

Thomas Hülsmann

The costs of open learning: a handbook

(with an introduction by Hilary Perraton)

**Studien und Berichte der Arbeitsstelle Fernstudienforschung der Carl von Ossietzky
Universität Oldenburg, Band 2**

BIS-Verlag (Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg), 2000

ISBN 3-8142-0724-6

DM 28,-

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5

PART I

1. What we found	8
2. How we found it	21
3. Why these things are difficult to interpret	39
4. How to apply it	51
5. How to justify your decisions	73

PART II (Case Studies)

Introduction to Part II	82
Case study 1 Health and social welfare: Open University/United Kingdom	88
Case study 2 Mathematical modelling: Open University/United Kingdom	92
Case study 3 Upper secondary curriculum: NKS in Oslo/Norway	95
Case study 4 Transition from kindergarten to school: NKS in Oslo/Norway	106
Case study 5 Post-graduate diploma in business engineering: FVL in Berlin/Germany	112
Case study 6 Professional development for nurses: University Oldenburg/ Germany	117
Case study 7 Domestic violence and sexual assault: APU/ United Kingdom	122
Case study 8 Philosophy: University of Rheims/France	128
Case study 9 Videoconferencing in engineering: Politecnico di Milano/Italy	132
Case study 10 Virtual seminar: Professional development in distance education, University Oldenburg/ Germany	139
Case study 11 Law degree: Catalan Open University in Barcelona/Spain	142
Summary table of case studies	147
Bibliography and Internet references	148

Acknowledgements

We have six sets of acknowledgements.

In a book about costing, funders come first. We acknowledge the support of the European Commission which provided the bulk of the funding for the work within the Socrates programme. We also acknowledge support from the Department for Education and Employment of the British government which provided funding for a companion volume on *Planning and evaluating systems of open and distance learning*. This support, from the Training Technology Unit, encouraged us to keep going at a point where Commission funds looked as if they were running out.

Next, we are grateful to all the staff with whom we worked at educational institutions across Europe. Without their patience, and willingness to dig out information that was of greater value to us than to them, we would have had nothing to report.

Third, we were helped by various friends and allies who guided us in thinking through the problems of costing and gave informal advice throughout the project. The International Research Foundation for Open Learning's steering group offered general guidance over the two years of work. Others interested in costs, costing, effectiveness and policy helped us at a two-day seminar in 1998. We appreciate all their continuing interest, advice and support.

Fourth, we had three institutional allies throughout the project: the Open Learning Foundation in Britain, the Institut de Recherche sur l'Economie de l'Education (IREDU) of the Université de Bourgogne, and the National Distance Education Centre at the University of Dublin. We much appreciate their contribution to the project and the personal interest and advice contributed by David Hardy, François Orivel and Chris Curran.

Fifth, and here the author needs to untie the inclusive 'we', for a moment, to acknowledge his debt to the members of IRFOL. I profited from the frequent discussions with Palitha Edirisingha. Honor Carter has done with patience and humour most of the tedious DTP work. Most importantly I need to thank Hilary Perraton, director of IRFOL, for his advice and guidance throughout the research process. His thorough editing not only eliminated the unavoidable infelicities of a non native speaker but also clarified ambiguities and identified errors in calculation. The remaining errors, misinterpretations and omissions, of course, remain the responsibility of the author.

Finally, I thank Ulrich Bernath, the director of the Arbeitsstelle für Fernstudienforschung at Oldenburg University, whose cooperation with IRFOL made the publication in this form possible.

Hilary Perraton and Thomas Hülsmann

The costs of open learning: a handbook

Introduction

This book is designed to help educational managers who are deciding how to use open and distance learning. It examines the comparative costs of various educational technologies, suggests how we can examine and control costs, and sets out some of the difficulties in doing this. The second half of the book consists of eleven case studies.

The work has been carried out with funding from the European Commission's Socrates programme. We are indebted to them for their support and to the staff of the institutions where we carried out case studies for their interest, cooperation and help.

Open and distance learning has grown dramatically over the last twenty-five years. In many industrialised countries, between six and twelve per cent of all enrolments in higher education are of students studying at a distance. The world now has more than thirty open universities. Perhaps as important, the lines between conventional education and open and distance learning are becoming blurred. Australian universities have started to talk about 'flexible learning'. Within Britain at least half of all universities now have some open-learning programmes. Increasingly, institutions are teaching both through ordinary classrooms and lectures and through open learning. Increasingly, too, students are taking some courses through one mode and some through another. On our doorstep, for example, Anglia Polytechnic University used to teach all its students within its campuses. Today it teaches some on campus, some by franchising courses to other institutions, and some through open learning techniques.

These changes present a double challenge for educational managers. First, managers need to choose the technologies that are most appropriate for the course they are teaching and the students who are following it. Second, they need to look at the cost implications of using open and distance learning.

These intertwined challenges are more complex than at first sight appear. The costs of conventional education are mainly determined by the cost of buildings - from halls of residence to laboratories and classrooms - and the costs of staff. As student numbers increase, so staffing costs increase, although the rise may be tempered by changes in staffing ratios. In open and distance learning, the picture is more complicated with some expenditure on the production of materials, which may be used for any number of students, and some on student support. The cost of preparing materials in different formats will vary: generally, for example, producing materials in print is relatively cheap and in television relatively dear but there may be social and educational reasons for avoiding the cheapest option. The use of computers in education has added a new layer of complexity to the analysis of costs. They make it possible for example, to distribute material cheaply and to allow students increased interaction with each other and with their tutors, but at the price of demanding investment by the student in a computer and a modem and sometimes of transferring the cost from the teaching institution to the individual student.

Within the project whose results are reported in this book, we have tried to look at some of these complexities. We have done so both by reviewing what is already known about the cost of open and distance learning and by carrying out eleven case studies with colleagues within institutions in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Norway and Spain. We have used a common framework for examining and analysing costs, looked at the choices of technology that have actually been made by people running educational programmes, and reached some general conclusions to guide decision makers. Table 1.1 sets out the case studies we carried out with summary information on the technologies used.

Our findings are set out in five general chapters in the first half of the book and in the summary case studies which appear as the second part.

Our major findings, on the comparative costs of different technologies and on the factors that affect these, are dealt with in chapter one. In order to put these findings in context, we then move on, in chapter two, to explain the methodology we used and then in chapter three, to discuss the difficulty of interpreting the findings. This makes it possible for us, in chapter four, to produce guidance for the manager on applying the findings and the methodology that have been used and in chapter five to examine some of the issues involved in justifying decisions that follow.

The findings are based on quite different case studies. While they vary widely, all of them fit within a set of definitions agreed for IRFOL's work generally:

We have used the term 'open and distance learning' as an umbrella term for our sphere of interest. It covers distance education, open learning and the use of telematics in education. We have working definitions of each of these, although the way the terms are used varies with location: something called distance education in one place is called open learning in another. The definitions are:

Distance education is an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner.

Open learning is an organised educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on study are minimised in terms either of access, or of time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination of these.

Telematics is the combined use of telecommunication and computer technology.

Hilary Perraton

