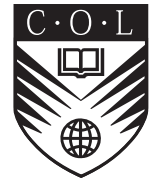


COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



PREST

Practitioner Research and
Evaluation Skills Training in
Open and Distance Learning

Reporting on research to
support or influence change

MODULE

A6

The PREST training resources aim to help open and distance learning practitioners develop and extend their research and evaluation skills. They can be used on a self-study basis or by training providers. The resources consist of two sets of materials: a six-module foundation course in research and evaluation skills and six handbooks in specific research areas of ODL. There is an accompanying user guide. A full list appears on the back cover.

The print-based materials are freely downloadable from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) website (www.col.org/prest). Providers wishing to print and bind copies can apply for camera-ready copy which includes colour covers (info@col.org). They were developed by the International Research Foundation for Open Learning (www.irfol.ac.uk) on behalf of COL.

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Acknowledgements

We are particularly grateful to Hilary Perraton and Raj Dhanarajan who originally conceived of the PREST programme and have supported the project throughout. Among those to whom we are indebted for support, information and ideas are Honor Carter, Kate Crofts, John Daniel, Nick Gao, Jenny Glennie, Keith Harry, Colin Latchem, Lydia Meister, Roger Mills, Sanjaya Mishra, Ros Morpeth, Rod Tyrer, Paul West and Dave Wilson. In developing the materials, we have drawn inspiration from the lead provided by Roger Mitton in his handbook, Mitton, R. 1982 *Practical research in distance education*, Cambridge: International Extension College.

Module A6: Reporting on research to support or influence change

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ISBN 1-894975-05-7

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See the last page of the module.

Contents

Reporting on research and evaluation to support or influence change	1
Aims of the module	1
Reporting	1
Module objectives	3
Module organisation	3
Resources	4
Unit 1: Getting your message across	5
Unit overview	5
Learning outcomes	5
What are my report findings to be used for?	6
What contexts will my findings be used in?	8
Insider or outsider role?	9
What kinds of communication are needed?	15
Summary	19
References	20
Feedback to selected activities	20
Unit 2: Writing reports	23
Unit overview	23
Learning outcomes	23
Introduction	23
Structuring a research report	25
Writing the text	29
Summary	34
Feedback to selected activities	35
Unit 3: Selecting and displaying data for use in reports	37
Unit overview	37
Learning outcomes	37
Introduction	37
Working with quantitative data	39
Working with qualitative data	41
Reporting survey data	45
Summarising from documents	46
Unit summary	47
Further reading	48
Feedback to selected activities	48
Unit 4: Embedding the data in the report	51
Unit overview	51
Providing descriptions	51
Making an analysis	53
Offering an interpretation	55
Combining different kinds of data and using them for multiple purposes	58
Unit summary	61
Feedback to selected activities	62
Unit 5: Reporting and dissemination strategies	69
Unit overview	69
Learning outcomes	69
Introduction	70
Ethical issues	71
Academic writing	72
Preparing policy papers	73

Reporting on an evaluation	.77
Workshops and oral presentations	.77
Sharing the results of action research	.80
The press and the media	.81
Publishing on the Web	.82
Comprehensive dissemination strategies	.83
Unit summary	.84
Feedback to selected activities	.85
Unit 6: The research-practice divide and turning research into action	.89
Unit overview	.91
Learning outcomes	.91
The research-practice divide	.91
Problems that may lie with the researchers	.94
Problems that may lie within the system or institution	.97
Problems that may lie with the research	.99
Bridging the research-practice divide	.104
Feedback to selected activities	.106
Appendix: Advancing the research agenda in open and distance learning institutions	.109
Introduction	.109
Learning outcomes	.110
Addressing the challenge of bridging the research-divide	.110
Institutional policies and procedures to support research	.111
Open and distance learning as scholarly practice	.112
Encouraging and supporting research enterprise	.116
Involving colleagues in scholarly practice	.119
Strengthening research capacity	.126
Summary	.130
References	.131
Feedback to selected activities	.131
Permissions	.134
Resources File	.137

Reporting on research and evaluation to support or influence change



Aims of the module

In this module, we first consider presenting your findings and recommendations to various audiences. We then look at the processes involved in writing up and presenting your research findings in different ways. Finally, we examine the barriers that can prevent your research findings from being more widely disseminated and adopted, and how to overcome them.

The aims of this module are to:

- 1 Encourage you to think more widely about how your research and findings might be used in policymaking and practice, and what might prevent them being used in this way.
- 2 Help you write up your research findings and present them in different formats and through different channels for different purposes and for different audiences.
- 3 Help you overcome any barriers to dissemination and adoption that may arise.

There is an appendix to this module which looks at these issues from an institutional perspective. The appendix discusses ways in which research activity can be encouraged and developed in open and distance learning organisations. Although it may not be of immediate relevance to you, we hope you will read it in order to place your research within this wider context.

Reporting

Whenever you set out to inform and influence people within or beyond your institution through your findings, you need to think carefully about the individuals and groups you are targeting. We call these the 'stakeholders' and it is most important that you find out what will attract and interest them and what will help them change their mindsets. Before we start the module we will take a brief look at how you might need to take account of the needs of different stakeholders.

Journals

If you are aiming to publish your work in a specialised journal or academic publication, you will need to present your findings in a form that will meet the editorial requirements of the publishers in terms of length and quality, and in ways that will appeal to the academic interests and expectations of the readers.

Conferences

If you are going to present your findings at a conference or in a workshop, then you will need to think about how to get your message across effectively to your fellow professionals within a limited timeframe, compressing all of your detailed research and findings into something like a twenty-minute oral and visual presentation.

Government and institutions

If you are aiming to support or influence change in governmental or institutional policies or practices, you will need to be able to formulate convincing policy or background papers that will serve the needs of those who determine the nature of the policies and practices.

The public

If your aim is to inform the general public, you will need to be able to attract the attention of non-expert audiences and persuade them to your point of view, for example, in public meetings or via the mass media.

We strongly believe that research should inform, support and influence policymaking and practice in open and distance learning. Unfortunately, this doesn't always happen. Researchers are not always consulted. Nor are research findings always heeded. People attribute this to a phenomenon known as the 'research-practice divide'. The reasons for this divide and for research failing to shape policies and practices can be extremely complex, but it is important that you try to understand these and learn how to deal with them.

Thus, this module is concerned not only with the technical skills of presenting your research results, but also with strategies for dissemination (where your findings and recommendations are scattered around as a sower scatters or broadcasts the seed) and diffusion (where your findings and recommendations intermingle with and permeate practice, like liquids mixing together). These points are discussed in more detail in Unit 6.

Dissemination

Where your findings and recommendations are scattered around as a sower scatters or broadcasts the seed.

Diffusion

Where your findings and recommendations intermingle with and permeate practice, like liquids mixing together.

Module objectives

When you have worked through this module, you should be able to:

- 1 Identify ways in which your research and evaluation findings can inform and influence thinking, policies and practices in open and distance learning.
- 2 Prepare and present your research findings in ways that are clear and coherent and appropriate for different types of audience.
- 3 Discuss the research-practice divide, its causes and how to bridge it.
- 4 Use your research to inform and influence thinking, policies and practices in your work context.

Module organisation

This module will take you about 20 hours to study, although you may need more or less time depending on the pace you like to go at. There are six units and an appendix:

Unit 1: Getting your message across (2 hrs)

Unit 2: Writing the report (4 hrs)

Unit 3: Selecting and displaying data for use in reports (3 hrs)

Unit 4: Embedding the data in the report (4 hrs)

Unit 5: Reporting and dissemination strategies (5 hrs)

Unit 6: The research-practice divide and turning research into action (2 hrs)

Appendix: Advancing the research agenda in open and distance learning institutions

Throughout this module, it is assumed that you have worked through the other modules (or are familiar with their content from some other means of study) and that you have been carrying out some research of your own. If this is the case, you should refer as appropriate to your own research proposal, to your research diary, and to the data you have collected. If this is not the case, it would be useful to have some examples of research to hand that have been carried out in your work context, or in some related area.

Resource	Name when referred to in our text	Location
Akhter, Z. 2003 'Muslim women and open learning: a selection of case studies from Bangladesh' <i>OSAC Journal Of Open Schooling</i> 2: November-January	<i>Akhter</i>	<i>Resources File</i>
Fentiman, A. 2003 <i>SOMDEL: Somali Distance Education Literacy Programme (Macallinka Raddiya)</i> , report prepared for Africa Educational Trust by the International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL), Cambridge: IRFOL	<i>Fentiman</i>	<i>Resources File</i>
Hamilton, D. 1996 <i>Finding a voice in academic writing</i> , at http://www.pedag.umu.se/personal/hamilton_d/voice020228.pdf	<i>Hamilton</i>	<i>Resources File</i>
Kane, E. 1995 <i>Seeing for yourself: research handbook for girls' education in Africa</i> , Washington: Economic Development Institute, World Bank (extract p 252)	<i>Kane</i>	<i>Resources File</i>
Kunje, D. 2002 'The Malawi integrated in-service teacher education programme: an experiment with mixed-mode training' <i>International Journal of Educational Development</i> 22, 3-4: 305-320. © 2002, reprinted with permission from Elsevier.	<i>Kunje</i>	<i>Resources File</i>
Latchem, C. 2003 <i>The case for and feasibility of introducing open and distance education into a Nyanu Teachers' College</i> , a fictional Executive Summary produced by the author for the International Research Foundation for Open Learning	<i>Latchem</i>	<i>Resources File</i>
Latchem, C. 2003 <i>Three forms of reporting</i> , learning activity produced by the author for the International Research Foundation for Open Learning	<i>Latchem</i>	<i>Resources File</i>
Naidu, S. 2004 'Research, scholarship and publishing in distance education', paper presented to <i>Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning 2004</i> , Dunedin, New Zealand, 4-8th July	<i>Naidu</i>	<i>Resources File</i>

These resources are included as an appendix at the end of the publication.

Getting your message across



Unit overview

This unit is designed to help you to think about the context(s) in which your findings are going to be read, seen or heard and to plan your presentation. You will look at:

- ▶ what your report findings will be used for
- ▶ in which contexts they will be used
- ▶ who the stakeholders are
- ▶ the kinds of communication that you will need.

Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 State clearly why you are reporting your findings.
- 2 Describe the contexts in which your findings are going to be used, who the key stakeholders are, and what kinds of communication and dialogue are going to be needed.
- 3 Begin to plan the presentation(s) of your report and findings.

Introduction

Whenever you draw up your research findings, you will be sure to have certain aims in mind – for example, submitting them for publication in a journal, presenting them at a conference, using them to inform and influence policymakers or practitioners, or to get some message across to the wider community. Whichever of these may be your aims, you need to:

- ▶ identify your target audience(s)
- ▶ understand their interests and needs
- ▶ present your findings in the way(s) best suited to the audience(s)
- ▶ provide them with the right kinds of evidence and offer the most convincing arguments.

Generally speaking, you are likely to have the greatest impact and influence if you present selected findings to particular audiences, and focus on specific contexts and tangible issues rather than looking at abstractions and making sweeping generalisations. In some situations it will be important for you to engage in 'academic discourse'. In others, it is better to use clear, everyday language.

When developing your research proposal in the earlier modules, you asked yourself:

- ▶ What do I need to find out and how?
- ▶ What is it for?
- ▶ What do I expect to happen?

In planning your presentations to others, there are further questions to be answered. As you saw in *Module A2*, you also need to think about these questions right at the start of the project and not simply at the writing up stage:

- ▶ What are my findings going to be used for?
- ▶ What contexts will they be used in?
- ▶ Is my role that of an insider or an outsider?
- ▶ Who are the stakeholders I'll be communicating with?
- ▶ What kinds of communication will be needed?

In this unit, we are going to take a closer look at these five questions. As you work through the following sections, you need to think about your particular research project and any other research agenda that's important to you in your work context. The learning activities that you will do in this module are designed to help you report your findings in the ways that will be the most appropriate and the most effective.

What are my report findings to be used for?

You first need to decide what your findings are to be used for. For example, are they going to be used for one or more of the following?

- ▶ **Research and development** For example, helping with the design and development of a course or piece of courseware, the selection and use of particular methods and media, or the establishment of student services or a learning support system.
- ▶ **Evaluation** For example, showing where improvements are being achieved and how to capitalise on these, or where problems are occurring and how to resolve these.

- ▶ **Quality assurance** For example, helping an institution to be accountable to government or a department, or a programme be accountable to an institution.
- ▶ **Market research** For example, providing data on student, public or employer perceptions of an institution or the need for new courses.
- ▶ **Policy-making and planning** For example, providing data on the human, resource or infrastructure needs, or providing evidence of competition from other providers or the potential for strategic alliances with other institutions.
- ▶ **Political purposes** For example, providing evidence to help support or oppose existing or planned-for policies or actions.
- ▶ **Academic purposes** For example, gaining a higher qualification.
- ▶ **Purposes other than these**

Your aims

Paradigm shift

On the one hand, your findings might guide short-term action; on the other, they might educate stakeholders, challenge their current thinking and influence their policies and practices over time. They may be able to achieve both of these. So you also need to ask yourself whether you are aiming to:

- ▶ inform and influence day-to-day policies and practices
- ▶ achieve gradual shifts in thinking about policies and practices that will eventually lead to substantive change or a paradigm shift at the institutional or system level
- ▶ develop theories and hypotheses that will enlighten judgement and opinion and contribute to the furtherance of academic knowledge and understanding
- ▶ or some combination of the above.

If your aims are primarily academic, you will probably decide to publish your work in a journal or book or present your findings at a conference. If your aims are more to do with policies, you are more likely to present your findings in the form of a report and recommendations to the policymakers. If your aim is to influence practice, you will probably opt for providing workshops or training materials for your colleagues. Your research may, of course, be used in more than one way, and you may present your findings in several forms.

Paradigm shift

A paradigm shift takes place where a series of changes in perceptions compete with the older frames of reference and crystallise into a totally new mindset and way of doing things.

Activity 1 10 mins



This activity will help you to think about the broad parameters of your reporting.

Referring to the points we have set out above, write down

- 1 What your research is about.
- 2 What it is going to be used for.
- 3 How you want to present it.

There is no feedback to this activity

What contexts will my findings be used in?

For your research findings to have maximum impact, you also need to think about the context(s) in which they will be read, seen or heard. For example, you need to ask:

- ▶ Are my findings restricted to a particular system or institution, or might they apply in a wider context?
- ▶ What policies or practices are in place or being discussed that will help or hinder the understanding or adoption of these findings?
- ▶ What barriers to change or gaps in knowledge might prevent my findings from being accepted or acted upon?
- ▶ What other contextual factors do I need to take into account?

The degree of change implied in your findings

You also need to consider the degree of change implied in your findings. For example, your research might suggest:

- ▶ **Minor changes to current policies or practices** For example, proposing that existing courses be made available to a wider group of similarly qualified students, using the same syllabus, teachers and teaching methods, but teaching by means of videoconferencing to remote classrooms
- ▶ **Major changes to current policies and practices** For example, recommending that some existing on-campus courses should be offered to similar kinds of students through open and distance learning
- ▶ **Substantially different policies and practices** For example, recommending a radically new open learning system with more flexible entry procedures, new types of course, new forms of technology-based delivery and new kinds of learning opportunities for new kinds of students in previously un-served regions and communities.

Clearly, the greater the change, the longer the implementation will take, the more wary people will be of your findings and the more carefully you will need to plan your dissemination strategy.

Activity 2 10 mins



Again referring to your own research project and taking the above points as a guide, note down:

- 1 The context(s) in which your findings will be used.
- 2 The degree of change implied in these.

There is no feedback to this activity

Insider or outsider role?

Your research will be greatly influenced by your own position. In some cases you may be doing research inside your own institution: researching your own practice, or investigating some aspect of the organisation that you are familiar with. You will have much background and contextual knowledge about how things 'work'; you will be able to use your own informal networks both to find things out, and to influence change. In other cases you might be coming in as an 'outsider' and will have to learn about the organisation, its culture, and its networks from scratch. The discussions that follow need to be read with these two perspectives in mind, and we shall return to the topic in Unit 6.

Who are the stakeholders I'll be communicating with?

The stakeholders are all of those individuals and groups who have an interest in your work or in the issues addressed, who may be influenced and affected in some way by your findings, and who may be influential in deciding whether your recommendations will be adopted or rejected. Their participation, feedback and follow-up are critical to your work.

Stakeholder

Someone who has an interest in the results of your work because the results may affect them.

Sometimes, you will have only one set of stakeholders to deal with. More commonly though, you will have to take into account the views of a number of different stakeholders. Generally speaking, the more you involve the stakeholders and the more stakeholders you involve, the better the chance of your findings having an impact. However, the people you really need to concentrate on are the 'key stakeholders'. These are the individuals or groups with the power and influence to bring about or prevent change and the time, commitment, knowledge and experience to debate your work honestly and openly. You should not focus just on the most obvious or most compliant of these stakeholders. It is important to listen to those who hold different views about your findings, the outcomes and their relative worth. And even if some

of the key stakeholders are not willing or able to participate and cooperate, you should still try to find out what their views and reactions are likely to be.

Stakeholders may be:

- ▶ government, non-governmental organisations, donor agency or other officials
- ▶ leaders
- ▶ senior policy-makers
- ▶ middle managers
- ▶ practitioners
- ▶ researchers
- ▶ students
- ▶ the general public
- ▶ or some mix of these (which is the most likely).

Let's look at these stakeholder groups and their characteristics in rather more detail.

Governments, non-government organisations, international donors and other funding agencies

These stakeholders can offer you opportunities to do research that can have an impact on the organisation, development and delivery of open and distance learning. They often commission research into, for example, sectoral needs, policy options, and areas for investment. They also often need evaluations of projects and programmes. If you do work for these stakeholders, you will need to accept that they tend to define tightly the purposes and timelines of these commissioned reports.

Leaders of organisations, institutions, projects or programmes

These people have clear visions of the kinds of transformations they want to achieve through open and distance learning. They are not afraid of radical change or crisis management and they are quite prepared to take risks in creating and changing cultures, opinions and practices. They show their commitment by not only 'talking the talk' but 'walking the walk'. By this we mean they are ready to invest time and money in the human and technological resources needed to achieve their ends, discuss their vision with those who will implement it and involve themselves directly in the implementation processes. They will therefore welcome and act upon any findings you can give them that will help them justify or carry through their vision.

Senior policy-makers

Senior policy-makers are politicians, senior government officers, senior institutional managers and others with the power and resources to influence events. They may lack expertise in open and distance learning and in technology and they may be out of touch with some of the realities of the workplace. They often have to make decisions very quickly and deal with matters at a rather superficial level. Their decisions may be more influenced by political or budgetary considerations, trusted advisers or the last person they spoke to, rather than expert knowledge. Faced with competing demands they typically try to reconcile conflicting interests and arrive at a consensus. They rarely have the time or capacity to read lengthy reports or engage in protracted discussion. They are most likely to welcome your research if it addresses crucial political or budgetary matters such as 'how to achieve more with less'.

Middle managers

Middle managers in organisations and institutions generally understand the realities and needs of the workplace better than policy makers and they may already have an idea of what works and what doesn't in open and distance learning. They usually prefer to work for acceptable compromises within existing systems, cultures and ways of doing things. They have discretion over resource allocations and may be well placed to influence both senior policy-makers and other staff. They can therefore play a critical role in supporting or undermining new approaches. They are most likely to be interested in any research findings you can provide that will show them how to improve the operations they are responsible for, or how to provide these at lower cost.

Open and distance learning practitioners

Practitioners include open and distance learning course developers, course tutors, instructional designers, media producers, information technologists, librarians and so on. They can gain much from your research and evaluation. However, they may not have the knowledge or capacity to recognise or absorb your findings. Some may also look upon you as living in an 'ivory tower' and see your writings as too theoretical or unrelated to their needs. Organisational or resource constraints may prevent them from adopting your research findings. They are most likely to pay attention to your findings if they see you as one of their peers, or if they regard your work as serving their immediate needs and bringing immediate benefit.

Researchers

Researchers will be primarily interested in how well you define the problems, the rigour and validity of your research or evaluation methods, and the accuracy of your findings. Like practitioners, they may lack the means to implement your findings. However, sharing findings with fellow researchers

helps you to develop your ideas, advances the research agenda in general, and can progressively inform and influence policies and practices over time.

Students

Students should be the prime and ultimate beneficiaries of research and evaluation in open and distance learning. However, they are an all too often underestimated resource in research and evaluation. Their insights, experience and advice can be invaluable in shaping policies and practices. It is therefore important for you to keep the students 'in the loop', both in carrying out your research and reporting on your findings.

The general public

The general public also needs to be borne in mind. There are times when research can be used to change public opinion and in turn, influence political and policy decisions. Some research findings are so significant that they warrant wider publicity. Some can be used to give open and distance learning institutions or programmes a higher profile. Others can be used to convince taxpayers that their money is being well spent or might be better spent in other ways. Here, your reporting strategies have to be geared to a very different audience; one that lacks specialised knowledge and will be put off by wordiness and jargon.

Activity 3 10 mins



This activity will help you to anticipate the reactions of different stakeholders to your research.

Read through the following comments and note down the types of stakeholder most likely to have made them.

- 1 *'Yes, there is lots we could do to improve things round here. But I don't have time to read long, complicated reports full of lots of theoretical stuff. I want something that'll help me in my work. But don't expect us to change overnight. We are far too busy for that. Last year, some colleagues did some research into the experiences and attitudes of our mature-aged students. This showed me why some of our students are so unresponsive, and so I'm now changing the ways I deal with them.'*
- 2 *'I know exactly the kind of transformation this organisation needs! We have to change the whole working culture if we are going to improve our open and distance courses and offer them internationally. I'm going to try to get additional funding so we can buy new equipment and send staff on training courses. I'll welcome any findings that'll help us do this.'*

- 3 *'We always get left out. You talk about the need to be 'customer-focused' in open and distance learning but somehow, you never ask us what we like or don't like, what's helpful and what isn't and why we are here in the first place. You should be helping us and helping to make things better for us. Just come and ask us. We'll be happy to co-operate.'*
- 4 *'I don't know much about open and distance learning but I do know that everyone comes to me wanting more money for their particular projects! My Minister has his own agenda, and that's all to do with saving money and pleasing the voters! I don't have the time to read lengthy reports or come to your meetings. Tell me clearly and simply what the benefits are, what the options are, and how much they will cost. Then I'll see if we can put these to the Minister'.*
- 5 *'This is an interesting new approach to the problem and it should help us to understand this aspect of open and distance learning more fully. Have these methods been tried out anywhere else? Can we be sure these results are valid and reliable? It is always good to have firm evidence to base policies on, but all we can do is write and recommend – it is up to those above to implement the findings.'*
- 6 *'Look, I just know how this place works. If you try to change things too quickly round here, you will only upset people. But yes, of course we need to improve our courses and student support services. Just tell me what you can find out, and if your findings seem OK, I'll try to have a word with the Director, and sound out some of the staff at our next meeting. But we have a tight budget, so don't suggest anything that is going to cost us more!'*

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Power relations

In Module A1, we mentioned that there can be different power relations involved in undertaking and reporting on research. We described these as:

- bureaucratic
- autocratic
- democratic
- market-oriented
- liberal
- radical.

We suggest you refer back to these points to remind yourself of the kinds of power relationships that could come into play when you report your findings to these different kinds of stakeholders and try to gain their acceptance.

Activity 4 20 mins



- 1 Referring back to your research project again, and taking the above pointers as a guide, note down who the key stakeholders are:
- 2 Now select the two or three most important, and write down the your answers to the questions below. In real life, you would need to answer these for of all of the key stakeholders, but for this activity, you can just concentrate on two or three groups.

	Stakeholder group 1	Stakeholder group 2	Stakeholder group 3
How do I want these stakeholders to use my findings?			
What do these stakeholders need to be told to do this?			
What power and influence do they have?			
What knowledge and experience do they have?			
What resources do they have?			
Are they likely to agree on my definition of the problem? (If not, why not?)			
Are they likely to agree on my findings? (If not, why not?)			
Are they likely to agree on the implications of my findings? (If not, why not?)			
Are they likely to use my findings in their policymaking or practice? (If not, why not?)			

There is no feedback to this activity

What kinds of communication are needed?

How you actually communicate your findings will also have an effect on whether they are rejected, misinterpreted, accepted, or taken up by the stakeholders. It is important for you to think not only about how you can spread your findings more widely, but how they can be made to permeate systems and people's thinking and translate from one context into another. (See Unit 6 below.)

Good communication calls for more than one-off, one-way transmission of information. There needs to be continuous dialogue between you and the stakeholders. True understanding, deep understanding, comes about through the various parties being discursive, adaptive, interactive and reflective. Here the difference between being an insider and being an outsider may be very important.

Your dialogue can take various forms. For example:

- ▶ Where you are sure your findings, research methods and expertise will be acceptable to the stakeholders, you may only need to present your findings and then discuss the implications of these with the stakeholders.
- ▶ Where the problems are more complex and the issues and the outcomes are less certain, you may need to debate the issues *and* the methodology with the stakeholders right at the start of the project, incorporate the stakeholders' feedback into your research as it progresses, and then present your findings as a 'framework of ideas' for discussion rather than a prescription for what should happen.
- ▶ Where you would like to widen the debate on the findings, implications and local decisions and actions needed, you can hold workshops or public meetings.

If you can't manage all this dialogue by yourself, you can try to recruit others who will act as 'information brokers' (agents in disseminating and diffusing your findings and recommendations) or 'gatekeepers' (people who by virtue of their position or expertise regulate access to your findings and recommendations).

All of these forms of diffusion and dissemination can be achieved more easily through face-to-face means. But, if you can't engage directly with all of the stakeholders for reasons of time, distance or sheer numbers involved, you can present your findings in the form of online, print or audiovisual media self-study material. You can design these in ways that will promote an 'inner dialogue' in the minds of the readers, listeners or viewers, by posing questions or presenting arguments and counter-arguments within your reports.

Information broker

A person who helps in disseminating and diffusing your findings and recommendations.

Gatekeeper

A person who, by virtue of their position or expertise, helps regulate access to your findings and recommendation

Activity 5 15 mins



This activity will help you to begin to identify the gatekeepers and information brokers for your project.

With reference to your own context, list

- 1 Those who can be contacted informally and who are likely to agree.
- 2 Those who are not easily reachable, or who may be difficult to convince.
- 3 Those who might be used as gatekeepers or information brokers.
- 4 Note down what strategies you might use to enter into dialogue with these groups.

There is no feedback to this activity

People's reactions to innovation

We have already noted that stakeholders' willingness to pay heed to what you say and engage in dialogue will depend upon their perceptions, dispositions, prior knowledge, experience and peer influence on their thinking.

Rogers (1996) shows that people vary in their reactions to innovations over time. According to his findings, you can expect to be reporting your findings to five distinct groups:

- 1 A small minority of **innovators** – people who are adventurous, accept uncertainty, and like to play with new ideas and tools. You should certainly focus on these. They should be easy and pleasurable to deal with and they can play an important role as gatekeepers.
- 2 A slightly larger group of **early adopters** – people who recognise the advantages of new policies and practices and can be won over by your findings. You should also focus on this group. They can be valuable opinion leaders and role models and can communicate your findings to near-peers through their interpersonal networks.
- 3 A larger group – **the early majority** – may deliberate for a while but will eventually change their thinking and actions as they see the tide of opinion going that way. They are important if you want to gain a critical mass for change. It will pay to keep on talking to press your case with this group. Policies and practices can't be changed overnight. So you will need a longer-term strategy to win this group over.
- 4 Another largish group of staff – **the late majority** – will be sceptical of your research and slow to change their thinking or practices. You will find it pretty difficult to deal with this group. The only thing that will really motivate them is peer pressure. So it may be better to concentrate on gaining the support of the groups above.

- 5 A hardcore minority – **the laggards** – who will adopt a ‘not over my dead body’ attitude to any new idea or suggestion of change. They might adopt your findings if it can be proved that they are fail-proof, but in many instances, they will never be persuaded by your findings. You may simply have to ignore them and bypass them.

A word of warning is needed here. You may not always be able to tell in advance who will fall into which of these categories. Different people will behave in different ways according to the nature of your findings, the meaning they attach to these and where you are in the diffusion or implementation process. But you should be aware of these differences and think about the strategies and tactics you could adopt as you come up against these various individuals and groups.

In communicating with any of these stakeholders, you need to be sure that they have at least a basic understanding of the:

- ▶ **technological concepts** – the audio-visual, computer and internet systems used in open and distance learning and their particular strengths and weaknesses
- ▶ **educational concepts** – educational principles and methods such as self-directed and guided learning, peer-directed and collaborative learning, and constructivism.
- ▶ **changes involved** – the human and other resource ramifications of changing the policies and practices.

Constructivism

Learners use their existing knowledge to evaluate and master new knowledge and construct their own understanding.

You may have to act alone in diffusing your findings. However, if at all possible, and particularly if the issues you are dealing with are complex and multidisciplinary, you should try to seek out partners to help in this work. You will have noticed how many research reports, conference papers and journal articles are actually co-authored. It is so useful for researchers to share their research and findings and form networks with like-minded people. We look at this issue in further detail in the appendix.

So far we have discussed these issues abstractly. Below is a case study that may help to put flesh on the bones and relate the discussion to concrete cases.

Activity 6 20 mins



The following case study will give you a chance to get a sense of the real-life issues involved in disseminating findings and involving stakeholders.

Read through the account and answer the following questions.

- 1 What were the findings used for?
- 2 In what contexts were the findings used?
- 3 Who were the stakeholders?
- 4 What dialogues were undertaken?
- 5 How were the findings presented?

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Case study



An international development agency commissioned a one-year consultancy to advise a teachers' college in a developing country on how to introduce distance education into its operations. The college had been unable to meet the demands for initial and in-service teacher training because of its limited accommodation, resources and staffing. Its senior management felt that distance education could help, but were not too sure about how to go about embarking on this. The international consultant was asked to develop a strategic and operational plan, conduct pilot programmes in course and materials development, and train key staff. Two senior members of staff who were to be subsequently responsible for distance education were appointed as counterparts.

The consultant and her counterparts examined government reports on teacher supply and training and the college's strategic plan. They organised a strategic planning workshop to gauge the views of the Ministry of Education, school managers, teachers, parents, college managers, staff and students, community representatives and other stakeholders. Having analysed all of the data that emerged from this research, the consultant worked with her two counterparts to draft a strategic plan and then circulated this for comment from the stakeholders.

Workshops and questionnaires were organised to obtain input from staff on their attitudes towards distance learning and the courses that they felt could be offered through this mode. The findings revealed that the staff varied considerably in their commitment and understanding of the issues involved. The students were also invited to complete questionnaires on whether they might opt for distance learning and if so, why, and whether they could use computers and the Internet. It was found that many students would prefer the distance learning option, mainly for reasons of time, money and convenience. A surprisingly large number confirmed that they had access to the technology, something that had not been considered in the planning, even by the college IT officer.

The pilot course development projects run by the consultant and her counterparts trained the staff and gave some idea of the staff capabilities and support, training and time needed in this work. The pilot courses were tried out on some students and evaluated. Both the staff and the students involved became more enthusiastic about distance learning.

The consultant drew up a final strategic and operational plan that included quantitative and qualitative research findings, the costs and cost benefits, a plan for implementation, and a set of recommendations. Her findings were enthusiastically accepted by senior management. They were then presented by the principal, the consultant and the two counterparts to the staff through a series of meetings and PowerPoint presentations. Not all of the staff were instant converts to the cause. However, subsequent presentations by the staff who had undertaken the pilot projects had quite a noticeable impact on their colleagues and the mood began to change.

The principal championed the report through the corridors of power. He arranged for a 20-minute meeting with the Minister of Education – who was primarily interested in increasing student numbers – and the Minister of Finance – who was mainly interested in the costs and cost benefits. After some close and informed questioning, the two Ministers accepted the findings and the request for funding. Thereafter the college was assured of moving into distance education in the following financial year. A de-briefing was organised to inform and thank the external stakeholders and gain their ongoing support. The project was also publicised through newspaper, radio and television reports and interviews. The consultant reported on her work at a national conference and submitted a final report to the funding agency for the purposes of accountability and publicity.

Summary

To present your findings in ways that will inform and influence thinking, policies and practices, you need to think about:

- ▶ how, where, when, by whom, and in what ways, your research or evaluation will be used
- ▶ the status, influence, interests, knowledge and skills of the stakeholders and their likely reactions and actions in the light of your findings
- ▶ the contexts in which your findings will be received and used
- ▶ the degree of change implied by your findings
- ▶ how to stimulate dialogue that will lead to understanding and action
- ▶ the forms and channels of communication that are best for the necessary diffusion and dialogue.

In Units 2–5, we will offer you more detailed guidance on how to plan and present your findings to meet the requirements of different stakeholders, publications, events, and so on. In Unit 6 we will go on to discuss the barriers that can stand between researchers and policymakers and how you might overcome these. These Units are presented sequentially, but you may like to read through them all quickly, and then work back through them in whatever order best meets your needs.

Project task



The project task gives you a chance to consolidate what you have learnt in this unit. It will also help you to progress your own research study.

Re-read the notes you made as you worked through this unit and use them to outline a dissemination or diffusion strategy for your findings, describing:

- 1 How your findings will be used.
 - 2 The context(s) in which your findings will be considered and the recommendations implemented.
 - 3 The key stakeholders.
 - 4 Those you intend to enter into dialogue with, and how you will do this.
 - 5 The forms of presentation best suited to these circumstances (you can confirm these as you work through Units 2-5).
 - 6 Who could partner with you in this work.
-

References

Rogers, E. 1996 *Diffusion of innovations* (4th ed.), New York: Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group

Feedback to selected activities



Feedback to Activity 3

The correct answers are:

- 1 Teacher or tutor.
 - 2 Institutional leader.
 - 3 Student.
 - 4 Senior civil servant.
 - 5 Researcher.
 - 6 Senior manager in a university or college.
-

Feedback to Activity 6

These are our suggested answers. You may have come up with different or additional answers:

- 1 The findings were used to:

- provide senior management with the case and recommendations for adopting distance education
 - provide the economic and political evidence to convince the government to fund this initiative
 - define the institutional and staff capacities to develop and deliver distance education courses
 - determine the courses and forms of delivery needed
 - help managers and staff understand what is entailed in distance education
 - achieve gradual shifts in thinking and eventually, a paradigm shift.
- 2 The findings were used in the following contexts:
- within the institution, where there were barriers to surmount, attitudes to change and gaps in knowledge to be bridged
 - within government where there was need to prove the benefits and gain support and funding for distance education
 - within the wider community, where there was also a need to gain support for the initiative.
- 3 The stakeholders were:
- the government
 - the teaching profession
 - parents
 - others in the community with a stake in the schools and teacher education
 - the college managers and staff
 - the students
 - the international funding agency
- 4 Dialogue was needed:
- between the consultant and the various stakeholders – to share ideas on need for and nature of the distance education initiative, how best to implement it, and how best to persuade the government, the staff and the wider community to these views
 - among the staff and among the students – to gain their understanding and support
 - within government and the wider community – to gain a consensus on the need for the initiative and present the case for additional funding

- between the various stakeholders – to ensure that there was ongoing debate to inform the implementation of the programme after the consultancy was concluded
- most of this dialogue was with the innovators and early adopters. Attempts were also made to involve the early majority. Winning over the early majority and the late majority would take longer than this one-year consultancy. Since the laggards were not actually disruptive, they were left to work as they always did until they retired or moved on elsewhere.

5 The findings were presented in the form of:

- a strategic and operational plan to inform management and staff, government and other stakeholders about the needs, feasibility, costs and benefits of the distance education initiative
 - a debriefing for the external stakeholders to thank them, inform them and gain their ongoing support
 - workshops and presentations to the staff by the principal and the consultant
 - presentations (peer championing) by staff involved in the pilot projects to inform and win over staff
 - brief oral presentation to the ministers of education and finance to gain their political and funding support for the initiative
 - newspaper, radio and television reports and interviews to inform the public and gain political support
 - conference presentation to report on the work and how other institutions might follow this example.
-

Writing reports



Unit overview

This unit deals with some aspects of writing up research findings. You will look at:

- ▶ different kinds of reports and presentations
- ▶ how to structure a research report
- ▶ where to start your report
- ▶ how to write your text, looking at choice of voice and writing clearly and logically
- ▶ using headings
- ▶ improving your draft.

Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this Unit, you should be able to:

- ▶ Distinguish between description, analysis and interpretation in your own and others' work.
- ▶ Make an outline plan of your draft report, with a schedule for writing it.
- ▶ Plan your main arguments clearly and logically.
- ▶ Identify and use structuring devices in your writing.

Introduction

For those who have not already written research reports, this may seem a huge and difficult task. However, think of it as a story; you are going to address your audience and:

- ▶ tell them what happened (description)
- ▶ explain how and why these things happened (analysis)
- ▶ help them to understand the implications (interpretation).

That is the structure that we will follow in this unit.

Activity 1 20 mins

Read the extract below, adapted from *Researching Girls' Education in Africa* by Eileen Kane. Then consider, in your own case, your intended audience(s) and make notes on the following:

- 1 What important information about your research situation which will be new to them?
- 2 What kinds of things are you planning to explain to them?
- 3 What insightful and valid interpretations of the situation will you give to them?
- 4 What kinds of recommendations for action would be appropriate in this case?
- 5 What proportions of your report are likely to fall into the three categories of description, analysis and interpretation?

There is no feedback to this activity

Reading**Three aspects of research reporting**

All research reporting involves description and analysis, and most research reports also include some interpretation:

description tells what happened

analysis tells the relationships and patterns you found and

interpretation tells what you or others think the research means and how to use it.

How much space should you give to each of these elements? Each report differs. If little is known about the situation, or what is known turns out to be incorrect, your real contribution is description, so that section will take up a greater proportion of your report. Description is also useful to show how all the pieces fit together, that is, to present a holistic picture of a situation. For example, we have little detailed information about daily life in refugee camps; if you were researching the possibilities of setting up open and distance learning in such a place, you might need to include quite detailed descriptions of the situation to show the potentials and problems of ODL programmes.

If the facts are clear enough, but people do not know how to relate them to one another and to make sense of them, your biggest contribution will be analysis, and that will form the major section of your report. Traditionally, quantitative research provided a lot of material for analysis and convenient statistical tools for doing it, so quantitative researchers gave this part of the report a greater emphasis, but qualitative researchers can do this as well by boiling down data into categories, patterns, typologies, and so on. For example, if you were looking at problems of drop-out in ODL the analysis will show who leaves, under what circumstances, and why.

If people want to know what you or others who are participating in the research think the analysis means, you will spend more time on interpretation. People who take an interpretive approach will emphasise this section, and examine the perspectives of all those involved and the meanings they attach to them. People with a lot of experience can bring insights to bear in reaching beyond the material at hand to speculate, suggest implications, and challenge theory. For example, after undertaking a case study of a particular ODL programme, you might have a chapter showing in what ways it is innovative, in what ways

it goes back to traditional roots, and what lessons can be drawn from the case study for other ODL providers.

Recommendations are a form of interpretation. Practical constraints, ideological and political considerations, diplomacy and common sense also enter into the process of making recommendations. Analysis may show a finding to be statistically significant, but that has nothing to do with it being important. You have to use your judgement to decide whether it means anything, and what, if anything, should be done.

Adapted from Kane, E. 1995 *Seeing for yourself: research handbook for girls' education in Africa*, Washington: Economic Development Institute, World Bank pp 289-90

Different kinds of reports and presentations

Your findings may be presented in many different forms, depending on your audience. Here is a preliminary classification:

Table 1 A classification of report types

Type	Formats	Audiences
Written	Academic reports, e.g. journal article, conference paper, thesis	Academics
	Policy papers	Administrators, directors, government departments
	Evaluation reports	Funders, participants, decision-makers
	Action research accounts	Colleagues and participants
Oral presentations	Workshops, conferences, public meetings	Small audiences
Print	Handbooks, manuals	Practitioners
Mass media	Radio, television, web-sites	Mass audiences

If you take seriously what was said in Unit 1, you may well find that you need to produce more than one type of report for more than one set of stakeholders. Our advice is to draw up a full written report first; it is easier to shorten and adapt afterwards when you are sure of what you want to say. You will almost certainly find your ideas become clearer the more you write. What at the beginning needed three pages to explain, you can later summarise as one paragraph!

These different forms of reporting will be considered in more detail in Unit 5. We shall now consider a generic report as a starting point.

Structuring a research report

A full research report will probably contain most or all of the following. Each section can be made longer or shorter according to the audience and the purpose.

Reading



Common elements of a research report

At the start

- title page
- list of contents, tables and figures
- acknowledgements of help received, including financial help.

Executive summary

This gives a short summary of the key information and main findings in a format which is easy to read. It often uses headings, numbered short paragraphs and bullet points.

Abstract

This is a one-paragraph summary, used in journals instead of an executive summary.

Introduction and overview

This sets out why the research was undertaken, and states clearly the problem, the area of enquiry, or the research questions. The final section gives a brief overview of the rest of the report, stating what can be found in each section or chapter.

Background information

This gives factual information which the reader may need in order to understand the situation being researched. It is particularly important when writing for an audience that is unfamiliar with the place or the subjects of the research.

Literature review

This places the research in the context of similar work carried out by others. It is particularly important for an academic report, but it may be useful for any audience to understand what is already known or thought about the study area.

Research design and methods

This explains briefly how you designed the study, the basic research approach/methodology, the population and sampling (if appropriate), and the methods used. Examples of the instruments (questionnaires, interview schedules, observation charts, etc.) should be placed in appendices. You should include a section on 'limitations' i.e. what you were **not** able to do, or things that went wrong.

Findings

This is the main part of the report and may be divided into several sections or chapters. Here you describe and analyse what you found, as clearly and succinctly as possible. It is often useful to take each problem, area of enquiry or research question in turn, and give the findings related to each. Commentary and interpretation can either be added as you go along, or reserved for a later section. (Units 3 and 4 deal in more detail with this.)

Discussion

How much discussion is needed depends on your audience, and on whether you have already commented on the findings as you went along. This is where you will give your interpretations of the data. An academic audience will expect you to relate what you found to the literature, and to aspects of theory. A more practically-oriented audience will need to know how your findings can be implemented. For any audience, you should point out any gaps or unanswered questions, and highlight new questions and issues that have arisen in the course of your study.

Conclusions and recommendations

The concluding section or chapter will summarise the findings and relate them back to the problem or research questions outlined in your introduction. It should also restate any key issues raised by the research. Finally, where appropriate, it should set out a short, clear list of things you believe, on the basis of your research, should be done.

References

This is a list of all the sources mentioned or cited in your text, set out according to academic conventions.

Appendices

The appendices include material that may be of interest to some readers, but which is too detailed or bulky to go in the report. Examples are: research instruments, extra details of the sample, or of case-studies, extracts from relevant documents.

Activity 2 30 mins



This activity will help you to get started with the preliminary planning of your report.

- 1 Study the headings outlined above.
- 2 Make very short notes about what you might include in your own report in each section.
- 3 Invite a colleague to comment, if possible.

There is no feedback to this activity

What have you got already?

Before starting to write, collect together all the materials you have produced so far. If you have followed earlier modules, you will already have much draft material for your report. For example, you may have:

- ▶ your research proposal, with the rationale and some review of literature
- ▶ summaries of information drawn from documents
- ▶ your research journal, with periodic analytical memos outlining issues that have emerged, patterns you have noted, and preliminary conclusions

- ▶ first level analyses of data you have collected. Quantitative data will be in the form of frequency tables, cross tabs, etc.. Qualitative data may have included condensed versions of interviews, themed analyses, comparative matrices, etc.

Project task



- 1 Collect your material together.
- 2 Reread it and remind yourself of what you have found out.
- 3 Then think of your audience and what they need to know. This is an iterative process. While constructing your report you should be moving between the two.

Where to start?

Though everyone should draw up an outline along the lines shown above, few people would write the report in this order! Here are some suggestions on the order in which you might write:

1 Good places to start

Some components are self-contained and can be written separately, at almost any time. For example:

- ▶ **the background information.** Tailor this to the needs of the specific audience
- ▶ **research design and methods.** Redraft what was in the research proposal, to match what actually happened. Keep it factual, clear and short. Add a reflective component if appropriate
- ▶ **the literature review.** Redraft this from the research proposal, expanding, adding or summarising depending on your audience and purpose
- ▶ **the rationale and aims** (part of the Introduction). Rephrase if necessary from the research proposal.

2 The findings and discussion

The findings and discussion are the heart of the report and can only be written when the data has been analysed. If possible, set aside a period of relatively unbroken time when you can write and complete at least the first draft of these sections.

3 The conclusions

The conclusions should obviously be done at the end, but so should the full introduction and overview. The beginning and the end of the report need to be consistent with each other and with the rest of the report: one sets out

what you intended to do, the other summarises the story and points forward. A busy reader should be able to get the main points of your study by reading the first and last chapters only!

Activity 3 10 mins



This activity will help you begin to get a sense of the schedule that you will need for your report.

Draw up a time plan for writing your own report, showing in which order you would like to draft the components.

There is no feedback to this activity

Writing the text

Choosing a voice

First decide whether you will use the first or third person. Formerly reports were mainly written in the third person e.g. 'The researcher considers that the problem can be solved by ...' Today it is perfectly acceptable to use 'I' or 'we' e.g. 'I concluded that the main reason for the large student drop out was ...'

An alternative is the use of the impersonal passive voice e.g. 'The sample was selected from ...' or 'It was found that a large number of students ...' The passive is sometimes useful for describing factual aspects, or in putting forward recommendations, but I would personally avoid it in the discussion and interpretation sections.

The choice may depend on your audience. An action research report, telling colleagues how you improved your own practice, sounds much better in the first person. In a policy paper for a minister, or an evaluation report, a more impersonal style might be appropriate. Many academic articles use a combination of voices.

As you practise writing you will develop your own style. Writing your research journal will have helped.

Writing clearly

It is not necessary to use long words or academic jargon when reporting research. Short sentences are nearly always better than long ones. However, this does not mean that your thinking is shallow. Complex ideas can be expressed in short sentences and straightforward words.

To write in this way, you need to be very clear in your own mind what you want to say. You need to choose exactly the right words, which make the connections between your ideas clear. Each sentence has to mean something in its own right, and at the same time should contribute to the flow of the paragraph.

Paragraphs should not contain more than one or two main ideas. Good writers often use key sentences at beginning of paragraphs, or sometimes at the end. These sentences indicate the key point that is being made in that paragraph.

Activity 4 20 mins



This activity will give you some practice in making a piece of text easier to read, without any loss of authority or meaning.

- 1 Read the text sample below. It uses far too many words, some of it is repetitive, it uses long words where short ones would do, and it is written in the third person.
- 2 Rewrite the text in the first person, using more but shorter sentences, and just including the main points and necessary information.

(It would be useful to do the exercise with one or two other people and compare your results before looking at the feedback.)

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Reading



The sample text

The original notion for the present enquiry had its roots in the concern expressed by a number of participants at a formal review meeting, who counted among their number not only the present author and her collaborator but also many people from the ranks of the university administration, those responsible for the curriculum delivery, and even representatives of the students from different courses and departments.

Having consulted extensively in the literature, it is the view of the authors that the amount of effort expended on delving into the multifarious causes of unsatisfactory retention rates and on attempting to ascertain through in-depth enquiries factors implicated in the departure of students before the completion of their courses is not commensurate with the illumination achieved by the results. Notwithstanding the fact that these undertakings have been pursued with diligent efforts, utilising all varieties of research methodologies, it transpires that the causes vary with local or national location and specific contexts, so that the exact conditions pertinent to successful completions remain obstinately obscure. It is therefore important to state that it was decided as a result of the meeting that several concurrent research studies should be carried out, funded by the University, into the exact nature and causes of the problems that had been identified above.

Organising your thoughts

The following is a physical way of organising your thoughts.

Write down on separate slips of paper the key points you want to emerge from your report. These could be ideas, concepts, findings, conclusions. You may find you have a few big main ones and smaller subsidiary ones linked to

them. Move these around on the table until you find a suitable order. You may end up with a concept map, a linear structure, or other patterns. If you like, write linking sentences showing how they relate to one another. As your report is a linear structure, you need to decide on the order in which you will deal with them.

This can be done at any stage: before you start, or in the middle of writing to clarify your own thinking, or at the end to check the coherence of what you have written. In the latter cases, you can use copies of headings, key sentences or even paragraphs, and see if they would be better in a different order. If you are using a word processor, it is easy to move them around in your file afterwards.

Logical argument and coherence

This is a key aspect of good report writing and the most difficult to achieve. The writers should take the readers along a well-defined pathway towards a clear goal. For this to happen, two things are important. Firstly, the writers must themselves have a clear idea of where they are going and what they want to say at each stage. Secondly, they must signal directions to the readers. This involves putting themselves in the readers' position – thinking again of the audience.

Brainstorming

Start by brainstorming. Write down the ideas as they come to you, fitting them together roughly. Then revise, adding and subtracting, moving them around until your ideas become clearer. Then work them into a linear structure which will give you an outline for your written argument.

Concept mapping

Next, draw a concept map. This will help you see how your ideas fit together and where the logical connections are. Here, for example, is a concept map for this unit.

Study tip: concept mapping

A concept map is a free-style diagram which shows a number of key points, or topics, and how they are related to one another.

Useful links

<http://www.graphic.org/>

<http://www.coun.uvic.ca/learn/program/hndouts/class1.html>

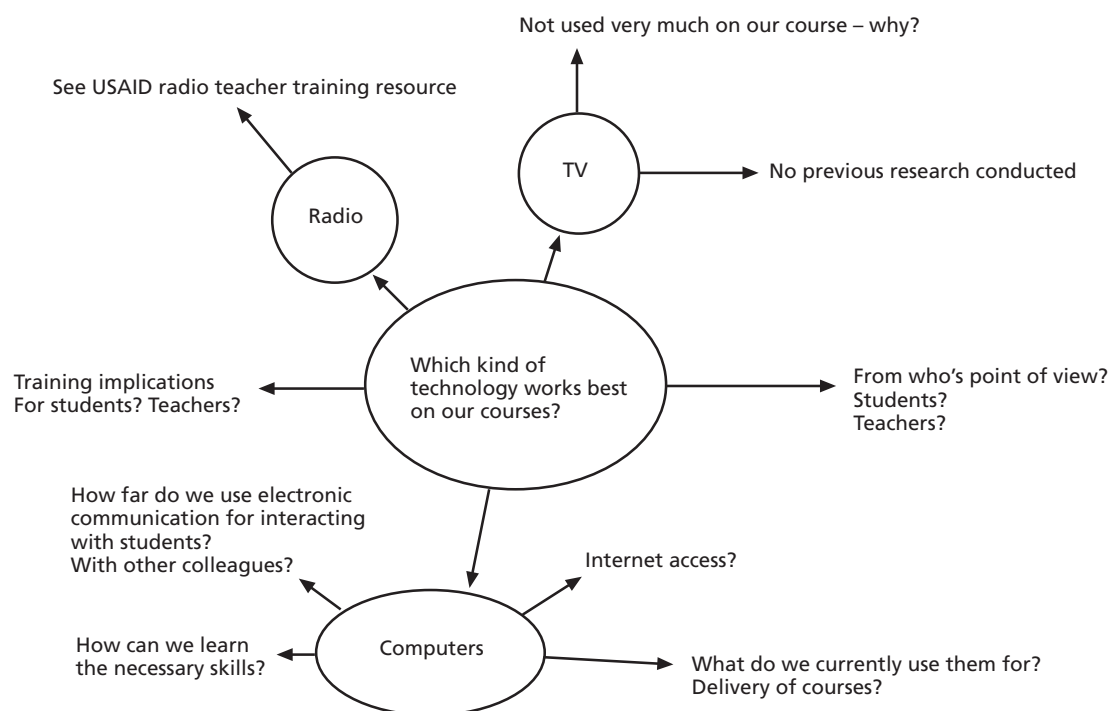


Figure 1 An example of a concept map

Showing your structure to your readers

There are lots of ways in which you can help your readers to follow your argument. Here are a few:

- ▶ At the start of the report, and perhaps at the start of each chapter or section, you can give a short overview: *In this section we shall look at ...*
- ▶ At the end of each section you can summarise what you have said, and if you want to, point forward to the next one. *We can therefore say that ...* Or *To conclude ...*
- ▶ Signal the order of your points by using: *firstly, secondly, thirdly* etc.
- ▶ Point up comparisons and contrasts by phrases like: *On the one hand ...* *On the other...* or *By contrast, we found that ...*
- ▶ Remind the reader of earlier points, or indicate where you are going next: *As noted above ...* or *I shall refer to this below ...*
- ▶ If you do want to take a diversion, signal it with such phrases as: *I am now going to consider the special case of ...* And then: *Returning to my main argument, this shows that ...*

Use headings to divide the material into sections

The use of headings can help structure the argument for both writer and reader. They can act as 'advance organisers' indicating what is coming. Two or

three levels are helpful – more can be confusing –and can be signalled using different fonts and/or by numbering.

Example

Level 1 **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods**

Level 2 **3.2 Use of sampling**

The study used both random and stratified samples

Level 3 *3.2.1. Sample of students*

This was selected as follows ...

This is relatively easy when using description, as above. It is less obvious in the analysis and interpretation sections. However, using such hierarchical headings will force you to consider which of your ideas are the main, or key points, and which are the subsidiary points.

Improving your draft

Very few writers get it right first time. Be prepared to revise even three or four times.

Ask other people to read your draft. People who could be helpful include:

- ▶ **colleagues and/or stakeholders** who know the situation – they could suggest, for example, what you have left out, where the emphasis could be changed, where they note bias
- ▶ **outsiders** –they can comment on how well you have explained the situation to them, what other information is needed, and how it fits into what is known more generally
- ▶ **experienced writers/editors** – they can help with style and accuracy.

(Such help should be acknowledged at the beginning or end of the report.)

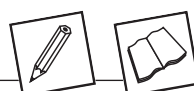
Activity 5 30 mins



Read the selection from *Finding a Voice in Academic Writing* by David Hamilton. This can be found online at: http://www.pedag.umu.se/personal/hamilton_d/voice020228.pdf

There is no feedback to this activity

Activity 6 60 mins



This activity gives you some practice in analysing a research report.

- ▶ Read *Kunje* in the *Resources File*.

- ▶ Study the way this research report is constructed, using the following suggestions and questions. Make notes on what you find.
 - 1 What kind of audience is being addressed here?
 - 2 There are ten sections. Classify them according to the outline structure given above. Which pieces appear to be missing? Why might they be left out? Does this matter?
 - 3 Are answers to the research questions (Section 2) all summarised in the conclusions (Section 9)?
 - 4 Does Section 3 supply you with sufficient background information? Write down one or two questions that you would like to ask the author.
 - 5 What is the purpose of Section 3.4 ‘Comment’?
 - 6 There is no section labelled ‘Discussion’. Identify paragraphs in other sections where the findings are commented on, or interpreted. Do you find this helpful, or would you prefer all the comments at the end? Are there any sections which appear to have no comments?
 - 6 Identify paragraphs which have a summarising function for their section or sub-section. Note the words/phrases that indicate this function. Are there any sections or sub-sections which lack a summary?
 - 7 Look at the headings used. In what ways are they useful? Are there enough? Study the way sections dealing with findings are subdivided. Section 4, in my view, should have had two sub-sections. Suggest where another heading might be useful.
 - 8 Find some examples of ‘linguistic structuring’, where words or phrases are used to signal what is coming next.
 - 9 Are there any other details you would have liked to see in the appendices?

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ▶

Summary

In this unit you learnt that:

- ▶ reports need to contain description, analysis and interpretation in appropriate combinations
- ▶ there are certain standard components of reports, which can be combined and used in different ways, at different lengths
- ▶ different components can be written at different times and in various order
- ▶ the author needs to find an appropriate voice, write clearly, and pay particularly attention to logical arguments and coherence
- ▶ the text can be structured using various techniques to guide the reader.

Feedback to selected activities



Feedback to activity 4

The paragraphs below reflect the style of the author of this unit. Note the length of sentences, the number of clauses, and the vocabulary used. There are still 'academic' words, but they are used because they have specific meanings, and help to keep the text short. There are many other ways of doing it!

Reading



The original idea for the study came from concerns raised at a formal review meeting at which I and my collaborator were present. The meeting was attended by university administrators and academic staff, together with student representatives from different courses and departments.

We have looked at a number of relevant studies which tried to identify the many causes of unsatisfactory retention rates and early drop-out. It seems to us that although much effort has gone into such enquiries, using a variety of methods, they have produced few illuminating results. It appears difficult to pinpoint the exact conditions which lead to success, because they are often context-specific. The university therefore decided to commission several concurrent studies to research the exact nature and causes of early drop-out.

Feedback to activity 6

1 International academics, researchers and policy planners.

2 There is an abstract rather than executive summary.

Section 1 covers the introduction, rationale and some background; does not introduce research questions.

Section 2 summarises the research questions and methods.

Section 3 provides background.

Sections 4–8 give the main findings.

Section 9 summarises the findings in the light of the research questions.

Missing sections are: the executive summary, the literature review (references are mainly to other MUSTER studies), and recommendations.

Acknowledgements are at the end.

3 Research questions 1-5 are answered, but not in exactly the order or wording in which they appear in Section 2. No. 6 is answered in Section 8 and not repeated in Section 9. Note the use of 'first, second, third', to separate out the points.

- 4 In Section 3 the facts and figures are drawn from documents locally published but widely scattered, so serves to bring together information in a way useful to local as well as international readers.
 - 5 The Comment section is a preliminary discussion which highlights certain key issues thought by the author to be important, and draws readers' attention to ways of understanding the data. The last paragraph serves as an overview of the next five sections.
 - 6 The discussion/comment paragraphs can be found in 3.4 – see the last paragraphs and/or the last sentences of Sections 4, 5.3, 6.1 and 8.
 - 7 Summarising paragraphs can be found as follows: Sub-section 5.2 'In summary ...' Section 8 'In a nutshell ...', Section 9 'In conclusion...'. Sections 4, 5, 6, and 7 do not have summaries at the end of the sections.
 - 8 Two heading levels have been used. They are mostly very short. Some authors use longer phrases, indicating more detail. The Findings Sections are subdivided: Sections 4, 5 and 6 all start with a general paragraph, and then go on to more specific findings. In my view, Section 4 needed another heading called 'Curriculum content' before the second paragraph ('The content of the MIITEP programme...')
 - 9 Examples of linguistic structuring can be found as follows: Sections 3 and 9 – use of first(ly), second(ly) etc; 3.4. 'Before discussing the data...'. 4.1. 'In the college classroom there are several points that need highlighting'.
-

Selecting and displaying data for use in reports

UNIT 3

Unit overview

In this unit we will consider the processes of preparing data for use in your reports. We emphasise the need to condense, select, and combine data, and to create displays in order to make it easy for the reader to understand. We show how words and numbers, text and displays, are used to reinforce the message. We discuss some ways of working with both quantitative and qualitative data of various kinds, including interviews, observational data and surveys. We note in places how data and text can be used for description, analysis and interpretation, but this is dealt with in more detail in Unit 4. The full contents of the unit will cover:

- ▶ tables
- ▶ diagrams
- ▶ the use of quotations
- ▶ vignettes
- ▶ observational data
- ▶ reporting survey data
- ▶ summarising documents.

Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this Unit, you should be able to:

- ▶ Summarise and present quantitative data in tabular or diagrammatic form.
- ▶ Select and use quotations appropriately.
- ▶ Find ways of presenting clearly observational data and information from documents.
- ▶ Report survey data succinctly.

Introduction

One big problem in presenting findings is how to make clear to the reader (or the listener) where the results have come from. You have to steer between

two extremes: on the one hand overloading the text with tables and quotations, and on the other giving so little information that the reader cannot see how you came to your conclusions. Your analysis and conclusions must be clearly grounded in the data. You do not need to put in every scrap of evidence, but you do need to show the extent of the ground covered, including the awkward data that don't fit easily into the conclusions!

The key words for working with data are:

- ▶ condense
- ▶ select
- ▶ combine
- ▶ display.

All your data will be going through recurring processes of selection and condensation. You have seen how to begin this process in earlier modules and you should already have some first level analyses to work on.

Iteration

Another important activity is iteration. You need to be continually going between your data on the one hand, and on the other your research questions and the report you want to write.

You will have studied your results so far, and written short analytical memos, summarising what you have found, noting anything unexpected, or contradictory findings. The memos will indicate which of the research questions have been answered, what remains unclear, and what other issues have been raised. You will be thinking in terms of description, analysis and interpretation.

Can I mix words and numbers?

Yes, you may and indeed you should! As you have seen in earlier modules, many researchers mix quantitative and qualitative research methods, and you may have done the same.

If your data is mainly qualitative, you can and should still use numbers. For example, you should indicate the approximate numbers or proportions of those you observed or interviewed who fall into different groups, or who hold certain views. Suppose you have interviewed 20 tutors and 40 students, asking them about their perceptions of a certain course. You might be able to say:

'While 40% (8) of the tutors interviewed mentioned 'language difficulties' as one of the main student problems, only 15% (6) of the students referred to problems with reading and writing.'

If your data is mainly quantitative, it needs to be summarised, explained and interpreted in words. Rather than repeating the exact figures given in a table, you can use phrases more easily grasped and remembered, giving approximate results. You might say:

'From Table X it can be seen that over three-quarters of the students passed all their courses in Year 1. In Year 2, this dropped to two-thirds. Just under a quarter of these had A or B grades.'

If you have used several methods you should bring them together to show how they confirm, or perhaps contradict, each other. This is known as triangulation. For example, data from a survey and from interviews on the same topic, and even with the same people, can throw up very different perspectives. Unit 4 has some examples.

Triangulation

The use of more than one method in collecting data on a particular event.

Working with quantitative data

In some ways quantitative data are simple to handle. Your statistical analysis software will have provided you with the results you need – always providing you have asked the right questions and used the correct statistical analyses! It will create some kinds of tables and diagrams for you.

However, you have now to decide which are the most appropriate for your report. Which results are the most important for your analysis and conclusions, and how can these be presented in ways your audience will understand?

Tables

Tables need to be as simple as possible, consistent with your purpose. If you are preparing a report for a government department or a donor agency you can use sophisticated and complex tables, and include details of the significance levels. On the other hand, if you are writing for a lay audience, make the tables simpler – with no more than 5–6 rows or columns and clear headings – banishing the details of the calculations to an appendix.

You may need to create tables yourself from your frequency data. In this way you can combine results, simplify the categories, round up the figures and generally make the data more user-friendly.

The example below shows how survey results from three cohorts of primary teacher trainees were combined to make a point about the usefulness of teaching practice (TP) as perceived by students at different stages in their careers. The accompanying text is both analytical and interpretative.

Example 1

Table 2 Students' perceptions about the usefulness of teaching practice

<i>TP should be?</i>	<i>Current students</i>	<i>Exiting students</i>	<i>Newly qualified teachers (NQTs)</i>
Longer	48% (43)	47% (30)	41% (29)
Same length	42% (38)	40% (26)	36% (26)
Shorter	10% (9)	13% (8)	23% (16)
Totals	100% (90)	100% (64)	100% (71)

Contrary to our expectations based on the general literature, teaching practice is not always seen as the highlight or most useful part of the course. While at the point of exit students thought it had been very useful, the NQTs gave it a somewhat lower usefulness rating. Comparing data from these two surveys with data from the teaching practice study of current students, we see a consistent trend for students as they progress to think teaching practice is less important. From this we could infer that while students need practice, it is not essential that this take place while in college; supervised training in the NQT year might be just as useful.

Diagrams

Many people can understand quantitative data more easily if it is presented visually. You have already seen examples of ways of displaying data in the quantitative module. The important points to bear in mind when choosing a display method are:

- ▶ use a **bar-graph** rather than a table e.g. for showing people's ages
- ▶ use a **line-graph** rather than a sequence of numbers for showing a trend over time
- ▶ a **pie-chart** is a good way of showing proportions, such as the amounts of money spent on different things, or the numbers of people coming from different provinces. It works best with between 4–7 categories.

Study tip: numbers and percentages

Always show both, as in the above example, so the reader is quite clear about the magnitude of the group. In a very small sample, 50% might only refer to 3 people, and that might be misleading!

All such displays need a brief text, above or below the display, which summarises the information verbally. It should also point out any anomalies in the data and indicate what is missing. This just enhances its descriptive powers. But the text can also provide an analysis, by highlighting certain aspects and explaining some of the connections. This may lead into some interpretation.

Activity 1 20 mins



This activity will help you to think about the relative advantages of tables and other display methods.

Use *Akhter* for this activity in the *Resources File*.

- 1 Study Tables 1–4, and say whether the data in any of these tables might be clearer to the reader if presented in visual form as graphs or charts, giving your reasons. In Section 2 ‘Open and Distance Learning in Bangladesh’, some of the data have been presented in tabular form.
- 2 If you decide that a visual form would be better, decide which form would be best.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Working with qualitative data

If you have been interviewing or observing you will have a lot of verbal data in the form of interview transcripts and observation schedules or notes. Perhaps you will have visual data as well in the form of photographs, or sketch maps.

Use of quotations

Quotations can be used to give an authentic flavour to your descriptions, to illuminate or highlight an analytical point. They can also be used to show typical comments or views, or to show unusual or extreme positions – the ‘outliers’. Sometimes – if you are lucky – someone will have said something that summarises or encapsulates a common perspective of the group.

You can use paragraph-long quotes, indented, or you can include in the text shorter quotes, sentences or even significant phrases. These need to be highlighted in some way, by quotation marks or use of italics. Example 2 shows how interview data (from 20 college lecturers) was condensed down into themes, and used to illustrate the tutors’ views. In the example, italics has been used to give emphasis to a summary statement, and the rest of the quotes are in quotation marks.

Reading



Example 2 – 2.3.5 Personal theories

We sought through the interviews to elicit something of their own personal or lay theories about teaching and learning as these might have developed over the years.

There emerged a rather technical view of training, apparently shared by most interviewees, which goes something like this: we tell the students what to do, let them practice it, and they should be able to do it. Learning to teach often seems to be treated as quite unproblematic: ‘when one has enough content plus teaching strategies, he can disseminate it’. The role model theme reappeared as well. One explained, ‘they need residential training so we can shape them by our instruction and example’. Possibly the old DPTE training contributed to this consensus, as two tutors specifically quoted things they had learnt there. There was little evidence of tutors’ independent reflection, though two said ‘one keeps on learning’. One tutor was more explicit, explaining how she developed ways of making trainees use the methods they would have to use in the primary school, ‘they teach each other, and little by little they will learn’.

Stuart, J., Kunje, D. and Lefoka, J. 2000 'Careers and perspectives of tutors in teachers training colleges: case studies of Lesotho and Malawi', *MUSTER Discussion Paper No 16*, Centre for International Education: University of Sussex. Available from http://www.sussex.ac.uk/usie/muster/pdf/mpd_16_11_02.pdf

If there is an long piece of text which exemplifies something particular and which needs to be read as a whole, such as a classroom sequence, then it can be put in an appendix.

Do not use too many quotes! You do not want a tedious list that goes:

Student A said this:

Student B said this:

Another student said this:

Choose quotes that illustrate your findings and contribute to your argument. Just as with the tables and diagrams, the quotations need to be introduced or followed by text that explains and/or interprets the words.

Activity 2 30 mins



This activity will help you to select quotations with care and use them to good effect.

- 1 Read the extract below. (In the extract, university teaching in two countries is being compared; it is a fictitious example based on a real case-study. Country A is a low-income country with very large classes and traditional teaching methods. Country B is an industrialised country with much better resources, allowing smaller classes, where 'progressive' methods are possible.)
- 2 Make notes on which quotations are most pertinent to the argument.
- 3 Rewrite the passage, using only 3 of the quotes, and adding some comments relevant to the problems illuminated here.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Reading



Pedagogy in the College (Version 1)

As I mentioned earlier when discussing my classroom observations in Country A, the great amount of theoretical knowledge in the curriculum, and the large numbers of students, combine to make lecturing the prevailing method used. This is revealed from data gathered from both students and faculty members.

Student teachers commented:

It is very rare that we talk to the lecturers in the sessions, as there are a very large number of students. And if we want to talk and ask questions, most of the lecturers say that it is a waste

of time to interrupt them to do so. We can ask questions at the end of the lecture, but as soon as the lecture finishes the lecturer vanishes.

We listen all the time to our professors throughout the whole course. In the educational courses we are allowed to provide our points of view. But we very seldom do so.

In some sessions we discuss or answer some questions in groups, but it is not worth it. Because our number is more than a hundred in small sessions and up to four hundred in lectures.

A Faculty member commented on this saying:

Honestly speaking, we cannot use any other method than lecturing, because there are so many students in each session, which does not encourage anyone to use another method.

Another one said:

My lectures are attended by up to 400 students at a time. If I allow them to participate I cannot cover all the material in the curriculum.

In Country B by contrast, my observations show that tutors use a variety of teaching strategies in order to keep students' attention, participation and involvement. One tutor summed this up when she told me:

Using different teaching strategies serves a number of purposes. Firstly, it motivates students. Secondly, we show them in practice what they can do in their classroom. Thirdly, teaching is a creative profession which needs imagination and creativity, and this is what we are trying to show to the students.

Students need to see different teaching strategies in order to be able to pick up the one that suits their teaching environment.

Vignettes

These are like the 'pen portraits' that we used in *Module 1* and the *User Guide*. They are descriptions of typical individuals rather than of one actual person, though they may be given (fictitious) names for easy reference. They will have been created out of all the data given in interviews and perhaps observations as well. Here is an imaginary example that Venkamma might use after studying her prisoners:

Vignettes



Example 3

Saeed is in his late forties. He is illiterate and has been in and out of prison several times for various minor offences. He expresses polite interest in courses, but soon loses interest. His psychological profile suggests he has mild learning disabilities.

Ahmed completed secondary school. He is in prison for theft. He identified several subjects he wanted to study, saying that once he had intended to go to college. The prison officials noted he reads whatever materials he can get his hands on.

Mehta is very angry about being in prison and does not believe the authorities care about him or his needs. He expresses no interest at all in education.

These names can then be used in discussing the possible strategies for introducing distance education into the prison. For example: ‘If more staff were available, then Ahmed could be offered regular teaching ...’

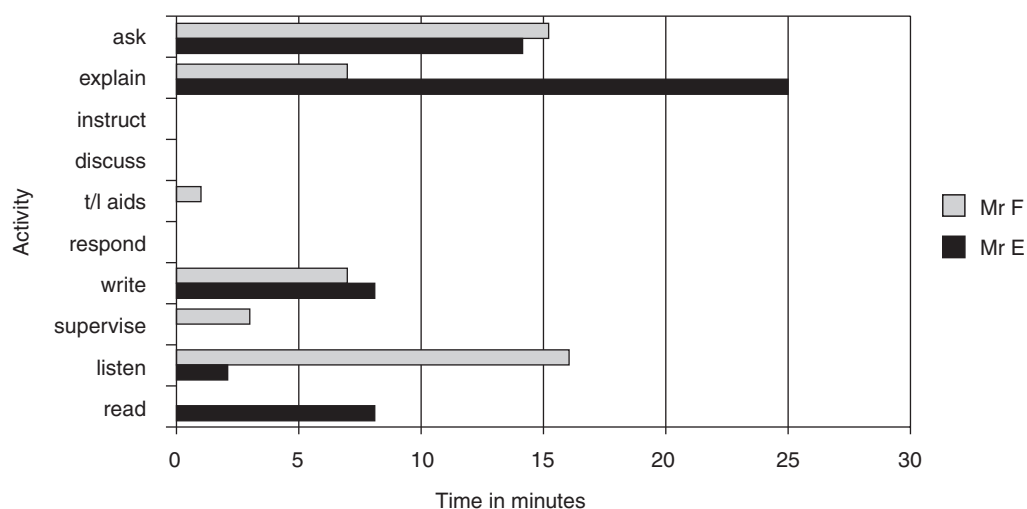
Using observational data

Observational data can just be summarised. Or you can include a short section of classroom interaction that illustrates a point. In the extract below, note that the interaction has also been summarised quantitatively. You can see an example of this in *Kane*, which is in the *Resources File*. You can see there how the observational data are summarised in a table.

Example 4

You can invent your own methods of turning events into graphics. This example is a visual summary of classroom interaction in a teacher training college during a mixed mode course.

It was derived from a timed observation schedule, which recorded the activities of tutors and students at each minute intervals. While it may not be perfectly accurate – and the coding presented some problems – it shows vividly how one tutor spent far more time interacting with his students, and listening to them, than the other one did. This illuminated the analysis that most teaching was highly didactic and most classes were very passive; Mr. F. was an exception.



Teaching cash accounts – tutors’ activity pattern

Source: Stuart, J., Kunje, D. and Lefoka, J. 2000 ‘Careers and perspectives of tutors in teachers training colleges: case studies of Lesotho and Malawi’, MUSTER Discussion Paper No 16, Centre for International Education: University of Sussex. Available at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/usie/muster/pdf/mpd_16_11_02.pdf

Other methods

You can also draw maps or include photographs.

Reporting survey data

Surveys can produce masses of data! How do you select what to put in your report? You certainly do not need to include full details of the answers to every question or you will end up with yet another 'catalogue'. The watchwords are again: **condense, combine, select**. Go to and fro between your research aims and questions, and the data, deciding what is significant, what is not.

At this stage you should have the first level analysis or semi-processed materials from your survey. That is, your numerical data will have been analysed, giving you frequencies, cross-tabs, and the results of statistical tests. Open-ended questions will have been coded and summarised in tabular form, with illuminating quotes noted separately.

Here are some ways to reduce the data.

- ▶ combine answers to several questions in one table
- ▶ combine results from different surveys to show comparative figures, or changes over time – see Example 1 above
- ▶ summarise basic data as bullet point statements – Example 5 (below) shows a great deal of information in an easily read format.

Reading



Example 5 – Overall characteristics of the entering teacher trainee

The overall characteristics of the entering primary teacher trainees can be summarised as follows. Trainees:

- ▶ are mainly female
- ▶ are mainly in the age group 21-30 years
- ▶ are mainly single
- ▶ have taught for 3-4 years prior to entry into the colleges
- ▶ have taught mainly at government-assisted schools
- ▶ possess more than 5 CXC/GCE* O-level passes
- ▶ typically have not passed 3 CXC/GCE O-level science subjects
- ▶ typically do not possess GCE A-level passes
- ▶ come from homes in which the mothers are mainly house persons; the fathers operate at the lower professional, skilled and semi-skilled levels; and few of the parents possess post-secondary qualifications.

The profile of trainees seems to be changing as older people and a greater percentage of married people seem to be entering teaching.

*Caribbean Examinations Council/General Certificate of Education i.e. the school-leaving exam.

George, J. and Quamina-Aiyejina, L. 2002 'An analysis of primary teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago: The MUSTER Project', MUSTER Research Report No 4, Centre for International Education: University of Sussex. Available at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/usie/muster/pdf/cr_4_11_02.pdf

Summarising from documents

In this section we look at how to make the best use of the factual evidence you have gathered for your research project: curriculum documentation, course outlines, assessment procedures, internal working papers, and so on. Much of this information is detailed, and often hard for outsiders to understand. But you may need to condense, summarise and simplify at least some of it when providing the necessary background and contextual information for your report.

Your aim should be to provide the necessary information in the clearest and simplest way possible. Much background information can best be presented in tabular form rather than in continuous text. For example, you can set out in a table the main details of an institution: numbers of staff, of students, courses, etc. You can summarise the main elements of a programme or a course on one side of A4. Or you could tell its history as a time-line.

Example 6

Table 3 below sets out key information about two colleges.

Table 3 Key information about two colleges

	<i>College A</i>	<i>College B</i>
Date of foundation	1963	1975
Ownership/management	Roman Catholic Church	Ministry of Education
No. of students on full-time residential courses	485	2115
No. of students on part-time distance learning courses	–	6550
No. of teaching staff	24	143
No. of programmes currently taught	2	25
Etc		

Example 7

Table 3 shows an example of a timeline for Open University X.

Table 3 An example of a timeline

Date	Event	Approx. student numbers
1926	Found as overseas college of the University of London	250
1965	Became constituent college of the National University of Polevedia	1500
1975	Granted independent status as Polevedia Polytechnic	2500
1990	Opening of Department of External Study (correspondence courses)	4000
1996	All departments required to set up distance learning programmes	7500
2000	Became Polevedia Open University with a brief to make ODL available throughout the country.	12,000+

Further examples

More examples can be found in the *Kunje* article in your the *Resources File*.

Tables 1 and 3 summarise factual information, collected from the documents, about the course structure (Table 1) and the assessment pattern (Table 3).

Activity 3 30 mins



This activity will give you practice in selecting and displaying tabular data.

Draft a tabular summary of some key features of your own institution, or the one where you have carried out your research. It should be designed to give a reader from another country the necessary background information to understand your report.

There is no feedback to this activity

Unit summary

In this unit you have learnt about:

- ▶ the importance of condensing, selecting, combining and displaying data in order to show clearly and succinctly where the findings have come from
- ▶ writing text to accompany figures, and including numbers where appropriate for qualitative data
- ▶ presenting quantitative data in reports
- ▶ selecting and using quotations, and using vignettes
- ▶ ways of presenting observational data
- ▶ combining survey responses into summary form

- ▶ presenting documentary information in matrices and tables.

Project task



- 1 If you have collected quantitative data, review it and note what kinds of tables and diagrams you are likely to use.
- 2 If you have collected qualitative data, review it and note ways in which you can condense it for use in your report.
- 3 Mark which extracts from interviews you might use.

Further reading

Bell, J. 1999 *Doing your research project: a guide for first-time researchers in education and social science* (3rd ed.), Buckingham: Open University Press

Kane, E. 1995 *Seeing for yourself: research handbook for girls' education in African*, Washington: Economic Development Institute, World Bank

Miles, M and Huberman, A. 1994 *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks: Sage

Feedback to selected activities



Feedback to activity 1

There is no definite right or wrong way, but these would be our suggestions:

Table 1 Enrolment

A line graph based on the actual numbers, with the male and female enrolments clearly distinguished by using two different kinds of line, would give a clearer idea of the way the enrolments have risen. You would lose the percentage, but these could be estimated by the gap between the two lines. You would lose the total enrolment figure for the 7 years, unless that was put in a small separate table.

Table 2 Ages

A bar-graph would show the age distribution very clearly. The accompanying text could give the total of the sample.

Table 3 Causes of dropout

This one is fairly clear. An alternative would be a vertical bar-graph. In either case, it would be clearer if the causes were arranged in descending order of

frequency. A pie chart would not be appropriate since there are too many factors, and some are small.

Table 4 Income

Though quite clear as it is, this one could also be done as a pie-chart, for clarity and to give some variety to the text.

Feedback to activity 2

There are two problems here. Firstly, the author has used too many quotations, some of which just repeat the same ideas. Secondly, some of the quotations just give facts, rather than the personal interpretations of the interviewees. She has already discussed her observations, which described the large classes, so it is unnecessary to use quotations to make the same point. In the shorter version below, the three quotes are used to show slightly different things. One gives a student perspective on the problem. Another uses one lecturer's words to sum up a widely held view. The third is used to show a contrasting perspective, which in itself neatly puts three important points across. The author's comments have been included, which takes the passage from description to analysis (triangulating interviews and observation data) and interpretation (last sentence) which makes this section part of a wider argument leading to the conclusions to be drawn at the end of the report.

Reading



Pedagogy in the College (Version 2)

Interviews with lecturers and students in Country A confirmed that lecturing was the main teaching method used. The large numbers present, and the amount of material to be covered, were given as the main reasons. This was summed up by a faculty member who said:

My lectures are attended by up to 400 students at a time. If I allow them to participate I cannot cover all the material in the curriculum.

Some students, however, seemed to think the lecturers did not try very hard to overcome the difficulties:

It is very rare that we talk to the lecturers in the sessions, as there are a very large number of students. And if we want to talk and ask questions, most of the lecturers say that it is a waste of time to interrupt them to do so. We can ask questions at the end of the lecture, but as soon as the lecture finishes the lecturer vanishes.

This is substantiated by the fact that I never observed a lecturer stay behind to answer students' questions.

In Country B, by contrast, my observations show that tutors use a variety of teaching strategies in order to keep students' attention, participation and involvement. One tutor summed this up when she told me:

Using different teaching strategies serves a number of purposes. Firstly, it motivates students. Secondly, we show them in practice what they can do in their classroom. Thirdly, teaching is

a creative profession which needs imagination and creativity, and this is what we are trying to show to the students.

Here tutors are clearly trying to model good practice rather than just transmit information. It must be said, however, that the much smaller classes in Country B make this an easier option. In Country A, a radical reform of the programme would be necessary in order to bring class sizes down to the point where interactive pedagogy becomes possible.

Embedding the data in the report



Unit overview

This unit is about using your data most effectively within your report for description, for analysis and for interpretation. To help you think through these phases, we shall discuss them separately, but as the examples will show, in practice data displays can be used for two or even all three purposes. Qualitative data is, of course, often reported in continuous text. In this unit, we focus more on ways in which data of all kinds can be transformed into displays. These can replace some but not all of the text. We offer a number of examples and activities for practice.

Providing descriptions

Some of the data in your report or presentation will be there to tell the story, to describe how things are, to say what happened.

Background information

Much background information, included that taken from documents, can be presented in tabular or visual form. If the tables are very long or unwieldy, they can be placed in an appendix.

Research design and methods

Descriptions of how you carried out your research can be wearisome, but the reader should know the details. Look at Example 1, which summarises a typical research process. There are other examples in the *Fentiman* report in the *Resources File*.

Example 1

Table 4 Typical research process stages

Phase	Activity	Evidence gathered
1	Interviewed Programme Leaders Examined course materials Examined student records	3 interviews: Director, Deputy, Administrator Sample of five course outlines, assessment procedures, reading lists Enrolment, progression and graduation data
2	Interviewed students at three sites Interviewed tutors at three sites Observed contact sessions at two sites	18 semi-structured interviews (6 × 3) with students Five open interviews with tutors Notes from two 1-hour contact sessions
3	Analysed data Returned to Sites 1 and 2 to check findings	Focus group interviews with selected students to gather their views on the preliminary findings.

Case studies

Details of a sample of case studies can also be presented in this way, with an accompanying brief text. Example 2 gives an extract from an evaluation where much of the data was collected from a carefully selected sample of six students. This table provides at a glance all the reader needs to know to make sense of the findings reported in the main body of the paper:

Example 2

Table 5 Summary of selection criteria

The selection process took into account gender, the level taught (primary or secondary), whether or not students had study partners, and the cost implications for visiting schools. The table below provides a summary:

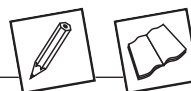
Student	Level	Study partner	Gender	Location	End of year marks	End of year marks
					SED 1	ENG 2
A	Secondary	No	M	Jonesville	78%	74%
B	Primary	No	M	Planeton	66	60
C	Secondary	Yes	M	Williamsburg	75	87
D	Secondary	Yes	F	Williamsburg	68	71
E	Primary	Yes	F	Austinham	55	54
F	Primary	Yes	F	Austinham	63	58

There were three female and three male teachers; two females and one male taught at primary level while two males and one female were secondary teachers. Two of the men did not have study partners (these could be teachers in the same school or a nearby school.) Due to budget and time constraints, all the schools were relatively accessible from the University. The

courses selected were considered to give an overall sense of the students' academic achievement. It can be seen that Student E is borderline, and Student F has some difficulties, while Students A and C are achieving very well.

SAIDE. 1998 *Strategies for the design and delivery of quality teacher education at a distance: a case study of the Further Diploma in Education*, report for English Language Teaching Unit, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg: South African Institute for Distance Education

Activity 1 30 mins



This activity will give you practice at summarising case study material in a tabular format. Use Ahkter *Women and Open Learning* for this activity in the *Resources File*.

- 1 Create a table (similar to the example above) for the seven case study women described in the article. Use headings such as: age, marital status, schooling level, family social position.
- 2 Write a short paragraph to accompany the table.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Making an analysis

By the time you have your data ready for a report, much of it should be in a form that helps you to provide an analysis of what you found. You will be able to show patterns, clarify relationships, make comparisons, and perhaps link cause and effects.

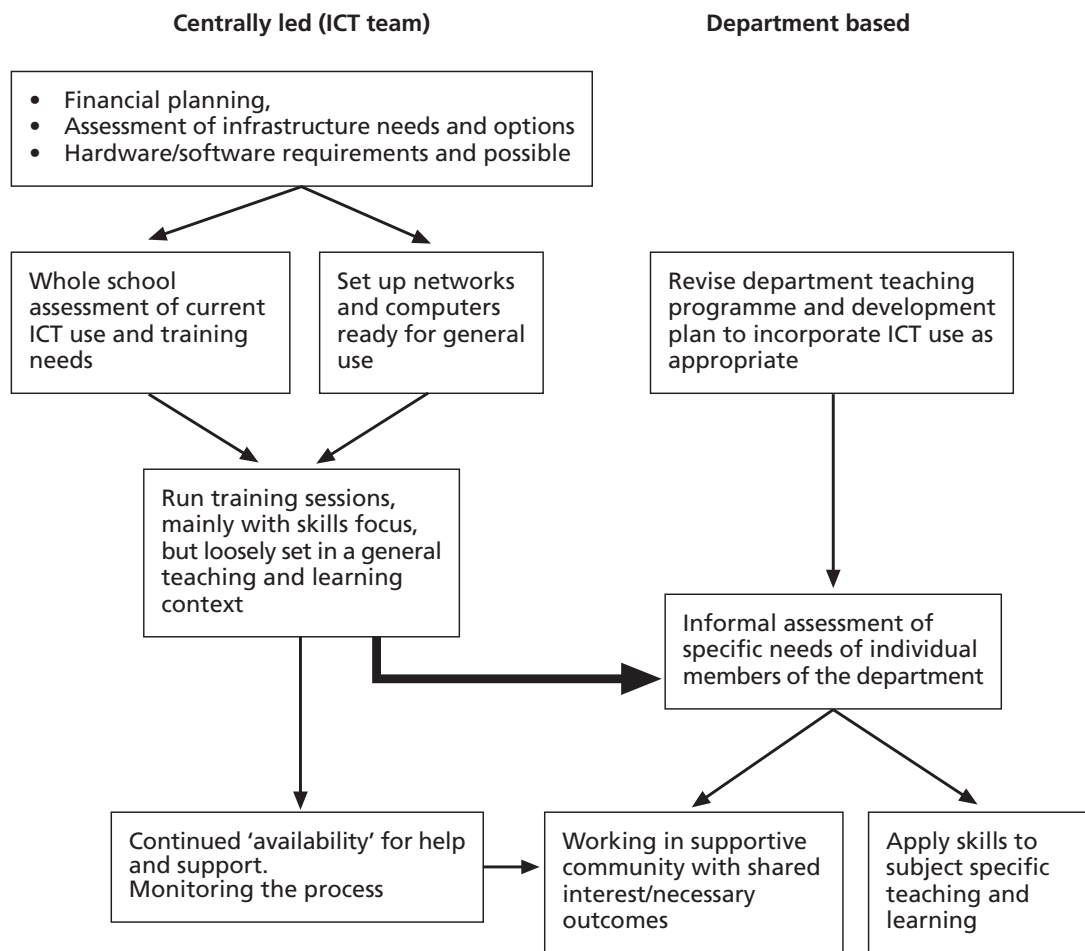
Written analysis

A good example of written analysis can be found in the *Fentiman* report in the *Resources File* (pp. 21-26). The section headed 'Perspectives' give an analysis of the findings. The views of each group interviewed – Fentiman learners, the teachers, the Africa Educational Trust staff – are taken in turn, and summarised. For the first two groups, sub-headings are used to indicate important issues that arose.

Visual analysis

Sometimes it is possible to show results in the form of a diagram. Here is an example.

Example 3



Variations in different subject areas. Some quite structured 'requirement' with 'support', others had less clear lead and worked collaboratively

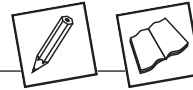
The model used for the ICT implementation process

Source: Tearle, P. 2003 'ICT implementation: what makes the difference?' British Journal of Educational Technology 34, 3

This diagram uses boxes and arrows to show how information and communications technology (ICT) was successfully introduced into a school in the UK, so that both staff and students came to use computers for teaching and learning. It shows what was done by the central team, and what was done by each subject department. Such a model can then be used to show others how to do it.

Analytical discussion

If you are using qualitative data, you can include the data in the text in such a way that you offer an analysis as you go along. That is, you write about the data in a way that shows the themes which have emerged, and how the data helps explain the situation or answer the research question.

Activity 2 1 hour

This activity gives you practice in turning case study data into a discussion. Continue using *Akhter's* report from your *Resources File*.

- ▶ The author has presented her data in the form of seven descriptive case-studies, followed by a short concluding section with the findings in bullet points. An alternative way would be to omit the case-studies, and to replace them with an analytical discussion which summarises each of the main themes in turn, illustrated by short quotes from the case-studies. (The case-studies could be included in an Appendix for the interested reader.)
- ▶ Try to turn these case-studies into such a discussion. When analysing qualitative data of this kind, it is often useful to draw up another table or matrix, similar to the one you did for Activity 2, but this time summarising the case-study data under suitable headings, such as academic achievement/problems, personal/social problems, support received, comments on course, and general comments.

This matrix will not go into the report – it is just used as an *aide-mémoire* to prepare the analysis section.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ▶

Offering an interpretation

At this point you are telling your audience what you think the research means. You are answering the questions: 'So what?' Or 'What now?' If you use displays here, they are likely to be at a higher level of generality than the actual data you collected. You may be showing the conclusions you have drawn, or setting out issues that have arisen from the research. You may be offering a new way of looking at the problems.

There are no standard patterns here: it is your understanding and creativity that will produce them! Examples 4 and 5 offer some ideas.

Example 4

This example shows the use of a matrix to set out arguments for discussion.

Table 5 The case for and against distance learning in developing countries

	Proponents for	Critics against
Can distance learning be quality education in developing countries?	<p>Distance learning offers learners greater flexibility with regard to the time, place and pace of learning.</p> <p>Distance learning is less disruptive to work and family obligations.</p> <p>Conventional education in developing countries is plagued with many problems and cannot fulfil the needs of educational systems.</p> <p>Distance learning can reach groups, such as rural learners and women, not adequately served by conventional education.</p> <p>Lower costs associated with distance learning make possible a wider and more democratic reach for educational systems.</p>	<p>Isolation from teachers, libraries and other learners makes distance learning inherently difficult.</p> <p>Distractions of work and family make learning difficult.</p> <p>Distance learning in developing countries is hindered by logistical problems, financial constraints, and human resource gaps.</p>
Can distance learning improve educational access and equity in developing countries?	<p>Distance learning can reach groups, such as rural learners and women, not adequately served by conventional education.</p> <p>Lower costs associated with distance learning make possible a wider and more democratic reach for educational systems.</p>	<p>Distance learning favours the same relatively privileged groups as conventional education.</p> <p>Distance learning does not necessarily cost less; when distance learning does extend access, it does so by providing education which is poorly resourced and widely regarded as second-rate.</p>

Source: McLean, S., Gasperini, L. and Rudgard, S. 2002 'Distance learning for food security and rural development: a perspective from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation' *International Review on Research in Open and Distance Learning (IRRODL)* 3, 1. Available at <http://www.irrodl.org/content/v3.1/mclean.html>

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Example 5

This next example is a diagrammatic one. It was used at the end of a long and comprehensive report to donors about primary teacher training in five countries. It shows in diagrammatic form what policy-makers need to consider when developing a teacher education strategy and what some of the options are.

Reading**Thinking outside the boxes of traditional teacher education**

In restructuring teacher development, attention needs to be paid to what happens before, during and after initial teacher training. In most countries too much attention is focussed on the training itself and too little on what precedes and follows the training course. A coherent policy would ensure that the activities and experiences were complementary between the three phases. The following suggests some of the alternatives which can be 'picked and mixed' to suit local conditions and resources.

Pre-training

- 1 Unsupported teaching.
- 2 Targeted subject up-grading.
- 3 Short orientation course prior to entering school.
- 4 On-the-job apprenticeship training; combination of courses, distance learning and mentor support.

Initial training

- 1 1, 2 or 3 year residential college-based course with short teaching practice.
- 2 Combination of college and college-supervised internship year: e.g. in-in-out, or in-out-in.
- 3 Mixed-mode course with intensive residential study periods and school experience.
- 4 School-based course with distance learning, vacation courses and local support.
- 5 Combination of 3 and 4.

Post-training

- 1 Short school- or district-based induction course.
- 2 Probationary or locally-supervised Internship year.
- 3 Regular recurrent INSET, district- or region-based.
- 4 INSET leading to further qualifications, or completion of those begun during ITC.

Lewin, K. and Stuart, J. 2003 *Researching teacher education: new perspectives on practice, performance and policy*, London: DfID pp. 202-3

Activity 3 1 hour

This activity provides further practice in summarising data by the use of tables. Use *Kunje* from the *Resources File* for this activity.

- 1 Read Section 9 Conclusions.
- 2 Design a matrix to show clearly some 'Lessons learnt from MIITEP for designing a mixed-mode teacher training programme'.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Combining different kinds of data and using them for multiple purposes

This section is based on a series of activities for you to work on.

Activity 4 20 mins



Read the extract ‘The Characteristics of Teachers entering Training’ below and then answer the following questions on it.

- 1 What is missing from the table as it stands?
- 2 Identify the paragraphs according to whether they are mainly descriptive, analytical or interpretative.
- 3 In what kind of report would this be useful?

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Reading



The characteristics of teachers entering training

This is an example of reporting findings from an open-ended question within a larger questionnaire given to primary teachers in training in Trinidad and Tobago.

Table 6 Question 1 What was the best thing about your primary schooling?

Codes	Frequency
Play/carefree life/friendships	78
Helpful and caring teachers/ mutual liking between pupils and teachers/good staff-pupil relationships	62
Extra-curricular activities	20
Good teaching	15
Treats/bazaars/concerts/outings	13
The laying of a good foundation	09
Art and craft and physical education	07
Receiving an ‘all round’ education	07
Passing the Common Entrance examination	07
No response	20

- 1 Some typical responses to this item were:
 - Having caring teachers and buying lots of snacks.
 - My friends and my standards I and II teachers, playtime.
 - Taking part in co-curricular activities (singing, socialising with others).

Playing with and making new friends.

Going to school and playing games.

- 2 The majority of these responses have to do with the affective, with emotions, with positive and caring relationships, and with being engaged in a variety of activities outside of the formal learning setting.
- 3 Purely academic reasons such as good teaching or passing the Common Entrance examination did not feature highly. What trainees seemed to cherish most was the quality of interaction they enjoyed, among people they liked, who liked them, and who shared common interests. The fact that the qualities of good teaching and the laying of a good foundation for further academic work occur with low frequency suggests that academic matters are not viewed as being as important as good relationships, fun, and activities which allow pupils to express themselves in a variety of ways.
- 4 Trainees' best memories of primary school days seem to be related to instances where the **self** (Ball & Goodson, 1985) is allowed free expression through games, interaction with friends, participating in extra-curricular activities, and in the classroom with caring teachers.

Activity 5 20 mins



Read the extract 'Evaluating a Distance Learning Course' below and then answer the following:

- 1 Comment on the combination of survey and interview data.
- 2 What do you think of the use of the quotations here?
- 3 What elements of description, analysis and interpretation can you identify here?
- 4 Can you suggest what sort of audience it might be for?

Evaluating a distance learning course

The following extract comes from an evaluation of a distance learning course. The report is organised according to the aspects of the course that were being evaluated and this comes from the chapter on 'Assessment design, support and quality assurance'.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Reading



Student opinion and experience of assessment design

The questions asked in the survey of student opinion were on all three aspects: assessment design, teaching on assessment and quality assurance. It is useful, however, to record the responses together, because they demonstrate an overwhelmingly positive opinion of assessment as a teaching and learning strategy in the English courses.

Table 7 Students' opinions of assessment

	Question	Very much	Quite	Not at all
1	Were the assignments helpful in consolidating the teaching of the course?	40	3	0
2.	Did the assignments say clearly what was expected?	34	8	0
3.	Were the assignments returned sufficiently quickly?	32	10	1
4	Were you able to learn from your tutor's comments?	39	3	1
5	Were your tutor's comments supportive and constructive?	41	1	1

A comment from one of the students during the course of an interview adds some texture to the positive opinion represented in the survey:

The standard at the university is high compared to the ODL college. At the college you use a book, you reproduce what you learnt... no creativity. At the university you produce your own assignment and create something new.

Data from interviews (extracts)

The assignments obviously compel students to work in the classroom. However, the way this is done is not as with many other courses, where students are simply required to repeat in their own class the model lesson provided by the lecturer. There is a process of adaptation. As one student reflects:

... the text can be adapted to suit different levels whether primary or secondary... the text provides room for interpretation and thus encourages the teacher to take into account the realities in the school and the level of the pupils.... Some of the activities depend on the amount of vocabulary the pupils have and the teacher can make judgements and adapt the activities.

Another teacher confirmed this emphasis on adaptation:

(The tutor) gave us different examples. Many transcriptions, many examples of other teachers. You read that, then you ask yourself 'How am I going to present this lesson (to my class)?'

The second aspect of process relates to reading and interaction with study partners around assignment completion. Two students mentioned reading the course materials as essential to the assignment:

The reading usually builds up towards an assignment. In this way one has to read and one cannot write the assignment without the reading.

Although collaborative work on assignments is not regarded as essential by all students, one student reported quite an interesting process:

First of all, before I involve my study partner, I read (the information on the assignment) at home, and I decide which one I must write that is on their level [for her class].

From there I go to my study partner and discuss it. We share ideas. As we share, I write some of it down, so that when I go back I combine my own ideas with my study partner's. Sometimes if we get stuck, we involve other teachers who are doing the course. So today I invited one of the teachers to come and evaluate my work.

Concluding comments

It is clear both from the features of assessment design recorded above and from the processes students record moving through to complete assignments for the Theory and Practice course, that the assessment is creative, motivating and classroom-based, and that it assists students to design lessons and research, implement these and reflect on their own practice in collaboration with others and on their own. It is also clear that the students appreciate the opportunities created by the assessment. It must also be noted that it is not only the high achievers or the secondary school teachers that express this appreciation. All the students – those that are struggling with the theoretical parts of the programme, and those that are relishing the intellectual stimulation – find that the emphasis in assessment on classrooms and learners is invaluable to them.

Reproduced with kind permission of Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch of the South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE). SAIDE. 1998 *Strategies for the design and delivery of quality teacher education at a distance: a case study of the Further Diploma in Education*, report for English Language Teaching Unit, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg: South African Institute for Distance Education, p 64

Unit summary

This unit looked a variety of ways of embedding data in reports. It emphasised that:

- ▶ data can be used to illustrate description, analysis or interpretation.
- ▶ many kinds of information can be turned into visual diagrams, tables and matrices for clarity and effect
- ▶ creative thinking and imagination are needed to make best use of these methods.

Project task



It is now time to apply the ideas in this unit to your own data.

- 1 Review your own data.
- 2 Decide what you can use for description, and what for analysis.
- 3 See if any of the examples in this unit could be adapted for your purposes and if so, sketch out some ideas.
- 4 If you have qualitative data, try drawing up some matrices, either for use in the report, or as an interim stage in writing the analysis.
- 5 Draft a way of putting your conclusions into a short, visually striking, format.

References

Ball, S. and Goodson, I. 1985 *Teachers' lives and careers*, London: Routledge Falmer

Feedback to selected activities



Feedback to activity 1

Table 8 To show basic biodata for sample of Bangladeshi women studying with BOU

Name	Age	Marital status/history	Parental circumstances	Schooling level	Reasons for dropout from formal school
Noorjahan	28	Married, 2 ch	Working class	Class 8	Poverty, mother did not allow her
Mina	25	Married, 1 ch, 2 step-ch.	Father dead	?	Poverty, girl seen as burden
Fatema	–	Single	Parents believed in education	Failed SSC	Had to help at home instead of studying
Rokeya	23	Divorced after unhappy marriage	Lower middle-class	Class 8	Household chores, caring for mother
Rupa	–	Single, refused to marry	Farmer, stepmother	Class 8	Father ill, needed at home
Halima	45	Married	Landless labourers	Class 8	Marriage
Rashida	35	Separated; one ch.	Lower middle class	Village school	Poverty, sons got schooled

Paragraph to accompany the table

As the above table shows, the women's ages ranged from early 20s to over 40. All but two had been married, but this had not always worked out well, and two were now divorced or separated. They came from lower middle class, working class, or peasant families. All had had some schooling, but only one had gone beyond Class 8; she was also the only one to report that her parents had favoured education for girls. Several of the others mentioned that brothers' education was given more importance, especially when money was scarce. The reasons for dropout confirm this cultural pattern, as several said they had to stay home to do household work or care for sick parents.

Feedback for Activity 2

Table 9 Working analysis table – this is not for the report, but used as a stage when analysing the data and preparing the report

Name	Academic achievement/problems	Personal/social problems	Support received	Comments on course	General comments
Noorjahan	English and maths hard; passed SSC at 2nd try	Husband's attitudes; must 'serve the family'	Tutors and tutorial centre	Tutorial centre effective	Has gained respect, enhanced social value
Mina	Passed SSC	Husband reluctant; insisted she continue household work; lack of time to study	Tutorial centre and peers; 'social gathering'		Wants to continue, to help her children's education; she has 'rebuilt her life'
Fatema	Passed SSC; tutorial centre too far from home	Not sure if she could cope at first	Family, tutorial centre, peers	Materials/books are of appropriate standard; fees should be reduced	Wants to continue; encourage others to ignore barriers and study
Rokeya	Took 10 subjects, SSC; long distance to collect testimonials	Hesitant at first. Working in a factory	Tutors, peers		Wants to continue, to get a better job. 'brings us out of a mute life'
Rupa	Did poorly, then improved	Working part-time in tea garden	Encouragement from peers	Flexibility suits her; more AV programmes needed	Put education before marriage. With stamina and willpower anyone can succeed
Halima	English and maths hard	Mother-in-law objected	Tutors	More counselling sessions needed more optional subjects related to women; more flexibility.	Believes it will enhance her social value and family prestige, and empower women
Rashida	English and maths hard; long distance to collect testimonials	Doubtful at first; daughter already in school. Worked part-time while studying		More women's subjects needed; course materials late	Enables women to transcend purdah; helps mature students overcome shyness

Below is a possible version of this data written up in the form of an analytical discussion. It is quite short – one might put in more quotes and further comment. Note that the discussion does not follow exactly the categories in the table; these were mainly used as an *aide-mémoire* while writing. The topic of each paragraph is signalled in its first sentence.

Reading



Discussion – students' progress and the problems they encountered.

Several patterns seem to emerge from the stories. These women, albeit from modest or even poor homes, all had had a taste of schooling, mostly up to Class 8. They were then forced to abandon it, for reasons of poverty or cultural expectations about women's roles. They saw the BOU Distance Education courses as a chance to complete what they had started. Many had in the interim become aware of what education could do for them, and how the lack of education had constrained their options.

The women interviewed were, without exception, very enthusiastic about their studies and four of the sample had already passed SSC. However, few had found it easy. The problems they mentioned fell into three main categories: academic content, practical constraints of time and distance, personal problems of re-adjusting to study, and problems inherent in their social situation as Muslim women.

The academic content did not seem to present many problems, except that four out of the seven mentioned English and maths as being difficult. Some were prepared to work very hard: Rokeya sat for five exams in her first semester, and then five more, saying that if she failed in some she would simply retake them.

Finding time for studying was not easy. While some of the women, like Mina, were housewives, others were in paid employment. Rokeya worked in a garment factory, and Rupa worked part-time in a tea-garden, while Halima ran her own small poultry farm. Sometimes finding time was compounded by their geographical location; two mentioned the long distance to the centre at Gazipur to collect their testimonials, and Fatema lived a long way from the tutorial centre.

More salient were the problems of starting to study again. Several mentioned feeling 'hesitant' or 'doubtful if they could cope.' Rashida already had a daughter at school, and worried about putting herself on the same level, until she found out that other students were even older than her. Several explicitly mentioned the help and encouragement they got from their class mates, and it seems that peer support was often an important factor in their success. Many of them may have felt quite isolated at home, and Mina compared their meetings at the tutorial centre to a 'social gathering'. When Rupa was disappointed at her low marks, her course mates 'encouraged her and helped her keep her dream alive'.

All of the stories, in one way or another, mention socio/cultural barriers, often expressed in hostile attitudes from family members. Noorjahan's husband thought that her role as a 'Muslim woman' was to 'serve the family' rather than to become educated. Mina only received her husband's permission to study on condition that she did not neglect her household chores, which meant she could only study late at night when the work was done. Halima's mother-in-law had declared that the duty of a *bouma* (wife of a son) was to bear children and take care of the family, and so Halima was only able to start studying, aged 45, after her mother-in-law's death. Among the seven, only Fatema described her parents as a source of support and encouragement to return to study.

Some of the interviewees, wanting to encourage others, said 'any one can do it.' However, it is clear from the stories that all these women had considerable reserves of courage, and determination; they were prepared to take risks, to work hard, and to defy convention.

Some had been through unhappy marriages, which may have stiffened their resolve to escape. Two (Fatema and Rupa) had remained single. Rupa explained that, aged 18, she refused the marriage her parents were proposing because for her 'education was a higher priority' and she wanted to earn her own living before she got married. As this was against Muslim conventions, it required a lot of 'will-power and stamina'.

Views of the course

The views were mainly very positive. Most spoke highly of the course tutors, and often mentioned the tutorial centre, which, as Fatema said, helped to broaden their outlook. She added that the materials were of an appropriate standard and the books 'are written in such a manner that the student can help herself'. The flexibility of the course seemed a strong point. In particular, the fact they could study at a distance, without having to attend formal institutions, was a great advantage for women in purdah. Rashida mentioned how this enabled her to overcome the 'fear and shyness of being a mature student'. All these comments suggest that the format of the course is well suited to the needs of this group of women.

There were only a few criticisms of the course, and some suggestions for improvement. Sometimes materials arrived late. Rupa wanted more AV programmes shown at the centre, and Halima thought more counselling sessions were necessary. Both Halima and Rashida thought that there should be more optional subjects relating to women's needs and interests. This view may be related to their age, as they were among the oldest students. Fatema thought that more women would enrol if fees were reduced. These thoughtful suggestions are further evidence of how they value the course and want it to widen its scope.

In summary, they praised the course for offering them a second chance, and through the phrases they used in the interviews we can see what it means to them. Noorjahan feels she was now 'more respected by her husband and mother-in-law' and that she has enhanced her 'social value'. Halima came on the course to build up her social value and family prestige, and believes it can have a 'strong impact on women's empowerment'. Rokeya thinks that 'education can bring women out of a mute life'. In spite of many continuing frustrations, Mina has 'rebuilt her life' through her studies. These comments are testimony to the success of the course, and suggest strongly that it should be continued and made more widely available.

Feedback for Activity 3

There are many ways of doing this; here is one possibility.

Lessons learnt from MIITEP

If mixed-mode teacher training is to be successful the following principles should be followed:

Table 10 Principles for successful mixed-mode teaching

Aspect	Principle
General	Do not try to be too ambitious; focus on changing key aspects rather than the whole system.
Preparation and training	Allow enough time for training all key players, especially those undertaking new roles and needing new skills (head teachers, mentors, and local education advisors). Ensure colleges understand their new role and have appropriate resources
Learners	Assess the starting level of the trainees, taking into account such aspects as their academic background and professional experience.
Curriculum	Redesign the content to fit the mixed-mode programme, keeping a balance between academic upgrading and pedagogic training.
Supporting materials	Produce handbooks, if possible locally written and designed, and make available at the start of the course, and throughout.
Administration	Keep this as simple as possible, and design it to fit the available institutional capacity. Ensure funds are available at the appropriate times.
Collaboration	Find ways of linking the college and the school-based aspects of the programme through effective channels of communication and as much face-to-face contact as possible.

Feedback to activity 4

- 1 The table should include the total number of respondents, and whether the coding allowed for a person's response to be placed under more than one code.
- 2 I think that paragraphs 1 and 2 are descriptive. Paragraph 3 gives some analysis by pointing out patterns. Paragraph 4 offers an interpretation using a theoretical framework from Ball about how the self develops. This last point becomes a major element in the conclusions, and is being flagged here deliberately.
- 3 This was written as a discussion paper for colleagues both in the research community and at the Teachers' College. This amount of detail is rather too much for a report to a busy government department or to policy makers.

Feedback to activity 5

- 1 This demonstrates how data from survey and interviews can be condensed and combined to make an analytical point – to show how assessment works as part of a teaching and learning strategy.
- 2 The quotes are not just listed, but selected and used to illustrate the argument. The points made above could have been just summarised, but by using quotes the reader is given a much clearer idea about how the

teachers are actually applying their learning in the classroom. So the concluding comments are seen to be grounded in the data.

- 3 Most of this passage combines description and analysis. The purpose here is evaluation, so the interpretation that is offered in the 'Concluding comments' is oriented towards a (favourable) judgement on the course.
 - 4 It was intended for top-level government policy makers at a time of transformation in education in South Africa
-

Reporting and dissemination strategies



Unit overview

This unit looks more widely at ways of preparing your findings for different audiences and stakeholders, both in writing and orally. It assumes that to be effective you will need to produce more than one version of your report. We start with a reminder about ethical issues, and then look at some of the different kinds of writing and reporting, with examples. Finally, we suggest ways of developing comprehensive dissemination strategies to ensure that your messages are heard. The unit will cover:

- ▶ ethical issues in reporting
- ▶ the academic style of reporting
- ▶ preparing policy papers
- ▶ reporting on an evaluation
- ▶ giving workshops and presentations
- ▶ sharing the results of action research
- ▶ dealing with the press and the media
- ▶ publishing on the Web
- ▶ comprehensive dissemination strategies.

Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this module, you should be able to:

- ▶ Devise ways of protecting the anonymity of your sources.
- ▶ Identify different formats for reporting research, both written and oral.
- ▶ Outline the advantages and disadvantages of each format and the kinds of impact they are likely to make on different audiences.
- ▶ Plan and implement comprehensive dissemination strategies.

Introduction

You will wish to aim to get your results as widely circulated as possible, to maximise their impact and to enhance the likelihood that they will be adopted and implemented. This unit will help you to do that. It builds on the different ways of reporting that we identified in Unit 2 as in Table 4.

Table 11 Classification of reports

Type	Formats	Comment and examples
Written	Academic reports,	e.g. journal articles, conference papers, theses
	Policy papers	Background papers for working or policy groups. Short summaries with (alternative) recommendations
	Evaluation reports	Setting out what has been achieved against given criteria
	Action research accounts	
Oral presentations	Small private meetings	
	Workshops	
	Academic conferences or symposia	
	Public meetings	
Print	Handbooks/manuals	
Mass media	Radio	
	Television	
	Web-sites	

Activity 1 10 mins



This activity will help you to think about which types of reporting best match different audiences.

Go back to the list of stakeholder groups in Unit 1 and see which of the above types of reporting would, in general, be most effective in reaching each group.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Differences In reporting for different audiences

The following activity will demonstrate some differences in reporting for different audiences.

Activity 2 20 mins

- 1 Read the *Witwatersrand* (see the *Resources File*) in which the findings of a study have been presented in three different ways.
- 2 Note down the differences you find, with reference to the audience, the level of formality, the use of references, the sentence length, and the general style.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Ethical issues

You have looked in other modules at various ethical issues that arise in research. Here we focus on the ethical issues that arise in reporting.

Honesty versus diplomacy

If your findings are critical of certain people or institutions, you have to exercise judgement about what you include and how you say things. This partly depends on the audience; if the report is only circulated internally, it may be possible to be quite frank. If the report is to be published more widely, then the style may need to be more diplomatic. This may be only a matter of wording. Compare these two versions of the same point: one is couched in negative terms, the other phrased more positively:

Staff morale is low because the Director and his team are seen as unapproachable and unpredictable.

A more consultative and consistent management style would raise staff morale and encourage participation.

You need to remember that people you offend are unlikely to implement your recommendations!

Feedback to stakeholders

A draft of the report should be shown to those involved. Do they consider it fair? Is there anything they wish taken out, or added in? You may be able to negotiate an acceptable compromise. If you have fed back your findings to those you have collected data from at various stages of the research, you will already be aware of their reactions.

In certain cases, the researcher has to ensure that stakeholders' hopes are not raised too much by the research activity. Venkamma, in talking to the prisoners, might inadvertently lead them to believe that they would all be offered education the following week. She should present her draft report to the prisoners if possible, but, working with the officials, make it clear that no promises had been made.

Anonymity

It is not always possible to hide the identity of those people and institutions being researched. If there is only one institution, everyone knows who 'The Director' is, and can probably guess the names of most of the staff referred to. That is one reason for showing them the draft as early as possible.

On the other hand, the identities of people you have interviewed and/or observed should be kept secret. In case-study research it may be possible to disguise the context but retain the key information, including quotes. Pseudonyms can be used. This makes the report easier to read.

Activity 3 15 mins



This activity will help you to begin to think about protecting stakeholders' interests in your report and taking account of their concerns.

- 1 Draw up a list of the people who might be affected by your report. Write down how you will protect their interests in each case.
- 2 List those to whom you will show your draft before finalising it, noting what their concerns might be.

There is no feedback to this activity

We will now take some of the different kinds of reporting in turn and discuss them, with examples. We will use the pen-portraits given in Module 1 for context, and use a 'consultant's voice' to give advice.

Academic writing

We will look at academic writing by considering the case of Kabir, who you met in *Module 1* and the *User Guide*.

Case study



Kabir Shastry is a lecturer at the Open University of Udaipur (OUU) in the Department of Education. You may remember that his desire to do research was driven more by personal concerns than by any institutional encouragement. Kabir has now carried out a piece of research on course development at the OUU and wants to publish it. There is little support for him at work and he is seeking advice.

Here's what our consultant might say to Kabir:

The consultant's advice to Kabir

Journal publishing

Publishing in journals (especially academic journals) is an activity highly valued by academic institutions but not by anyone else! You may

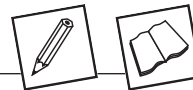
have good reasons to publish in academic journals but you need to be aware that your readership is likely to be confined to academics. What they will want to know is how you carried out your study, what you found out and how your findings relate to current issues and debates in the field. The style of academic writing for journals is usually but not always, rather terse, highly dependent on knowledge of a theoretical/technical literature and closely referenced to it.

If you want to publish in academic journals the best advice I can give is to identify those journals that publish in your area and study them carefully. Most journals arise from networks of researchers who share academic interests, and if you want to publish in them you need to show that you have something relevant to contribute to their field. So, careful reading of the existing journals can help you locate where to place your work and save you a lot of time, effort and discouragement. If what you write is close to the interests of a journal, but they do not have room for it, or think it is better placed elsewhere, then the editors will normally help you by suggesting where you might send it. It is important not to waste people's time by submitting papers that clearly do not fit the interests, style and standard of a journal. Most journals are run on voluntary labour and people may get annoyed if they feel you are wasting their time!

Getting published in academic journals

The following activity will provide you with some more detailed guidance (including technical guidance) on how to get your material published in academic journals.

Activity 4 15 mins



For this activity you will need to use the *Naidu* resource, which you will find in your *Resources File*.

- 1 Read pages 5–8, starting at the heading ‘Getting your research published: some guidelines’.
- 2 Make notes on any aspects that will help you to make your research more publishable in academic journals.

There is no feedback to this activity

Preparing policy papers

Case study



Yahaya and Agatha, who are employed by the Ministry of Education in Nuime, provide us with a good way of looking at the issues involved in producing policy papers.

Yahaya, you will recall, was asked to conduct a study into the national take-up and drop-out rates in distance education at the country's four institutions that provide it. The Minister is wondering whether additional expenditure on these particular initiatives is justified or whether the extra resources might be better granted to develop an open schooling system, making up for deficiencies in the current primary school system.

Agatha, on the other hand, had been asked by the Minister to look at the case for open schooling. Universal schooling has never been achieved and now the country and its teachers are being devastated by AIDS. The Minister wants to know the extent of the needs and whether open schooling would be an effective and cost-effective way of addressing this issue and whether there are technological solutions to improving access to the relatively few well-qualified teachers.

In these circumstances, both Yahaya and Agatha will have to provide relatively short reports (5,000-10,000 words – 10-20 pages) which are clear and free of academic or technical jargon. At the same time, they must demonstrate that their research was rigorous enough for people to have confidence in their findings. Their advice must be shown to rest on accurate information, carefully analysed. The policy options must be clearly set out, with a supporting analysis of the likely costs and benefits.

Here is the consultants' advice to Yahaya and Agatha

Preparing policy papers

- ▶ *the background and description should be kept to a minimum*
- ▶ *the analysis should include summary tables showing the take-up, drop-out, etc. and the costs, but more detailed supporting tables should be in the appendices*
- ▶ *the findings should outline how an open schooling system could work and what it might cost. There might be a descriptive analysis of such a system in another country, summarised in the text, with more details in an appendix*
- ▶ *Agatha might make sparing use of quotations and vignettes of schools to show the effects of AIDS in a dramatic way*
- ▶ *the interpretation needed is to show how policy alternatives can be justifiably drawn from the analysis of the facts and figures*
- ▶ *the reports will have short executive summaries with recommendations. It may be that this is all the Minister will read, but his officials will have to digest the rest of the reports and prepare for policy changes based on it. Think of them as you write.*

Writing an executive summary

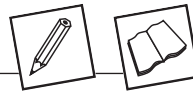
Since the executive summary and recommendations are so important, we shall now look at them in more detail

The executive summary should be 2–4 pages in length and should include:

- ▶ why the research or evaluation was needed
- ▶ a short description of how it was carried out

- ▶ a paragraph on each of the main findings
- ▶ the recommendations.

Activity 5 30 mins



This activity gives you practice in looking at styles of executive summaries. This should help you to decide how to produce your own executive summary when you are ready to.

Study the executive summary of the *Report on Nyau Teachers' College* (see the *Resources File*) and compare it with Fentiman's *SOMDEL Report* (see the *Resources File*). Then answer the following questions:

- 1 Who do you think are the likely audiences for these?
- 2 What are the main differences in content?
- 3 What are the main differences in style?
- 4 What are the main differences in format?

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ▶

Recommendations

Your recommendations should be as short and clear as possible. They should be numbered – you hope they will be discussed and acted upon! They should be practical and achievable, rather than vague wishes for general improvement.

Activity 6 20 mins



This activity will help you to think about what makes good recommendations.

Compare the two sets of recommendations below.

- 1 Which is clearer? Why?
- 2 Write down at least three guidelines to follow when drafting your own recommendations.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ▶

Reading



Recommendations version 1

The College tutors should examine and improve their own professional behaviours so that they become good models. There is a need to develop a code of ethics to be adhered to by lecturers and the management.

The College should review its current instructional approaches with the aim to merge innovative ones with good traditional teaching strategies. This way the tutors will be modelling how to integrate good traditional teaching strategies used by teachers in the schools with new ones that they will be bringing from the college. There will also be a need to develop good professional relationships among lecturers so that they can observe each other's lessons and give each other feedback. In the process of practising good professional relationships tutors will be directly demonstrating to their students how to relate to co-workers and/or to other professionals.

Recommendations version 2

- 1 **Code of ethics.** A code of ethics for staff should be drawn up by the College Board of Governors in consultation with senior management and the staff union, by the beginning of the new academic year. The code should include time-keeping, organisation of leave, and the regulation of conducting private business on college grounds.
- 2 **Improving instructional approaches** A working group comprising representatives of all departments should be set up to review teaching methods. The terms of reference should include:
 - ways of integrating traditional teaching approaches with 'progressive' ones
 - opportunities for collaborative approaches to staff development such as peer observation
 - diagnosis of further professional development needs among staff.

The group should report within six months.

Other ways of organising recommendations include

- ▶ separating them into short, medium and long term tasks
- ▶ separating them according to what kinds of changes are envisaged
- ▶ dividing them according to who is responsible for carrying them out e.g. Ministry of Education (MOE), a teaching institution, senior management team, individuals etc.

Activity 7 15 mins



This activity will help you to think about the principles that you might wish to use when preparing the recommendations in your own report.

- 1 Study the recommendations in the Executive Summary for the *Report on Nyanu Teachers' College* (see the *Resources File*).
- 2 What principle(s) seem to have been used in organising these recommendations?

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ▶

Reporting on an evaluation

Module 1 contained extensive discussions of evaluation. We are now going to look at how evaluations should be reported.

Case study



Abida, you will remember from *Module 1* and the *User Guide*, is particularly interested in gender issues at the Auranzeb Open University. She has carried out a small scale evaluation of the AOU courses in relation to women participants. As part of this, she did a gender analysis of the course materials provided, and found that many of the examples and illustrations related more to men and their interests than to women.

The consultant gives her some advice on what to include in her written report.

Advice on preparing an evaluation report

Reports on evaluation are normally directed at a specific audience for a specific purpose, so you must ensure your report is carefully focussed. Of course as usual you will give the rationale, some background about women students at AOU, and explain briefly your research questions and methods.

Evaluation always presupposes some standard of value, so what are the criteria against which you are evaluating these courses? You will probably want to analyse how far the results match up to the goals and expectations of the stakeholders: Have they met the targets for women students? How well do the women do compared with the men? But you can also draw on external criteria in your conclusions, perhaps using the work of feminist researchers in other countries. In this case you may need to explain what a 'gender analysis' is, and what the results can mean. In your discussion, you may offer your own interpretation, from a woman's perspective and from your reading, of what the implications are. But remember, your audience is those who have commissioned the evaluation, and/or those who are accountable for the activity in question.

(The Fentiman SOMDEL report in the *Resources File* is another evaluation that you might wish to look at.)

Workshops and oral presentations

We are going to look at how to use workshops and oral presentations by looking at two case studies. You will do this in the following activity.

Activity 8 15 mins



Read through the two case studies below.

What, in your view, were the strong and weak points about each of these meetings in terms of dissemination of information and the implementation of the findings.

Case study



Zobaida's meeting

Zobaida has been studying why girls are dropping out of school and has now finished analysing her data. With her Director's support, she calls a meeting of all 12 regional advisors working for her NGO in Bangladesh, sending them a draft version of her main findings. At the meeting she reviews these quickly, using overhead transparencies, and presents her own suggestions for action. The participants then work in groups, discussing and refining the proposals. When these are agreed by everyone there, the groups reconvene to work on implementation strategies. At the end of the day Zobaida has a draft list of recommendations to polish and present to the donors.

Fancy's meeting

Fancy works for an NGO in Botswana. Her research into AIDS and schooling has been commissioned by the Botswana Government. Her Director organises a meeting bringing together representatives from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, donors, church leaders, political parties, teachers' unions and parents' associations. There are 120 people in a large conference centre. The Minister of Health opens the meeting with a speech, and the Minister of Education closes it with another speech. Fancy presents her findings, using PowerPoint, and distributes a summary of her report. A Malawian researcher gives an account of what is being done in his country for AIDS orphans. An external consultant offers a comparison of AIDS and education in Uganda, Malawi and Botswana. In the afternoon, discussion groups of 10-12 people each spend an hour looking at different aspects of the problem and making recommendations. A rapporteur from each gives a verbal report. A task force is then elected, with 15 members, one from each of the various stakeholder groups represented at the meeting, to advise the ministries on suitable policies. Though no press release is given out, reports of the meeting are carried that evening on local TV and radio, and articles appear in all the national papers next day.

Preparing overhead transparencies or PowerPoint slides

Visual aids (such as overhead transparencies or PowerPoint slides) have to be visible at a distance, therefore clearly set out and using an appropriate font. They must not contain too much information at once – 5–6 points per page or slide is enough

The slides will form the structure of your talk, so they must follow in logical sequence, with appropriate headings, sub-headings and visuals.

Your sequence might include:

- ▶ title
- ▶ introductory information about the project and the researcher(s)
- ▶ the minimum of contextual information

- ▶ brief description of the research methods used if appropriate
- ▶ findings
- ▶ conclusions setting out the 3–4 main points you want them to remember
- ▶ any recommendations.

If you want to encourage dialogue, you can include some questions. Then you could ask the audience to talk in 'buzz groups' (2–3 people sitting next to each other) about how they would answer them. You could present a table with some information missing, and ask the audience what they think the figures are.

Examples of PowerPoint

Staff involved in ODL are expected to be capable of:

- moving from an elitist system to the provision of 'mass' and 'customised' education
- changing from 'instructor' to 'resource specialist' and 'response specialist'
- encouraging self-directed and resource-based learning
- largely abandoning face-to-face methods for mediated, technology-based teaching and learning
- writing and producing courseware.

Staff development can be provided through:

- institutional centres providing training and support for teaching and learning, distance education and uses of technology
- open and flexible delivery
- collaborative staff development through networks or consortia
- local staff development forums.

Activity 9 20 mins



This activity will give you some practice at selecting key points to put on a slide.

Below is a paragraph of information about staff development. It refers to Slide 9 of the same sequence as above. Redraft this in the form of heading and four main bullet points.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ▶

Reading



At the University, the Scholarship and Training Division carried out a study of the teachers involved in ODL whose previous experience had not prepared them fully for their new role. Some had come from conventional universities and did not understand the philosophy behind distance education, nor had they grasped the key ideas such as independent

learning, pacing of instruction, giving of feedback, and so on. Others had no experience at all in developing courses or writing materials for distance learners. In their previous roles they had always used textbooks and usually carried on traditional schemes of work. Many of the new staff had only taught undergraduates on a normal campus, and were used to seeing their students frequently, so they found it very hard to know how to relate to students working far away. These people also tended to think of their students as young, and needing much guidance; they did not realise that many ODL students are mature adults leading responsible lives. Finally, they found that new staff were unfamiliar with the working practices of ODL, such as how to make use of email and internet. It took them time to get used to the type of management and operating systems.

Sharing the results of action research

We shall explore sharing the results of action research with the aid of a new case study in the following activity.

Activity 10 10 mins



First read the case study below.

Then identify all the opportunities for ‘dialogue’ (see Unit 1) within the above scenario, and list those who talked to each other.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Case study



Puleng

Puleng works in the Education Department of a university in South Africa. She used to be a teacher trainer, but her college closed down. Due to her enthusiasm and academic record she was able to join the faculty of one of the historically black universities. She has a degree in history which she gained distance-wise through UNISA, but this gave her little research training.

There are many under-qualified primary teachers in the rural areas. The School of Education is developing distance learning materials for these people. It also uses ‘facilitators’ who meet, on a fortnightly basis, with groups of these distance learners in their local area.

Puleng is one of these facilitators, but she is not altogether satisfied with the way the meetings go. She decided to undertake action research with a couple of her colleagues who also facilitate the meetings. After two cycles, of a term each, of investigating their own practice, they are ready to write up and present their findings. Their dissemination strategy takes the following form:

Informal feedback is given to the learners. Each of the three researchers prepares a short talk, with transparencies, to her own group about how she thinks her practice has changed as a result of the action research.

After hearing the learners' comments, each writes up her 'story' and circulates it to her two colleagues.

They meet for a day to redraft the three stories into a joint report. This sets out the reasons for undertaking the research, what they did, and what they have learnt. It ends with suggestions for how other tutors might follow a similar path.

They send this report for comment to 'critical friends' and then to their managers (the Dean of Education and the Programme Director).

They run a workshop with the other 30 facilitators at which they present their findings orally, and encourage their colleagues to try action research for themselves. There is a 3-page summary for participants to read and take away. The full report is available on request.

Six other facilitators are interested, and the original three act as mentors for the next term as they try out new methods of running their fortnightly meetings.

The Dean of Education asks them to write a short piece for the University's *Journal of Research*.

They develop this article with the help of an experienced editor and send it to the *Educational Action Research Journal*, where it is accepted after some revision.

The press and the media

Fancy was not pleased with the way the media reported her meeting. She talked with the consultant, who had this to say:

Reading



The consultant's advice to Fancy

Writing for the press and the media is a specialised skill and if at all possible find someone who knows your local media and who can help you. Perhaps if you work in a large organisation you have a media officer or press officer. Otherwise the best advice is to know the media source. If you are familiar with the newspaper or radio programme that a reporter or producer works for, then you can make some guesses about the angle they might put on your story. Remember, they are looking for a story-line that will engage the attention of their audience, they are normally not interested in doing justice to your project or reporting your research in all its subtlety and complexity, though it might be in their interests to let you believe that this is their only motive!

If you are writing a press release put the most important information at the top, not the bottom. Academics normally leave the best information for the conclusion, or the last few paragraphs of the essay. Journalists will often use whole sections of a press release without editing it or changing it, (the academic conventions about plagiarism do not apply here!), but when they pass their piece to an editor or sub-editor this will invariably have to be cut to fit a space in the layout. (It is easier and quicker to cut

than to write additional copy, so journalists are encouraged to over-write.) Routinely, sub-editors will cut from the bottom of the story. They will not edit the whole document or ask for a rewrite as this would take too long. If all your important points are at the end they will simply be cut and no-one but you will notice!

Keep paragraphs short. Most newspapers have paragraphs that are only two or three sentences long. Also, if your story is going to be edited (see 2 above) you will make the editors job easier if your paragraphs are short.

Keep sentences short. Most journalism is written in the form of sentences that are five to seven words long. Academics typically write sentences that are twice this length (check the length of any sentence in this module!).

Activity 11 30 mins



Draft a three-paragraph press release about your findings.

There is no feedback to this activity

Publishing on the Web

Once again, we will look at this specialist way of reporting through the aid of a case study and the advice of a consultant.

Case study



Kabir is anxious to get his research on to the Web. The consultant offers him the following advice:

The consultant's advice to Kabir

Yes, the Web is another useful tool for publishing your research. Your website doesn't need to be flashy but it does need to be attractive, easy to read and easy and quick to navigate. You may wish to include graphs and diagrams. But do remember that many people still use slow modem speeds and have problems with their Internet connections. Most people click away after about six seconds if they find nothing happening on their screens. So give careful thought to the loading times, keep your pages simple and focus on the specific information you want to get across. Using too many colours, introducing fancy colour backgrounds or dividing pages into too many sections will only confuse or distract the reader.

Remember too that people don't read the Web – they scan it. Straight text is very difficult to read on computer screens, so break your report up into sections, simplify your text into bullet form, or, if you are presenting the whole paper, suggest to the readers that they print it out. And always make sure that every page provides full value to the reader.

Ensure that there is a menu bar at the top or side of every page so that the readers can go from section to section. When using hyperlinks, make sure that they are relevant and important. Some readers may be visually

impaired so don't use small font sizes or tones and colours that are too close. Place all your contact details in an obvious place.

Before you go public, check your site on more than one computer (Macs and PCs) and using more than one browser to make sure that your material is readable whatever computer, monitor or system the reader is using.

Keep your site updated. If you don't want it accessed any more, have it taken off the server.

Comprehensive dissemination strategies

As we explained in Unit 1, there are a number of issues to consider when writing up and presenting your research findings. If you are serious about having an effect on policy and practice, you need to plan a comprehensive dissemination strategy. Here is an example of what Zobaida might do.

Zobaida works with an international non-governmental organisation in Dhaka whose aim is to increase access to basic education for girls in Bangladesh. Zobaida has been asked by her project director to document the regions in Bangladesh where enrolment is lowest and to conduct interviews with out-of-school girls.

She has been allocated a travel grant to visit these areas and to find out why so many girls have dropped out of school. She has been asked to put together a report on her findings and to make a presentation at a meeting in front of her donors in two months. Table 5 shows the kind of plan she might make.

Table 12 A dissemination plan

Audience	Project Director of NGO, donors; local partners
User group	Findings will have to be implemented by: NGO staff, parents and communities
Possible types of report/presentation	Written report 3-4000 words
	Verbal presentation to donors: 30 minutes
	Public meetings
	Local media

Activity 12 30 mins



- 1 For each of the four proposed types of report, draw up an outline of what Zobaida might do and what she might include.
- 2 Suggest what she should do to fulfil her ethical commitments to her subjects.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Unit summary

This unit pointed out that:

- ▶ all reports need to take account of ethical considerations to protect the subjects and stakeholders
- ▶ most research findings will need to be written up and presented in several different ways to have maximum impact
- ▶ there are different approaches and different techniques for different types of reporting, which need to be studied and practised
- ▶ dialogue with stakeholders can take place in various ways
- ▶ researchers need to plan comprehensive dissemination strategies linked to plans for acting on and implementing the research findings.

Project task



Decide on the format(s) for reporting your own research and develop your outline plan in accordance with the criteria suggested in the unit.

Feedback to selected activities



Feedback to activity 1

It will depend on circumstances, but these we think the most likely ones:

Table 13 Dissemination methods appropriate to stakeholder type

Stakeholder	Dissemination method
Governments, NGOs international donors	Policy papers, evaluations, oral presentations
Leaders	Oral reports in private, short policy papers, mass media
Senior policy-makers	Policy papers, evaluations
Middle managers	Oral presentations
Practitioners	Workshops, handbooks
Researchers	Journal articles, conference papers
Students	Mass media, workshops, handbooks
General public	Newspaper articles, TV

Feedback to activity 2

First report

The first of these is obviously written for an academic audience. The style is formal, sentences are relatively long, definitions are clarified, discussion points are detailed, and there is extensive use of references to articles and websites.

Second report

The report for government officers is shorter, compressing the main points into a series of bullet points, each a phrase or a sentence long. There are no references embedded in the text and the case studies are treated as an option in the appendix. The aim here is to produce a short, focused document for busy officials that will enable them to keep the main points in mind. The language is still formal, but very clear.

Third report

The newspaper report is much more 'punchy' and informal in style, short and to the point. It is obviously aimed at a lay audience and it is also setting out to 'sell' the telecentre concept to the wider community by explaining the benefits to the users and appealing to national pride by suggesting and that such an initiative will help the country keep up in the 21st century technology-based 'knowledge-based economy'.

Feedback to activity 5

These are our views, but yours might differ:

1 Audience

The *Nyanu* report is probably written for the Ministry of Education who commissioned it, but also for other academics and consultants in the field. The *SOMDEL* report is probably written for the funders, and for other NGOs.

2 Content

Both explain what the study was about, though *SOMDEL* gives more background and contextual information. Both give some details about how the study was carried out. Both, in different ways, give an overview of the report, stating what is to be found in each section. Then in both reports the findings are summarised. *Nyanu* sets out a long list of recommendations; *SOMDEL* gives two main recommendations and some pointers for improvement.

3 Style

The *Nyanu* report is more formal, with more use of the passive voice. Everything is summarised very succinctly. *SOMDEL* has incorporated some of the text from the main body of the report into the executive summary.

(This is often done, and is fine if the text used is already a summary paragraph. Otherwise it is better to make a new summary.)

4 Formatting devices

Nyanu uses italicised headings, some bullet points, and numbers its recommendations. *SOMDEL* uses a lot of bullet points (for aims, findings, and pointers) but only one heading, though two other paragraphs have leading sentences in bold. (We think more headings would have helped clarify the structure.)

Feedback to activity 6

- 1 The first version expresses hopes and wishes in general terms. The second is clearer because it states more precisely what should be done, when and by whom.
 - 2 Guidelines might include:
 - make the focus clear, by a title, number or highlighted word
 - state what is to be done, in realistic and practical terms
 - who is to do it
 - when it is to be done
 - avoid moralising.
-

Feedback to activity 7

The recommendations were intended to spell out the management, operational, staffing and resource requirements. It might have been clearer if these had been grouped under these headings.

Feedback to activity 8

Here are some of our reflections; you will probably have others, especially if you have experienced meetings like these:

Meeting 1

The meeting was small enough for everyone to be actively involved. It is likely that the participants will feel they 'own' the conclusions, and leave committed to implementing the findings from the NGO point of view. However, no one outside the meeting will have heard anything about the research. In particular, the parents and communities where the girls are dropping out need to be involved in similar discussions.

Meeting 2

The issues were thoroughly aired, and it is likely that through the media some information will reach at least some of the general public, though without an

official press release the journalists may give their own opinion, (possibly an inaccurate or biased one). It was democratic in that many stakeholder groups were represented, though it is not clear whose voices will be taken into account.

There may have been too wide a focus – how did having the speakers from the other countries help the discussion? Fancy will have mentioned important findings from those places in her report. The task force appears rather too disparate to produce a firm, practical consensus in a short time: a small group of 3-4 experienced people would be more effective. It is not clear who will implement the results. The presence of the ministers confirmed the status of the meeting, but did nothing to ensure the findings would be acted upon.

The first meeting can truly be called a 'workshop' because all participants 'worked' and there was a product. The second, though advertised as a workshop, was more like a consultative meeting. Do not confuse the two! Both have their uses, but serve different purposes.

Feedback to activity 9

This is our suggested slide:

The Scholarship and Training Division found four main groups of staff needing assistance:

- ▶ teachers experiencing difficulty with the philosophy and concepts of distance education
- ▶ teachers concerned about their lack of skills in course and materials development
- ▶ teachers experiencing difficulty with the off-campus/adult learners
- ▶ teachers needing exposure to the new management and work practices and technologies.

However, any version that identified four groups of staff with these needs would be fine. Note that the grammatical format of each point must be identical.

Feedback to activity 10

We identified the following: researchers and their learners; the three researchers among themselves; the researchers and, respectively, a critical friend, their peers, their dean, the wider academic community.

Feedback to activity 12

The following are what we might do. But there are many ways of reporting, and it will depend on what her findings are.

Written report

To include:

- ▶ statement of the problem/focus of enquiry
- ▶ how she carried out the research
- ▶ description of what she found using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data, bar/pie charts, 2 vignettes of 'typical' girls/schools/families and selective quotes
- ▶ analysis: what patterns of enrolment and drop-out; what key factors emerged
- ▶ interpretation and discussion: what does this mean in terms of policies, plans, actions, likely barriers and problems; what would have to happen for things to change
- ▶ recommendations: a plan of action for various stakeholders.

Presentation to donors

Up to ten slides giving:

- ▶ a statement of the problem or the focus of the enquiry
- ▶ the methods used to collect data
- ▶ the findings: key points set out partly in visuals, partly in clear headings or note form with 5–6 points to a slide
- ▶ recommendations.

Public meeting

- ▶ held with the communities with agreement of local leaders, officials and representatives of parents
- ▶ make available a 2-page handout in the local language, giving key points from the findings as they affect local people, with one or two anonymous pen-portraits of typical girls.

Mass media

- ▶ radio interview
- ▶ article in local press.

Ethical considerations

- ▶ draft of main findings given to local partners as early as possible
 - ▶ case studies/vignettes given pseudonyms.
-

The research-practice divide and turning research into action



Unit overview

Having looked at presenting your findings in ways best suited to the various stakeholders and applications, we now return to the issue of the research-practice divide mentioned in Unit 1. We shall look in some detail at the factors that may prevent your findings from having the impact or take up that you hoped for. The unit will look at:

- ▶ the nature of the divide
- ▶ problems that may lie with researchers
- ▶ problems that may lie with the system or institution
- ▶ problems that may lie with the research
- ▶ problems that may lie with the dissemination or diffusion
- ▶ bridging the divide.

Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this Unit, you should be able to:

- ▶ Describe the factors that can cause the research-practice divide.
- ▶ Identify the barriers that may prevent your findings from being acted upon in your work context.
- ▶ Suggest strategies for overcoming the research-practice divide in your work context.

The research-practice divide

Many researchers hope that their findings will influence policymaking or practice, immediately or over time. Some researchers seem to be able to have the ability to produce findings that support, extend, challenge or disprove existing theories and findings and that are acted upon almost without question. Others examine all of the issues under review, present findings that seem to be valid, reliable and conclusive and make recommendations that appear to be appropriate – only to find their work ignored or having no impact on policies and practices.

Some writers attribute this failure of research to impact on practice to the phenomenon called the research-practice divide. They suggest that the problems lie in the fact that:

- ▶ Researchers and policymakers and practitioners live in different worlds, each with its own particular culture, values, language, reward systems and political or professional affiliations.
- ▶ Researchers see knowledge as being gained through theory and research, whereas policy makers and practitioners see knowledge as acquired through experience and common sense.
- ▶ There may be conflicts of interest between the researchers and the practitioners. For example, the researchers may be arguing for more open and flexible entry systems and programmes for the disadvantaged and marginalised, while the policymakers are trying to raise the status of the institution and raise more income through fee-for-service courses.

All of these observations may be correct. However there can be other causes for the research-practice divide. The problems may lie:

- ▶ with the researchers
- ▶ within the system or institution
- ▶ with the research
- ▶ with the dissemination processes.

In this unit we invite you to consider whether and how these issues apply in your own particular work context and what strategies you might use to overcome them. These are far more complex matters than you can hope to fully resolve in just a few hours of study. So we hope that you will continue to bear these points in mind as you carry out and report on your research in the future.

Activity 1 20 mins



Read through *The Vice-Chancellor receives conflicting advice* (below) and note down your answers to the following questions:

- 1 Why did the Vice-Chancellor not accept the DEC research?
- 2 Why were the external consultant's findings so much more acceptable to the Vice-Chancellor?
- 3 Who was proved right in the long run?
- 4 Why was the evaluation that was carried out three years later accepted?

Reading



The Vice-Chancellor receives conflicting advice

Concerned that students were able to enrol in courses from other national and overseas universities, and believing that online learning could enhance his university's reputation and provide much-needed additional revenue, a Vice-Chancellor commissioned a study into these matters from the institution's longstanding Distance Education Centre (DEC).

The DEC's findings were that these issues were far more complex than the Vice-Chancellor had imagined. Local and overseas providers did pose a threat to future enrolments. Students could enrol in other institutions' courses via the Internet. Some of these courses were cheaper, and the university could become vulnerable in those subjects that were difficult and expensive to provide such as science and technology. On the other hand, to compete in this market, the university would need to substantially change its entry systems and be far more competitive in terms of the costs, range, flexibility and quality of its courses.

The DEC report acknowledged that ICT was re-shaping other institutions' plans and resource allocations. However, it noted that using ICT in open and distance learning warranted close examination. International research showed that developing and delivering off-campus programmes required a total systems management approach and teamwork, both of which were alien to the ways of working in the university. It was also shown that it was not enough to transfer existing courses into digitally-based 'products' and hope that these would somehow find a market. The courses needed to be market-orientated and strategically focused, offer learner-content, learner-instructor and learner-learner interaction, and use a mix of technologies. Where teams of staff were involved in developing commercial online programmes, there were copyright and intellectual property issues to be considered. There was also the problem of the underprivileged and their inability to access computers and bear the online costs. The report also cautioned about assuming cost advantage or profitability in converting traditional courses into online form. It showed that trying to minimise the online course development costs would result in a deluge of student inquiries and thus higher delivery costs. It noted the need for cross-cultural sensitivity if overseas markets were to be served. It also argued that the staff would need more training, support and time release for this work and that many staff were reluctant to lose time from their research and other teaching.

These findings clearly conflicted with the Vice-Chancellor's perceptions and ambitions for the institution. He felt that the DEC had been working for too long in the more traditional forms of distance education. He was even heard to say 'Distance education is old hat. What the world wants these days is online learning.' So he commissioned a second study, this time from an external ICT expert. This consultant reported that online learning was gaining momentum across the globe and that the university would indeed be well advised to use ICT to reach out to new markets. He argued that the DEC was no longer needed and that the departments could develop the programmes themselves. He was assured by the head of the Computing Centre that the technology infrastructure was adequate and that the Centre could respond to whatever demands were placed upon it.

The Vice-Chancellor was delighted with this second report and decided to proceed with implementing it. He proposed to his departmental heads that the DEC should be downsized, that the monies saved be transferred out to the teaching departments, and that responsibility for online course development should be devolved to them. Being under financial pressure, the heads readily agreed to this. The Vice-Chancellor assured them that they could expect all the support they needed from the Computing Centre.

Three years later, a new Vice-Chancellor was in post. Her prime concern was to raise the university's teaching standards. She commissioned a team of internal and external academics to conduct a review into what was happening in technology-based flexible learning across the university. This report revealed that the previous Vice-Chancellor's

initiative had been visionary, but mistaken in focusing exclusively on ICT-based off-campus programmes. The educational requirements had been secondary to the technological, financial and administrative requirements, the staff had been put under tremendous pressure to adopt new methods without adequate training or support, the enrolment and economic targets had not been met, there were morale problems among staff and complaints from students. The head and key staff of the DEC had moved on to other jobs as a consequence of the downsizing and the Computing Centre was under extreme pressure and asking for instructional design staff.

This review group's recommendations were that:

- ▶ teaching and technological development should go hand in hand and both should be informed by research and evaluation
- ▶ a Flexible Learning Centre should be created, with the role of providing research, development and support for all forms of teaching and learning, both on- or off-campus
- ▶ this new Centre should work closely with the Computing Centre
- ▶ The Computing Centre's role should be to provide the technical support and planning for the next generation of technology for the academic, communications and administrative needs of the university.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ▶

Problems that may lie with the researchers

Let's start with the problems that may lie with ourselves as the researchers.

Researchers as insiders or outsiders

In carrying out your research, you may be an insider, doing this work 'in house'. On the other hand, you may be an outsider, brought in specially to do the job.

When you are working within your own system or institution you will probably be pretty familiar with its culture, politics, policies and practices. On the other hand, you may suffer from the 'prophet in his own land' syndrome. You and your work may be just be too well known to the users and you may not be given the trust and status usually granted to the outsider researcher.

If you are hired in as an external researcher, this is probably because there is a lack of research expertise within the system, institution or programme, or there is some political reason for bringing in an outside person. As an outsider, you may be accorded respect because of your expertise and achievements in the outside world. You may also be seen as 'detached'. On the other hand, you may be looked upon as not understanding the inner workings of the system and this argument may be used as an excuse for resisting your findings.

A single contract with a single researcher may be easier to manage, but a 'lone ranger' researcher may not be able to provide all the expertise needed, particularly where research projects are large, complex and involve multidisciplinary issues. So sometimes a research team is needed, and this may involve both external and in-house researchers. Research teams drawn from different backgrounds and different disciplines have their advantages and their

disadvantages. They can bring a breadth of knowledge and experience to the work and they can blend external expertise and insider knowledge. They may also overcome the credibility problem that an external or in-house researcher on their own may experience. On the other hand they may have differences of outlook and approach that are difficult to reconcile.

Status of the researchers

Your status as a researcher may also have an impact on the way your work is viewed.

If you are employed in the lower levels of your institution, you may be far removed from the policymakers and higher echelons. Those who are in the more senior positions may have little time or inclination to talk to you and so your work may not be known about or your findings may be misrepresented or ignored when major decisions are being made. If you are only able to report to the middle managers, they may have some resources and understanding of how things work or should work, but they may lack the authority and influence necessary to implement your findings.

In these situations, you will find it useful to find information brokers or gatekeepers – people who understand how the lines of communication work and how to operate in the corridors of power and who can help in ensuring that your findings do reach the right ears.

Some researchers are more interested in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake rather than seeing their findings translated into action. They tend to operate outside the corridors of power and are probably quite happy with this.

Some researchers are lacking in credibility. People question their knowledge base, professional standing, or the standing of the institutions or professional bodies they represent.

Some researchers' work may lack quality. Their work may be limited in scope, flawed, inconclusive, ambiguous, contradicted by evidence from other sources, or out of date. Their research may fail to take into account certain critical factors or their findings may not be valid, reliable or relevant to local needs and circumstances.

The status, credibility and quality of local researchers may be particularly problematic in low income countries. Here there is limited funding for research and research training, and consequently researchers don't have much opportunity to conduct, communicate and apply research. Unfortunately, this often leads to an over-dependence upon researchers and findings from the industrialised nations. This does nothing to encourage home-grown strengths and opportunities in researching ODL and the findings may not necessarily apply. Hopefully, if you are a researcher or would-be researcher working in such a context, this course will help you develop more indigenous and applicable research.

It is important that you can justify your status and that of your research by providing evidence of your experience, expertise and the quality of your work. This is obviously difficult if not impossible at the very start of your research career but, as soon as possible, you should start to develop a portfolio of work, a folder or dossier showing your qualifications, your research interests, the clients you've served, the grants you've received, the outcomes and benefits of the research you've carried out, your publications, and who you've collaborated with in this work. If the call is for a research team, you will need to be able to do this for each and every member and show what their complementary strengths are.

Researchers' perceptions

Researchers need to be good at 'reading the signs'. They have to have the knack of spotting trends and events and recognising windows of opportunity for research. It is therefore important that you constantly monitor what is being said and done within your system or institution. You need to be able to spot the hot issues, and be pro-active in pointing out where there is need for research and how they could use your services. You must also be able to deliver the findings in the timeframe needed. Very often policymakers and practitioners are looking for quick-fix answers to pressing problems.

As you have seen in earlier modules, the experience, beliefs, opinions and ambitions of some researchers may lead to bias or blindness in their methods and findings. Some may not even recognise these shortcomings in themselves. Some researchers, particularly when they feel they are working in controversial or sensitive areas, are afraid to be fully candid in their findings, or to come out with clear and unambiguous recommendations. Where people perceive bias, evasiveness, vagueness, or ambiguity in the findings, it is not surprising that they won't adopt them. So you should always try to make sure that your work and findings are candid and unbiased.

Activity 2 20 mins



Having read through this section, think about your own work context and answer the following questions:

- 1 What is your standing in the system or institution?
- 2 What status and credibility are given to you as a researcher and your work?
- 3 What status and credibility are given to research in general?
- 4 Are you reading the signs and taking advantage of windows of opportunity for research?
- 5 Are there brokers or gatekeepers who can help you by referring your findings up through the system?
- 6 How might you improve matters in these regards?

There is no feedback to this activity

Problems that may lie within the system or institution

Some of the problems you come across may lie in the system or institution. Let's have a look at these.

Changing thinking and practices

As you have probably noticed, it can be extremely difficult to change thinking or practices within certain systems and institutions. Not only are the norms and structures of some bureaucratic and academic organisations entrenched, but, like people, the older the institutions become, the more conservative and resistant to change they become. Some government bodies and institutions don't even have a tradition of taking research findings into account in their planning and operations. Some policymakers and practitioners are simply too busy and preoccupied with their own affairs to consider research findings and their implications. And of course, it is all too easy for those who are resistant to change and want to stick to the old familiar and reassuring ways of doing things, to reject research findings or any new ideas without even first putting them to the test.

You may also come up against a phenomenon known as **group think** – people sharing the same organisational mindset. This can lead to a stereotyping or even a demonising of anyone outside the organisation or particular group who doesn't share its values. It also leads to a reluctance to consider any ideas that don't match the existing belief systems and perceptions. The result is that the organisation or group is insulated from outside influences. Another unfortunate outcome of group think is that those in higher positions only want to be told what they want to hear, not what they really need to know. In presenting your findings in such an environment, you may find yourself in a situation like the story of the emperor who vainly paraded himself through the streets in his elegant but invisible new clothes. The question is, will you be one of the crowd admiring the emperor's garments, or the one to tell him he's actually got no clothes on?

Conversely, as we pointed out in *Module A1*, there may be conflicting agendas and groups that don't see eye to eye within a system or organisation. For example, there may be one group that is arguing for the need to increase access for learners with poor or unconventional educational backgrounds and another group, for equally powerful political reasons, advocating a strong push to improve graduation rates and raise the standing of the institution and its courses. In such a situation, if you produce research findings in support of the first agenda, they may be opposed by the second group.

Also, the 'presenting problem' may very well mask other questions that people are asking but which have somehow got lost in the bureaucratic or democratic process. Where this is the case, your research may bring to the surface some problems that are either seen as beyond your brief or too controversial or risky to be considered.

Games people play

Unfortunately, there also are some organisational or political games that those in positions of power and influence like to play. For example, they may commission some research or evaluation from you to play for time or give the impression that they are doing something, when in fact they have no intention of accepting or implementing the findings. This may cause your research to become bogged down in bureaucratic procedures and endless committees. Your findings may end up being filed 'for future reference' or otherwise lost in the system. Or your findings may become modified or compromised by the political or bureaucratic dynamics. There's probably very little that you can do about such situations. If possible, it is better to avoid them. Forewarned is forearmed!

Gaps in understanding and communication

Things can go wrong even where there is genuine commitment to your research and findings. Those who commissioned the research may not be entirely clear in their own minds on what findings they want from you. Or, when you pass on your findings, these may not fully understood. There may be gaps in the communications process so that your message becomes changed as it proceeds through the system or key points fail to get through. There may also be gaps between the current policies, practices and thinking in the system or organisation, and the theories and findings in your report. So it is important for you to take control of the diffusion and help all of the stakeholders work through the findings and think through the ramifications. You will recall how much we stressed the importance of dialogue in the diffusion process.

Implementation difficulties

There may be problems in implementing your findings. The senior managers may accept the findings but may then fail to gain the necessary support of the middle managers and staff because they feel that the recommendations are too prescriptive, too vague, in conflict with the prevailing values and ways of doing things, or too demanding in their resource requirements.

Those for whom your research is intended may lack the knowledge and skills to put your findings into operation. The organisational arrangements may be inconsistent with the recommended changes in roles and practices. The required resources may not be available. There may be too many variations in the contexts in which the findings are to be applied. There may be conflicting pressures and a desire for consensus, or an easy way out may lead to your findings being distorted, watered down, undermined, or not implemented.

Another thing that can go wrong – and you probably can't do that much about this – is your research being overtaken by events. Many a researcher has found that half way through their work, the circumstances have changed; that there is been a change of leadership, a financial crisis or other political agendas that are taking priority.

Yet another problem is that your findings can lead to power conflicts. For example, your findings may suggest the need for a new organisational structure, or a shifting of the balance of power and status among those who were formerly equals. This will almost inevitably lead to resistance from those affected.

Another problem is that most people need incentives to change their ways. It is difficult to introduce new ways of thinking, new policies and new practices if there is a lack of incentives or where there are changes to the longstanding incentives system.

There can also be a problem for you if the organisation and its members don't share a long-term vision or perspective. Some of your findings may only be able to lead to a change in thinking and actions over an extended period of time. If there is no far-sightedness on the part of the users, some or all of your findings may go to waste.

Activity 3 20 mins



Having read through the above section, consider your own work context and the research needed and answer the following questions:

- 1 Is it easy or difficult to change people's thinking and actions?
- 2 Are policies and practices informed and influenced by research?
- 3 What helps or hinders research findings from being considered and acted upon?
- 4 What changes might you be able to help bring about in these regards?

There is no feedback to this activity

Problems that may lie with the research

Sometimes the problems lie neither with the researchers or the users but with the research or research process itself.

Sometimes, even with the best of intentions, you may find it difficult to come up with findings that are useful to the users. You may not be able to find absolute proof as to why or how something works or doesn't work well or you may not be able to identify the most important factors in this. If your findings are inconclusive, you will be unable to confirm whether a particular policy or practice is necessary or desirable.

Another problem may be that your research is incomplete, or hasn't explored all of the options or ramifications. So it is important to ensure that you have explored all of the options or uncovered and made public all the relevant facts, figures, and factors that need to be taken into account. This may mean that you need to undertake a series of ongoing studies. One-off research activities and limited research findings may be useful for informing and

influencing relatively small, routine, and incremental decisions about policies or practices. But the larger, more fundamental decisions, those that can result in paradigm shifts, often require more sustained research and careful consideration of many findings from many different sources. The problem is that you may not know about these, or you may have difficulty in tracking them down and accessing them. They may be too fragmented, too widely distributed, not properly organised, or unavailable via the Internet or the usual library and information channels. Again, this can particularly be a problem in low income countries or other environments where there are limited library and information services and there is limited research capacity.

Perhaps your research turns out to lack relevance or utility in particular contexts.

In some cases the users come up with conflicting findings from other sources.

There may be a lack of follow-through to your research. Timelines are set for research projects, grants expire, reports are published, and you move on to other things leaving the users in a position where they are uncertain about what they should do next. Research that is simply left to make its own way is unlikely to lead to systemic innovation or improvement. Without adequate ongoing communication and support, even those who originally supported your work and its findings may become frustrated and abandon the idea. So you need to give careful thought to the follow-up or aftercare needed for your research

Activity 4 20 mins



Having read through this section, consider your particular work context and the research that is done or needed here and answer the following questions:

- 1 Can you identify problems in the research or research process?
- 2 Is it easy or difficult to access research and findings within your system?
- 3 Is it easy or difficult to access research and findings outside your system?
- 4 What follow up or support is there for interpreting findings, considering their implications and implementing them?
- 5 What changes might you help to bring about in these regards?

There is no feedback to this activity

Problems that may occur with the dissemination and diffusion

As we have stressed throughout this module, you need to present your findings in the right forms and through the most appropriate channels. Few

policymakers or practitioners will take the time and effort to look up your findings in specialised publications. Fewer still will stick with reports that are too long, too wordy and too full of jargon. You must therefore walk the fine line between fulfilling your academic needs and meeting the users' needs, and between providing too much and too little information.

Dissemination and diffusion

In Unit 1, we distinguished between **dissemination** – the scattering or spreading abroad of research findings – and **diffusion** – where findings intermingle with and gradually permeate thinking and practices. Drawing upon work of Schon (1971) and Havelock (1973), we can say there are four basic models of dissemination and diffusion, each with its own particular strengths and weaknesses.

The centre-periphery model

First, there is the centre-periphery model. Here you disseminate your findings directly to the ultimate users, the stakeholders. There are actually two ways in which you can do this. You can act as a 'magnet', with people being attracted to your ideas and coming to you for advice. Or you can be like the American character, Johnny Appleseed, who travelled around sowing seeds where he felt they were needed and where the ground was fertile. This approach may be all right if there are few stakeholders or end-users involved, if the contexts are similar, and if the distances from the centre are not too great. It will not work so well if those you wish to inform and influence are far away, if the lines of communication are weak, if the contexts are different, if the findings aren't presented in ways suited to the different audiences, and if there are insufficient resources, incentives and energy to sustain the process.

The proliferation of centres model

Second, there is the proliferation of centres model. Here the diffusion takes place through a network of centres. These could be within an institution, across a national system or even across international boundaries. Using a proliferation of centres approach, you aim for a multiplier effect. Rather than training everyone, you concentrate on training the trainers, who will then diffuse the findings and manage the implementation in ways that are tailored to local contexts. This approach can only work if you or your primary centre can provide the necessary leadership and resource support to sustain the other centres and change agents. In turn, these must be able to respond appropriately to the local needs and circumstances.

If you are adopting this approach to get over problems encountered with the centre-periphery model, you need to identify key people in key institutions, make them fully aware of your findings, and discuss how they might be related to local contexts. You then delegate the task to them and support them in their work. They in turn test, adapt and adopt your findings in the unique situations in which they work.

The social interaction model

Third, there is the social interaction model. Here you identify and influence the opinion leaders in the system or institution. The communication is essentially person to person rather than through a network of centres and the findings are gradually diffused throughout the system. Such an approach can fail or succeed in the same ways and for the same reasons as social or political movements rise and fall. The fluidity, lack of structure and informality of the process mean that if the timing is wrong, if there isn't a groundswell of opinion, and if the energy and synergy aren't maintained, the diffusion process will falter and ultimately fail. Examples of such movements include the campaign against smoking and the movement for women's rights.

The problem-solver model

Finally, there is the problem-solver model. Here you aim for far closer collaboration between the researchers and the users, both in defining the needs and finding the solutions. You relate the research and the findings more closely to the local realities and turn the research process into an educative experience for the users.

We have made a number of references to this last strategy throughout this course. Sometimes we have called it 'participatory research', at other times 'collaborative research', and in other contexts, 'action research' or 'reflective practice'. Whichever term is used, what is called for is for the researchers to roll up their sleeves and to get their hands dirty and use their expertise to help others learn research and development procedures in one context so that they are able to apply these to other contexts.

None of the above approaches is infallible. Some work better in particular contexts. You may sometimes find the need to adopt a mix of these. However, if you study the appendix, you will find that the strategies we suggest for furthering the research agenda in your particular context are predominately the social interaction and problem-solver models.

Activity 5 30 mins



- 1 Read through the following case studies and match them to the four dissemination and diffusion strategies described above.
- 2 For each, suggest the advantages and the problems in adopting this approach in the case described.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Case study**Case study 1**

Research carried out by a team of international researchers showed that face-to-face or email-based interaction between learners and their tutors was a significant factor in students' completion rates in degree-level distance education courses. The team of researchers ran workshops in a number of countries where they described their methods, findings and recommendations. They also trained local researchers to communicate these findings to other institutions and to work with teaching staff in carrying out action research into the effects of face-to-face and mediated contact in course delivery, using the original findings as a base-line.

Case study 2

A university department that made extensive use of web-based conferencing in its distance education courses employed a full-time researcher to inquire into the most appropriate software for achieving this, the forms of interaction and learning that could be supported through this medium and the educational benefits from the perspectives of the learners and the tutors. When the research was completed and the findings published, this work was seen to be relevant to all other departments. The researcher was therefore asked to run workshops and develop a guide for teaching staff in how to use the Web for collaborative learning and problem-solving, and how to evaluate these activities.

Case study 3

A technical college identified a need to offer some of its courses through open and distance learning. However, it met with considerable resistance to this idea both on the part of the staff and the students. The college principal set up a small research team to enquire into the reasons for this resistance to change, to find ways of gaining greater acceptance for the new approaches, to recommend to senior management the changes needed to encourage and support these new ways of working and to collaborate with the staff in exploring the new forms of course development and delivery.

Case study 4

A Minister of Education in a low-income country recognised that a wind of change was blowing through the world's universities. Much was being written and talked about how ICT could be used to enrol and serve more students, reduce teaching costs, support more flexible and constructivist learning, achieve greater inter-institutional collaboration and bring in courses from overseas providers. He instituted a series of meetings to which he invited various researchers to provide evidence of these opportunities. One meeting was convened for educational administrators and designed to encourage dialogue on the political and economic benefits of these ideas. Another was organised for leading educators, to discuss the educational and social benefits that could come through such an approach. A third meeting was arranged for ICT experts to consider the technological feasibility and requirements of such an enterprise. A fourth meeting was organised for employer and community representatives to consider how such a strategy could serve the country's

needs for lifelong learning. Each of these special interest groups was presented with the relevant research findings, asked to debate these issues further with their own reference groups, and report on their findings so that this agenda could be pursued further.

Bridging the research-practice divide

In the above sections, we have shown you some of the prime causes of the research-practice divide.

We need to take account of the following factors:

- ▶ Policy and practice don't always follow the evidence. They may ignore or conflict with the findings.
- ▶ Policymakers and practitioners don't always take into account all of the information or all of the options. They may only consider those findings that confirm their current thinking or practices and meet their immediate needs. Their interest in your research may stop as soon as they can see a workable option.
- ▶ Research doesn't always solve problems. It sometimes complicates issues, creates new problems, and shows need for further investigation.
- ▶ Change doesn't come about through a series of logical linear steps or cyclical processes of progressively modifying policies and procedures. It often comes out of muddle, confusion, false starts, hold-ups and dead ends.
- ▶ People's thinking and actions aren't entirely rational. They are often shaped by their unconscious thoughts, feelings and reflexes and their core beliefs are highly resistant to change.
- ▶ Knowledge is not neutral. It is socially constructed. What one group or individual thinks or believes may be denied by another. The specialised knowledge of the expert may be in conflict with the conventional wisdom of the layperson.
- ▶ Knowledge is an instrument of power. This is why information and ideas can be so sharply contested.
- ▶ Those who promote or contest ideas may not even be aware of their blind-spots or prejudices.
- ▶ Not everyone shares the same culture and belief systems. Every society, every community and every institution harbours a mass of different cultures and beliefs. Knowledge and action are therefore culturally determined.
- ▶ Not everyone works to the same agenda. Those who are interested in maintaining systems are more interested in such issues as efficiency, effectiveness and economies. Those committed to changing or improving

systems are more interested in those aspects that support their particular vision and goals.

If your aim is to get your message across in ways that will achieve change, you need to understand these human quirks and try to find ways of dealing with them. Sometimes you will need to be the advocate, sometimes the trainer, sometimes the solution-provider, sometimes the problem-solver and sometimes a mix of all of these.

Summary

Bridging the research-practice divide is a complex issue. You need to consider the:

- ▶ problems that may occur with the researchers
- ▶ problems that may occur with the stakeholders
- ▶ problems that may occur with the research
- ▶ problems that may occur with the dissemination and diffusion.

Bridging the research-practice divide can bring many benefits:

- ▶ the stakeholders are better informed and better able to use the new knowledge
- ▶ the researchers gain greater satisfaction and credit for their work
- ▶ open and distance learning is improved
- ▶ and all of this creates a virtuous circle that assures quality.

In the Appendix we go on to suggest that research needs to become an integral part of institutional learning; that as open and distance educators, we should see ourselves as engaged in 'scholarly practice', that research should be part of normal professional development and that we should be working to achieve 'learning organisations'. We suggest further ways of bridging the cultural, conceptual and behavioural gaps that all too often exist between the researchers, policymakers and practitioners.

Project task



- 1 Refer back to your answers to Activities 2–5.
- 2 Using these as a framework for your thinking, list some strategies that you and others might use in your particular work context to overcome the research-practice divide.

References

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Feedback to selected activities



Feedback to activity 1

These are our answers. Yours may be slightly different.

- 1 There appear to be a number of reasons for the Vice-Chancellor not accepting the original DEC research. He was concerned about growing competition and what he'd heard about the growth of online learning, he had a vision that was primarily based upon a belief in the technology, he felt the DEC was out of touch and out of date, he failed to see that lessons learned in distance education applied to online learning, and he did not appreciate the cost, staff and educational factors that needed to be taken into account.
- 2 The external consultant's findings were so much more acceptable to the Vice-Chancellor because they coincided with the Vice-Chancellor's views and plans, they concentrated on the technological potential, they didn't seem to present so many problems and uncertainties as the DEC study, and they could be 'sold' to the departmental heads as a means of saving money and transferring funds into their accounts.
- 3 The DEC study's findings were vindicated by the subsequent experience and review team's findings three years later.
- 4 The reasons for the evaluation carried out three years later being accepted were that a new Vice-Chancellor was in post with a new vision encompassing all forms of teaching and learning, the team comprised internal and external experts in the field, and there was evidence that the new approaches were not working from the point of view of the teaching staff, students and support services.

Feedback to activity 5

Here are our answers and some ideas. You may well come up with different 'advantages' and 'problems':

Case study 1: Proliferation of centres

Advantages: The original team took the message direct to different countries so it is put across accurately; local teams were trained; these could adapt the findings to the context; the action research encourages adaptation by the users.

Problems: Local teams might not fully understand the message, which then gets diluted and/or distorted. Time consuming for original team to travel to many different places. The contexts might be too different for the findings to be relevant.

Case study 2: Centre-periphery

Advantages: The original researcher talks directly to all staff, so the message should be clear. This can be done quickly and efficiently.

Problems: Other departments may be so different that the 'solution' isn't applicable. They might object to being told what to do.

Case study 3: Problem-solver

Advantages. At the end of the process the proposal will probably be improved, having been altered and adapted to what is feasible and acceptable. More staff and students will feel they own the proposal since they have been consulted and therefore they may be more ready to implement it.

Problems: The process is time-consuming. The original ideas may get lost in the attempt to please everyone.

Case study 4: Social interaction

Advantages: All the interest groups will be better informed, and if the change is implemented, they will feel they have had an input and may be more ready to accept it.

Problems: The process is time-consuming, and at the end there will not be a plan, just a lot of ideas and reports. Nothing may come of it, unless a leader takes it forward. A lot of opposition might be generated rather than support.

Appendix: Advancing the research agenda in open and distance learning institutions

Introduction

So far, we have concentrated on how to plan and carry out your research and how to report on it. At various points, we have stressed the need for more research to inform and guide policies and practices in open and distance learning. This final unit is an appendix in order to explore more fully ways of advancing the research agenda and developing a 'research enterprise' in ODL institutions, why this is important and how you might help to achieve this.

Laurillard (2002) suggests that our universities – and her argument applies equally well to colleges, schools and any other public and private educational and training providers – need to be 'learning organisations'. She defines a learning organisation as one that attempts to conduct an internal dialogue so that it can learn from its experience and adapt to its environment. She suggests that we need to abandon any distinction between teaching and research and treat these as essentially inter-related activities. She argues that academics should not just be researchers and teachers of their own subject areas, but researchers into teaching and learning. This, Laurillard (op cit.) claims, will create a learning institution right down to the level of the individual course. In this appendix, we are going to discuss ways in which you might help to develop such a research culture in your system or institution.

It may be that you don't see this as your job. You may be quite happy to concern yourself with pure research that is more removed from the policy-making or practices in your organisation. On the other hand, you may already feel that you should play a role in applying your research to managing, operating and improving teaching and learning. We shall argue here that this can only come about when as many people as possible collaborate in their research, and develop dialogue between individuals and groups right across an institution. As Laurillard observes, each discipline has its particular challenges and vulnerabilities, so all of the research has to be reworked and applied in each and every field of academic endeavour:

Spray (2003) suggests that researchers can seek to influence by either getting close to policymakers or by being confrontational and forcing policymakers and practitioners to be more responsive to what is going on. It is obviously much easier to operate in these ways if you have some status and influence within your institution. If you are a would-be or a beginning researcher or a 'fairly small cog in the wheel', trying to do this on your own may be an uphill battle. Whatever your circumstances, you will certainly find it much easier if you involve some of your colleagues in this work and help to create a research community. In this appendix, we share some ideas on how to do this.

Some of you may read through what we have to say in this appendix and conclude: 'If we have to do all this, we might as well give up right at the start!'

Well yes, it will take time. It won't always be easy to put all of these ideas into practice. And you will need to learn to walk before you can run, so you may need to master the basics of carrying out research that we have covered so far. But if you can keep the strategies we describe in this appendix in mind and seize every opportunity to apply these ideas and involve others in your work, you will find that over time you will be capable of achieving so much more.

Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this appendix, you should be able to:

- 1 Discuss the ways of advancing the research agenda in organisations.
- 2 Consider how scholarly practice, reflective practice, action research and collaborative research might apply in your work context.
- 3 Consider the case for joining or forming professional associations, research networks or other communities of practice.
- 4 Consider ways of supporting these developments in your work context.

Addressing the challenge of bridging the research-divide

As we discussed in Unit 6 it can be quite difficult to bridge the research-practice divide in our institutions. In this appendix, we are going to look at further ways of addressing this challenge. We are going to consider how institutional cultures can be changed to give greater support to research and how our institutions can be transformed into learning organisations. We shall show that to do this, there is need to:

- ▶ establish institutional policies and procedures that encourage and support local, home-grown research and application
- ▶ recognise the cultural diversity within each institution, and the different knowledge, skills, interests, attitudes and agendas that exist among its staff
- ▶ avoid any distinction between those who research and those who practice
- ▶ promote the idea of open and distance learning as 'scholarly practice'
- ▶ involve more colleagues in research activities, professional associations, research networks and other communities of practice
- ▶ bring more enterprise, energy and boldness to the research.

Working in such ways, we are far more likely to enrich understanding, bridge the research-practice divide and invigorate open and distance learning.

Institutional policies and procedures to support research

If you are working in a traditional university, there may already be an institutional research policy in place and your colleagues may already be involved in research (although this is more likely to be in their own particular disciplines rather than into open and distance learning). There may also be such a policy if you are working in a distance teaching or open university. In both instances, there may very well be resources and support for research.

If on the other hand, you are working in a dual-mode technical, community or teachers college, an open school, or a private, non-government or community distance learning provider, it is probably the case that there is no formal research policy nor much support in the way of time release or funding for such work.

The status, nature, extent, quality and impact of research depend ultimately upon there being institutional support for this work. They also depend on researchers and practitioners connecting with each other and sharing and addressing the same priorities. There are severe limitations to what you or a small research group can achieve on your own. Work done in isolation may lead to wasted effort or potential synergy being lost. And researchers operating alone can become disillusioned and feel marginalised by the system.

If institutions really wish to ensure that their open and distance learning programmes are intellectually powerful, have quality and relevance, and are competitive and cost-effective then research must be central to their mission. As Laurillard (2002) points out, a close synergy between research and teaching is needed to ensure that our institutions are truly centres of learning. To achieve this synergy, they must place research at the core of their missions, recognise and reward research and evaluation, and provide training and professional support for the staff undertaking such work.

Unfortunately, open and distance learning is not always highly valued by institutions or looked upon as a scholarly or high priority activity by their staff. There is also a tendency for institutional recognition and reward to be granted to research concerned with knowledge building rather than policy formation and with intellectual understanding rather than action. There are still many battles to be fought and won in this regard.

Activity 1 10 mins

Consider your work context and answer the following questions from your own knowledge of it:

	Yes	No	Don't know
1 Is there a research policy in place?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Is research carried out into open and distance learning?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Does the research have a high profile/status?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Are the results published or disseminated internally?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Are the results published or disseminated externally?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Is there institutional reward and recognition for this work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Is there training and support for staff engaging in this work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Is there adequate time release/allowance for staff to do research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 What new policies would encourage and support more research in open and distance learning?			

There is no feedback to this activity

Open and distance learning as scholarly practice

The late Ernest Boyer's (1990) ideas on re-defining scholarship have had a profound effect in many institutions. Like Laurillard (op cit.) he challenges the way we run our institutions. He avoids the tired old debate about whether the staff are there to teach or carry out research, whether research should be 'theoretical' or 'pure', or 'applied' and 'useful', and which of these activities should be the more highly rewarded.

He suggests that we need to recognise that there are four equally creative, equally intellectually demanding, overlapping forms of scholarship:

- ▶ the scholarship of discovery
- ▶ the scholarship of integration

- ▶ the scholarship of application
- ▶ the scholarship of teaching.

Reading



The scholarship of discovery

For Boyer (1990) the scholarship of discovery is close to what we may call pure research. It is concerned with asking fundamental questions about what we know and need to know. It contributes to our stock of knowledge and the intellectual climate in our institutions. In the open and distance learning context, it can take the form of fundamental research into, for example, the theory and philosophy of this form of learning, issues of cognition and metacognition, or new technological development. Some of your colleagues may be primarily interested in this fundamental, discipline-based form of research.

The scholarship of integration

The scholarship of integration focuses on the meanings of these discoveries. This is research carried out at those points where the disciplinary boundaries meet, where things need to be put into wider context, where isolated findings need to be given meaning, and where new connections need to be made across disciplines. In the ODL context, it is the kind of research that helps us to improve our understanding of how our students learn, the contexts in which this learning takes place, and how we can design better learning systems. In the technological context, it explores areas at the crossover between psychology and technology, for example, into expert learning systems and artificial intelligence. Some of your colleagues may be more interested in such inter-disciplinary research.

The scholarship of application

With the scholarship of application, the focus turns to applying new knowledge to real-life problems. Here, theory and practice interact, inform and renew each other, and new understandings arise in the very act of implementation. In the case of open and distance learning, we need to examine such issues as how to bridge the research-practice divide, how to make professional development more effective, and how to ensure that our programmes serve the learner's needs as well as the social and economic interests. Some of your colleagues may be more interested in such applied research.

The scholarship of teaching

The term scholarship of teaching embodies the belief that we should never look upon any form of teaching as a routine activity but should continually examine how to benefit the learners, how to educate the teachers, and how to make new connections with the other forms of scholarship. Those of your colleagues who are primarily interested in teaching may be more interested in this form of research.

We need to recognise that these four forms of scholarship should not just be a minor or discrete part of whatever role we play in open and distance learning but should be **integral to our role**. We should link scholarship and practice in:

- ▶ applying various disciplines to solving complex problems in managing, developing and delivering courses and programmes

- ▶ assessing, revising and improving policies and procedures
- ▶ developing effective, efficient and robust educational products and processes
- ▶ adapting general findings and recommendations to specific local conditions.

Figure 2 links Boyer's four forms of scholarship to the kinds of educational and technological research that need to be inter-related in open and distance learning. This model suggests that there can be a scholarly role for everyone, according to their various interests – teachers, managers, technologists and support staff.

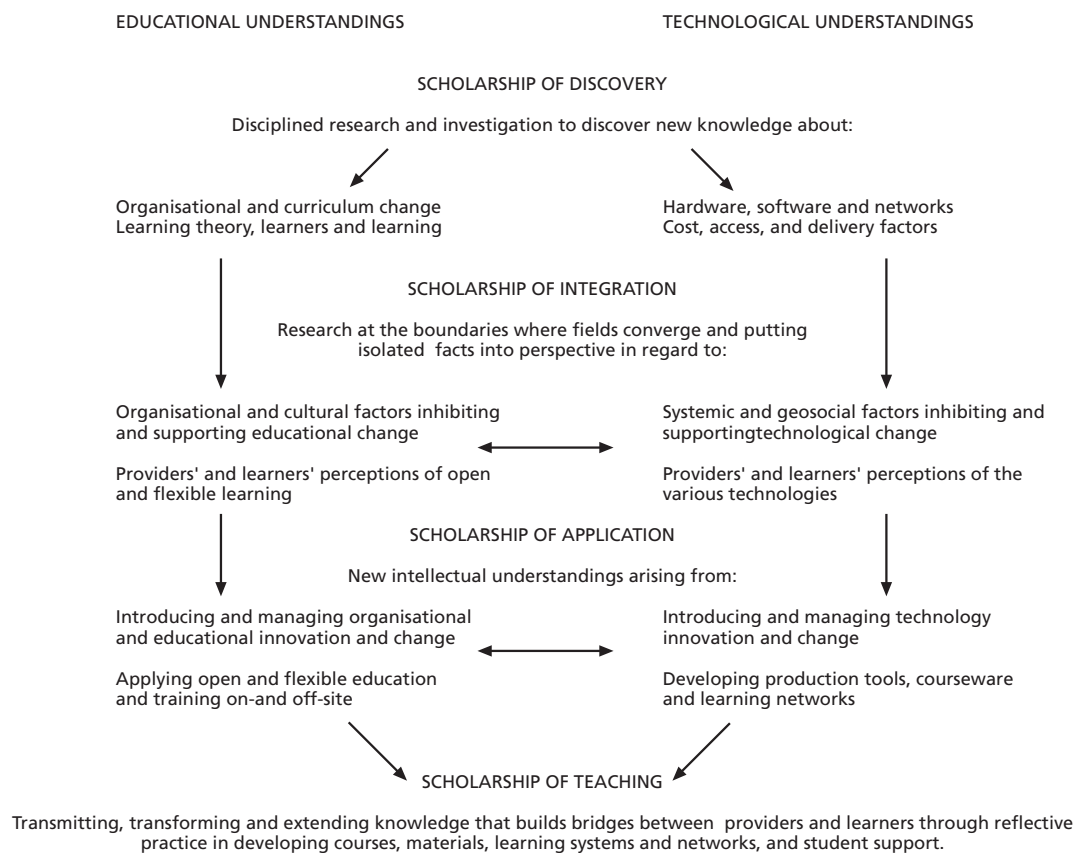


Figure 2 Boyer's four forms of scholarship

Source: Latchem, C. and Hanna, D. (eds.) 2001 *Leadership for 21st century learning: global perspectives from educational innovators*, London: Kogan Page, p 51

In the first module, we suggested that data gathering and data analysis should be a collaborative exercise. All of the policymakers and practitioners should be involved in conceiving, designing and conducting the research and exploring and interpreting the multiple realities and perceptions. And this should be done for the benefit of all members of the academic community. In later modules, we observed that there is strength in the concept of 'partners in research'. There is great need for all of the managers, teachers, researchers and technologists in our institutions to move out from behind their traditional

boundaries, take on board each others' agendas and viewpoints and collaborate in linking theory, research and practice to improve professional understanding and practice. And there is need for such work to be strongly supported by institutional policies, staff development and incentive schemes.

Activity 2 10 mins



Consider your work context and answer the following questions:

- | | Yes | No | Don't know |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Is Boyer's definition of scholarship familiar to your colleagues? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Would it be helpful to introduce this idea, to suggest the forms of research that can be undertaken, and to challenge the division of two usually opposed groups – the practitioners and the researchers? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 What forms of work could be usefully undertaken in open and distance learning in your context under the headings of: | | | |
| • The scholarship of discovery? | | | |
| • The scholarship of integration? | | | |
| • The scholarship of application? | | | |
| • The scholarship of teaching? | | | |

There is no feedback to this activity

Encouraging and supporting research enterprise

Unfortunately, some researchers **do** live in ivory towers and some **do** prefer to deal with abstractions rather than everyday realities. However, if research is to become an active force in changing policy and practice in open and distance learning, researchers need to become far more pro-active and enterprising.

Maxwell (2003) suggests four possible roles for a researcher in influencing policy and practice:

- 1 **the storyteller:** the researcher provides narratives that help to explain what the problems are and what the solutions might be
- 2 **the networker:** the researcher influences events through the position s/he holds and relationships s/he has established with others in the institution and the wider community
- 3 **the engineer:** the researcher involves him/herself in actually diagnosing the problems and working through the solutions
- 4 **the fixer:** the researcher understands the politics of the situation and knows how, when and with whom to take the appropriate steps.

Here then are some of the ways in which you might be able to strengthen research capacity and increase research activity:

- ▶ look for, and fully exploit any opportunity that gives you the chance to demonstrate your research capacities and how useful your findings might be
- ▶ improve your lines of communication and working relationships with the policy-makers and practitioners, so that you are in a stronger position to pass on your research findings and influence their thoughts and actions
- ▶ develop your skills in advocacy so that you are better able to influence the policymakers and practitioners
- ▶ put your findings into places and into forms that are readily accessible to the policymakers and the practitioners
- ▶ identify information brokers or gatekeepers who know their way around the organisation and can help to promote your research
- ▶ create a research culture within your institution, for example, by launching a monograph or a newsletter on research into open and distance learning, organising workshops, seminars or conferences, or establishing a website
- ▶ develop an institutional research database or resource collection, network access to national and international research findings, and develop strategies to make these known to staff

- ▶ form working groups or networks of open and distance learning policymakers, researchers and practitioners, to collaborate in research activities and exchange ideas and good practice within institutions, across sectors, and where possible, nationally and internationally
- ▶ change mindsets within the wider community by, for example, tailoring your research products to different audiences, presenting findings in digestible chunks and ways that will appeal to non-specialist audiences, using high impact findings, headline-grabbing quotes or sound-bites in the newspapers or on radio or television, and by writing articles for newspapers and popular journals.

Activity 3 20 mins


Having read through the above points, consider your work context and answer the following questions:

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Can you see any 'windows of opportunity' for demonstrating your research skills or promoting your research findings? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If 'Yes', what are they? | | |
| 2 Could you improve your lines of communication and working relationships with some key policymakers and practitioners? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If 'Yes', how might you do this? | | |
| 3 Can you identify any information brokers or gatekeepers who could help promote your research? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If 'Yes', who are they? | | |

4 Could you create more of a research culture in your institution?

If 'Yes', how might you do this?

5 Are there any useful working links you could establish with others inside or beyond your institution?

If 'Yes', what are they?

6 Is there a need to change mindsets in the wider community?

If 'Yes', how might you do this?

7 Could you see yourself as what Maxwell (op cit.) calls a 'storyteller'?

If 'Yes', how might you do this?

8 Could you see yourself as a 'networker'?

If 'Yes', how might you do this?

9 Could you see yourself as a 'engineer'?

If 'Yes', how might you do this?

10 Could you see yourself as a 'fixer'?

If 'Yes', how might you do this?

There is no feedback to this activity

Involving colleagues in scholarly practice

In some cases, it may seem a rather daunting task to try to involve your colleagues in researching open and distance learning. However, here are some ideas for you to think about and try out.

Helping colleagues appreciate the importance of research

First, if you are going to try to involve more of your colleagues in research work, you may need to remind them that, in today's world, we are all expected to become more accountable, and we are all required to assure quality in our work. This means that each and every one of us, in our own way, has to become a researcher or an evaluator. Whatever we do, we need to continuously ask and answer questions that will help us improve our knowledge, skills and practices, predict and control the course of events, and ensure that things are going well and according to plan.

Then, you may need to discuss with them what is actually meant by 'doing research'. You may recall that, in earlier modules, we noted that this term 'research' is used variously in different work and non-work situations and that it can carry different meanings in different cultures or communities. You may therefore need to explain to your colleagues that researching open and distance learning essentially involves three main questions:

- 1 What do we mean?** – For example, What do we mean by 'ensuring student access'?
- 2 How do we know?** – For example, how do we know whether we are or are not achieving student access?
- 3 What do we do then?** – What should we be doing or not doing in regard to student access?

You could then explain that to find answers to these questions, we need look for evidence that confirms or refutes current thinking and practices. We have to find certain data (facts or examples), analyse and synthesise these data (applying our cognitive skills), and then apply our thinking (metacognitive skills), in ways that help us be better informed in our decision-making and actions.

You could explain that there is always so much more for us to learn. So it is important to keep on testing our assumptions, our theories and our ways of working, checking these out against other evidence and others' ideas and practices. Only by doing this can we be sure that we are doing the right things and doing the things right.

When you've talked these points through with your colleagues, you could then ask them:

4 Should not this approach be the hallmark of every open and distance educator?

5 Should not we always be asking the questions 'What shall we do?' and 'Is what we have done worthwhile?'

If their answer is 'Yes', and hopefully this will be the case, whether they be managers, course designers, tutors or technologists, they could be encouraged to engage in some form of reflective practice or action research.

You may recall that we considered Donald Schon's (1987) notion of 'reflection in action' in the first module. Schon argues that professional practice, whatever form it may take, is always complex and fluid. He suggests that professionals need to be able to make sense of the unexpected and make the right kinds of judgement in confused and uncertain situations. He therefore suggests that the true professional is someone who is always learning and that their learning is experiential, personal, local and focused on continuous improvement. He calls this form of learning 'reflective practice'.

Reflective practice

In open and distance learning we tend to treat such issues as course and materials design and providing tutorial support as if there was a set of well-designed procedures. In fact, as anyone who engages in this kind of work knows only too well, it is often far from straightforward. There is also a tendency to look upon research and development as a neat linear process in which the one leads logically into the other. In the real world, the research-policy-practice linkages are confused, complex and dynamic. We often have to deal with problems that are unexpected, recurring, multifaceted, messy and ill defined. So the research needs to be embedded within the actual practice. This is what reflective practice is all about. It is an activity in which professionals individually or – even better – as a group:

- ▶ reflect upon and develop their own abilities within their own working contexts (it is an important form of professional development)
- ▶ combine research and practice in their everyday operations
- ▶ continually question commonly held assumptions and practices and their implications
- ▶ sanction open discussion where definitive answers can't be found

- ▶ look for answers to real-life problems and where these solutions might be applied in other contexts
- ▶ use a variety of findings as a basis for developing hypotheses and conclusions and revising assumptions and practices
- ▶ share and reflect upon experience.

Case Study 1 below shows how reflective practice enabled some teachers to revise their assumptions (about the course goals) and practices (in course development) in a distance teaching programme. As you undertake the activity, ask yourself whether you and your colleagues might not be able work collaboratively in this way and what outcomes and benefits might come from this way of working.

Activity 4 10 mins



- 1 Read Case study 1 below.
- 2 Identify the ways in which the tutors demonstrated that they were engaged in 'reflective practice' as described above.

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ▶

Case study



Case study 1

Two universities, one in country A and the other in country B, decided to collaborate in providing an international business course through a mix of face-to-face and videoconferenced teaching and learning. For the videoconferenced sessions, they devised a role-play in which the two sets of students in the two countries were to plan for a joint business venture in country C. The prime aim of this programme was to expose the students to the differences in business methods and legislation between the three countries.

Analysing the recordings of the conference sessions, the tutors noticed that there were marked cultural differences in the behaviours of the two groups of students. Those in country A had prepared themselves well for the negotiations with the students in country B and thought their counterparts were not at all well prepared and were not taking the exercise at all seriously. The country B students were surprised at the strong negotiating positions adopted by the country A students and their aggressive approach to the discussions. The tapes also showed that the country A students had seriously underestimated the determination of the country B students. They might have appeared to be casual and unprepared but they were capable of quickly steering the agenda to their advantage and they had shown resourcefulness and flexibility in their thinking. The country A students might have been better organised beforehand, but in the event, they found it difficult to break away from

their agreed plan and change direction in response to the country B students' strategies.

These observations alerted the tutors to the fact that there could be important cultural differences in conducting international business between these two countries. They carried out further studies into how these cultural differences could shape business dealings, how the behaviours of one culture could be interpreted or misinterpreted by people of another culture, and the educational and societal reasons for these differences.

Armed with this new knowledge, some of which they gained by consulting with the students, they gave a far higher prominence to these cultural issues in their teaching. They continued to study inter-cultural communication and decision-making in the world of business, all the time feeding their findings back into the syllabus, sensitising these business leaders of the future to the cultural dimensions of conducting business in other countries. They had never previously looked upon themselves as 'researchers', but now they began to publish their findings. To their surprise, their work not only attracted interest among distance educators but in business journals and business forums.

Action research

As Bates (2001) shows, research findings, theories, tools and techniques generated by academic researchers on behalf of others rarely trickle down through the normal channels of academic publication and dissemination. Noting the inadequacy of the dissemination of knowledge gained about telelearning in Canada's large research funding program, the *Networks of Centres of Excellence (NEC) Program*, Anderson (2002) concluded that the lack of connection results from conducting research in contexts that are fundamentally different from the eventual places of application, and from which information transfer is highly unlikely. He suggests that we should look upon our education systems and institutions as research laboratories ripe for generating both basic and applied knowledge, and that practitioners should themselves be engaged in identifying real problems, discovering new knowledge and finding appropriate solutions through action research.

Action research is a form of inquiry that can be invaluable in professional development. It encourages the participants to examine and try to improve those aspects of their work that they themselves see as of particular interest or concern. In such a case their learning is grounded in the realities of the workplace.

Like reflective practice, action research can be undertaken by individuals or by groups. However, for the staff to share and gain maximum benefit from each other's experience and for the multi-disciplinary nature of the issues to be reflected in the work, such projects are better undertaken by teams.

Action research projects are usually organised as follows:

- ▶ they are undertaken by small groups with similar interest or concerns

- ▶ the projects are chosen by the participants with the aim of investigating and improving some aspect of their work
- ▶ the groups meet regularly to reflect upon their work and report on their findings
- ▶ the groups are mentored by someone whose role it is to question, prompt and challenge their thinking and actions
- ▶ the projects proceed through cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection
- ▶ evidence of the effectiveness or otherwise of processes and outcomes is gained through a variety of evaluation methods
- ▶ this evidence is then used to try to persuade colleagues that they too could change
- ▶ the lessons learned can also be more widely disseminated through publications, conferences, etc.

Case study 2 below illustrates action research at work. You might like to think about areas where this approach might be used in your own work context and which of your colleagues might be willing to be involved.

Activity 5 10 mins



- 1 Read Case study 2.
- 2 Which of the above characteristics of action research are shown in this account?

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ▶

Case study



Case study 2

Two lecturers, working in two different institutions and who had never before collaborated, were contracted to tutor an online course for a third university. Online conferencing was a major element in this course.

When assessing the students' online conferencing performance, the tutors found that they differed in their opinions on the merits of their performance and that their feedback to the students caused confusion and even resentment over the grades. They realised that the objectives and the criteria for assessing this aspect of the course were far from clear or well thought-through.

When they asked a colleague in the education department for help, he referred them to Bloom's taxonomy of objectives and helped them to find research findings on online conferencing so that they might determine what behaviours they could expect in the students and how

they might assess and grade their performance. Having drafted some changes in these regards, they consulted with the students on the transparency, fairness and appropriateness of the new planned-for assessment system.

In the following year, they put their plan into action. They clearly stated the objectives and assessment criteria for the online conferencing right at the start of the course and monitored the learning process and learning outcomes to determine the impact of these changes. The lecturer in education collaborated with them in this research which revealed improvement in the frequency and levels of interaction and the students' understanding.

By this time, the lecturers had become intrigued by the process in which the students sought out and shared knowledge, resources and ideas within an online environment. Mentored by their colleague in the education department, they began to research how these exchanges could lead to collegiality and collaboration within a virtual student group whose members were previously unknown to each other. They began to conduct experiments to show them when and why information and ideas were requested and provided, and when and how this was done within the group as a whole, within subgroups, or on a one-to-one basis. They took careful note of the regularity, frequency and extensiveness of the exchanges. They inquired into whether the online exchanges adhered to the course outline or were more spontaneous and idiosyncratic. They also sought to find out when and why the group functioned as a whole and how and why subgroups formed.

The new insights they gained suggested further changes to the content and structure of the course. The tutors also became better informed on the roles they should play and when and how they should intervene to guide and support the students' learning.

Keen to share their new knowledge with their colleagues, they mounted workshops on online tutoring. Staff in other subjects began to develop a similar interest in their students' online collaborative learning and in how to design and manage online collaborative learning environments.

Reflective practice and action research

You will see from these two examples that reflective practice and action research have much in common. They can be applied in every aspect of open and distance learning – in policy-making and management, in course and programme development, in costing and financial decision-making, in applying technology, in regard to teaching and learning processes and outcomes, in enhancing learning environments, in internationalising open and distance learning, and so on.

Reflective practice and action research should never be looked upon as easy options. They call for systematic and rigorous enquiry and the integration of theory, practice and research. The findings need to be subjected to public scrutiny and capable of informing policies and practices at the 'micro-level'. The results also need to be reliable and robust enough to feed into other research being carried out at the macro-level.

Knowledge sharing

If research findings are to have any real impact, they need to be available to the right person at the right place in the right form at the right time. Furthermore, your colleagues need to feel that they are researching things they can do something about. So it is important to find ways of establishing networks to share this new knowledge. Intranet or internet discussion forums, mailing lists, chat rooms, links to websites and so on are all excellent ways of making findings more widely available, enabling colleagues to share their knowledge, and moving things forward.

Here is an example of how one university embedded the concept of reflective practice within its strategic plan and then put this concept into action. It is not enough to have the rhetoric right. The follow-through and the actions need to be right too. You might like to think about how you and your colleagues might collaborate and encourage the idea of reflective practice in your organisation's planning and operations. You might also like to think about the idea of organising a local forum along the lines described here.

Case study



Case study 3

A university developed a strategic plan for on- and off-campus teaching and learning. One of the five key objectives in this plan was 'to encourage reflective practice among staff'. Performance indicators or benchmarks were established to judge the extent to which this objective was being achieved. These were that ongoing training would be provided to encourage and support the concept of reflective practice, that grants, time release and other forms of reward and recognition would be used to encourage this work, and that staff would be helped in publishing and disseminating this work. The implementation of this objective was supported by:

- ▶ workshops for new and existing staff to promote the concept of reflective practice
- ▶ institutional grants and time release for staff engaged in reflective practice projects
- ▶ institutional support for national educational research and development grant applications and projects
- ▶ a forum designed to encourage and promote research in all forms of teaching and learning.

In regard to this last event, although the forum was initially conceived as in-house event, it quickly attracted teachers from other local institutions. It then became an inter-institutional event in the annual calendar with the responsibility for the venues, planning, management and proceedings rotating across the institutions. These teaching and learning forums attracted an increasing number of participants, papers and presentations. They led to an ever growing inter-institutional network and research culture. They provided a local and informal outlet for staff to share and follow up on common research interests. They enabled

new researchers to try out their ideas and findings before committing themselves to more formal and demanding presentations at national conferences and publishing in learned journals. The published proceedings provided an invaluable locally accessible resource for the ever-evolving research agenda.

Activity 6 15 mins

Consider your own work context and note down:

- 1 Research projects that might be possible in open and distance learning.
- 2 Those of your colleagues who might be interested in undertaking such work.
- 3 Those who could mentor these projects.
- 4 How you might disseminate the results of these projects.

There is no feedback to this activity

Strengthening research capacity

If learning organisations are to live up to their name, their senior managers need to create awareness of the importance of research, and opportunities for learning how to do it. They need to provide the time, resources and support for the staff to use research as a means of adapting to new conditions and ensuring high standards. Here are some ways in which institutions can provide support:

- ▶ **Post-experience and postgraduate courses.** These enjoy a high status and offer qualifications that can help staff to advance their careers. However, they do involve considerable time and cost and so they may not be open to everyone. On their own, they may not achieve the necessary bridge between research and practice.
- ▶ **In-service training.** This can be more local in focus and relatively easy to organise. However, it is usually voluntary and has a tendency to attract those who are already convinced rather than those most in need of induction and training. Short, one-off training programmes do not usually have that much impact on the system or translate into follow-up action.
- ▶ **Self-instruction.** Online, computer-based or print resources on research methods can be accessed any time, anywhere by anyone. However, their users may experience a sense of isolation and may need face-to-face support when they try to implement the new ideas.
- ▶ **National and international conference attendance.** This is useful for exchanging research findings, building up personal networks and seeing

the bigger picture. However, it can be costly and difficult to provide for everyone on the staff.

► **Formal symposia, informal gatherings, planning groups, discussion groups and debates at the local or institutional level.**

These can be useful for sharing ideas and findings, and particularly if management and staff collaborate in organising and contributing to these events.

► **Sabbaticals, secondments and shadowing** These allow managers and staff to see how others do things in other contexts. Again, it may only be possible to organise these for the lucky few and the experience in one situation does not necessarily translate readily into another.

► **Mentoring** A mentor is someone with superior research experience who supports another researcher. S/he asks questions that may have been overlooked, gives feedback on the work, and relates theory to practice. Of all of the above strategies, this may be the most convenient, cost effective and effective way of developing research capabilities. And indeed, all of the above options can be strengthened by combining them with mentoring

Putting such ideas into operation requires leadership and support from the top. Again, it may be difficult for you to promote these ideas or put them into operation if you are working all on your own and have relatively low status in your institution. But if you can find others of a like mind and form an institutional research committee and get some management representatives to serve on it, you can start to promote these ideas. There is always strength in numbers. This leads us on to the next section, which looks at joining or forming professional associations, communities of practice and research networks.

Professional associations, communities of practice and research networks

Professional associations, communities of practice and research networks can be useful research think tanks. They provide opportunities for those with common research interests to share their concerns and ideas, collate, repackage and disseminate their findings, and undertake collaborative research and capacity building. Such networks are typically voluntary and non-hierarchical. They are usually diverse in their membership and opinions and they can provide a vital bridge between policymakers, practitioners and researchers. They can be organised at the local, national or international level. Some meet regularly, hold conferences and publish journals and reports. Some are formally constituted; others are ad hoc. Some are ongoing and managed by professional bodies or national or international organisations. Others are created by individuals, do not outlive the research issues that brought them into being in the first place, or rise, wane or become dormant as issues and members come and go. Some are virtual, their members meeting online. Just

as professional associations, journals and library collections cater for specific groups, so the Internet is attracting the formation of communities of practice and special interest groups.

The Commonwealth of Learning is a strong advocate for, and supporter of, networks in open and distance learning. It helps to organise national, regional and pan-Commonwealth forums to share research and practice and it facilitates contact between professional associations in distance education. You will find a listing of Commonwealth open and distance learning associations at www.col.org/resources/weblinks/associations.htm.

Activity 7 15 mins



Read the following two case studies.

Pick out three aspects of the activities described (from either or both) which you feel would be particularly useful for new researchers.

- 1
- 2
- 3

The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit ►

Case study



Case study 4

A small group of distance educators in a low-income country decided to overcome the problems of distance and isolation in providing staff development by developing an online conferencing network to train would-be researchers. They mentored collaborative learning groups, provided guidance on research topics and methods and encouraged the participants to bring their own experiential knowledge into play.

The Web-based conferencing network was closed, so the participants were able to share common problems frankly and confidentially. There were weekly conferences, and within each of these, one of the working groups was given the task of defining a research topic and suggesting the most appropriate research methods. Other members read and responded to their postings and the mentors gave a critique.

A sub-conference was established for the absolute beginners and anyone else needing to discuss their concerns with their peers or the mentors. This provided timely support and encouragement to anyone who might be tempted to give up on their learning.

The mentors had some problems in keeping all of the participants up-to-date with the discussions, but the participants enjoyed the ‘conversation-in-writing’ approach and gained from the experience. The technology was found to be good for open discussion and reducing gender,

hierarchical or status differences. The participants welcomed the opportunity to share in learning and decided to form a local association to continue the work. They were able to hold occasional meetings and but they mainly kept in touch by means of email and an online newsletter.

Case study 5

As a lead-up to an international open and distance conference, the organisers mounted a series of online virtual conferences. The topics included: *Bridging the digital divide*, *Open and distance learning and lifelong learning*, *Student support*, *Quality assurance in open and distance learning*, *Open and distance learning for community development*, and *Copyright and intellectual property*.

These email-based conferences were topical, accessible and immediate. They were open and free to everyone, whether or not they intended to attend the conference. Each conference was moderated by an expert in the particular field. Members were also able to send private messages to the moderators and to the other participants.

The virtual conferences proved to be an excellent vehicle for drawing upon expertise and experience in developed and developing countries alike. They achieved 200-300 postings per topic.

They facilitated the incubation of ideas, access to other information sources on the Web, peer input and idea sharing on research. They also forged new working relationships across institutions, sectors, and national borders.

Activity 8 10 mins



Consider your work context and consider whether the following strategies would be feasible for advancing the institutional research agenda.

	Yes	No	Don't know
1 Post-experience and postgraduate courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 In-service training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Self-instructional materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 In-house symposiums, discussion groups, etc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Sabbaticals, secondments and shadowing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Mentoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Forming a research committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Forming a professional association	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 Joining a professional association	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Forming a research network	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11 Joining a research network



There is no feedback to this activity

Summary activity

By now, you should be in a position to start thinking about how to help advance the research agenda and do Learning Activity 9

Activity 9 20 mins



- 1 Look back over the answers you've given to Activities 1–8 and the bullet points in the Summary below.
- 2 Note down the main strategies that you would see as important and feasible if you want to advance the research agenda in your own particular work context.

There is no feedback to this activity

Summary

In this unit, we have aimed to show you that to bridge the research-practice divide and advance the research agenda in organisations, it is necessary to look beyond issues of dissemination and diffusion. We need to show enterprise and to embed what we have referred to as scholarly practice in the organisational policies and procedures of our institutions.

If, having worked through this unit, you think you would like to try to advance the research agenda in your work context, you might like to consider the following questions:

- ▶ Do we have the right policies in place?
- ▶ Do we have the right incentives?
- ▶ Do we have the necessary support?
- ▶ How can we encourage more reflective practice, action research and collaborative research?
- ▶ What professional associations, communities of practice or research networks can we join or form?
- ▶ How can we advance the research agenda and change mindsets in the wider academic community and general public?
- ▶ What other levers for change can we use to advance the research agenda and bridge the research-practice divide?
- ▶ What barriers and resistances are we likely to encounter and how can we surmount these?

- ▶ How can we measure success in these regards?

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Feedback to selected activities



Feedback to activity 4

We feel that these tutors demonstrated that they were engaged in reflective practice by:

- ▶ recording the sessions in order to review them later
- ▶ analysing the interactions and noting that there were marked cultural differences between the student groups

- ▶ carrying out further studies to determine how these cultural differences might effect the conduct of international business
 - ▶ examining how behaviours could be judged differently in different cultures and the educational and social reasons for such differences and judgements
 - ▶ consulting with the students
 - ▶ studying inter-cultural communication and decision-making in the world of business
 - ▶ feeding their findings back into the syllabus and observing the effects.
-

Feedback to activity 5

We feel that this Case Study exemplifies action research in that:

- ▶ the three tutors worked together in diagnosing the issues and seeking to improve the course
 - ▶ they continued to work collaboratively over the year
 - ▶ their colleague from education acted as a mentor or critical friend
 - ▶ there were at least two cycles. The first involved identifying the problem and exploring its causes, then planning changes in the ways in which they set out the objectives, monitoring the ways in which the learners performed and the learning that took place and finally, reflecting upon the results in later cycles, they looked into the exchanges of information within the groups and their role as facilitators
 - ▶ evaluation methods are not mentioned here but if they 'carried out experiments' it can be assumed that there was rigorous monitoring and measuring
 - ▶ they ran workshops for their colleagues and encouraged them to undertake further research in this area.
-

Feedback to activity 7

You will have your own views, but we would see the following as being particularly useful here

Case study 4

- ▶ taking the training to the trainees by developing an online learning network
- ▶ encouraging the would-be researchers to learn in collaboration with each other
- ▶ providing mentoring by the more experienced
- ▶ organising a sub-conference for the absolute beginners

- ▶ the provision of follow-up activities such as meetings, email exchanges and an online newsletter.

Case study 5

- ▶ looking at a range of relevant topics from the perspectives of different types of professional in different kinds of institution in different countries and circumstances
- ▶ calling in recognised experts to moderate discussions in their particular areas of expertise
- ▶ providing online orientation and preparation opportunities for a face-to-face regional conference
- ▶ creating new working links and networks that could further the research agenda.

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