

Rumble, G. (2000). Student support in distance education in the 21st Century: Learning from service management. *Distance Education*, 21(2), 216-235.

Student Support in Distance Education in the 21st. Century: Learning from service management

Greville Rumble

The popular conception of distance education is of a system in which students receive few of the consumptive service benefits of their colleagues in full-time education. In fact, distance educators have generally been better at articulating what they mean by student service than traditional educators. Nevertheless, the rationale developed by distance educators for providing such services is less well based, making the service-side of distance education vulnerable to pressures to reduce costs. With signs of a change in what traditional students, acting within a consumerist framework, want in the way of support services, and with distance education undergoing considerable changes in the wake of the development of e-business, there is a need to reconsider the rationale for and nature of student services, drawing on some of the thinking that has taken place in the service management sector.

If there is a popular conception of the distance-educated, university student, then it is one of isolation from both teachers and peers who receives none of the consumptive benefits enjoyed by campus-based students (Carnoy and Levin, 1975: 396). This image is reinforced by the generally poor reputation that correspondence education, and now virtual education, has of failing to support students in the interests of maximising drop-out money (Noble, 2000). Even distance educators feel that we do not do as well as we should when it comes to student services. Chronic underfunding in some systems does not help, of course, but even in relatively well-funded systems there seem to be problems when we think about the level of services our students have. Tait (1995: 232) remarked that across distance education as a whole, „the rationale for student support in ODL [Open and Distance Learning] has been weakly conceived over the last twenty years, and, not surprisingly, in many ODL systems, weakly realised, and subject to wild fluctuations in terms of financial support“. In the UK, with the Oxbridge university model deeply entrenched in some kind of ancestral memory, and reinforced by images drawn from television series based on books such as *Brideshead Revisited*, we forget that most students in the system are not on full-time first degree courses (Watson, 2000: 76), and so perhaps we feel that there is much we could learn from the traditional universities.

But is this so? In this paper I want to suggest three things. Firstly, that when it comes to articulating what we mean by student services, distance educators are way ahead of their colleagues in conventional universities. Secondly, that we cannot afford to be complacent. Our thinking is indeed weakly conceived, though there are signs that this is changing. Thirdly, that we could do worse than learn from service industry, and for this reason: students are increasingly acting as consumers in their relations with the universities, and it is in the service industries that most of the really good thinking about customer care has gone on.

STUDENT SUPPORT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The American sociologist George Ritzer (1998) argues that the university is becoming a component in a consumer society, and that education is now seen as a product to be consumed. What students want,

Ritzer says, is for their universities to operate like banks and fast-food restaurants (Ritzer, 1998: 152). He cites a research study conducted by Arthur Levine (1993:4) that found that in the US higher education is not the centre of most university students' lives. Levine's report said that students

„want education to be nearby and to operate during convenient hours – preferably round the clock. ... They want ... short lines, and polite and efficient personnel and services. They also want high high-quality products but are eager for low costs. They are willing to comparison shop – placing a premium on time and money. ... they want a stripped-down version of college without student affairs, extracurricular activity, residence life, varsity sport, campus chaplains All they want of higher education is simple procedures, good service, quality courses, and low costs. They are bringing to higher education exactly the same consumer expectations that they have for every other commercial enterprise with which they deal“.

Of course, universities cannot isolate themselves from the society within which they are based. A consumerist society breeds consumers, but Ritzer would, I think, argue that universities have colluded in this process by applying the rationalist and bureaucratic precepts of modern management – processes that are best exemplified in the practices of the McDonald's fast food chain (Ritzer, 1993: 31-2) – to the campus. This has resulted, paradoxically, in a growth in irrationality within the university, with many staff and students put off by „the huge factory-like atmosphere of these universities“ where education can be „a de-humanising experience“ in which it is difficult for students to get to know other students and virtually impossible for them to know their professors (Ritzer, 1993: 141-2).

Although some universities (Harvard, Oxford) will buck these trends, most will accommodate themselves because this is how they can enrol lots of students and save money. They will embrace technology because students are attracted to high-tech environments; because technology promises to lower the university's costs even more (Ritzer, 1998: 154); and because technology promises to deliver programmes to satellite campuses near where students live, if not into their homes, for „like Domino's [Pizzas], universities are increasingly in the business of home delivery“ (ibid: 11). Convenience education, like convenience foods, is with us. Thus officials at the University of Northern Arizona claim that their university is „designed around the concept of convenience for the student“ (Howard, 1996: 7). Integral to this is the delivery of distance learning and virtual education courses – the ultimate convenience in education, increasingly based around smart card technology for instant delivery to the home.

I have started with the trends taking place in mass conventional higher education in the developed world partly because I find them intrinsically interesting, and partly because I think that distance educators have already had to think through some of the issues raised, and in many ways are ahead of the game. Our students have never seen their university as the centre of their lives: how can they, when so many of them have demanding jobs as well as family and other responsibilities? We have always had to think through our support services, trying to find the best delivery mechanism for students who will never come on-campus because the campus, in the traditional sense, does not exist. Perhaps this is why twenty years ago one commentator felt able to claim that the emphasis placed on student support systems by distance educators was unusual in academic organisations (Friedman, 1981: 123).

When it comes to traditional higher education, not much seems to have changed. Look for example at Sir David Watson's recent book, *Managing Strategy* in the 'Managing Universities and Colleges: Guides to Good Practice' series. If customer care were really important for universities, one would expect a book on the strategic management of the university to focus somewhere on client services and customer care. However, while Watson (2000: 76-7) has a brief section on student satisfaction and the need to seek student opinion, there is very little in the book that deals with student services. The concept of 'student support' is restricted to the question of how students pay for their studies and living expenses; other headings in the index deal with debt, discipline, employment, loans, overseas students, paid work and life-styles, and student unions. There is no reference to guidance, advisory, or counselling services in the index. Now, I am not making any comment about the quality of services

offered by the UK's traditional universities, nor am I saying that they do not give any consideration to student support. Patently, they do: the University of Brighton's Corporate Plan, which is included as an appendix to Watson's book, gives among the priorities for 1999-2004, the development of „a quality strategy covering academic and support services“ (p. 137), though the details of what this means in practice are unclear from the information given. What I am saying is that the distance education community seems to be more driven by concern for planning customer care and support than the traditional universities.

There are reasons for this:

- Firstly, our experience tells us that students need support if they are to succeed. Distance educators are generally conscious of their roots in correspondence education. In the 1960s correspondence education had a bad image, mainly because it did not help students learn successfully. The focus on student services in the 1970s – driven to a large extent by the adult educators who came to work at the British Open University – was motivated by the wish to avoid the catastrophic drop-out rates of correspondence education, and by the knowledge that evidence of high drop-out would kill the reputation of the university, and by a recognition that provision of a package of materials was not a sufficient support for students (Sewart, 1983).
- Secondly, a systems approach to distance education is embedded in the literature. It is part of our culture, and it covers student support. We talk routinely about course development, materials production, materials distribution, materials reception, course delivery, student administrative and support services, logistical systems, decision-making systems. Somewhere under student administration and support we will focus on advisory and guidance services, counselling services, financial assistance, and support for the disabled, among other things. (Rumble 1986, 1992).

It was because so much correspondence education was so poor that the Open University in the UK seemed to be so very different when it was founded in 1969. From the start, student support was central to the concerns of the University. The current Vice-Chancellor, Sir John Daniel, has argued that the 30 years of success of the Open University is based on three things: excellent teaching materials, high quality student support services, and efficient logistical systems. However, when the University was founded, the problem was to define what was meant by student support. The early history of the Open University shows that this was disputed territory. Many of the University's early regional student services staff came out of adult education. Based on their experience, they believed that adults needed a great deal of supportive help in areas divorced from their academic studies. They therefore developed right at beginning a counselling service that was designed to provide each student with a named contact (their counsellor) who would remain with them for as long as they stayed in the university and within the region where they had first enrolled. The rationale for this role was that this person would provide the 'continuity of concern' that was felt to be so important to student success (see Sewart, 1983 for a discussion of the approach developed in the 1970s). However, many of the central academics responsible for creating the courses did not share this view: they thought that most of the advice that students would need would best come from their course tutor whose principle task was to correct the written assignments and deliver the occasional face-to-face classes built into the Open University's instructional system (Perry, 1976: 113). This would have made student support a peripheral, not a core service.

Recent changes in the Open University's student support system have shown the deep divide between the remnants of the earlier generation of staff who continue to believe in approaches pioneered within adult education and the Open University, with their focus on the provision of continuity of concern through a *counsellor* (provided in actuality by a tutor-counsellor who was responsible for tutoring a first year entry course, and then providing continuity of concern to a larger group of students whom he or she had tutored in the first year and who had progressed onto higher level courses), and those who run the administration and who believe that a more professional, consistent and cheaper *advisory* service can be delivered by a centralised service using modern communications systems – that is, through a national Customer Call Centre featuring Help Desk facilities. It is the latter group that has won the argument. The role of tutor-counsellor has gone. Whatever continuity for concern that survives will be based not on the personal knowledge that counsellors had of their students – a

resource always likely to disappear with resignation, retirement, or death-in-service – but on what can be captured and held on the student’s computer record as projected onto the screen in front of a Call Centre operative.

Perhaps the case for retaining the older, adult education derived system, would have been easier to make if we knew why it seemed to work, though I doubt it. Technology gave us the opportunity to remodel the service, cost-reduction the incentive, and the lack of consistency of service the excuse: and so the old system has gone. Still, resistance to these changes was not helped by the generally woeful lack of knowledge about the effectiveness of student support services. Let me summarise just some of the research findings while warning that the evidence is often confused and contradictory:

- Advice given during recruitment and enrolment affects later success or failure.
- Contact between students and the institution seems to be beneficial, and learners who make contact seem to value it. Support is most needed early in the first year of study.
- Many factors affect student performance. Higher course completion rates seem to correlate with course pacing, continuous assessment, reminders from tutors to complete work, early submission of the first assignment, a short turn-round for the completed assignment, supplementary audio-tapes and telephone tuition, student access to favourable conditions in which to study.
- Learners without support are likely to delay completion of a programme or drop-out altogether
- There are many causes of drop out but personal circumstances and lack of time are the major causes. The cost to the student can be a major disincentive to rapid progress, and is a factor in keeping people out of the system.
- There are wide variations in how institutions define student support and in how much resource is put into it, making comparative institutional studies very difficult.
- It is as important to think about what is missing as what is there: for example, there is nothing supporting the value of the personal relationship built upon continuity of concern that might have saved the Open University’s old approach, had the case been proven (and even assuming, of course, that it could have been proven).

PROVIDING STUDENT SUPPORT

Distance education organisations are both ‘manufacturing’ organisations – producing a physical product (the materials), and service organisations – producing a student learning experience. There are some very considerable differences between manufacturing and service organisations (see Table 1). The very nature of the some of these differences – the fact that the course materials are physical, can be demonstrated, can be stored, and so on, seems to make the package dominant. This, coupled with the difficulty we have in demonstrating the service and showing its effect, makes the service side of the organisation vulnerable to cuts. However, we know that the package of materials on its own is not enough: some kind of learner support is necessary – but what are we doing to rectify the weak conceptualisation of student services that exists?

TABLE 1 HERE

Over the years a number of people have tried to articulate more clearly what we know about providing student support. I have sought to summarise some of the findings by addressing three questions:

- Where should we start when considering student services?
- What kind of services should be provided?
- How are services to be delivered?

Where should we start when considering student services?

We should begin with students' needs. Identifying and understanding the implications of such needs requires prior knowledge about the characteristics of the student body as a whole. Distance educators stress the heterogeneity of their student body. This diversity is borne out by the extensive surveys that many institutions carry out on their students, in order to establish their distribution by age, gender, geographical location, social class, income, educational background, employment status, language abilities, home circumstances, access to communications and technology, physical disability, etc.

Unfortunately, this kind of aggregated data reveals nothing about the individual students themselves. Most of the time individual student remain invisible (Evans, 1994: 16). Evans sought to enlarge distance educators' understanding of their students' contexts through the histories of individuals themselves, using as much as possible their own words to explore a range of issues that impact on or relate to student support. Evans's work is important. What is actually provided ought to be driven by the students' individual needs, and on the whole one only comes to an understanding of their needs by talking to them – lots of them.

In the final analysis, each market is different. There is no substitute for carrying out one's own market research.

What kind of services should be provided?

There are wide variations in how people define learner support and student services (see Table 2). The first two examples I give here, based on work by Reid (1995) and Tait (2000), are very much geared to the identification of the services students need as they progress through their studies, whereas Simpson's typology (Simpson, 2000) is rather different, looking as it does far more at the kinds of activities student support professionals engage in in delivering a student support service.

TABLE 2 HERE

Reid (1995: 268) suggests that institutional perspectives of learner support will either view student support as „an essential integral component of the teaching/learning system“, and as a result build it in and make it complementary to the teaching system; or it will view student support as „compensatory, regarding students as having deficits in learning that need to be fixed“, and establish specialists „who will relieve tutors of their responsibility for meeting student needs“. Services that are built in tend to be more robust because it is the students that drive the extent to which the service is used. Compensatory services tend to be reactive, activated only when the institution feels they have to be. If you want to control the use made of a service, or run down it down, you will make it reactive. Comprehensive services, on the other hand, tend to be more expensive because services are available even for those who not want or need them.

In the end, each institution's service concept (that is, the package of benefits that it will offer its students) will be different. There is no substitute for thinking it through oneself.

How are services to be delivered?

Distance educators such as Bates (1995: 29-31) distinguish between media – that is, generic forms of communication (text, face-to-face, audio, video and, less clearly though arguably, computing) – and the various technologies that deliver them (see Table 3). These technologies, each with their own characteristics, enable communication to take place in various ways – one to one, one-to-a-group, one-to-many; synchronously (where reception occurs at the same time as delivery), or asynchronously; one-way (message out, nothing back), or two-way (allowing interactivity between the participants).

Although Bates is primarily concerned with the use of media and technology for teaching, rather than for student support, his ACTIONS model (pp. 1-2) governing media selection is as appropriate in the student services area as it is for course production and delivery. ACTIONS is an acronym standing for Access – Costs – Teaching/Learning [and Support] – Interactivity and user-friendliness – Organisational Issues – Novelty – and Speed. Table 4 takes this model, outlines some of the issues and questions that have to be confronted in assessing the utility of particular media and technology, and some of the requirements (in terms of understanding the environment and the technology) needed before a decision can be taken.

Every service delivery system will be different. There is no substitute for doing one's own thinking.

TABLES 3 and 4 HERE

LEARNING FROM SERVICE MANAGEMENT

The current environment is being driven by three requirements:

- Firstly, the transformation of education into a service industry. Students approach education as consumers. As consumers, they have more varied expectations of the kind of services that they want, and higher expectations that the services they believe they have paid for should meet their expectations. On the other hand, providers do not have to meet every expectation, however unreasonable – it would be unreasonable to expect a McDonald's to serve a Chateau Lafitte. Management of expectations is a major issue for service providers – higher education included.
- Secondly, increasing competition for students is putting pressures on providers both to be innovative when defining their service concept (that is, the benefits that they offer their clients), and to reduce their costs. Competition will also lead institutions to adopt strategies to become 'sticky', by providing learners with incentives to remain with them their whole lives (Oblinger, 2001). There is a continuing tension here, between cost reduction on the one hand, and on the other service provision to attain 'stickiness' and student success.
- Thirdly, there are the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The flexibility and convenience of e-learning will make it increasingly popular. E-business and e-commerce applications will also reduce costs.

Service industries are responding to these demands in a variety of ways, all of which involve innovation in the delivery of services.

Application of new technology

The application of new technology enables innovation to occur. The application of e-mail and computer conferencing to distance education, in conjunction with databases and electronic libraries, has enabled the emergence of a whole new kind of industry – e-distance education. ICTs are also enabling more established providers to rethink and re-engineer of the nature of their student services. The UK Open University is involved in just such a process as part of a strategy to position the University as a global player. Part of this re-engineering may involve disaggregation around 'value nets', rather than operating as end-to-end, vertically integrated firms (Oblinger, 2001). As a direct result, constructivist approaches to education have been applied within distance education (Ward and Davis, 1994; Jonassen, 1995; Collis, 1996: 135), and new roles – such as the e-moderator – have emerged (Salmon, 2000). Other key benefits derived from the latest generation of technology are the extent to which it has reduced location dependence, enabling businesses in some areas (and particularly those dealing with ephemeral goods such as knowledge), to source service providing agents anywhere in the world. It is no longer unusual to teach a course for a foreign university without leaving home.

Social innovation

Providers are seeking to respond to the challenges facing them through social innovation. Such innovations create new roles, new social links, and new types of social behaviour. At one level this can involve greater *client participation* in the process of ‘production’ of the service. Self-help and self-service concepts have revolutionised banks, restaurants and petrol stations. Similarly, the provision of on-line services with access to information, advice and guidance, or to automatic enrolment and billing facilities, will enable students to do far more for themselves in the future. This hands them greater control of the relevant process by *enabling* the customer, and it also helps to reduce costs. It does however reduce the opportunities for proactive intervention in some of the processes – for example, opportunities to provide detailed advice on course choice at enrolment.

Social innovation may also create new structures and roles. One of the problems with distance education is that it involves a division of labour, with the result that some of the jobs in the industry (for example, that of correspondence tutor) are heavily circumscribed. Critics of ‘Fordist’ distance education point to the resulting degradation of academic work, involving both deskilling and loss of power (Peters, 1983: 100-5, 108; Peters, 1989: 5; Campion and Renner, 1992: 10; Raggett, 1993: 25-7). The Open University, having in its first teaching year experimented with the ultimate in division of labour, separate posts for the correspondence tutor, class tutor, and counsellor, rapidly re-organised its system twice in the early 1970s to provide the more satisfying roles of course tutor (combining correspondence and face-to-face tutoring) and tutor-counsellor (combining the course tutor role on entry courses with a counselling role for those of the tutor-counsellor’s students who had moved on to other courses). This role-based social innovation removed some of the soul-destroying aspects of the system introduced in 1971, and did much to provide attractive roles that exploited the utilisation of ‘unfocused human energy’ (Normann, 1991: 25) (that is, the ‘spare time’ of people who had jobs in other organisations, or were newly retired, and who wanted to work in an academic organisation).

Another solution to the problem of academic alienation is to rethink the whole structure of the university. Service organisations have discovered that there is no reason why people have to belong to the organisation in order to participate in the production of the service. The National Technological University in the USA is an example of this principle in action. NTU brings together the leading engineering schools of the USA, the professors who teach classes at those schools, and firms who want their employees to update their knowledge. Working with a very small core staff, NTU puts the producers in contact with the customers, providing the facilities by which the company employees can be taught at a distance by academics based at the leading engineering schools in the USA. It has devised a payment system that benefits all those involved in the production of the service, and delivers an operating surplus.

Elsewhere Rumble (1998) has outlined an innovative structure that draws upon approaches that date back to the twelfth century and the emergence of an urban intellectual class who sold their knowledge and instruction in the same way that artisans sold their goods (Le Goff, 1993), and upon contemporary ideas about the nature of post-bureaucratic organisations (Heckscher, 1994), to suggest how a service organisation might bring individuals academics together with students inside a post-bureaucratic structure (see Box 1). In Rumble’s scheme, many of the academics involved in the enterprise would have jobs in other sectors, and thus only teach part-time. This taps into another feature of innovative service organisations – their ability to discover and employ under-utilised and hitherto unfocused human energies (Normann, 1991: 24).

Network effects

A key advantage of NTU’s structure is that each university within a consortium, and each teacher within the university, acts as a node in a network that attracts and retains customers. This exploits another innovative service management approach – the network effect (Normann, 1991: 26). This is an effect utilised by franchises such as McDonalds – creating a chain in which customers can have

confidence that the service standards and processes are similar across the network. The UK Open University's recent establishment of a legally independent sister institution in the United States, the United States Open University (www.open.edu) is a major step in the Open University's development of a network effect.

Maintaining a consistent quality

Perhaps the key challenge in service organisations is to maintain quality. Normann (1991: 16) argues that „most services are the result of social acts which take place in direct contact between the customer and representatives of the service company“. What happens during this interaction determines how the customer's perception of quality. This is what Normann refers to as 'the moment of truth' In large service providers there may well be tens of thousands such moments of truth each day, hence the challenge if quality is to be consistent. While service delivery may be capital as well as labour intensive, it is also personality intensive (p. 17) – that is, „the quality supplied to the customer is essentially a result of the way people perform in the specific situation“ that surrounds the moment of truth. Negative or positive performance by the service deliverer has an enormous impact on customer perceptions, and on the wider public's perception of the provider. This puts a premium on the service design process, on the values and culture of the organisation, and on training.

Well designed service systems must be reproducible. Reproducibility depends on identifying the absolutely essential elements of the service and designing effective ways of controlling and reproducing those elements. These elements cannot be over-complex or unclear. Indeed, successful service systems seem to be simple and uncomplicated (Normann, 1991: 40, 45). This has the added benefit that the service concept – basically, the package of physical, psychological and emotion benefits that accrue to customers – tends to be clear and unequivocal. In particular, it should be clear what the core service concept is, and what is peripheral (ibid: 46).

The personality intensive nature of services places a premium on the organisation of the service delivery function. Moments of truth involve uncertainty; they are difficult to prepare for. Training of staff is therefore crucial. Normann (1991: 77) suggests that this needs to focus on providing the trainee with opportunities for personal growth and development; on modelling the desired behaviours and getting trainees to practice these; and on infusing the employee with the company's values. Although there are other approaches, Normann seems to prefer strategies that increase the discretion of contact staff. Such approaches rely on training to deliver consistency. Neither of the alternative strategies of removing as much of the power from the moment of truth, and putting it in the back office, nor of reducing the discretion of the contact staff, thus standardising their situation and behaviour, finds favour (ibid: 72). Indeed, within an academic community, it is unlikely that these alternative approaches would work. The key must therefore be to define the core service in simple terms, while leaving staff considerable discretion as to how they deliver service within the values espoused by the institution. That way, one relies on their professionalism. Moreover, by acknowledging that professionalism, one enhances their self-esteem – which is yet another feature of the well-designed service system (ibid: 43).

CONCLUSIONS

It is surprising how little attention universities in general have paid at a theoretical level to the definition of the services they offer students. Distance education institutions tend to be the exception to this rule. Distance educators seem to have a clear understanding that student support services are integral to the overall working of their systems. However, there is surprisingly little hard knowledge about what works, and why. This, and the very intangibility of the services, makes the support services side of the business vulnerable, particularly where costs are being brought down. There are signs, however, of a renewed interest in student support. The impetus for this renewed interest is driven above all by concern with student dropout and, in an increasingly competitive world, student retention. Students' conception of themselves as customers also plays a part here. Given that the package of

materials alone is not enough to ensure student success, this renewal of interest in student services is welcome. Recent work by various practitioners (Tait, 2000; Simpson, 2000) has sought to understand student needs, define the services that ought to be provided, and determine the means by which they should be delivered in given circumstances. Yet this effort could benefit some of the innovative thinking has taken place within the service sector. By raising these issues, this paper seeks to contribute to a crucial area of development in distance education.

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Greville Rumble is Professor of Distance Education Management at the Open University, UK:
 Address: Student Services, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK.
g.rumble@open.ac.uk; <greville.rumble@talk21.com>

Table 1: Typical differences between manufacturing and service industries

(from Richard Normann, *Service management: Strategy and leadership in service business*, Chichester, John Wiley, 2nd.edn., 1991, p. 15)

Manufacturing	Service
The product is generally concrete	The service is intangible
Ownership is transferred when a purchase is made	Ownership is not generally transferred
The product can be resold	The product cannot be resold
The product can be demonstrated	The product cannot usually be effectively demonstrated (it does not exist before purchase)
The product can be stored by the sellers and buyers	The product cannot be stored
Consumption is preceded by production	Production and consumption generally coincide
Production, selling and consumption are locally differentiated	Production, consumption and often even selling are spatially united
The product can be transported	The product cannot be transported (though 'producers' often can)
The seller produces	The buyer/client takes part directly in the production
Indirect contact is possible between company and client	In most cases direct contact is necessary
Can be exported	The service cannot normally be exported, but the service delivery system can

Table 2: Defining the scope of student support in open and distance learning

Reid (1995)	Tait (2000)	Simpson (2000)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career counselling • Academic guidance • Student advocacy • Learning support (including study and exam skills seminars, access to formal study groups and informal buddy networks, 1:1 assistance • Personal counselling • Support for special needs • Specific course and programme information • Financial advice • A library service • Specific one-to-one tutorial assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enquiry, admission and pre-study advisory services • Tutoring • Guidance and counselling services • Assessment of prior learning and credit transfer • Study and examination centres • Residential schools • Library services • Individualised correspondence teaching, including in some cases continuous assessment • Record keeping, information management, and other administrative systems • Differentiated services for student with special needs of one sort or another, e.g. disability, geographical remoteness, prisoners • Materials which support the development of study skills, programme planning or career development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic support • Non-academic support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advising in developmental areas (vocational guidance, course choice, learning skills, general motivational counselling) and in problem-solving areas (institution-related, study, time, and personal problems) - Assessment (giving feedback to the individual on non-academic aptitudes and skills) - Action (practical help to promote study) - Advocacy* (making a case out for funding, writing a reference, supporting a student's complaint) - Agitation* (promoting changes within the institution to benefit students) - Administration* (organising student support) <p>* These do not involve direct work with students</p>

Table 3: Delivery mechanisms for student services

Media	Technology	Characteristics
Text	Personal letters (postal service and hand delivered)	One-to-one, interactive asynchronous
	Problem page (Agony Aunt) letters	One-to-many but in answer to a particular problem, asynchronous, can be interactive
	Circular letters, leaflets, newsletters, booklets, books, etc.	One-to-many, non-interactive, asynchronous, though may incorporate self-assessment questionnaires
	Correspondence tuition	One-to-one, could be interactive asynchronously
	E-mail	One-to-one, interactive, synchronous and asynchronous
	Computer conferencing	Many-to-many, interactive, asynchronous and synchronous
	Video-text	One-to-many, non-interactive
Audio	Telephone (one-to-one)	One-to-one, interactive, synchronous
	Telephone voice mail	One-to-one, can be interactive, asynchronous
	Audio text services, voice mail notice boards	One-to-many, asynchronous, non-interactive
	Chat lines	Many-to-many, synchronous, interactive
	Audio-conferencing	One-to-many, interactive, synchronous
	Audio-cassette	One-to-one or one-to-many, could be slow interactive on a one-to-one basis, asynchronous
	Radio (broadcast)	One-to-many, non-interactive, synchronous or, if recorded either end, asynchronous
Two way radio	One-to-one or one-to-several, interactive	
Video	Television broadcasts	One-to-many, non-interactive, synchronous or, if recorded either end, asynchronous
	Video	One-to-many, non-interactive, asynchronous
	Video-conferencing	One-to-many or one-to-one, interactive, synchronous
Face-to-face	Lectures	One-to-many, limited interaction, synchronous
	Seminars	One-to-several in a group, interactive, synchronous
	Tutorials	One-to-one or one-to-a-few, interactive, synchronous
	Personal coaching, mentoring, etc	One-to-one, interactive, synchronous
Computer	CAL, CAI, CBT	One-to-many one-way
	Interactive databases	One-to-many, two-way, asynchronous
	E-mail	One-to-one, interactive, synchronous and asynchronous
	Computer conferencing	Many-to-many, interactive, asynchronous and synchronous

Table 4: Bates's ACTIONS model applied to Student Services

Bates model	Issues to be confronted	Requires
A	Access: How accessible is a particular technology for learners and for student support staff (e.g. tutors)? Is delivery to the home, or a local centre? Will students be able to access the technology in the home, or will there be other users wanting access for other purposes? How accessible is the local centre? How flexible is the technology for a particular target group? Will all students be able to use the service, or will some (the disabled, for example) be excluded?	Understanding of student characteristics and geography: e.g. age, gender, employment status, educational background, technological knowledge, access to technology, special needs, etc.; impact of geography and the socio-political-economic conditions as these may affect access
C	Costs: What is the cost structure of each technology? What is the absolute capital cost? What are the running costs? What is the unit cost per learner of providing support through the technology? What is the total cost providing the service to all students? What will students be asked to pay? Will they be able to afford to pay for the service?	Understanding of costs, relationship of technology and service costs to scale, and ability to pay
T	Teaching and Learning (<i>and Support</i>): What kinds of support are needed? What approaches best meet these needs? What are the technologies for supporting the service delivery? Will the media/technology support the desired presentational framework for the delivery of knowledge and information? Will it support the development of different types of skills?	Understanding of programme and course demands (both cognitive and affective), student/learner needs, and technological capability
I	Interactivity and user-friendliness: What kind of interaction does this technology enable? Will it allow synchronous communication, or not? Does it support interactive, two-way communication? How many people can be accommodated at the same time without losing effectiveness? To what extent does the technology put the student in control of the situation? How easy is it to be used? Will students need to learn how to use the technology, and if so, how will training be provided?	Understanding of programme and course demands (both cognitive and affective), student/learner needs, and technological capability
O	Organisational issues: What are the organisational requirements, and the barriers to be removed, before this technology can be used successfully? What changes in organisation need to be made?	Understanding of technology and organisational capability
N	Novelty: How new is this technology? Will it attract external funding (it is often easier to find donor money for newer technology)? Can the technology be sustained once donor money dries up? Has the technology secured its position in the	Understanding of the technology and its position within the marketplace

market place, or is it likely to be supplanted soon by a radically improved or entirely different technology? Is the supply over-dependent upon a single manufacturer or are their industry standards enabling a choice of suppliers?

S	Speed: How quickly can services be mounted and delivered using this technology? How quickly can service messages and characteristics be changed?	Understanding of business needs (including customer needs) and technology
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Box 1: Towards a global interactive university

Based on Greville Rumble (1998) 'Academic work in the Information Age. A speculative essay', *Journal of Information Technology in Teacher Education*, 7 (1), 129-45.

In theory academics can now develop a curriculum and materials for an Internet based course and teach it from their own Web site. Their problem is to find customers who can be confident about the quality of the educational experience they are buying.

This 'problem' resonates with the situation in Europe in the twelfth century. The period saw the development of an intellectual class whose profession it was „to think and share their thoughts“ (Le Goff, 1993: 1), and who worked in „workshops out of which ideas, like merchandise, were exported“ (ibid.: 62). The gathering together of masters and students in urban centres such as Paris, Chartres, and Orleans was the precursor of the European university. Some time in the twelfth century these intellectual artisans began to organise themselves within corporations or colleges of masters and students, out of which the universities developed. These universities secured the right to confer degrees. Masters were paid from two sources: salaries and stipends. Salaries, reflecting the master's position as a worker, were derived from either the master's students or the civil authorities. Stipends or scholarships were gifts from private benefactors, public organisations and civil authorities. These different options had important consequences (Le Goff, 1993: 93): Masters who earned their money from fees paid by their students were merchants. Masters who were paid a salary by communal or princely powers were employees - functionaries. Masters who received stipends from a benefactor were domestic servants. Masters who lived off the money they were paid by their students had the advantage that they were free of temporal and ecclesiastical powers and private patrons: „This solution seemed natural to them for it conformed the most with the habits of the urban workplace of which they considered themselves to be members. Masters sold their knowledge and instruction the way artisans sold their wares“ (Le Goff, 1993: 94).

The fact that the contemporary academic can put their own courses on the Internet means that, potentially, we have the modern day equivalent of the twelfth century knowledge artisan – a global artisan in the knowledge industry, able to attract web-based students wherever they live. What is needed is an organisational model to deliver this.

Organisational analysts such as Heckscher (1994) believe that we are witnessing the emergence of the post-bureaucratic organisation. These differ from bureaucracies in that, whereas in a bureaucracy with its rational definition of office, „people are responsible only for their own jobs“ (Heckscher, 1994: 20), the key to post-bureaucratic organisations is „an organisation in which everyone takes responsibility for the success of the whole“ (ibid., p. 24). Heckscher's calls this new kind of organisation the *interactive organisation* (Heckscher, 1994: 24).

One can envisage a community of academic partners within an *interactive university*, each of whom is licensed to practice (i.e. teach). They would have the flexibility to choose how many courses they teach and how many students they support. They would prepare the students for examinations, and they could be paid by their students for this. The university would act rather like a law firm. It would advertise its academic partners and their courses, and point would-be students towards academics having the

appropriate expertise to support them in their preparation for examinations. It too would charge for its services. The success of the enterprise as a whole would be everyone's responsibility.

Accreditation of the student's work would rest with the university as a body licensed to set examinations and grant degrees. The typical university would consist of a small central licensing, validating, examining, and accrediting body. To allow students to move between universities, carrying their accumulated credits with them, there might also be national, regional and global Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) schemes. Universities would protect the integrity of their awards within CATs schemes by choosing their partner universities carefully. Whether an institution's credits are recognised or not by a particular validating body would, of course, become a significant factor in their success. The whole system would comprise a network of academics, institutions, and partnerships built around systems designed to ensure that all constituents gained financially from the structure.