Innovative and Good Practices of Open and Distance Learning in Asia and the Pacific

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Innovative and Good Practices of Open and Distance Learning in Asia and the Pacific

Executive Summary

Context of the Study

- Some unique features of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Asia and the Pacific (AP) region include huge student population in ODL institutions, the concentrated efforts of governments with the establishment of dedicated single-mode ODL institutions, the rapid growth of ICT use, and globalization. All these features have contributed to the development of ODL and shaped current ODL systems in the AP region. Especially considering the high number of student enrollment, quality assurance (QA) efforts of the ODL universities are becoming more important than ever for the future of higher education in this region.

- Several studies have attempted to review current changes in ODL and to evaluate QA systems of ODL for higher education at the national or institutional level. These studies reveal that ODL institutions are in the midst of instructional and technological changes and the QA frameworks of ODL in a globalized context are still at the early stages of development. The previous studies also indicate the need for investigating a wide range of innovative and good practices in different contexts of ODL.

Study Objectives

- This study is to identify information on innovative and good practices in ODL in the region, in particular areas such as quality assurance, curriculum, policy and management, student services and tutoring, ICT integration, cost-savings, collaboration, and for-profit involvement.

- In addition, the study aims to promote information sharing by publishing its results onto the UNESCO’s ODL-KB website (http://asiapacific-odl.oum.edu.my).

- To achieve these objectives, a survey of ODL institutions in the AP region and analyses of published documents and web sites have been conducted.

Innovative and Good Practices in ODL

Innovative and good practices in ODL in the AP region are presented in eight categories.

- Quality Assurance: Over the past years, developing and implementing policies to assure the quality has become a priority of ODL institutions. QA is becoming even more important as ODL becomes popular and faces a proliferation of borderless education. Seven cases are reported to highlight innovative QA efforts in various aspects of ODL.

- Curriculum: Instead of offering a wide range of different subject areas, new ODL institutions tend to offer programmes or courses specialized in one or a few fields of study. In fact, business and management at graduate level and technology toward
certification are two most popular fields for for-profit e-learning institutions. Cases discuss examples of market-driven curriculum in NetVarsity and new study fields for e-learning in several ODL programmes.

- **Policy and Management**: To meet the needs of a rapidly changing environment for ODL, existing policies have been revised and new policies developed in some ODL institutions. Athabasca and USQ have developed ODL policies in a rather comprehensive manner whereas OUSL has adopted a national level ODL QA policy manual.

- **Student Services and Tutoring**: Typical forms of student services in recent ODL include face-to-face and/or online tutoring and counseling, telephone or email services, digital libraries, and mentoring. With the development of ICT, ODL institutions are able to offer individualized and interactive student services faster and easier than ever. Cases of comprehensive one-stop student services and integration of online technology in tutoring and assessment of services are analyzed.

- **ICT Innovations**: Modern developments of innovative technologies have provided new possibilities to distance teaching professions, but at the same time have placed more demands on ODL institutions to explore effective ways of using these new technologies for their ODL practices. Cases which highlight innovative approaches of utilizing ICT including multimedia, LMS, mobile technology and e-books are introduced.

- **Cost-savings**: There is research evidence that an online programme can be cost-effective due to increased enrollments, increased student access to quality programmes and resources, and other benefits. But there are also cautions that initial fixed costs are only the beginning: providing continuous student services, hiring new staff, maintaining virtual systems, and offering new training add substantial costs to the institutions. Two cases are analyzed to show how some of these variable costs can be reduced without diminishing the quality of online programmes.

- **Collaboration**: Collaborative partnerships are important for ODL providers in that they reduce the cost of introducing new technologies and also improve the quality of developing programmes. Two cases are analyzed to show some innovative ways of building collaborative partnerships locally and internationally.

- **For-profit Involvement**: An increased for-profit involvement has challenged the existing QA frameworks of ODL, which often do not address for-profit education. Two cases show how for-profit e-learning institutions have emerged and how some of QA issues have been addressed.

**Conclusion**

The results of the study show that:

- Many ODL institutions have implemented QA measures throughout their ODL practices including student services and tutoring, course development, staff evaluation, and student assessment.

- Some ODL institutions have obtained accreditation from outside of their own country to achieve an international recognition and improve their market value.

- In several ODL practices, new collaborative partnerships have been emerged. Such partnerships include private and public collaboration, for-profit and non-for-profit collaboration, regional and international collaboration, and specific task-oriented partnerships with other ODL institutions or international organizations.
• Most institutions have introduced ICT-based programmes and services in pursuit of quality improvement and expansion. In some institutions, the use of ICT in distance teaching and learning is no longer considered an experimental work.

• Moreover, several ODL institutions in the AP region have updated existing curriculum to meet the emerging needs of new ODL learners.

The cases presented in this paper will provide valuable help for those ODL institutions which are in search of benchmarks. Nevertheless, the study also shows that we are not yet at the stage where attention to QA is covering all parts of our ODL activities. And in quite a few cases, innovative approaches have touched only a small portion of ODL students and staff. Moreover, cross-border educational activities are still at the margins in most ODL institutions, and gender-related innovations have not been reported in any of the survey replies. For further development of quality ODL in the AP region, much still needs to be done.

• First, it is necessary to develop a holistic QA strategy and strong QA frameworks to improve quality of ODL practices as a whole.

• In addition, re-conceptualization of the role of an ODL provider in cross-border higher education market is also necessary for future development of ODL in the AP region. ODL institutions in the AP region need to be proactive rather than reactive to the challenges of the expansion of for-profit ODL programmes and transnational education.

• At the same time, ODL institutions in the AP region need to address issues that are pertinent to the region such as gender gap, digital divide, human rights, and equity in developing and implementing ODL policies.

• Finally, we need to learn from previous studies in distance education and educational technology showing the importance of instructional design and pedagogical philosophy behind the design activities in creating ICT-based learning environments. The starting point must be the learners’ learning problems, not technology.
Introduction

Background

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Asia and the Pacific (AP) region has many unique features. The most distinctive feature is huge student population in ODL institutions. For example, at least seven ODL institutions in the AP region are mega universities (universities with over 100,000 active students in degree-level courses). AIOU (Pakistan), Anadolu (Turkey), CCRTVU (China), IGNOU (India), KNOU (Korea), STOU (Thailand), UT (Indonesia), and PNU (Iran) have more than 5.6 million active students all together as of 2004 (See Appendix 1 for the list of abbreviations used in the study). Besides these well-known mega universities, quite a few distance teaching universities in the region have been established more recently and provided tertiary level education to those seeking continuing education opportunities. With two thirds of the global population, the AP region is known to have over 500 million potential students for ODL institutions (Shive & Jegede, 2001).

Another distinctive feature of ODL in the AP region is the concentrated efforts of governments with the establishment of dedicated single-mode ODL institutions. In the 1970s and 1980s, many countries in the AP region established at least one open university at the national level to meet the social demand for education. Some countries such as Bangladesh established its own open university in the 1990s. With limited resources and the need to expand education rapidly, countries in the region saw ODL institutions as an alternative mode of delivery to widen access to education, to satisfy continuing educational needs of adults, to expand trained workforce, and/or to train teachers to improve quality of schooling.

A recent change in ODL in the AP region is the rapid growth of ICT use. According to a report published by the International Telecommunication Union (2004), growth rates for fixed lines, mobile subscribers and Internet users in the AP region over the last few years have surpassed the single digit growth rates seen in other regions. The growth of ICT in general has stimulated ODL institutions to introduce ICT in teaching and learning process. Most institutions have adopted ICT as supplementary modes of instruction and also as a way of improving student services. E-tutoring, e-testing, one stop online service, online discussion, and digital library are examples of using ICT for ODL. Some ODL institutions have started totally online courses or programmes. Examples include e-MBA of Athabasca University and Anadolu University, and online Lifelong Education Graduate School at Korea National Open University.

Globalization of higher education is another recent feature of ODL in the AP region. In the past ten years or so there has been a noticeable surge in the export and the import of educational services in the region. Distance education including e-learning is one of the many manifestations of the current trend, and it has been steadily gaining ground. For example, universities in Australia, UK, USA, and Canada have actively exported their distance education programmes including e-learning to this part of the world. China, Hong Kong (China), India, Malaysia and Singapore are the major importers of these programmes. However, among these importers, Hong Kong (China), India and Malaysia have also exported their programmes to some other countries such as Bangladesh, China, Indonesia and Sri Lanka (Jung, 2004a). Global e-learning providers such as Thomson Learning, Apollo International, and UNext have been recruiting students from Hong Kong (China), India, Korea, Malaysia and Singapore.

All these features have contributed to the development of ODL and shaped current ODL systems in the AP region. With the increasing number of student enrollment in ODL universities, the issue of quality assurance (QA) has become more pressing than ever before. Several recent studies have attempted to review current changes in ODL and to evaluate QA systems of ODL for higher education both at the national and institutional level. These studies discussed issues related
to QA and the emergence of virtual universities or e-learning programmes and cross-border higher education (for example, Farrell, 2001; Jung, 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; Lockwood & Gooley, 2001; OECD, 2004; UNESCO, 2003). The findings show that ODL institutions are in the midst of instructional and technological changes and that QA frameworks of ODL in the globalized context are still at the early stages of development. The previous studies also indicate the need for investigating a wide range of innovative and good practices in different contexts of ODL.

Objectives

The present study aims at identifying innovative and good practices of ODL in the AP region at the tertiary level and sharing the findings with ODL institutions so as to improve the quality of ODL in the region. The objectives of the study are:

- to identify innovative and good practices in ODL in the region, in particular areas such as quality assurance, curriculum, student services and tutoring, ICT integration, cost-savings, collaboration, and for-profit involvement.
- to promote information sharing by publishing its results onto the UNESCO’s ODL-KB website (http://asiapacific-odl.oum.edu.my).

Methods

To achieve the study objectives, data were collected from a survey questionnaire to selected ODL institutions in the AP region and analyses of existing documents and web sites. First, criteria for identifying innovative and good cases in ODL in the AP region were developed based on information gathered from ODL journals and newspapers, ODL related seminars at the regional and international level, UNESCO/COL/OECD/WB Databases, Distance Education Clearinghouse, and the researcher’s own experience. As a result, 30 ODL institutions were identified.

Second, a survey questionnaire was sent to these 30 ODL institutions in the AP region (See Appendix 2 for the survey questionnaire and Appendix 3 for key terms used in the survey). The survey was conducted between June and August, 2005. The selected ODL institutions for the survey included both public and private, single-mode and mixed mode, non-profit and for-profit, and conventional and ICT-based e-learning institutions. Both higher education degree and diploma-granting institutions as well as institutions that provide only professional development programmes were included in the sample. Only 12 institutions returned the questionnaire of the survey. In addition to these 12 institutions, seven more institutions from for-profit private sector were added to the sample so as to present a wider range of practices in ODL. Table 1 shows the profiles of the 19 ODL institutions in the final sample.
Table 1: 19 ODL Institutions included in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Year of Establishment</th>
<th>Number of ODL Students (foreign students)</th>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>Homepage URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(data as of 2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(data as of 2005)</td>
<td>(1982 named as Anadolu)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Athabasca (Canada)</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>28,898 (1,048)</td>
<td>Public, Non-profit, Single-mode</td>
<td><a href="http://athabascau.ca">http://athabascau.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(data as of 2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBT (Japan)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Private, For-profit, E-learning</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bbt757.com">http://www.bbt757.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(data as of 2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(MBA only)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*CCRTVU (China)</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>2,006,710</td>
<td>National, Non-profit, Single-mode</td>
<td><a href="http://www.crtvu.edu.cn">http://www.crtvu.edu.cn</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>(data as of 2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credu (Korea)</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>400,000</td>
<td>Private, For-profit, E-learning</td>
<td><a href="http://www.credu.com">http://www.credu.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(data as of 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Professional development only)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*IGNOU (India)</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1,311,145 (7,861)</td>
<td>National, Non-profit, Single-mode</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ignou.ac.in">http://www.ignou.ac.in</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(data as of 2005)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>*KNOU (Korea)</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>183,475</td>
<td>National, Non-profit, Single-mode</td>
<td><a href="http://www.knou.ac.kr">http://www.knou.ac.kr</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(data as of 2004)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Monash (Australia)</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>51,926 (all modes) 8,483 (DE mode)</td>
<td>National, Non-profit, Dual-mode</td>
<td><a href="http://www.monash.edu.au">http://www.monash.edu.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>(data as of 2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netvarsity (India)</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Around 500,000</td>
<td>Private, For-profit, E-learning</td>
<td><a href="http://www.niit.com/inde">http://www.niit.com/inde</a> x.asp</td>
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<tr>
<td>(data as of 2004)</td>
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<td>(Professional development only)</td>
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<td>(data as of 2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(data as of 2004)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Ramkhamhaeng (Thailand)</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>516,300 (95)</td>
<td>National, Non-profit, Dual-mode</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ru.ac.th">http://www.ru.ac.th</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(data as of 2005)</td>
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</table>
Limitations

This study has three major limitations. The first is that the terms used in this study may have been somewhat different from institution’s own understanding and thus resulted in different interpretations of the survey questions. The second limitation is that the criteria for identifying innovative and good practices in ODL in the AP region are biased towards large institutional ODL providers, formally accredited programmes, or relatively well-known ODL institutions. Small scale, non-accredited ODL programmes, local community-based non-formal ODL practices, unpublished ODL activities have not been included in this study. Finally, only a small number of ODL institutions responded to the survey due to time constraints. As a result, only a snapshot of recent innovative and good practices of ODL in the AP region could be presented in the paper.

Innovative and Good Practices

ODL practices are changing. New fields of study have been emerged, policies revised, a quality culture emerged, student services improved, new ICT-based delivery modes explored, and a variety of collaborative relationships developed. This section cannot provide a full picture of all the innovations and good practices of ODL in progress. Instead, it reports a snapshot of innovative and good practices of ODL in the AP region based on the survey results and other available resources. The innovative and good practices identified in the study are categorized into eight areas: quality assurance, curriculum, policy and management, student services and tutoring, ICT innovations, cost-savings, collaboration, and for-profit involvement. Within each area, specific cases are discussed.

Quality Assurance

Over the past years, developing and implementing policies to assure the quality has become a priority of ODL institutions. QA is becoming even more important as ODL becomes popular and faces a proliferation of borderless education. A majority of the institutions investigated in this study have developed and implemented QA standards and procedures in the key areas of ODL activities and more than half of the institutions have institutionalized a central QA unit and thus sought the development of a more systematic and coherent quality culture. Capacity building efforts for QA are also made by the institutions. At least half of the institutions surveyed have provided continuous staff development opportunities to their academic and administrative staff in pursuit of quality improvement. Moreover, most ODL institutions have shown an aspiration of obtaining national recognition as a high quality ODL provider. Some institutions such as Athabasca, USQ, and OUM have gone beyond the national level accreditation and recognition and pursued recognition from outside the country such as USA or ISO certification for their services.
It is also noted that there exists a variety of QA systems of ODL even though the globalization and competitiveness of higher education and the development of technology have brought distance teaching universities closer together in terms of developing a common quality culture. First, the level of QA policy integration in an overall university policy framework varies across the institutions. Some ODL institutions such as IGNOU and UT apply a set of standards and criteria pre-determined by the institution or by the national quality assurance agency to the assessment of key areas of distance education whereas other institutions such as CCRTVU and KNOU provide only general guidelines or areas for QA and leave room for the internal and external review teams or individual units to make QA judgments. Even though core areas—such as course and programme development and delivery—for QA are similar in most institutions, some QA areas draw more attention than others. In some institutions, assessment of staff performance and tutoring services is emphasized whereas in other institutions, learner assessment or monitoring of e-learning courses gets more attention. Following cases show some innovative approaches to QA policies and measures in ODL institutions.

**Shifting from provider-centered to learner-centered QA**

Of particular interest to students in any ODL institution is whether they can receive enough support services from the institution and successfully complete their study. To improve its ODL practices in general and student support services in particular, Anadolu has implemented the Total Quality Management (TQM) as the main management strategy since 1998. The Anadolu University Improvement Project was initiated by the Quality Commission to create QA strategies within the TQM framework. All the representatives of the University faculties were invited to participate in the project. As a result of this project, a widely shared quality consciousness in individuals and organizational units was developed and QA measures were tried out in various service processes. Each faculty (school) has developed its own Faculty Quality Management (FQM) model, leading to the clarification of the University Overall Quality Assurance Policy.

In this FQM model, the Faculty perceives itself as a service provider and students as a service receiver to be satisfied individually concerning their unique educational needs and expectations. Changes in perception, from teacher-centered to learner-centered, have led to major revisions in mission statements, organizational policies and implement strategies such as the employment policies and the technology investment strategies. Priorities have been given to the students rather than the university members or organizational units. Specific changes include:

- initiating highly interactive e-learning projects and virtual class models to meet the needs of Anadolu students to study in a more flexible environment,
- introducing an online academic advising system to increase two-way-communication opportunities
- implementing the policy which requires all the faculties to respond to students’ inquiries within 24 hours,
- adopting the strategy of blending physical and virtual contacts to introduce need-based student services, and
- including output variables such as students’ satisfaction and graduation rate as QA factors.

As seen above, Anadolu’s learner-centered QA system is still at its developmental stage and thus more detailed QA standards and procedures are yet to be developed. However, Anadolu’s learner-centered QA approach still provides an insight to other ODL institutions that wish to implement QA measures in ways that assist in the progress of students in their studies and go beyond QA for the production and the delivery of course materials.

**Applying QA procedures during student assessment**

Considering the nature of ODL, student assessment is especially important for institutions and faculty members to obtain information about how and what students are learning in order to improve their ODL efforts and to demonstrate to others the degree to which students have
accomplished the learning goals. A case of OUHK depicts how an ODL institution has managed QA in student assessment.

The QA procedure during assessment and examinations development at the OUHK is extensive and involves about 22 steps. These steps include validations by internal and external examiners, and monitoring before and after examinations. Some of the steps for preparation of course examinations at OUHK are shown in Table 2 (Jegede, 2001, p 63).

Table 2: QA steps during assessment and examinations development (OUHK)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps to be taken by Course Coordinator (CC)</th>
<th>Steps to be taken by others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparing the examination</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Design exam paper and marking guide</td>
<td>• Check exam paper and marking guide (External Examiner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Application for approval of External Examiner (EE)</td>
<td>• Print exam paper, set exam date, book rooms, etc. (Examinations Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inform registry of exam materials (e.g. calculator)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nominating and appointing script markers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After the examination</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use Batch X for Coordination Meeting (below)</td>
<td>• Send two Batches (X and T) of scripts to the CC (Examinations Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mark all Batch T scripts to see how marking guide works</td>
<td>• Collect scripts form the OUHK (script marker)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chair Coordination Meeting (CM) to standardize marking by training the script markers using Batch X</td>
<td>• Send monitoring batch to CC and EE (Examinations Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Script monitoring to see script markers’ performance</td>
<td>• Script monitoring to see script markers’ performance (External Examiner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set the minimum thresholds for each band, etc.</td>
<td>• Compute results, distribution scores (Examinations Office/ITU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Standardization meeting with the EE</td>
<td>• 2nd computation of results based on confirmed thresholds (Examinations Office/ITU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review borderline cases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confirm thresholds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Award Meeting including CC, EE, Dean and others</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Documentation for the Award Meeting</td>
<td>• Oversee all exam results (Course Result Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comments on performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confirmation of standardization results</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Confirmation of results status boundaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Determination of borderline results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Special circumstances (e.g. illness, occasional misconduct)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nomination of outstanding students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recording results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prepare and sign minutes of the Award Meeting</td>
<td>• Send in a report (EE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sign the minutes (CC and Dean)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In ODL implementation, student assessment is the final step of the process, and the one that is most often overlooked. However, as seen in the case of OUHK, rigorous QA is important for ODL institutions to demonstrate that the ODL assessment is of an equivalent level to campus based assessment. At the same time, the case of OUHK shows one of efficient ways of implementing rigorous QA by placing course coordinators at the centre of managing the whole QA processes and utilizing internal and external human resources during the development and administration of student assessment.

**Linking QA to staff performance evaluation**

While the ODL institutions share a quality culture in general, the level of QA policy integration in an overall university policy framework varies across the institutions. In the case of UT, the
internal QA policies are well integrated into the general university policy and staff performance framework, and QA results are often used for staff evaluation and promotion.

UT developed a new “Quality Assurance System for UT” based on modifications and contextualization of the “AAOU Quality Assurance Framework” and further developed QA manuals to put QA into practice. This new quality assurance system encompasses nine components and 107 quality criteria or statements of best practices (Zuhairi, Pribadi, and Muzammil, 2003). Each criterion is further delineated into indicators and methods of achievement.

Once the new quality assurance system was developed, UT undertook unit-by-unit and university-wide self-assessment and priority setting. Managers from all units were invited to conduct self-assessment using the criteria of the QA system and set priorities for quality improvement over the next four years. All operational units were involved in producing these job manuals. Under the supervision of the Quality Assurance Center within UT, 197 job manuals have been developed. These job manuals include:

- systems and procedures in performing particular jobs and activities,
- standards relating to time, output, workflow, resources and competencies needed to perform the task, and
- the relationship of tasks among different units.

To ensure that the manuals are used consistently by all the members of UT in carrying out their daily responsibilities, assessment forms have been developed to monitor and assess tasks performed by individual staff, to support self-assessment of each unit, to record processes and outputs of the tasks, to identify problems, and to offer solutions. Each manager is responsible for implementing QA and assessment in his or her unit. All the assessment forms are analyzed and the result summary is reported to the Rector. The UT’s QA is linked to staff performance evaluation in such a way that units and individuals performing high quality works are fairly rewarded (See Appendix 4 for details of UT’s QA system).

More than anything else, human resources play a significant role in QA implementation. Their performance is what makes a difference in ODL quality. In this regard, UT’s fair performance appraisal system based on clear performance indicators provides other ODL institutions with a benchmark of monitoring organizational performance against objectives and key principles, and thus improving ODL quality.

**Operating a separate QA system for e-learning**

KNOU has developed more detailed criteria to monitor the quality of its e-learning services because, to KNOU, e-learning is not a supplementary mode of education but a main form of ODL especially at graduate level. In 2001, KNOU opened a totally online Lifelong Graduate School and began to offer four programmes in business administration, public administration, computer science, and lifelong education. To meet the need to oversee QA processes and pursue continuous quality improvement of these new e-learning programmes and online services, the e-Learning Centre was created. This centre develops all the e-learning courses utilizing digital materials produced by the Centre for Educational Media Development and supports faculty in delivering e-learning courses. It also carries out e-learning course evaluations and monitoring activities based on specific QA measures. Important QA measures include:

- experts’ evaluation of the appropriateness of e-learning development and objectives, accuracy of the contents, and structure of the contents before developing any e-learning course
- experts’ assessment of pedagogical strategies, multimedia components, user interface, and course management functions of each e-learning course during the course development
• seeking comments from the public including students during the course development, and
• revising e-learning courses and services based on feedback from students and experts after the course delivery.

E-learning is increasingly being looked to by many ODL institutions as an economical way of expanding their services, widening opportunities for students around the world, and making effective use of the emerging technologies. In fact, quite a few ODL institutions have integrated e-learning components in their ODL services. However, most of the institutions investigated in the study have not developed a separate QA system for e-learning. It appears that quality assurance schemes for e-learning content and practice are still at the early stages of development. The emerging good practice of KNOU’s QA for e-learning indicates that it is necessary to give a role to internal and external experts, students and the public in voicing their opinions about quality of e-learning.

**Utilizing QA handbook for ODL at national level**
Whereas other countries adopt the QA system for higher education to oversee and monitor the quality of ODL institutions, India is one of few countries which have a separate agency for assuring and managing the quality of ODL. Being the separate QA body for ODL in India, the Distance Education Council (DEC: http://www.ignou.ac.in/dec) has provided a comprehensive and consistent guidelines for QA in ODL.

DEC was established in 1992 within IGNOU with the mandate to promote open and distance education network, and to plan and implement schemes for ensuring quality in distance education in close collaboration with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council. The DEC can be seen as a quality assurance and accreditation system that has been developed independently of the constraints of the organization, management and funding that govern the conventional universities.

As a national apex body for distance education in India, the DEC provides financial support and grants and academic guidelines to open and distance education institutions, develops norms, procedures and guidelines in respect of admission, evaluation, and certification, assesses and accredits open and distance education institutions to ensure quality, and promotes convergence of conventional and distance learning and other systems to facilitate mobility of learners through credit transfer/sharing.

The DEC has developed the Handbook of recognition process for distance education institutions and programmes. The Handbook includes criteria set for the approval of a new conventional distance education institution or programme. A distance education institution or an open university that considers application for approval or recognition is requested to fill out three kinds of forms, Form I for institutional details, Form II for assessment details, and Form III for impact of grants/audits (Details can be found at http://www.ignou.ac.in/dec/index.htm). Major evaluation criteria of Form II include:

- curricular aspects,
- teaching, learning and evaluation,
- research, consultancy, and extension,
- infrastructure and learning resources,
- student support services,
- organization and management, and
- healthy practices.

It appears that over the years, the DEC’s efforts to establish a system of sharing distance education courses and facilities among open universities and to build a formal assessment and accreditation system has contributed to collaboration among open universities and refinement of a quality assurance and accreditation mechanism for distance education in India. To countries where a
centralized mechanism of QA for ODL needs to be developed, the case of India provides a useful benchmark.

**Obtaining foreign accreditation**

Most of the ODL institutions investigated were initially accredited by own government or a higher education accreditation body recognized by the central or local government. There are some exceptions. As a regional university, USP was accredited by universities in the region. A more recent trend is for an ODL institution to obtain accreditation from outside of its own country. It implies that ODL institutions want to gain confidence of current students and prospective students around the globe in their ODL programmes and services by meeting rigorous international QA standards. For example, Monash has obtained ISO9001 certification for its services. UT and OUM are developing QA systems to acquire ISO certification. UT is also in the process of seeking international accreditation and quality certification from the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE). Athabasca and USA obtained USA accreditation lately.

- In June 2005, Athabasca was accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, one of the six regional higher education accreditation boards in the USA. This accreditation is seen as “an indication of quality assurance and recognition of institutional excellence”. During the lengthy evaluation process, Athabasca was able to reflect itself and identified both opportunities to improve and areas of strengths.
- USQ was recently accredited by the Distance Education Training Council, one of the accreditation agencies recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation in the USA and dedicated to identifying quality distance learning institutions. The accreditation is seen “an endorsement that will allow the University to better sell its distance education programmes overseas”. By achieving the USA accreditation, USQ’s USA based students may be able to claim student financial assistance from their government.

In both cases, the USA accreditation is seen as an opportunity to have a better access to the ODL market in the USA and around the world. In the rapidly changing and evolving field of ODL and e-learning, foreign accreditation will certainly contribute to supporting capacity building efforts of an ODL institution and gaining international confidence in its courses and services.

**Developing QA guidelines for transnational ODL**

In most cases, quality assurance and accreditation criteria for transnational ODL have not been developed. However, there is a tendency for the mandate of national or institutional policies to include evaluation criteria for transnational education with the growth of the export trade in borderless education products during the last several years.

Monash has developed specific QA guidelines for off-shore courses. Consistent with the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee's "Provision of Education for International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Australian Universities", Monash’s Off-Shore QA Committee approves all courses, new and existing courses including those offered off-shore. QA criteria for off-shore courses include:

- details of Monash provider and partner(s), structure,
- content and delivery of the course,
- admissions requirements for students,
- human resources to support the course,
- teaching approaches and assessment,
- facilities,
- course management and evaluation,
- marketing the course, and
- financial resources and contract arrangements.
Similarly, Athabasca has specific guidelines and procedures in its policy on Strategic Partnerships. This policy also includes assessments for various risks involved in strategic partnerships and international activities. Characteristics of a Strategic Partnership include: objectives which seek to extend and or broaden the activities of the University beyond its normal business; mutually beneficial to the parties; outlines measurable outputs; contains details on the responsibilities and contributions of each partner; typically covers a pre-defined period of time; components vary depending on the business category and the needs of the parties and others.

IGNOU, being an exporter of its DE programmes has also set QA guidelines for exporting programmes. First, the credibility of partner institutions will be reviewed in collaboration with Indian High commissions and Embassies abroad. Second, IGNOU approves local tutors and counselors appointed by the partner institutions based on their curriculum vita. Those approved tutors and counselors receive training sessions on student support services from IGNOU faculty. Finally, the examination scripts are marked centrally by IGNOU to provide reliability of student assessment.

The issue of QA for transnational ODL – exports and imports – is still at the initial stages of development. As the transnational ODL operations increase in the AP region, the quality of ODL programmes offered by foreign providers and the national and institutional QA frameworks for transnational ODL are emerging as issues of concern. That is to say, serious attention has to be given to the development of QA guidelines for transnational ODL both at the national and institutional level. The above-mentioned cases should help in devising QA mechanisms for transnational ODL operations.

**Curriculum**

This study found that all institutions investigated offer university degree programmes at undergraduate and master’s level and non-degree (certification or other professional development programmes) in various professional fields. The fields of study in ODL institutions in the AP region are as wide-ranging as that offered by conventional institutions. The fields of management and commerce used to be and still are the most popular areas offered across ODL institutions. Education, Agriculture, and Environmental studies were not as popular. The present study, however, found that education or human resource training is being offered in all the institutions surveyed including the other 7 cases. Most institutions offer programmes in education both at undergraduate and graduate level. Some institutions such as IGNOU and AIOU offer doctoral programmes in education. Several institutions also offer graduate programmes in the field of distance education. Teacher certification programmes are offered in most of national ODL institutions such as UT, CCRTVU, KNOU, IGNOU, OUSL, and AIOU. KNOU’s online graduate school and Anadolu’s e-MA teacher training programme also offer education at graduate level. The last two programmes are especially targeting in-service teachers who need or want to obtain further degree online.

Whereas conventional ODL institutions choose to develop academic programmes based both on national and public education goals and the target learners’ needs, more recent e-learning institutions, whether for-profit or not, tend to develop their programmes mainly based on the market needs. Instead of offering a wide range of different subject areas, these institutions offer programmes or courses specialized in limited number of fields of study. In fact, business and management programmes at the graduate level and information and communication technology programmes toward certification are two most popular fields for for-profit e-learning institutions. Among for-profit institutions, U21G and BBT are focusing on MBA whereas Netvarsity provides ICT-related curriculum only. Credu and UOP offer a variety of programmes and courses with a special focus on business and management. This section analyzes two cases where a specialized
ODL programme has been developed and implemented to respond quickly to the changing needs of the market.

**Focusing on market-driven ICT-related curriculum**

NetVarsity started as an e-learning unit financed and operated by the National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT), India and now became an independent company. NIIT has around 500,000 students enrolled in its various programmes and courses worldwide. It has offered a 4-year comprehensive GNIIT programme equivalent to a Bachelor of Computer Applications degree course in other formal higher education systems. In fact, the quality of NIIT’s training programmes is defined not by Indian government or any national QA body but by certification and recognition from the industry. NIIT is not authorized to issue any formal degrees.

NetVarsity, founded in 1996, first created a free education portal which included online courses, a virtual library of links, and other interaction functions. Online courses were taken from NIIT’s regular ICT training courses. NetVarsity later added more interactive services such as Ask an Expert, Global Forum, and First Assess, and online testing for NIIT students. These services were offered in a site called “Tech Edge”. A more active business model was adopted when NetVarsity began to offer Microsoft certification courses. Students in these courses first study self-instructional materials at home and interact with instructors and other students using “Tech Edge” site. In 1999, NetVarsity was introduced to the 4-year GNIIT programme. That is, students who are admitted to this GNIIT programme are automatically enrolled in NetVarsity and use online courses and services. This hybrid model of combining face-to-face training in NIIT centres in several countries and e-learning by NetVarsity has proven to be successful. NetVarsity now provides several online courses for GNIIT programme and offers interactive tutoring and counseling. NetVarsity has developed over 300 courses for an annual enrolment of about 100,000.

Among success factors of NetVarsity’s ICT training, market-sensitive curriculum is worth mentioning here. Recognizing the fact that ICT training is a fast-changing area in any society, GNIIT continuously updates and customizes its curriculum based on skill needs of leading companies. Considering the fact that most of ODL students are working adults and seeking knowledge and skills applicable to their life, the case of NetVarsity’s need-based curriculum development and revision offers useful insights to other institutions. Figure 1 shows GNIIT’s industry-endorsed new curriculum.

**Figure 1: GNIIT’s curriculum**

(source: http://www.niit.com/Individuals/ILBGlobal_index.asp?Section=ILBGlobal&L1=Programs&L2=Career%20Programs&L3=GNIIT)
Developing new curriculum for e-learning

Several ODL institutions have developed e-learning programmes. Business administration and education seem to be the most popular programme. Athabasca, Anadolu, KNOU and USQ offer MBA programmes online. Anadolu, USQ and KNOU offer graduate programmes in education. Besides business administration and education programmes, more recently, new fields of e-learning have been emerged. The cases below present some innovative programmes for e-learning.

- Anadolu's e-Hospitality programme allows those who are working in administrative positions in the hospitality industry to develop their expertise and managerial abilities needed in this sector.
- U21G offers a Master of Science (MSc) in Tourism and Travel Management from The University of Nottingham. All the courses offered under this degree programme are delivered through an e-Learning platform.
- UOP offers graduate programmes in the field of Healthcare and Nursing. Four programmes via online study include Counseling, Health Administration and Management, Human and Health Care Services, and Nursing.

The new fields of e-learning identified in the cases above are all in fast-changing professional service areas and thus require regular updates of the contents, continuous interactions with students, and multimedia supports. E-learning, compared with other modes of ODL, can easily and rapidly adapt to the changing needs of students. Course contents of any e-learning programmes can be updated upon need without major cost increases, personalized interactions can be provided readily, and huge amount of multimedia materials can be provided virtually. In this regard, the above-mentioned cases which focus on service industry sectors present good examples of selecting appropriate fields of study for e-learning environment.
Policy and Management

Open education, open admission, innovative use of technologies, promoting equality of higher education for adult learners, contribution to national development and lifelong learning society, and provision of quality education frequently appeared in ODL institutions’ vision statements and mandates. Some institutions such as OUM and Ramkhamhaeng emphasize contribution to new knowledge creation and research functions whereas some other institutions such as IGNOU, Athabasca, UT and USP include regional or international contribution. KNOU specifies the mission of contribution to South and North Korea’s reunification.

To realize their visions and fulfill the mandates, all the ODL institutions have developed policies, management guidelines and organizational bodies which oversee or carry out the policies. Major policy development areas include academic affairs, personnel, admission, assessment, finance and resource allocation, quality assurance, and services. Several institutions such as AIOU, Athabasca, and KNOU have policies on equality, ethics, and protection of human rights. Only few institutions such as IGNOU and USQ have developed policies on transnational ODL activities. Some institutions such as Athabasca, USQ and OUSL have developed a rather comprehensive handbook or manual listing policies and guidelines in all major policy areas.

ODL policies at different levels determine the kinds of ODL practices. That is to say, ODL policies at institutional, national and international levels provide the directions and guidelines for the everyday operations and managements of any ODL activities and initiatives. To meet the needs of a rapidly changing environment for ODL, existing policies must be appropriately revised and new policies need to be developed. In doing so, an ODL institution must take a comprehensive, systemic approach rather than a piecemeal approach. This section introduces good practices in developing and implementing ODL policies in a comprehensive manner at the institutional and national level.

Developing a comprehensive policy manual at institutional level

Athabasca provides a comprehensive source of its official policies on the web. The Athabasca University Policy Manual (http://www.athabascau.ca/policy/) is maintained and issued by the Office of the President. Policies specified on the web apply to all units under the jurisdiction of Athabasca University regardless of locations unless otherwise noted. Following is the headings of the contents of The Athabasca University Policy Manual:

- Academic
- Administration
- Archives
- Centre for Learning Accreditation
- Communications
- Computing Services
- Course Materials Production
- Facilities and Services
- Financial Services
- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy
- Human Resources
- Library Services
- Records Management
- Office of the Registrar
- Research
- Student Services
- Vice President Finance and Administration
- Web
Similarly, USQ provides a comprehensive portal on its policies and procedures on the web. The University Calendar provides a good snapshot of current activities relating academic affairs. The headings of the contents of the University Calendar are given below. These contents cover a wide range of policy areas to administer and manage university activities including ODL practices.

- Organisation
- Governance
- Management
- Academic Program
- Academic Regulations
- Student Affairs
- Teaching, Research and Scholarship
- Exchange Agreements
- Information Technology
- Records and Archives

At USQ, policies and procedures relating to the management of human resources are listed separately in the Human Resources Policy and Procedures Manual. For policies and procedures for health and safety of USQ employees and students, the Workplace Health and Safety Procedures Manual has been developed. Financial management practices are governed by the Financial Services Policies and Procedures manual.

The cases of Athabasca and USQ highlight the importance of developing policies covering all aspects of ODL and making them public so that those policies guide daily practices of ODL. It is important for an ODL institution to integrate QA policy in an overall university policy framework. In other words, QA of an ODL institution should cover all parts of its ODL activities. Moreover, the internal QA system should be closely linked to the national QA framework.

**Developing a policy handbook at national level**

Sri Lanka has twelve campus-based universities and one open university. The University Grants Commission (UGC) disburses funds, formulate student-admission criteria and sets administrative guidelines and norms. In 2001, a QA project was initiated by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors and UGC with World Bank assistance to develop and implement a comprehensive QA system for Sri Lanka higher education including ODL. As results of this collaborative work, the Academic Procedures Handbook was completed in 2003 as a complementary to the QA Handbook.

The Academic Procedures Handbook covers all aspects of QA such as course production, accreditation, learner support and staff development both for conventional universities and OUSL. The Academic Procedures Handbook is made up of six Codes of Practice on:

- Assessment of students,
- Career guidance,
- External assessors,
- Postgraduate research programmes,
- Programme approval, monitoring and review, and
- Student support and guidance.

These six Codes of Practice provide policy directions on the key elements of good practice, which support the student learning experience in the universities including OUSL.

Countries which have relatively small numbers of higher education institutions can adopt this model of policy development of Sri Lanka. As seen in the case of OUSL, the policy manual which was developed at the national level has been used as guidelines for assuring the quality of
ODL services. This national-level policy will result in a significant improvement in the quality of education in general and ODL in specific.

**Student Services and Tutoring**

Student support system lies in the heart of any ODL activities. It is important for an ODL institution to offer opportunities for its students to connect with the institution and thus to develop valuable learning experience. Typical forms of student services in recent ODL include: face-to-face and/or online tutoring and counseling, telephone or email services, digital libraries, and mentoring. With the development of ICT, ODL institutions are able to offer individualized and interactive student services faster and easier than ever. Some examples include 24 hour telephone or email help desks, e-counseling, e-tutoring, and tutoring sessions via video-conferencing. This section discusses some innovative cases of student services and tutoring.

**Implementing one-stop student services**

OUM, as a private open university founded in 2000, provides one-stop comprehensive student services through the Learner Services Centre and 33 Learning Centres throughout Malaysia. The role of the central Learner Services Centre is to be a one-stop centre in providing support services to OUM learners in collaboration with 33 Learning Centres. These centres provide students with academic support and other services via face-to-face tutorials, faxes, and Toll free telephone sessions with tutors. Online services such as online interactions, MS ISO 9000:2001 certified digital library, and email-based supports are also provided.

More than 2,000 tutors are now employed to conduct tutorial and counseling sessions at the Learning Centres. To ensure the quality support for students, tutors are provided with extensive training and their performance is assessed by learners and Learning Centre administrators. OUM’s tutoring groups are kept small, 20-30 learners per group, to ensure that quality learning takes place. OUM claims that overall, the ratio of tutors to learners is now at 1:16 level that is well above the international standards.

Since the quality of student support services is heavily depending on the tutors’ performance, OUM operates a rather unique system called Lead Tutor system whereby senior tutors that are effective and active are selected to support other tutors. Currently close to 90 Lead Tutors are working at the 33 learning centres. The Lead Tutors’ distinctive role is to support other tutors in both the face-to-face and online pedagogy. Here they are required to monitor the tutors during the face-to-face interactions as well as their online discussions. An online feedback form will allow the Lead Tutors to key-in the results and tutors can view the feedback. The results are also captured and stored in the Tutor Teaching Database for Deans to view for decision making processes.

It is the duty of any ODL institutions to reduce or eliminate existing or potential barriers to ODL activities of students. In this regard, providing high-quality, just-in-time services for ODL students is essential. The concept of one-stop services shows ODL students ways to reach academic goals faster and more effectively. OUM’s case provides other ODL institutions with an opportunity to review their various student services from the perspective of one-stop services.

**Integrating ICT in student services and tutoring**

ICT has also contributed to the improvement of student support system in several ODL institutions. A combination of on-and off-line services is most common. Exemplary cases of utilizing ICT to improve student services and tutoring system are presented below.

- To provide adequate supports to large number of students, CCRTVU has introduced a multi-tier service system (Li Yawan and Li Linshu, 2003). In addition to its existing
arrangements with provincial Radio and TV universities, and local teaching centres, CCRTVU has also established a public support system platform, providing online access to learning resources, individual experts, and support for study groups. The Center of Learning Support Service at CCRTVU is responsible for provide off-and on-line services to the students.

- **KNOU** operates a three-layered tutoring system. Regular face-to-face tutoring sessions by faculty and part-time instructors, off- and on-line tutoring services by tutors, and special sessions offered by traveling faculty. The Traveling Teacher System is supplementary to regular tutoring sessions in 14 regional centres. KNOU faculty are traveling around the regional centres each semester to offer special lectures, conduct seminar sessions, provide individual supports and interact with students face-to-face. Online tutoring sessions are offered to KNOU learners via Cyber Tutor System where each learner can receive personalized tutoring services.

The use of ICT in student supports is a powerful strategy for providing learner-centered services in ODL. In many ODL cases, some students demand the opportunity to study with their friends and to receive face-to-face lectures from their tutors. Other students may prefer studying alone and receiving online tutoring upon their requests. By blending conventional types of services with ICT-supported services, the above-mentioned cases have been able to increase students’ satisfaction and improve learning.

### Assessing quality of student services and tutoring

Several institutions such as Athabasca, UT, CCRTVU, OUHK, KNOU, and IGNOU have set up QA criteria for their student support services. Selected good examples are discussed below.

- **IGNOU** has suggested QA criteria such as timely dispatch of course materials, training of tutors and counselors in providing support to students, timely delivery of multimedia packages to study centres, quality of regular tutorials and counseling sessions, timely feedback on assignments, timely response to students queries, feedback to students on their performance and progress, and facilitation of peer group interaction.

- **Learner support** is mainly through part-time tutors at OUHK and involves combination of optional face-to-face tutorials, available telephone support, and online instructional support through e-mail, discussion boards and synchronous chat. Tutors’ performance is extensively monitored through Course Coordinator visits to tutorial sessions, review of sample of marked assignments, feedback received from students.

The two cases discussed above suggest two effective ways to assess the quality of student services: one is to provide extensive training sessions for part-time tutors and the other is to evaluate their performance and provide feedback.

### ICT innovations

While ICT is not a panacea for all educational problems, technologies have become essential tools for teaching and learning in any mode. With advanced ICT, distance teaching is becoming one of the most challenging professions in our society where technology options are diverse and new concepts of learning are emerged. Distance teaching is now expected to facilitate self-learning, make it meaningful to individual learners rather than just to provide knowledge and skills, and improve interactions. Modern developments of innovative technologies have provided new possibilities to distance teaching professions, but at the same time have placed more demands on ODL institutions to explore how to use these new technologies in their ODL practices. The cases discussed below highlight some of innovative ways of utilizing ICT in ODL and show the diversity in ICT approaches to ODL.

### Building e-learning capacity through multimedia project
The Multimedia Electronic Courseware Design Centre at AIOU, established in 2001, initiated the Multimedia project. Major goals of this project were to develop and deploy multimedia materials, perform related R&D activities, and build e-learning capacity at AIOU.

During the project, a series of training workshops for faculty were conducted. And QA activities for multimedia product were carried out by faculty members, media specialists, students, and external experts at various development stages. As results of the project, the multimedia labs were established at main campus and one regional office to be used for course development. And multimedia materials for 10 courses were developed and delivered. But most of all, expertise of faculty and staff in multimedia design and development had been accumulated during the project.

In many instances, there is not general learning superiority for one type of technology over another. It is not the technology but instructional design factors such as flexible course structure, quick and frequent feedback, visual layouts, and meaningful interactions that influence e-learning effectiveness and learner satisfaction (Jung & Rha, 2000). AIOU provides a lesson to other ODL institutions to focus on capacity building in instructional design rather than technical skill development during e-learning projects.

**Increasing effectiveness and efficiency through online technology**

Quite a few ODL institutions use a standardized online Learning Management System (LMS) to allow students to read and download materials, participate in discussions, send and receive emails, involve in synchronous chats, take online quizzes, and track their learning progress. Some examples of utilizing LMS include that:

- OUM utilizes an online LMS called myLMS as a supplementary mechanism. Close to 29,000 learners are using myLMS as a virtual classroom. The learners can download reading resources and involve in a synchronous (chat) and asynchronous forum. The asynchronous forum is a MUST discussion forum where crucial discussion topics are posed and discussed. Learners are encouraged to reflect on the course materials and participate in the discussions with other learners. OUM’s standardized LMS has been an efficient tool to manage all these online activities.

- Apart from the above-mentioned OUM’s myLMS, Credu’s Cresys, KNOU’s e-Campus, Ramkhamhaeng’s Cyber Class, Athabasca’s myAU, BBT’s Air Campus, USQ’s USQConnect, and USP’s WebCT are other examples of LMS.

E-testing is another way of utilizing online technology to improve effectiveness and efficiency in ODL. Examples are discussed below.

- In the year 1999, a system called the Internet-Based Trial Exams was established to help students get ready for the exams at Anadolu. The students can reach hundreds questions interactively if they access the system after punching in their IDs and passwords. There are more than 13,000 questions in the question bank for the Internet-Based Trial Exams. More than 450 students has enrolled the system, and taken 22 million exams over the system since the beginning of this service. The trial exams are continuously updated and expanded as textbooks are upgraded. Without this e-testing system, Anadolu would not be able to support students in such a flexible way.

- UOP, Credu, Ramkhamhaeng, UT, Athabasca and KNOU have also implemented e-testing systems either in full or limited scope.

Experiences of the above-mentioned cases show that an LMS makes it easy to implement a variety of online learning activities including interactions and content delivery. Similarly, an e-testing system makes it possible for an ODL institution to administer a wide range of assessment to a large number of students. These online tools may not be directly related to QA efforts but certainly they add aspects of effectiveness and efficiency to QA developments in ODL.
Experimenting e-books and mobile technologies

An e-book is a book available fully electronically via a web-site on the Internet. E-book readers such as Acrobat Reader have been developed for devices such as Palm Tops and desktop PC's, including the notebook PC. Several ODL institutions have developed e-books for their students. While students can read e-books on a computer screen without being charged and download those e-books with minimal costs, copyright and health issues are yet to be discussed. Good examples of utilizing e-books in ODL include that:

- Ramkhamhaeng has developed a collection of e-books which replace conventional textbooks. These e-books are open to anyone who is interested in studying Ramkhamhaeng's textbooks. Each e-book is provided both in .html format for reading on the screen and .pdf format for downloading.
- All students enrolled in UOP can complete 100% of their educational and administrative activities online and can access an online collection of over 14,000 digital journals, 20,000,000 full-text articles, some 600 e-books for their classes and research. Its e-books have been written completely for the university by external experts. Once students pay US$70 resource fee per class, they are guaranteed access to the e-books and other digital materials even after graduation.
- The e-book projects started in the 2003-2004 academic year at Anadolu. Each distance course textbook was converted to PDF file and then delivered on the Internet. This e-Book service allows Anadolu students to read the books on the Internet before they receive the printed versions. 163 e-books which include more than 2000 units are now in service.

In some cases, mobile technologies, both old and new, have been introduced in a limited context. Three exemplary cases are presented below:

- Ramkhamhaeng has created a “Mobile University”, the first of its kind in Thailand. This mobile university is targeting both students of Ramkhamhaeng and those who are not enrolled at the university. With the aim of becoming fully "open", Ramkhamhaeng has introduced a new "mobile university" concept, offering all-comers - whether children or adults - the opportunity to learn what they want, regardless of where they live. The mobile university is in the form of a luxury coach fitted with 39 computers complete with a satellite hook-up and scheduled to bring education via the Internet or satellite to rural areas of the country. The coach has been used not only for educational purposes, but as a centre for people in remote areas to utilize new technology, especially the Internet, to help them conduct e-commerce. Since 2002, the “Mobile University” has reached out to nearly 50 provinces in Thailand.
- Since 2001, KNOU has converted most of the courses delivered via radio and TV into MP3 files and provided those files via the Intranet to its students. The students can download these lecture files to their MP3 players and study while working or moving around. KNOU has also developed MP3 Audio CD-ROMS to be distributed to over 100 visually impaired students without charge.
- The audio book project at Anadolu, which targeted the students with visual disabilities, was started to be available in 2004-2005 academic year, and five 1st year books were vocalized by professionals in a radio-phonc way. The audio books of ten 2nd and 3rd year courses will be ready by the end of 2005. The books will be delivered to the students in CD, MP3, cassette, and online format as well.

As the need for mobility is growing and mobile technologies are rapidly becoming prevalent in education, ODL institutions should consider integrating mobile technologies in content presentation, interactions, assessment and measurement, and support services. The cases discussed above provide guidelines for utilizing a wide range of mobile technologies to widen
access for the ODL learners who are studying under difficulties such as slow mailing systems, lack of high speed Internet connections, and physical disabilities.

Cost-savings

As a result of the exponential growth in ICT, most of ODL institutions have integrated the Internet and the Web into their courses and created totally online courses. Some have expanded their services to working adults through totally online courses or programmes. In any cases, ICT has been seen as the way to increase access and student numbers, and reduce costs.

There is research evidence that even though its fixed costs are higher than classroom-based programmes, a virtual programme can be cost-effective due to increased enrollments, increased student access to quality programmes and resources and other benefits (Jung, 2005). But there are also cautions that initial fixed costs to install the infrastructure, develop online courses, and purchase equipments are only the beginning: providing continuous student services, hiring new staff, maintaining virtual systems, and offering new training add substantial costs to the institution. Following cases show how some of these variable costs can be reduced without diminishing the quality of online programmes.

Reducing faculty and staff costs

UOP is the largest for-profit, private university in USA with more than 200,000 degree-seeking students. UOP is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission in the USA and is a member of the North Central Association. It receives no government subsidies, it charges moderate tuition rates, and it has made a substantial profit (Jackson, 2000).

Faculty and staff costs account for a large portion of most ODL institutions and UOP seems to have successfully reduced these costs. First, UOP uses part-time faculty members to facilitate discussions and provide feedback on student work. Many of the part-time faculty members teach at other institutions and some are practitioners from industry. The main role of the faculty is almost exclusively teaching. Course materials are written by scholars and experts from other organizations. All the course materials such as reading materials and e-books that students need for courses are developed in a digital format and delivered entirely online. UOP uses some 600 e-books that have been written completely for the university by someone other than its own faculty members. Admissions, student advising, management, research, and community service are also beyond the responsibility of UOP’s faculty. UOP’s faculty are paid about half as much per hour as the average assistant professor in the USA (Jackson, 2000). Since they are part-timers, they do not need offices as well.

A great portion of support staff work has been replaced by technology. It is well known that UOP has made heavy use of technology to automate many labor-intensive tasks, including admissions. The president of UOP, Ms. Palmer Noone, says that “forty percent of all admissions decisions at the university are now made without human intervention. The rest are made by admissions officers who work from their homes. Such an approach not only saves on office space, she said, but also results in increased employee productivity” (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005). In addition, UOP speeds up the credit transfer process by utilizing information in a database on academic credits.

While growing at a fast rate, UOP has been criticized by scholars in the field of conventional higher education for its weaknesses in academic reputation, faculty, general education, and maintaining quality. Some others have pointed out some of the positive aspects of UOP’s business model of running the university. The extensive use of trained part-time instructors and digital technology certainly reduce the costs. Whether UOP provides quality education despite its adoption of cost-saving strategies is yet to be confirmed. However, the fact that it is accredited and re-accredited based on the decision primarily by the judgment of a review committee whose
members are drawn from other accredited, rather conservative colleges and universities suggests the quality of UOP's education is within the range of accredited higher education in the USA.

**Reusing online contents from learning objects databases**

Learning objects consist of discrete lessons, learning units, or courses where digital audio or video clips are often integrated. Learning objects could be made available in online databases for access by learners or instructors using international standards. People can have access to learning objects in the form of audios, animations, videos, simulations, games, and multimedia texts. Reusability is the main purpose of developing learning objects. Cost-savings are expected from reusing digital contents from learning objects databases.

Athabasca created a repository of open source learning objects as a result of “Learning Objects in a Box,” a SchoolNet-funded project designed to study the feasibility of creating online courses using collected online learning objects. In 2004, four courses were created by faculty members, incorporating as many of the open source learning objects as possible. That is, using publicly available learning objects, faculty members were able to create their own online teaching course.

A basic problem faced by the ODL community is how to produce and deliver quality content for e-learning experiences. In many cases, the process of developing high-quality e-learning content is prone to unnecessary duplication of effort, driving up the cost, possibly past what an institution can bear. Reusable learning objects certainly represent an alternative approach to e-learning content development by saving unnecessary costs and efforts. Athabasca’s case shows that it is possible to gain economy of scale and reduce costs by sharing learning objects in online course development while effectiveness of learning objects is yet to be further investigated.

**Collaboration**

Most ODL institutions in British Commonwealth countries collaborate with one another through COL in developing and sharing their academic programmes. For example, BOU, AIOU, OUSL, IGNOU and COL created the executive Commonwealth MBA programme recently. Almost all institutions have links with regional and international associations and organizations such as AAOU, SAF, ICDE, UNESCO, World Bank, and COL. Collaborative relationships with other ODL institutions are also established in most institutions participated in this study.

Collaborative partnerships are important for ODL providers in that they reduce the cost of introducing new technologies and also improve the quality of developing programmes. By forming appropriate partnerships with other ODL institutions can secure external content experts and teaching support. Partnerships with professional organizations may help create quality programmes, recruit students and build capacity for ODL practices. Finding creative ways to share resources and expertise will be the key issue in forming partnerships with other organizations. Two cases below show some innovative ways of building collaborative partnerships with other institutions.

**Developing a Commonwealth Executive MBA**

The Commonwealth Executive MBA (CEMBA/CEMPA; [http://www.col.org/cemba/](http://www.col.org/cemba/)) was offered to South Asian executives and business professionals in 2002 to meet the growing demand for post-graduate human resource training in South Asia. This programme has been offered through four South Asian open universities: BOU, IGNOU, OUSL, and AIOU.

The programme consists of four components: core, specialist compulsory, electives and required courses. Table 3 shows course structure of the programme offered in AIOU. Other partner universities have similar course structure. Courses, offered in English, feature relevant local learning materials and case studies. All courses are offered through self-instructional learning materials with face-to-face or distance counseling options. The programme is currently being launched in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and six countries of African continent.
Table 3: CEMBA/CEMPA Course Structure (AIOU)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>CEMBA</th>
<th>CEMPA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core</td>
<td>8 courses from the Core Courses List*</td>
<td>6 courses from Core Courses List*, plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Public Systems Management</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Management and Public Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialist compulsory</td>
<td>• Strategic Management</td>
<td>• Public Policy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• QA Management</td>
<td>• Development Planning and Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electives</td>
<td>3 courses from Elective List**</td>
<td>3 courses from Elective List**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required</td>
<td>• Research Methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Course List: Managing Information Systems; Management in Organizations; Managing Human Resources; Operations Management; Economic Environment of Business; Public Systems Management; Quantitative Techniques; Marketing Management; Accounting and Finance.  ** Elective List: Electronic Commerce; Project Management; Managerial Economics; Policy Analysis and Implementation; Contemporary Administrative Systems; Disaster Management; Corporate Finance; International Marketing

The power of the CEMBA/CEMPA programme is the international collaboration between the four universities mentioned above and writers from universities in Commonwealth countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada. It seems that a brokering role played by COL and funding assistance from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation are two practical factors to the success of the programmes. The international collaboration is especially important for an ODL institution which plans to expand its ODL services to global learners. First, it provides the institution with opportunities for capacity building in development and delivery of globalized ODL programmes. In addition, international partnerships reduce the burden to single ODL institutions by distributing cost across partners. Moreover, as expected in the CEMBA/CEMPA, international collaborations in ODL can bring a short- and long-term economic development pay-off.

**Promoting regional collaboration via technology**

USP, founded in 1968, is a regional university jointly owned and operated by 12 nations in the region: Fiji, the Cook Islands, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The university's major campus is located in Suva, Fiji and two other smaller campuses in Alafua, Samoa, and in Emalus, Vanuatu. A unit called "University Extension" provides distance education in each member country or territory. Face-to-face services are provided through 11 USP Centres. USP’s uniqueness as a regional university can be found in its collaborative nature in technology.

Since the early 1970s, USP has operated satellite-based USPNet. The USPNet evolved from the use of radio communications, to itinerant use of the PeaceSat satellite and finally to USPNet-2000. USPNet-2000 is a new USP-dedicated telecommunications network funded by the Governments of Japan, New Zealand and Australia, together with the USP member countries (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2002). The network provides a high-speed, two-way data circuit for exchanging information and audio services. The network also allows up to four concurrent video transmissions from Suva. Through this USPNet-2000, distant students can participate in audio tutorials conducted from any campus, communicate by e-mail with an instructor or another student; access the web, watch a real time video broadcast of a lecture from any of the three campuses and take part in video conferences with the Laucala Campus in Suva.
The case of USP shows how technology can contribute to regional networking as well as delivering ODL programmes. In fact, whether technology should be used in regional networking and delivering ODL programmes is no longer the issue in distance education. Instead, the current emphasis should be ensuring that technology is used effectively to create new opportunities for ODL, to promote student achievement, and to enhance collaboration between the institutions involved. Technology is not, and never will be, transformative on its own. It requires the assistance of distance educators and administrators who integrate technology into the curriculum, align it with student learning objectives and organizational goals, and use it for engaged interactions.

**For-profit Involvement**

Over the recent years, for-profit e-learning providers have appeared in local and global ODL market. In the AP region, main global providers include Thomson Learning, Apollo International, and UNext. They have offered both degree and professional development programmes to adult learners. At the national level, for-profit e-learning companies in most of the countries in the AP region have not been authorized to award degree programmes independently. A few exceptions include USA, Japan and Singapore. An increased for-profit involvement has challenged the existing QA frameworks of ODL, which often do not address for-profit education. Following cases show how two for-profit e-learning institutions have emerged and how some of QA issues have been addressed.

**Assuring quality and promoting flexible for-profit involvement**

According to the white paper from the Economist Intelligence Unit, Japan was ranked the 23rd in the 2003 e-learning readiness ranking (The Economist Intelligent Unit & IBM, 2003). The rank was based on connectivity, capability of delivering and consuming e-learning, content quality and pervasiveness of learning materials, and culture including the number of institutions supporting e-learning. Among Asian countries, South Korea ranked Number 5, Singapore Number 6, and Hong Kong (China) Number 19. For Japan, as a world-leading economy, 23rd ranking out of 60 in e-learning readiness is not certainly as high as anyone has expected (Jung & Suzuki, 2005).

However, as education market is becoming more competitive and new types of technologies challenge the way educational institutions teach, Japanese government has begun to implement e-Japan Strategy in various sectors of the society including education. In addition, a new government initiative to promote structural reform and revitalize economy in some selected special zones has been implemented since 2003. This initiative enables a selected zone (town or district) to promote its structural reforms and boost economy in an approved field with some regulatory exceptions.

Among 236 special zones approved by Japanese government in 2003, Tokyo’s Chiyoda town was selected as a special zone for promoting “Career Education” and became to be able to establish “Professional Graduate Universities” including for-profit online institutions for adult workers, which cannot be done under existing regulations concerning the establishment of higher education institutions in Japan. A for-profit online university can be established in principle as long as the following conditions are met:

- A for-profit university must have one professor per 15 students. However, online universities can hire professors on non-tenure track, part-time basis while keeping 1:15 faculty-student ratio.
- A for-profit university must execute faculty development programmes for its members.
- A for-profit university must show the evidence of enough assets to run the organization.
- A for-profit university must have accumulated enough knowledge about school management.
- Top managements of a for-profit university must have obtained social reputation in Japan.
• A company running a for-profit university must disclose its business affairs and financial statements.
• In addition to the evaluation by one of the university accreditation agencies authorized by the central government, a for-profit university in a special structural reform zone must be evaluated as for its quality by the local government of that zone.
• Like any other non-for-profit universities, a for-profit university must secure a safety net for bankruptcy.

The Kenichi Ohmae Graduate School of Business/Business Breakthrough University (BBT University), founded in 2005, is the first corporate-owned, for-profit e-learning professional graduate university in Japan. Accredited by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, the BBT University was created by BBT Inc. as an online professional graduate university in Chiyoda town, a selected special structural reform zone in Tokyo. Flexibility in regulations made it possible for this first online professional graduate school in Japan to hire presidents of big companies or successful entrepreneurs both in Japan and around the globe as its professors and provide up-to-date authentic business cases to its students.

This case stresses that national policies should provide QA guidelines for for-profit involvements in ODL and at the same time allow for-profit ODL institutions to develop an organizational structure where they can purchase, lease or modify facilities quickly, develop, devise, or distribute materials efficiently, focus on a specific niche of the education market, respond to market changes quickly (Rumble & Latchem, 2004), and utilize human resources in a flexible way.

**Developing an international joint venture**

U21G was established as a joint venture between a Universitas 21 and Thomson Learning and now offers MBA, MSc in Tourism and Travel Management, and Executive Certificate of Management Studies as a new online university. The Universitas 21 is an international network of 16 research universities. The 16 universities are presented in Table 4. Thomson Learning is a for-profit company which provides learning solutions to individuals, business and institutions. U21G’s MBA Programme is registered by the Singapore Ministry of Education under the Distance Learning Programme. And its programmes are accredited by U21Pedagogica, the wholly-owned quality assurance subsidiary of Universitas 21.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North America</th>
<th>Asia-Pacific</th>
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<tr>
<td>McGill University</td>
<td>Fudan University</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of British Columbia</td>
<td>University of Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>Korea University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>Australia and New Zealand</th>
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<tr>
<td>University of Birmingham</td>
<td>University of Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Glasgow</td>
<td>University of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Nottingham</td>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lund University</td>
<td>University of Auckland</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Edinburgh</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Students who live in one of the 9 countries where the member institutions are located pay 80 percent less for an M.B.A. from U21G than they would to earn the same degree on the campus of the member institution. Degrees awarded by U21G will bear the names of the universities that are shareholders in this venture. U21G also offers opportunities for member universities to exchange students and faculty and conduct joint research. At the moment, U21G has about 500 students from more than 25 countries in Asia, Australia, Africa, the Middle East, and the United States.
The case of U21G highlights its efforts to gain public-confidence in the quality of its e-learning programmes and services. It looks like that one of those efforts is to collaborate with best conventional universities around the globe in creating and delivering e-learning courses and administering the institution. Even though the president & COE of U21G is from Thomson Learning, most member universities are shareholders and own 50 percent of U21G, and many of faculty members and deans in 16 member universities serve as academic consultants or part-time faculty member to U21G. Another way of gaining public-confidence is to apply its own QA framework through U21Pedagogica, with particular emphasis on the process governing the recruitment of adjunct faculty, training, supervision and mentoring, and teaching performance evaluation. Without hard evidence, we cannot conclude that these efforts of U21G have or have not contributed to the improvement of its e-learning practices. However, it is evident that U21G has addressed issues of QA in collaborative ways.
Conclusion

In general, ODL in the AP region is playing an increasingly significant role in national higher education system and becoming an important policy choice for most countries. Moreover, ODL is slowly gaining ground in transnational education market and beginning to offer more flexible and interactive learning experiences through advanced ICT.

This study has attempted to identify how ODL institutions in the AP region have responded to the increased social needs and ICT development and to report selected innovative and good practices across various aspects of ODL with a special focus on quality assurance. The results of the study show that:

- Many ODL institutions have implemented QA measures throughout their ODL practices including student services and tutoring, course development, staff evaluation, and student assessment.
- Some ODL institutions have obtained accreditation from outside of their own country to achieve an international recognition and improve their market value.
- In several ODL practices, new collaborative partnerships have been emerged. Such partnerships include private and public collaboration, for-profit and non-for-profit collaboration, regional and international collaboration, and specific task-oriented partnerships with other ODL institutions or international organizations.
- Most institutions have introduced ICT-based programmes and services in pursuit of quality improvement and expansion. In some institutions, the use of ICT in distance teaching and learning is no longer considered an experimental work.
- Moreover, several ODL institutions in the AP region have updated existing curriculum to meet the emerging needs of new ODL learners.

The cases presented in this paper will provide valuable help for those ODL institutions which are in search of benchmarks. Nevertheless, the study also shows that ODL institutions are not yet at the stage where attention to QA is covering all parts of their ODL activities. And in quite a few cases, innovative approaches have touched only a small portion of ODL students and staff. Moreover, cross-border educational activities are still at the margins in most ODL institutions, and gender-related innovations have not been reported in any of the cases investigated. All these indicate that much still needs to be done for further development of quality ODL in the AP region. More specific suggestions are as follows.

- First, it is necessary to develop a holistic QA strategy and strong QA frameworks to improve quality of ODL practices as a whole. As seen in this paper, the level of QA policy integration in an overall university policy framework varies across the institutions. In some institutions where the internal QA system is closely linked to the national QA framework, internal QA policies comply with the national QA standards and procedures and are relatively well integrated into the general university policy and performance framework whereas in other cases, QA policies are established only at the unit level or only for certain aspects of ODL activities, and thus not firmly integrated into the larger university policy and performance framework.

- In addition, re-conceptualization of the role of an ODL provider in cross-border higher education market is also necessary for future development of ODL in the AP region. This study finds that existing policies in most ODL institutions have not addressed the issues of cross-border education and for-profit involvement in today’s changing environment. Considering the rapid growth of cross-border and for-profit ODL activities, ODL institutions in the AP region need to be proactive rather than reactive to those challenges and develop appropriate policy measures.
Moreover, ODL institutions in the AP region need to address issues that are pertinent to the region such as gender gap and digital divide in their ODL policies. ODL in the AP region has provided education and training to women and thus contributed to lessoning the gender gap in education in the region. With the fast growth of ICT in the region, ODL has become more flexible and open to women who often juggle study with several responsibilities. But at the same time, ICT-based ODL has brought new challenges such as the high cost of equipment and network, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of relevant content. To reach women and those with digital disadvantages, support services or alternative delivery strategies need to be discussed.

Finally, we need to learn from previous studies in distance education and educational technology showing the importance of instructional design and pedagogical philosophy behind the design activities in creating technology-mediated instructional environments. The starting point must be the learners’ learning problems, not technology. Several empirical studies suggest that constructivistic strategies help learners in an online learning environment actively engage in constructing knowledge, form a virtual learning community, articulate what they are doing, and develop collectivity and team responsibility.
References

Commonwealth of Learning web site: http://www.col.org
Distance Education Clearinghouse web site: http://www.uwex.edu/disted/home.html
OECD Education web site: http://www.oecd.org/topic/0,2686,en_2649_37455_1_1_1_1_37455,00.html


UNESCO Bangkok, ODL-KB web site: http://asiapacific-odl.oum.edu.my

World Bank Global Distance Education Network web site: http://www1.worldbank.org/disted/

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Abbreviations

AAOU: Asian Association of Open Universities
AIOU: Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan)
Anadolu: Anadolu University (Turkey)
Athabasca: Athabasca University (Canada)
BOU Bangladesh Open University (Bangladesh)
CCRTVU: China Central Radio and TV University (China)
COL Commonwealth of Learning
DE: Distance education
ICDE International Council for Open and Distance Education
ICT: Information and communication technology
IGNOU: Indira Gandhi National Open University (India)
KNOU: Korea National Open University (Korea)
MOE Ministry of Education
Monash: Monash University (Australia)
NA (Information) Not Available
ODL Open and distance learning
OUHK: Open University (Hong Kong, China)
OUM: Open University Malaysia (Malaysia)
OUSL: Open University of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka)
OUUK: Open University (UK)
PNU Payame Noor University (Iran)
PRTVU Provincial Radio and TV University (China)
QA: Quality assurance
Ramkhamhaeng Ramkhamhaeng University (Thailand)
SAF South Asia Foundation
STOU Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (Thailand)
U21G Universitas 21 Global
UOP University of Phoenix (USA)
USP University of the South Pacific (Fiji and 11 nations in the Pacific)
USQ University of Southern Queensland (Australia)
UT: Universitas Terbuka (Indonesia)
WB World Bank
Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaire

Sir/Madam,

Subject: **A Survey on Innovative and Good Practices of Open and Distance Learning in Asia and the Pacific**

You are cordially invited to participate in UNESCO’s survey on Innovative and Good Practices of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). This survey has two main purposes:

- to collect data on legislation, policies and management, academic programmes, technology and delivery systems, international collaboration, quality assurance, cross-border educational activities, and financing of open and distance learning institutions in the Asia-Pacific region, and
- to share information on innovative and good practices in open and distance learning in the region, in particular areas such as curriculum design and course development, student support services, tutoring system and assessment.

The results of the survey will be published as a research paper for UNESCO Bangkok office and uploaded onto the ODL-KB website ([http://asiapacific-odl.oum.edu.my](http://asiapacific-odl.oum.edu.my)).

We will appreciate if you could provide us with:

- Detailed information for each of the survey questions,
- Further references, and
- Other data which can be included in the UNESCO’s ODL-KB website **by July 10, 2005 via email** (Professor Insung Jung, [isjung@icu.ac.jp](mailto:isjung@icu.ac.jp)) or surface mail (Professor Insung Jung, Division of Education, International Christian University, 3-10-2 Osawa, Mitaka-shi, Tokyo 181-8585, Japan; [http://icloud.com](http://icloud.com)). If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you very much for your time and support.

Yours sincerely,

Molly Lee
Co-ordinator of APEID and
Specialist in Higher & Distance Education
## Data provided here are as of: 2003 ( ); 2004 ( ); 2005 ( ); or ( )

### 1. Basic Information about Your Organization (University/Company Level)

- Name of your Organization: 
- Location of your Organization (City and Country): 
- Year of establishment: 
- Number of students: 
- Number of foreign students: 
- Number of academic staff
  - Full-time faculty 
  - Full-time instructors/tutors 
  - Part-time instructors/tutors 
  - Other academic staff (researchers, assistants, etc.)
    - Full-time: ___
    - Part-time: ___
- Number of administrative staff
  - Full-time: _____
  - Part-time: _____
- Homepage URL: 

### 2. National Legislation and Policies

- Your Organization is accredited by: 
- Your Organization is established and/or accredited under the Law of 
- List and briefly explain major national or local government level laws which affect your organization or students.
  - 
  - (Examples: Telecommunication laws; Copyright; Student loans, Draft, and others)
- Does your country have national policies for ODL? Please briefly describe those policies.
  - 
  - 
  - (Examples of those policies may include funding policies, policies for gender divide and digital divide, and special rate for telecommunication for ODL.)

### 3. Policies in Your Organization

- Mandates and Mission Statements of Your Organization:
• Faculty/Staff policy
• Student policy (admission, evaluation, graduation, financial assistance, learning support, and others)
• Policy for strategic planning and change management
• Policy for resource allocations
• Policy for copyright, privacy and ownership
• Policy for equal opportunity
• Others

4. Management

• Your Organization is:
  o International ( ), National ( ), Public ( ), Private ( ), for-profit ( ), Non-profit ( ), other _________
  o Single-mode ( ), Dual mode ( ), Mixed mode ( ), Consortium ( ), other _________
• Organizational structure (Council, President, Academic offices; Research and Support institutions, Administration, etc):

• Financing
  o Major funding source(s): __________________________ (___ % of total budget)
  o Other funding sources:
    ▪ __________________________ (___ % of total budget)
    ▪ __________________________ (___ % of total budget)
    ▪ __________________________ (___ % of total budget)
    ▪ __________________________ (___ % of total budget)
    ▪ __________________________ (___ % of total budget)

5. Academic Programmes

• Graduate and Undergraduate Degree/Diploma programmes:

• Certification programmes:

• Professional programmes or short courses:

• Totally online programmes or courses

• Others:
6. Technology and Delivery System

• Please list your main technology or method to deliver ODL courses.

• Please list technologies or methods you use as supplementary.

(Examples include printed materials, TV, Radio, Video, CD-ROM, Audio Cassette, the Internet, DVD, Mobile phone, PDA, Video conferencing, Audio conferencing, face-to-face schooling, and others.)

7. International Collaboration

• Links with international organizations/associations (Names and activities)

• Links with other ODL institutions (Names and activities)

8. Quality Assurance Mechanism

• Please describe the quality assurance mechanism in your organization in detail. You may use the categories suggested below.

  o Internal Unit(s) responsible for QA
  o QA Policy and Related Regulations
  o QA Processes
  o QA Areas
  o QA Criteria for each QA Area
  o QA Methods
  o Internal and External Experts’ Involvement
  o Use of Results of Quality Evaluation
  o Others

• Please describe how your internal QA mechanism is linked to the National QA framework. Provide an overview of the National QA framework for ODL as well.

9. Cross-border education activities

• Does your organization export any programmes or courses to other countries? Please provide information on those programmes or courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Programmes or Courses</th>
<th>Institution you export to:</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th># of students enrolled</th>
<th>Delivery Mode (such as prints, TV/Radio, Internet, on-campus, others)</th>
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Does your organization import any programmes or courses from other countries? Please provide information on those programmes or courses.

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<th>Institution you import from:</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th># of students enrolled</th>
<th>Delivery Mode (such as prints, TV/Radio, Internet, on-campus, others)</th>
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10. Innovative Practices in Your Organization

Please tell us your Organization’s innovative practices or ideas in areas like course design and development, course delivery, student services, tutoring system, assessment, partnerships, and administration.

- Area (s) of Innovative Practice in Your Organization:
- Name (s) of Office/Unit/School/Programme in Charge:
- Details of Innovative Practice (s):

11. Other Features

Please let us know other specific features of your organization and/or national policies for ODL, which you have not mentioned above.

12. Information Sharing

How can other ODL institutions obtain more detailed information on ODL practices in your organization and/or in your country? Please provide detailed information.

- Websites:
- References:
- Other data:

13. Contact Information

Name: ___________________________ Title: ___________________________
E-mail: _________________________ Tel: ___________________________
Fax: ___________________________
Appendix 3: Key Terms used in the Survey

**Accreditation:** “An evaluation of whether an institution (or programme) qualifies for a certain status; this status may have implications for the institution (or programme) in terms of recognition as an institution of higher learning or approval for offering degree granting programs or public funding. It typically results in a certification that is valid for a fixed period.” (Source: A. Stella, 2004)

**Consortium:** A cooperative arrangement among educational institutions for the purpose of a joint venture.

**Dual mode institution:** “also called bimodal; an institution that offers learning opportunities in two modes: one using traditional classroom-based methods, the other using distance methods; the same courses may be offered in both modes, with common examinations, but the two types of learner - on-campus and external - are regarded as distinct.” (source: http://www.col.org/resources/startupguides/glossary.htm)

**E-learning:** Any learning that utilizes the Internet and digital technologies to create educational experiences.

**Mixed mode institution:** “an institution that offers learners a wide choice of modes of study, including independent, group-based, face-to-face, mediated or some combination; mixed mode institutions maximise the flexibility of place and pace of study, and are the result of the convergence of face-to-face and distance modes of study.” (source: http://www.col.org/resources/startupguides/glossary.htm)

**Open and Distance Learning (ODL):** “a way of providing learning opportunities that is characterised by the separation of teacher and learner in time or place, or both time and place; learning that is certified in some way by an institution or agency; the use of a variety of media, including print and electronic; two-way communications that allow learners and tutors to interact; the possibility of occasional face-to-face meetings; and a specialised division of labour in the production and delivery of courses.” (source: http://www.col.org/resources/startupguides/glossary.htm)

**Quality Assurance (QA):** Planned activities carried out with the intent and purpose of maintaining and improving the quality of learning rather than simply evaluating activities.

**Single-mode institution:** “an institution that has been set up solely to offer programmes of study at a distance “ (source: http://www.col.org/resources/startupguides/glossary.htm)

**Totally online programme:** A programme delivered on the Internet; Content provision, discussions, or other communication occurring in an electronic format via the Internet.

For more information on ODL definitions, please refer to: http://asiapacific-odl.oum.edu.my/ODL/html/programme/framework_definition.shtml

- Internal Unit(s) responsible for QA

The internal unit specifically responsible for quality assurance (QA) is the Quality Assurance Center. The Quality Assurance Center is a unit established by the University to oversee the implementation of quality assurance system and mechanism university-wide, and it directly report its activities to the Rector. The major functions of the QA Center are as the following.

a) Develop plan of activities,
b) Develop QA system based on continuous improvement,
c) Develop cooperation with institutions for development and benchmarking of the QA system,
d) Facilitate, coordinate and administer QA implementation,
e) Facilitate national and international accreditation process,
f) Develop, implement and evaluate staff and unit performance,
g) Monitor, evaluate and report activities.

Some of the funding for the Quality Assurance Center relies on internal funding from the student fees. The Center has also successfully obtained grant for quality improvement based on competitive performance from the Directorate General of Higher Education, Department of National Education. Funding sought for this purpose is aimed at improving the quality of distance education services and the functioning of QA mechanism of the University. However, so far there has not yet been special funding allocation from the government for the QA Center.

The QA Center has a total of 11 staff, which comprises 7 academic staff and 4 support staff. The staff include 1 Head of the Center, 1 Coordinator of Quality Assurance, 1 Coordinator of Performance Management, 4 academic staff, 1 Head of Administration Sub-division, and 3 support staff.

- QA Policy and Related Regulations

UT Strategic Plan 2005-2020 and Operational Plan 2005-2010 clearly state that quality on top of the agenda for future development. Both UT Strategic and Operational Plans focus on three major areas of future development programs, i.e., (a) improvement of quality and academic relevance, (b) improvement of accessibility of educational services, and (c) improvement of internal management. Improvement of quality and academic relevance covers the following areas (1) educational programs and curriculum, (2) course materials, (3) learning support services, (4) evaluation of student learning, and (5) research and community service. Improvement of accessibility of educational services includes the following areas (1) improved service access points, (2) improvement of service quality, (3) improvement of networking and partnership, (4) image building. Improvement of internal management includes the following areas (1) organizational development, (2) development of human resources, (3) development of system and procedure, (4) development of financial management system, (5) development of facilities and infrastructure, and (6) development of organizational culture (UT, 2004; 2004a).

As part of an effort in meeting international standards and benchmarking, UT has adopted
the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) Quality Assurance (QA) Framework to improve the quality of its distance education provision to the clients. The UT QA system encompasses nine components, i.e., policy and planning, human resource provision and development, management and administration, learners, program design and development, course design and development, learner support, learner assessment, and media for learning. UT has further developed QA manuals, and applied systems and procedures to ensure the quality of its DE products and services.

Putting QA into practice is a significant step forward innovation which requires clear direction and vision of the UT top leaders. The UT QA system begins with an important step taken by the Rector in October 2001 to establish a small QA Committee to work carefully and thoroughly on the planning, design, development, implementation, and evaluation of the QA system university-wide. One of the main tasks of the QA Committee is to introduce gradually the idea of QA so that it is well understood by staff and eventually inspire staff with quality work culture. The Committee worked together with management and staff to develop the UT QA policy, and following that is the development of QA manuals, systems and procedures for use by staff. A further significant organizational change took place in July 2003, with the establishment of Quality Assurance Center (Pusat Jaminan Kualitas or PUSMINTAS), solely dedicated to coordinate, facilitate, manage and evaluate QA implementation university-wide. The UT QA Center, as a specifically established unit solely dedicated to QA, is the first of its kind in Indonesian higher education system and in open university system worldwide.

A further important step taken by UT has been the adoption of the draft Quality Assurance Framework of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) as a framework for use by UT continuous improvement effort. The UT initially set up a Quality Assurance System Committee in 2001, and produced a comprehensive quality program called Quality Assurance System of UT (known in Bahasa Indonesian as Sistem Jaminan Kualitas UT or abbreviated as SIMINTAS) (UT, 2002). Based on this quality program, work manuals outlining systems and procedures and assessment system have been developed. Then, in 2003 a new Quality Assurance Center was founded as a unit in-charge of quality assurance system and it is directly responsible to the Rector.

QA Processes

At UT, QA implementation involves a systematic step-by-step process, i.e., the development of the framework, self-assessment and priority setting, integration of QA system into annual action plans, writing of job manuals, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, linking QA to human performance, and external assessment. Successful and effective implementation of QA system involves changing the people’s mindset in terms of quality work culture and values. The challenge for the top leadership is to manage changes of existing organizational culture into quality work culture. Implementing QA system in a very large DE organization involving networking with participating institutions requires a great deal of effort, strong perseverance, and gradual internalization.

1. Development of QA framework. UT has adopted the AAOU QA Framework in a pragmatic way so as not to re-invent a new wheel. Modification and contextualisation of the adopted framework to suit UT needs have taken a great deal of time, effort, and energy. A document called “Quality Assurance System for UT” (Sistem Jaminan Kualitas UT or SIMINTAS) was produced after numerous
consultations and meetings (UT, 2002). The most difficult phase was to have common perception and platform among the university community. The UT QA framework comprises nine components and 107 quality criteria or statements of best practices. Each statement is further delineated into indicators and methods of achievement, such as what sort of manuals for methods, systems, and procedures are needed to improve quality. This document outlines reasons for implementing QA system, the instrument for self-assessment and priority setting, and a list of units or divisions within the University involved.

2. Self-assessment and priority setting. The next step to do was for individual units and the university to undertake self-assessment and priority setting. The UT management from all levels were invited to conduct self-assessment using the QA framework as instrument. After all items in the QA framework were self-assessed in terms of the quality, setting of priorities was decided for quality improvement over the next four years. In this way, UT started to integrate QA system into annual plans of activities for the coming years. It is essential that management and staff accepted the use of QA as method for quality improvement.

3. Integrating self-assessment and priorities into action plans. Integrating QA into annual action plans required careful consideration of resources used and cost needed. An instrument was needed to achieve effective and successful integration of QA into action plans, and this had to be supported and coordinated by the top level of the management.

4. Writing job manuals. Writing job manuals was a long and tedious work involving a lot of staff and time. A number of teams were set up to develop job manuals outlining methods, systems and procedures for QA implementation in their respective activities. Each team consisted of managers and staff from different units relating to particular tasks. Manuals are sets of guidelines used as sources of references for performing particular tasks. The manuals delineate systems and procedures in performing particular jobs and activities, and indicate standards relating to time, output, workflow, resources and competencies needed to perform the task. The system also shows the relationship of tasks among different units.

The manuals have been developed by users for the users themselves, and therefore the writing process involves a lot of people related to their respective jobs and activities. Every single unit in UT should have specific working procedures. Eventually, 112 QA manuals were produced in 2003, and additional 85 in 2004, so that up until now 197 QA manuals are used by staff and units in performing their activities.

5. Implementation of QA. Implementation is a critical step and delicate process to ensure that the policy can be effectively put into practice. As a major innovation, QA implementation requires a step-by-step process, which needs to be carefully orchestrated. In QA implementation, it is important to ensure that staff understand the concept clearly, they are sure of what they have to do, they realize which direction the top institutional leaders are taking them, and where the institution is going into the future. Socialization of the idea is critical, and training needs to be conducted in order to enhance staff understanding of the idea and to ensure effective implementation through the use of manuals consistently by staff in...
performing their tasks.

6. **Internal audit, monitoring and evaluation.** QA is a continuous improvement process which involves continuous monitoring and evaluation. The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to assess to what extent a particular target or task has been achieved and to provide feedback for continuous improvement, and whether tasks performed are in accordance with the methods, systems, and procedures described in the QA manuals. UT monitors and evaluates each process to assure that it is “on the right track”. Each unit monitors and evaluates its own work process, and the role of the Quality Assurance Centre is more to coordinate and facilitate units in assuring the quality of their products and services. Assessment forms for particular activities are developed to assist units in conducting self-assessment on a semester basis. The QA Center analyses data from each assessment form, writes a summary report to the Rector, and provides feedback to each unit, relating to particular tasks and accomplishments of the unit.

7. **Linking quality assurance to staff performance appraisal.** The role of human resources is significant in QA implementation. Resources make things possible, but only people make things happen. For that reason, units and individuals performing high quality processes and outputs should be fairly rewarded. UT has designed a fair performance appraisal system, which requires clear definition of job and standard performance, objective scoring system and procedure, fair and merit-based incentive system, and sound appeal and feedback system. This means that there must be is a fair system of appraisal so that improved individual human performance will eventually lead to improving unit and institutional performance.

8. **External assessment.** External quality assessment is undertaken by inviting external bodies, such as the National Accreditation Board of Higher Education (BAN-PT), or the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), or the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Using quality assurance and criteria with international benchmark will facilitate external assessment of distance higher programs. In June 2005, UT invited the ICDE Standards Agency (ISA) to conduct international accreditation and quality certification to ensure that the UT distance education provision meets quality standards internationally, and that distance learners get the needed quality service from the institution. Accreditation of Study Programs is undertaken by the BAN-PT, the national accrediting board. Preparation is underway for UT to improve its quality management system through seeking ISO certification in 2005, starting with the distribution activity, and will subsequently cover various core business activities of UT.

- **QA Areas**

UT’s QA areas have been developed through the modification of the draft *Quality Assurance Framework* of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU).

1. Policy and Planning
2. Human Resource Provision and Development
3. Management and Administration
4. Learners
5. Programme design and development
6. Course design and development
7. Learner support
8. Learner assessment

- QA Criteria for each QA Area

The UT QA criteria for each QA area have referred to and been based on the modification of the draft *Quality Assurance Framework* of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU).

1. Policy and Planning (7 items)
The institution determines its own mission and objectives that reflect its academic commitments and the needs of society.

2. Human Resource Provision and Development (9 items)
The staff and personnel management system is appropriate for the education and training services provided. The institution sets out development programs that equip staff to perform their tasks effectively.

3. Management and Administration (21 items)
The institution has clear and effective communication channels and has efficient resource management and administration systems that enable the institution to achieve its objectives. The institution is financially sound and can make reliable educational provision.

4. Learners (10 items)
There is a system of collecting detailed information about learners and using this information to inform all aspects of policy and planning, program and course development, support services, and the overall processes of teaching-learning.

5. Programme design and development (6 items)
Programs are designed and developed with the needs of learners, employers and society in mind; to encourage access to quality education; and set in place assessment methods appropriate to the aims and objectives of the programs.

6. Course design and development (14 items)
The course syllabus and content is well researched. The course materials have appropriate objectives and outcomes, content, approaches to teaching and learning as well as to assessment presented clearly. There is an identified process of development and review of courses.

7. Learner support (18 items)
Learners are supported by the provision of a range of opportunities for real two-way communication through the use of various forms of technology for tutoring at a distance; contact tutoring, assignment tutoring, mentoring, counseling, and the stimulation of peer support structures. The needs of learners for physical facilities and study resources and their ability to access these are also taken into account.
8. Learner assessment (15 items)

Assessment is an essential feature of the teaching and learning process, is properly managed, and reflects external standards.

9. Media for learning (7 items)

The selection and application of media should reflect the teaching and learning needs in a course and be the most appropriate. In particular, the choice of media should be based on knowledge of the learners’ and educators’ backgrounds and abilities, the requirements of the content, learners’ access to the associated technology, the pedagogical design for the course, and the limitations of the media (UT, 2002).

- QA Methods

The UT QA approach is a systematic and comprehensive, and is based on continuous improvement principles. For UT, QA means “we write what we do, we do what we write, and we improve continuously”. The UT QA methods involves benchmarking with the AAOU QA Framework, development of QA policy, production of QA manuals, implementation of QA, internal audit and monitoring, and internal and external assessment.

The UT QA system should bring about positive changes in organizational structure and culture that lead to improved results in terms of how DE institutions operate effectively. It should provide management with an effective instrument that has the potential to help DE institutions achieve quality brand from stakeholders. In this way, institutions will be better prepared to be engaged in collaboration and competition with other providers when they have high quality programs.

QA system should have impact on the performance of institution, unit and individual staff, and be linked with human performance assessment. Quality performance should be rewarded. For staff members, job manuals are important help to guide them in performing daily tasks. Writing job manuals is more than just documenting daily activities of staff. It has involved team building and establishing esprit de corps among staff members, improving the work systems and procedures, and changing the work culture of the staff.

Assessment plays crucial roles in QA, and it is done continuously through self-assessment and eventually external assessment. Self-assessment is conducted by individual units, so that units have ideas about what they have and have not achieved, and which systems and procedures can and cannot work. Continuous improvement can then be made based on this assessment. For the institution, self-assessment provides information about which units do and do not perform well. And if particular units perform less, the University can take the necessary actions to improve their performance.

A further important step taken by the UT has been to introduce human performance management based on QA. Individual staff will be bound by agreed-upon work contract in the beginning of the year, and will be evaluated throughout the year to monitor his/her performance. At the end of the year, performance results can be obtained, and staff can assessed in terms of their achievement and. If targets cannot be achieved, then systems and procedures may be looked at again more carefully for further improvement. Individual target achievement will be linked to incentive or compensation for the following year. QA
can be used a tool to improve human performance in a distance higher education institution.

Following the development of QA policy, writing job manuals has been a major initial step undertaken to implement quality assurance (QA) at UT. All operational units were involved in developing and producing the manuals. Manuals are categorized into four main areas of UT activities, i.e., academic affairs, administration and finance, student affairs and operations, and partnership. The manuals have been developed by users and intended for the users themselves, and therefore the writing process has involved a lot of people related to their respective jobs and activities. The function of the Quality Assurance System Committee, which later becomes the Quality Assurance Center (in Bahasa Indonesian known as *Pusat Jaminan Kualitas* or abbreviated as *PUSMINTAS*), has been to facilitate the units and teams in producing the manuals. In summary, the process of writing manuals were done in several phases, i.e., (1) determining the manual to be developed, (2) developing the outline of the manual, (3) writing the first draft of the manual, (4) reviewing the first draft, (5) revising the draft, (6) using the manual, and (7) improving the manuals continuously. Every single unit in UT should have specific work procedures.

Currently, 197 manuals have been developed and used in performing various tasks. These manuals are also equipped with self-assessment formats to monitor progress, quantity and quality of activities. Integrating QA into annual action plans have required careful consideration of resources used and cost needed. Instrument are needed to achieve effective and successful integration of QA into action plans, and this has to be coordinated by the QA Center and supported by the top level of the management. Teams have been set up to develop, revise and improve job manuals continuously, outlining methods, systems and procedures for QA implementation in their respective activities. Each team consists of managers and staff from different units relating to particular tasks. QA is the concrete action to improve the quality of distance education product, process, and services continuously. Quality audit is done internally by the unit as well as by an auditing team set up by the University. Units are also requested to submit quality assurance implementation reports on a semester basis.

- **Internal and External Experts’ Involvement**

The UT QA system has involved both internal as well external experts. The design, development, implementation and assessment of UT QA system have so far involved internal staff and management. The UT QA system involves a blending of both bottom-up and top-down approaches. Internally, a lot of people from all units have actively participated in QA policy development and QA manual production.

External assessment has involved the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE) on a semester basis, as well as from the National Accreditation Board of Higher Education (BAN) on every 3 to 4 year basis. Quality certification has also been sought from ISO (International Standard Organization) for a number of UT core business activities, starting with the area of distribution of course materials in 2005, and to be followed by printed material production and examination in 2006, non-printed material production and computing in 2007, and registration system and management of facilities and infrastructure in 2008.

As previously mentioned, external quality assessment is undertaken by inviting external
bodies, such as the National Accreditation Board of Higher Education (BAN-PT), the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), or the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Using quality assurance and criteria with international benchmark will facilitate external assessment of distance higher programs. In June 2005, UT invited the ICDE Standards Agency (ISA) to conduct international accreditation and quality certification to ensure that the UT distance education provision meets quality standards internationally, and that distance learners get the needed quality service from the institution. Accreditation of Study Programs is undertaken by the BAN-PT, the national accrediting board.

○ **Use of Results of Quality Evaluation**

Units university-wide are requested to undertake self-assessment and self-monitoring. The university also sets up a quality audit team which involves site visits to all units in Head Office and selected regional centers. The top management of the University also requests all units in Head Office as well as regional centers to submit QA implementation report on a semester basis. Feedback and inputs for continuous improvement is provided by the top management to all units.

○ **Link to National QA framework**

The UT has links to the national, regional and international QA framework. Nationally, the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE) of the Ministry of National Education has published a national policy paper on higher education, called *Higher Education Long Term Strategy (HELTS)*, aiming to achieve a healthy higher education system encompassing three fundamental features related to quality, access and equity, and autonomy. The basic policies for higher education addresses three strategic issues which are followed by concrete implementation strategy in three areas of priorities, i.e., the nation’s competitiveness, autonomy and organizational health. The national policy on quality assurance in higher education states as the following.

“In a healthy organization, a continuous quality improvement should become its primary concern. Quality assurance should be internally driven, institutionalized within each organization’s standard procedure, and could also involve external parties. However, since quality is also a concern of all stakeholders, quality improvement should aim at producing quality outputs and outcomes as part of public accountability. National Accreditation Board (BAN), professional associations, and other independent agencies, could play a key role in conducting an objective external control and audit based on certain standards. Considering the disparity currently existed, DGHE’s peer organization, e.g., Board of Higher Education (BHE), BAN, and other independent agencies should impose and develop minimum standard of requirements. In this regard, the government should serve the function of providing information on institutional quality to the public (DGHE, 2003, p.11).

The DGHE has also developed *QA Guideline for Higher Education* (DGHE, 2003a). The QA framework for national higher education focuses on ensuring that teaching, research and community services satisfy the needs of stakeholders. The QA criteria set by the DGHE comprises core and support areas of higher education provision. The core areas include the following criteria (DGHE, 2003a):
• Curriculum of study program
• Human resources
• Students
• Learning process
• Infrastructure and facilities
• Academic atmosphere

The support areas include the following criteria:
• Finance
• Research and publication
• Community services
• Governance
• Institutional management
• Information system
• National and international cooperation. (DGHE, 2003a).

UT Study Programs are accredited by the National Accreditation Board of Higher Education (BAN-PT). Accreditation of distance education study programs involves three aspects of assessment, i.e., self-evaluation of study program (10%), accreditation instrument of study program (55%), and institution portfolio (35%). Instruments used for accreditation include institution portfolio, program portfolio, self-assessment instruments, and site visit by a team of assessors. Desk evaluation follows the submissions of portfolios and self-assessment instruments and results of site visits by assessors in order to produce final results of distance education program accreditation. Each of the three aspects is assessed in terms of 14 accreditation standards as the following.
• Standard 1 Eligibility, integrity, vision, missions, goals and objectives
• Standard 2 Students
• Standard 3 Human resources
• Standard 4 Curriculum
• Standard 5 Infrastructure and facilities
• Standard 6 Funding/Finance
• Standard 7 Governance
• Standard 8 Management system
• Standard 9 Learning process
• Standard 10 Academic climates
• Standard 11 Information system
• Standard 12 Quality assurance system
• Standard 13 Graduates
• Standard 14 Research, publication, community service