, human resource development, etc.
- x) To **develop instruments and methods** by which the quality of programmes, products and services provided by the open university system is assured and mobility of students among open universities and between the open and the traditional systems is promoted through credit transfer, provision of multiple entry and exit points, modularity of programmes, and so on.
- xi) To **develop a cutting edge** for Indian education in the global context and establish a healthy competitiveness for Indian degrees.

## **THE IMPACT**

- 2.1 The IGNOU's policies, programmes and methods have captured the imagination of the Indian education system. Its ideas and innovations, and the applications of technology, in providing convenient and cost-effective programmes of education are now widely recognised and appreciated.
- 2.2 The **enrolment** in its programmes has been rising rapidly- from less than 4000 in 1987 to nearly 1,30,000 in 1996.
- 2.3 It has a **vastly heterogeneous student body**; demographically diverse (age, gender, region, social background), educationally disadvantaged (most of them without the traditional qualifications for entry into higher education and who have no opportunities to make up the lost time), and economically weak (a large majority belonging to low and lower-middle- income groups).
- 2.4 It has designed, developed and delivered **high quality academic programmes** in the humanities, sciences and social sciences as well as in professional areas like computer applications, education, engineering, management and nursing.
- 2.5 These programmes attract **large numbers of students**, most of whom are in the lower rungs of their career, looking for opportunities to improve their qualifications, professional competence and/or in acquiring new skills.

- 2.6 it has established that **modern communication technologies** can be effectively harnessed in providing access to educational opportunities and that high-technology need not necessarily be a high-cost medium.
- 2.7 The IGNOU experience has generated considerable enthusiasm among the country's educational providers. The initiative for a **countrywide OPENET** involving IGNOU, State Open Universities (there are six in 1995) and possibly 44 other dual mode universities is taking concrete shape.
- 2.8 **Empowerment of people** as an objective of educational provision and distance education as an effective instrument in this endeavour are gaining recognition. The Panchciyati Raj Project and the vocational/technical and other extension education programmes currently under development clearly demonstrate this reality.
- 2.9 The IGNOU and other Open Universities have established the fact **that resource for relevant education programmes can be mobilized / generated** with the provider playing a catalytic role. The new environment of education-training linkages has opened up opportunities for resource mobilisation on a vast scale and new approaches to human resource development in general.

## **THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT**

3.1 Demand for higher education places is constantly rising. The average rate of growth in enrolment in the traditional higher education system is currently about 5-6 % per annum. All indications are that this growth will continue for several years as the school system expands and more eligible candidates emerge to add to the pressure on the existing full-time conventional institutions.

### **Enrolment in the Eighth Plan**

3.2 The Eighth Five Year Plan recognised this fact and proposed that about 50% of the additional demand for higher education places in the conventional system should be absorbed by the distance education system. The Programme of Action 1992 proposed that the overall enrolment in the distance education system should be in the region of about 16 lakhs by the end of the eighth plan.

3.3 A major reason for this shortfall is that the large majority of students enrolled in the open universities belong to the category of adult learners (both employed and unemployed) are in the age group 21 and above. In other words, open learning system has still to make a significant impact in attracting large numbers of school leavers.

### **Diversity of Learner Groups**

3.4 Adult learners have not been reckoned in the past while assessing the likely size of the target group for provision of additional facilities in the plans. It followed that no specific measures were committed to provide facilities for these target groups in the expansion plans for the higher education system.

3.5 Changes in the composition of the student groups in higher education, with more mature persons seeking higher education facilities, have had significant consequences for the system of higher education, its functions. The response to these challenges was in the form of major innovations that the open universities initiated, which included:

- responding to the needs of an increasingly large and diverse student body;
- flexibilities in the design, development and delivery of programmes and courses to meet the varying needs of heterogeneous student groups;
- application of new learning technologies and teaching techniques, especially to meet the needs of home and work-based students.

3.6 These innovations have also had an impact on the type and nature of the content of programmes and its relevance at the needs of various student groups. Professional/technical/ vocational education programmes are greatly in demand in comparison with the traditional degree programmes offered by most institutions of higher education.

### **The Impact of Economic Liberation**

3.7 A significant outcome of the economic reform programmes initiated in the last five years is the modernisation of the infrastructure sector and upgradation of technology in all spheres. Inevitably, greater demands are being made on the upgradation of the technological skills and competence of the personnel already serving in these sectors through programmes of training and retraining. The existing system of education and training is unable to cope with this unprecedented demand.

3.8 In recent years, a very large number of new educational providers have registered their presence in the Indian educational scene. These include the emergence of a training industry in the private sector (Information Technology), a large number of private providers of education in such professional areas as management, development of in-company education and training establishments, and also a concerted effort by major foreign institutions to attract Indian students.

3.9 The developments in communication technology have opened up unprecedented opportunities for large scale dissemination of knowledge and information. The multi-media learning packages are fast replacing the traditional practice of classroom instruction. The adoption of these technologies in India will provide the education system with the means to reach out to large numbers and transform the teaching-learning processes significantly.

### **LOOKING AHEAD : THE DEMAND**

4.1 The expansion in higher education had never fully met the demand for places. The participation ratio in higher education is still about 6% of the relevant age group. On the other hand, there is an ever increasing number of mature learners, including working people, who are looking for opportunities for higher education, all indications are that the demand for initial education (age group 17 +) and continuing education (mature persons) at advanced levels will increase further.

## **Initial education**

4.2 The age group 17+ will apparently look for opportunities in the traditional system (colleges and universities) as in the past. A large majority of them may be able to find places in the formal sector. The frustrated and unmet demand from this sector especially from the urban areas will turn to distance education. Their number may not be high. If the distance education system has something more useful and relevant to offer, it would be able to attract a far higher number of students even from the formal sector.

## **Continuing Education**

4.3 The demand for continuing education of mature students will continue to be stimulated by the shift in the employment market towards high knowledge and skill-based jobs and the continuing need therefore to update and extend both skills and knowledge. It should therefore be expected that larger number of graduates would wish to reenter higher education For updating, broadening and specialist courses, while non-graduates will seek advanced courses and formal qualifications especially in areas related to employment.

4.4 The focus of these continuing education programmes will obviously turn to training and retraining in skills, upgrading knowledge, professional/technical/vocational programmes, and generally those initiatives that will enrich and empower the community.

## **THE RESPONSE**

### **Resources for Higher Education**

5.1 Conventional full-time institutions of higher education will continue to expand. More universities and colleges will continue to be established. However, there will be a slowing down in the rate of this growth as resources will be a major constraint. A large part of the public funding will be claimed by the elementary education sector whose expansion can no longer be delayed. Consequently, higher education funding will tend to decline. Suggestions that higher education should pay for itself, or at least raise sufficient resources to meet the needs of expansion will continue to be made.

### **New Providers of Education**

5.2 Innovations tend to be outcomes of adversity. As public expenditure declines, there would be faster growth in the non-traditional sectors which are less resource-dependent on public funding. There will be competition not only among universities, but also between the traditional and non-traditional sectors. The latter category will multiply further; there could emerge new competitors, not excluding owners of large electronic data-bases, producers of educational software, and possibly, publishers also. The private sector in education could also open up.

### **Programmes and their structures and Methods**

5.3 The competitive edge could assume several forms; expansion in the scope of educational provision, identification of new programme areas, and finding new ways of providing education and training, flexible learning patterns, provision of multiple entry and exit points through modular structures, and emphasis on vocational and experiential learning.

5.4 Universities will need to create opportunities for the development of broad-based as well as specialist qualifications at a number of different levels, which recognise the development of transferable skills and competencies as well as knowledge and understanding.

5.5 Greater attention will have to be given to the effective use of computer-supported approaches to learning and to other media and networks which enable students to study in more independent and flexible ways.

### **Quality Assurance**

5.6 As the content and processes of education continue to change qualitatively, the educational provision will have to adjust itself to new ways of quality assurance. New approaches involving resource-sharing, stronger linkages with user agencies of manpower, and development of consortia of institutions are likely to emerge. Quality assessment, accreditation, validation of courses, programmes and qualifications, etc. will become essential instruments in educational provision.

### **International Competition**

5.7 Alongside, higher education institutions in the country will need to harmonise their provisions in the emerging international perspective as competition across borders and through the sky is likely to be the order in the coming years.

### **Management of change**

5.8 The Management of these changes in the educational provision, as well as the diversification of the student groups, will require preparation of the staff to meet the new challenges, by giving greater attention to human resource management and to the development of new teaching and management skills.

5.9 Greater investments will be required to meet the needs of expansion and change of these magnitudes. As public funding will continue to decline, universities will be expected to economise on expenditure, improve efficiency, generate savings, and operate differently in the management of their resources.

## **THE ROLE OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

## **Quantum Jump**

6.1 The IGNOU and other Open Universities are equipped to deal with large numbers of students. The economics of open learning means that they are able to expand quickly and effectively on a high volume, low marginal cost base. The open universities will therefore have a major role to play in the continuing expansion of higher education.

## **Equity And Access**

6.2 Though their primary concern would continue to be adult learners and those previously disadvantaged in the pursuit of higher education, the open universities will be able to make a significant contribution to widening access not only to mature students, especially those without the traditional entry qualifications, but significantly to the traditional constituency of school leavers as well. The distinctive experience of the open universities in the delivery of academic programmes, and the advantages of modular study will enable them to respond effectively to the new demands. The potential of the open Universities in pooling their programmes together, transferring credits and enlarging the options available to students will enable large numbers to enroll in programmes of high quality.

## **Cost Effectiveness**

6.3 The Open University programmes will be cost-effective. The current indications are that they will cost only about 35-50% of the cost normally incurred by the traditional system on comparable programmes. The open universities can bring down [his cost still further through economics of scale since a large part of the fixed costs will get distributed over a larger number of students.

6.4 The Open Universities will still need the initial investments required in developing programmes and setting up the infrastructure for their effective delivery. These investments will necessarily have to be made from public funds though a substantial part of fees the operating costs can be recovered in the form of fees.

## **Paradigm Change : Innovative Initiatives**

6.5 Open Universities are strategically placed to launch experimental and innovative initiatives. A most significant component of this initiative would be networking of various kinds. They include :

- Open University Network - a provider's network to avoid duplication of efforts, with focused attention by each university on selected areas to ensure quality and excellence. The network will establish a pool of programmes developed by each member.
- Delivery networks-involving national level telecasts, broadcast, teleconferencing, computer-aided instruction, etc. and sharing the physical resources of various open universities for effective delivery of programmes.



- Development of national resource centres for technology support, human resource development, system research and development, etc.

## **DIRECTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

7.1 The major development initiatives which are planned over the five years 1997-2002 are:

7.2 Expansion of the Open Learning System

7.2.1 Pursue the proposal to establish one State Open University in each major State. This is necessary to increase the outreach and to ensure access to open university programmes throughout all major regional languages.

7.2.2 Redefine the concept of an Open University in terms of infrastructure, organisation, teaching/learning strategies, etc. It could be a node within a large network, or a partner/collaborator with another open university. This is essential in the context of the initial investments required and resource allocations to be made. A new Open University can share programmes and delivery systems established and developed by others.

7.2.3 Transform the existing correspondence education programmes of dual mode universities into distance education programmes of an acceptable quality.

7.2.4 Provide for mobility of students (through credit transfer, etc.) among institutions within the Open Learning System and also between the OLS and the conventional system.

## **7.3 Programmes and Courses**

7.3.1 Develop innovative programmes which will improve the employability of graduates. The IGNOU has already developed the first degree programmes in the humanities, social sciences and sciences on the pattern suggested by UGC. Expand these provisions by creating new and innovative first degree programmes with functional specialisations in new areas.

7.3.2 Develop new areas of study from existing bases (such as environmental education, business studies, health education, media studies, communication, etc.).

7.3.3 Develop and offer a variety of continuing and extension education programmes for upgrading knowledge and skills, retraining of serving personnel and improving the awareness of the community generally.

7.3.4 Design and introduce a large number of technical/vocational education programmes in areas related to economic development and employment needs.

7.3.5 Strengthen and consolidate the professional education programmes already initiated in Computer Applications, Education, Engineering & Technology, Health Sciences and Management.

7.3.6 Launch specific programmes addressed to identified target groups in cooperation with public and private sector organisations with a view to empowering people and peoples organisations (Panchayati Raj etc.).

#### **7.4 Student Numbers**

7.4.1 Increase the enrolment to 1 million students in the Open Universities (IGNOU and 15 State Open Universities) by 2002 on academic offerings, excluding those enrolled on extension education and other functional short-term programmes.

7.4.2 Increase the enrolment to 1 million in the distance education programmes of the dual mode institutions by improving their quality and content and also relevance by the year 2002. This will ensure that at least 25-30% of the school leavers will be attracted to the Open learning system in the 9th Plan.

7.4.3 Initiate efforts to improve retention and reduce withdrawals and drop-outs.

7.4.4 Remove or reduce system constraints on expansion of student numbers such as prior requirements for admission, inadequacy of infrastructure, rigidity of processes, etc. (Encourage Walk -in admission, on-demand examination, etc.).

7.4.5 Increase the coverage through continuing and extension education programme (skills, vocation, awareness, etc.) to at least 5 million people.

#### **7.5 Access and Student Services**

7.5.1 Effectively decentralise admissions to various programmes through Regional Centres. Provide for on-the-spot admission, multiple admission points during the year, etc.

7.5.2 Gradually move towards course-wise registration for the programmes, and provide for multiple entry and exit points to suit the convenience of students.

7.5.3 Provide better and more accessible information on courses and programmes and develop clear guidance on course profiles.

7.5.4 Introduce pre-admission counselling service to inform and guide potential students about the OLS its programmes, courses and methodologies.

7.5.5 Introduce large scale computerisation and mechanisation for effective decentralisation of processes, dissemination of information including pre-admission counselling and post-admission services like supply of instructional material, counselling schedules, etc.

7.5.6 Consider alternative arrangements for expanding the Regional Centre - Study Centre network by setting up more Programme Centres/Work Centres, etc. Involve user agencies of manpower in expanding this network through a partnership/consortium approach.

## **7.6. New Technologies**

7.6.1 Promote the use of educational technology to support students, and develop resource centres and multimedia learning centres throughout the country.

7.6.2 Develop and evaluate strategies for large scale applications of audio-visual computing and multi-media material in teaching-learning processes.

7.6.3 Consider, in collaboration with the concerned national agencies, the close involvement of the national networks of telecasting, broadcasting and Computer Communication for learning purposes.

7.6.4 Explore the possibility of launching dedicated education networks – knowledge network, multi-media learning networks, digital library, open education network, etc.

7.6.5 Complete transformation of all programmes of correspondence education into distance education programmes and ensuring their compatibility with new delivery technologies,

## **7.6 Research and Development**

7.7.1 Encourage and support research within the University by faculty and students through research fellowships. Research projects, etc.

7.7.2 Focus research initiatives on thrust areas like distance education system, communication technology, discipline communication, developmental problems at institutional/field level, etc.

7.7.3 Institute M.Phil/Ph.D. Programmes and encourage research studies and projects for system development, technology applications, etc.

7.7.4 Avoid duplication of research efforts in areas in which traditional universities and research laboratories are significantly involved.

7.7.5 Focus research and development efforts on knowledge technologies.

## **7.7 Continuing and Extension Education**

7.8.1 Design, develop and deliver a large number of short-term, self-contained, training/re- skilling packages/programmes.

7.8.2 Develop and introduce technical/vocational education programmes to develop skills in new technologies and their applications, upgrade the skills of serving personnel, etc.

7.8.3 Initiate efforts to introduce a strong vocational/application-oriented component in the traditional degree/diploma programmes to improve the employability of students/graduates.

7.8.4 Establish strong and enduring linkages with employer organisations NGOs, etc., and seek their involvement and support in the design, development and delivery of technical/vocational education programmes,

7.8.5 Initiate a new system of vocational qualification certification through the distance mode at various levels of competence and functional requirements.

7.8.6 Design and launch short-term programmes, for improving' the awareness of people in such areas as human rights, quality of life, citizenship education, etc., with a view to empowering them to live fuller lives.

## **7.9 National Resource Centres for Distance Education**

7.9.1 Focus IGNOU's role as a national level apex body (DEC) in the development of a strong resource base for the promotion and development of the distance education system in the country.

7.9.2 Pursue the efforts already initiated to

- establish a common pool of programmes that can be shared by all open universities.
- network the delivery resources and centres set up by IGNOU and State Open Universities.
- provide access to the delivery networks, communication networks, etc. already in operation (teleconferencing, broadcasting, etc.).

7.9.3 Establish and develop knowledge Network/Educational Technology Mission involving

- Physical and Intellectual Resources Network
- TC/BC network leading to virtual class-room
- Computer network

7.9.4 Develop a human resource development centre for distances education by strengthening the activities of STRIDE

7.9.5 Establish a quality assurance mechanism for distance education, leading eventually to a system of accreditation.

7.9.6 Develop norms of quality and standards for products, processes and services that will apply to all participants in the development and maintenance of distance education programmes.

7.9.7 Establish a Research and Development Institute for Knowledge Technologies.

7.9.8 Set up instruments/mechanisms to undertake a National Vocational Qualification Competence Certification.

## **7.10 International Role**

7.10.1 Take effective steps to promote global access to IGNOU's programmes and services.

7.10.2 Initiate immediate steps to encourage enrolment of Indian expatriates in IGNOU programmes in those regions where there is significant concentration of Indians.

7.10.3 Explore the possibility of partnership arrangements with local institutions outside the country to launch IGNOU programmes in those countries.

7.10.4 Explore new technological opportunities to make IGNOU programmes more widely available in the region and elsewhere.

7.10.5 Set up mechanisms to overseas the international dimension of IGNOU's programmes and activities with a view to ensure their quality, efficiency and effectiveness.

## **7.11 Management Structures and Processes**

7.11.1 Develop new structures and processes for the management of the open learning system keeping specially in view :

- the vast potential for sharing programmes and resources for delivery through networking.
- the relatively low investments in the initial infrastructure (building, staff and equipment)
- significance of the technological components (communications, computerisation, mechanisation, etc.).

7.11.2 Establish and develop flat organisational structures, relying significantly on the principles of decentralisation, delegation of authority, teamwork, etc.

- 7.11.3 Rethink the traditional concepts of university governance in the context of the new functions devolving on the OLS in the areas of production, distribution and management systems.
- 7.11.4 Redefine the role of IGNOU (University) and DEC (Apex body) as national lead organisations in the context of the paradigm change involving transformation in the functions and the quantum jump in numbers and diversity of the students.

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