CHAPTER 7

PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 7 addresses the last two questions of this study, namely Question 4 “What problems are CDEP participants encountering in their applications of CDEP ideas/practices/approaches in their job situations and how are DEASA member institutions assisting or hindering participants’ application attempts?” and Question 5, “What issues surrounding the CDEP delivery, for example materials, teaching and learning, learners’ responsibility in the learning/teaching process and collaboration in delivery, need to be addressed in the CDEP for feedback purposes?”

The chapter begins by discussing the problems that the CDEP learners are encountering in their application of CDEP ideas. The main problems identified by CDEP learners are lack of resources, job insecurity and the impact of national policy. The chapter then moves on to discuss two clusters of issues surrounding the CDEP delivery and the relationship between these issues and the feedback presented in the previous Chapter. The two clusters cover issues needing to be addressed by DEASA member organisations and by the providers, UNISA-ICE and SACHED-DETU. These issues are shown to result in paradoxical situations concerning the high regard for the programme versus enrolment, throughput rates, recognition and reward, on the one hand, and programme precepts versus delivery practices, on the other.
7.2 PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED IN APPLICATION OF CDEP IDEAS/APPROACHES

The problems identified by CDEP learners in the questionnaire responses, interviews, tutor-marked assignments and during observation are inter-related. Lack of and/or limited availability of financial resources has an impact on staffing and delivery. Job insecurity, on the other hand, results from both limited resources and the impact of national policy on institutional decisions about staffing.

7.2.1 Lack of resources

In Figure 6.6 Mogotsi, one of the Lesotho learners participating in the group interview mentioned how lack of resources resulted in understaffing and unavailability of services like face-to-face counselling to distance learners in his organisation and that this adversely affected application of the knowledge and skills he had learned from the CDEP. Other responses to the questionnaires and comments during non-participant observation have also noted that lack of resources impacted negatively on applications of CDEP knowledge and skills. The evidence cited included space problems where sharing of offices often makes it difficult to have confidential discussions with learners during counselling and other contact sessions, impact of limited resources on the learning materials produced in some organisations and the difficulties of extending the CDEP type of regional collaboration to other activities like the development of good quality materials and visits to other institutions to learn firsthand about new ways of improving institutional provision.
However, lack of or limited availability of resources is a reality in most ODL institutions. It manifests itself in a variety of ways ranging from budget cuts to staff retrenchments. It is, as will be discussed later, one of the issues facing organisations that are participating in the CDEP and which makes it difficult for them to pay enrolment fees for larger numbers of learners. The essential skill for dealing with financial resource problems is, perhaps, as aptly put by Lerato another Lesotho learners in Figure 6.6, how to provide a reasonably good service within the constraints of limited financial resource: “We are now in a position to advise how the scarce resources that we have can be divided among our centres.” Also though the face-to-face counselling skills cannot be immediately applied, the knowledge gained might be useful in future when the financial situation in his organisation improves or even when employed in a different organisation that can afford these services.

7.2.2 Job insecurity and impact of national policy decisions

Pitso in Figure 6.10 mentioned the problem of job insecurity affecting many White male South Africans who feel despite the valuable contributions they are making in their jobs, their chances of promotion or changing jobs are slim due to policies that seek to correct past racial and gender imbalances. In a predominantly Black rural town like the one where Pitso worked before changing jobs, such concerns are real when considered within an organisational context that:

- For many years favoured the employment of White males.
- Has recently made serious attempts to address the demographic imbalances through, inter alia, early retirements.
- Was at that time on the verge of being merged with another White male dominated institution.
It is, thus, not surprising that Pitso felt frustrated in his earlier job by lack of upward mobility and decided to and succeeded in looking for another position at head office before the merger took effect. Such a change is beneficial for the person concerned, but it has major implications for the organisation as Candice’s comments in Figure 7.1 will show.

Candice, a 1999 learner from the same organisation as Pitso and who happens to be a White female, viewed the problems caused by early retirements from the perspective of their impact on the quality of service to learners and the demands made on the remaining staff. Her narrative on early retirements comes from her portfolio assignment and it is in the form of comments on snippets from a management communiqué, see Figure 7.1. She mentions in the portfolio assignment that she could not refrain from commenting as she did on management’s message to staff about early retirements and the need for staff to work harder in a competitive environment because she felt that their decisions are based on financial reasons mainly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGEMENT'S MESSAGE</th>
<th>CANDICE’S COMMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early retirements: 121 academics staff and 140 administrative staff.</td>
<td>The retirement of those 261 staff members means also the loss of an invaluable amount of experience and wisdom in teaching, effective administration and student support. Where needed new staff will be appointed. But, we are all aware of the lengthy process needed for the selection and appointment of new personnel. Before the new staff can be appointed, the remaining staff will have to work hard and will have even less time to provide good teaching, effective administration and good student support. Later, the newly appointed staff will have to be trained. Again... less time will be available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone being prepared to work harder</td>
<td>It is what we have been doing for the past two and a half years! But it does not matter how...</td>
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hard we work: there are only so many hours available in a day’s work. Providing support to students takes time, if we have to work harder (or rather “do more with fewer hands – Principal’s address for the closing of the University – December 1997) somehow we have to find time!

Competitive environment: competition very strong – quality.

How can we provide “quality” in a strong competitive environment if, presently, we are already struggling to render a good service at all levels?

From my “little corner”, I feel that management’s move is not easy to understand. Management’s main consideration appears to be solely financial to the detriment of quality teaching, effective administration and good student support. To deliver quality in a competitive environment, our institution must provide the distance learners with quality student support at every level. Both conditions require time, experience/wisdom and knowledge.

Candice’s comments show the predicament of staff working in organisations undergoing transformation. Staff members are aware that they have to provide good service but dwindling numbers and loss of experienced staff adversely affect their work and services to learners. Organisations’ decisions, on the other hand, are not merely based on financial considerations as Candice suggests from her “little corner”. National policy imperatives demand change of old practices and introduction of measures to address past imbalances and major change is always difficult for those concerned.

In other countries these problems do not manifest themselves in black and white racial overtones, but in terms of nationality. Foreign nationals employed in Botswana, Lesotho and
Swaziland voiced similar problems of insecurity and sense of injustice. They raised concerns that though they are doing their work with integrity, diligence and quality, they often do not enjoy similar benefits as locals such as staff development and training and job security. A few, for example, mentioned that they had to enrol for the CDEP from their personal resources because of government policy. Also, they were allowed to continue in these positions only while there were no locals to do the same job. By the time of arranging in-depth interviews with learners in 2002, one of these foreign nationals had already lost his job in one of these countries because a suitable local person had been found.

But, while CDEP staff members tend to blame management for these types of adverse decisions, management are in fact implementing national government policies. Such decisions do hinder learners’ application of CDEP ideas, but institutions, especially public ones, have no choice but to comply with national policy.

7.3 ISSUES SURROUNDING DELIVERY

The CDEP participants have provided a balanced view of the programme, capturing the strengths and/or good quality aspects but also noting with concern some of the issues surrounding the delivery of the programme and recommending that these issues should be addressed to make the programme even better. These issues fall within two clusters. The first cluster is of issues related to enrolments and/or use of the programme by organisations and unsatisfactory throughput rates. The second cluster centres on issues that emanate from the two groups of CDEP organisations, namely providers and users. The user organisations issues cover lack of
enabling policy, no recognition, currency and reward after completion of the CDEP and limited financial resources. The issues relating to the providing institutions cover marketing, level and national focus of the programme, and management and administration matters which also encompass teaching and learner support issues as well as some aspects of the course materials, Figure 7.3, lists the two clusters and sub-groups of key issues. All these issues result in a couple of paradoxical situations surrounding the delivery of the CDEP, namely high regard versus actual enrolment, attrition, throughput, recognition and reward, and CDEP precepts versus provider practices.

**Figure 7.2: Issues surrounding delivery and emergent paradoxes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENERAL ISSUES</th>
<th>ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Enrolments</td>
<td>1. Enabling staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and unsatisfactory throughput rates</td>
<td>development policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Recognition,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>currency and reward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Limited resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PARADOXICAL SITUATIONS:**
1. High regard versus enrolments, throughput/attrition, recognition and reward.
2. Precepts versus practices

### 7.3.1 Enrolments and throughput rates

Evidence from field visits and CDEP records showed that enrolments over the four year period of this study never matched the plans of the providers. Between 1997 and 2000 the highest
DEASA enrolment figure was achieved in 1998 when 74 learners were registered. This represented an increase of over 321% on the initial enrolment of 23 learners in 1997, see Figure 6.1 in the previous chapter for the enrolment numbers. Thereafter there was a progressive decrease in enrolments during the last two years with 45 and 35 learners registered in 1999 and 2000 respectively.

Institutional participation was also at its highest in 1998 when 13 of the 17 total participating institutions, took part in the CDEP as compared to 8 in 1997, 6 in 1999 and 4 in 2000. Four of the participating institutions had the highest number of staff enrolled in the project over the four year period. These organisations are UNISA with 37 learners, CES 31, NAMCOL 30 and LDTC 27. Both the UNISA and CES highest enrolment figures were in 1998 when COL sponsored registration of some of the part-time tutors who were providing learner support services in rural learning centres. When in subsequent years, the number of sponsorships was reduced to below 50 per year for DEASA as a whole, enrolments declined, though some institutions provided limited additional support from their own resources. BOCODOL, CES, NAMCOL and UNISA are the four institutions that enrolled additional learners from their own funds to supplement the annual 45-50 total COL sponsorship and enable other needy organisations to have more learners.

In addition to low enrolments certain aspects of learner throughput rates presented another type of issues surrounding the delivery of the CDEP. As indicated in Chapter 5, the CDEP requirements for successful completion of studies are that learners should study the five prescribed print modules and the audio programmes; write, submit and pass the prescribed five
assignments, sit examinations and receive a minimum mark of 50% for both the assignments and examination.

An analysis of the CDEP documents reveal that the number of CDEP learners that met these requirements and successfully completed their studies over the period 1997 – 2000 is 119 (67%) of the total registration of 177 learners. These 119 learners would fall within Jeffreys’ (2004) “continuous programme retention” group in that they were continuously enrolled in the CDEP and took the required modules sequentially until they met the programme’s certificate completion requirements including modules repeated after temporary withdrawal and/or failure. From this continuous programme retention group, the “ideal programme retention” (Jeffreys 2004: 7) sub-group consists of 64 learners who successfully completed the required modules sequentially in the specified time period of one year without evidence of withdrawal or failure. The rest (55) completed at different times during the period 1997 - 2002.

![Figure 7.3 Annual continuous retention rates](image)

Analysed by cohort, the CDEP reveals a progressive decline in the continuous programme retention rates of the four CDEP 1997 – 2000 cohorts. The highest continuous programme
retention rate of 78.3% achieved by the first cohort (1997) declines progressively to 70.3%, 62.2% and 60% for the 1998, 1999 and 2000 cohorts respectively. Figure 7.3 is a graphic representation of these figures.

While 60% and above continuous programme retention rates in ODL are regarded as good (as some higher education programmes have as low as 10% completion rates (Perraton et al 2004: 216) the progressive decline is a worrying factor and this raises questions of the kind of support put in place by the providing institution and mechanisms used by participating organisations to arrest attrition during the various stages of study. User organisations have contributed at least 25% of learners’ registration fees, why then were they prepared to let their money and that of their sponsor, COL, go down the drain because of non-completion? DEASA, on the other hand, had received between 50% and 75% sponsorship from COL for these organisations and their learners. What did it do to address this problem? During field visits, learners commented that their institutions’ support during the course of their studies was minimal. Institutions had recommended the programme to them but seldom enquired about their progress nor rewarded them after successfully completing the course, see Figure 7.8.

Another dimension emerging from an analysis of the retention rates is the varying times taken by learners in each cohort to complete their studies. Except for the prescribed schedules for tutor marked assignments and the final examinations, open and distance learners study at their own pace, time and place. Most CDEP learners falling within the continuous programme retention group took advantage of the CDEP’s flexible arrangements for sitting examinations and wrote examinations at times that they felt ready to do so. However, some learners in the 2000 cohort
have not taken advantage of subsequent examination sittings to complete their studies, and thus dropped out completely after the first year of study.

Figure 7.4 is an illustration of the duration of continuous programme retention for each cohort. This Figure shows that in the 1997 cohort, those continuous programme retention group members that did not write their examinations in October 1997 sat for subsequent examinations within not more than 15 months of initial enrolment. The 1998 and 1999 cohorts took longer to finish.

**Figure 7.4 Cohort continuous retention rates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Registration and completion dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>10 43,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>1999</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2000</td>
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Figure 7.4 also shows that in the 1997 cohort, 10 learners (43,3%) fell within the “ideal programme retention” group in that they successfully completed their studies at the first possible examination sitting in October 1997 without evidence of withdrawal or failure. The remaining 8 learners completed in four subsequent examination sittings from Jan 1998 – January 2001. None of these learners had at any stage written and failed any examination. They had decided to “stopout” (Jeffreys 2004: 8), that is take a break in continuous enrolment for sometime and only
sat for exams when they felt ready. The overall attrition (drop-out) rate for this cohort was 21.7%, that is 5 of the 23 registered learners.

There were 18 (24%) learners in the ideal programme retention rate in 1998. A totals of 52 learners (70.3%) were within the continuous programme retention group and they completed their studies over six examination sittings from October 1998 – October 2000. For the first time there were examination failures in this cohort. There were six learners who failed at the first examination sitting, 2 at the second sitting and one of these came from the first sitting’s failures. 2 of the first sitting failures repeated and passed during the second sitting. The remaining 5 failures subsequently dropped out from the programme. The stopout period for some of the learners from this cohort was longer than in the first cohort. The attrition rate in this cohort was 29.7%, that is 22 of the total registration of 74.

From the 1999 cohort of 45 learners, the 28 continuous retention group of learners (62.2%) successfully completed their studies over five examination sittings between October 1999 and January 2002. The ideal programme retention group had 15 learners (33.3%). There were no failures during all these sessions, but the overall drop-out rate of 37.8% was higher than in the previous two years.

60% (21) of the total 35 registered learners in the 2000 cohort formed part of the ideal programme retention group and completed their studies at the first possible examination sitting in October 2000. None of the remaining 14 learners had to date sat for examinations during the subsequent sittings. This cohort had the highest attrition rate (40%) and there were no stopouts.
The picture emerging from an analysis of the annual ideal programme retention rates show a sharp drop in 1998 and the highest rise in 2000, as Figure 7.5 demonstrates. The percentage of learners completing their studies within the required period, ideal programme retention, is highest for the 2000 cohort. In comparison 1997, 1998 and 1999 had 43.3%, 24% and 33.3% ideal programme retention respectively. This suggests that the learners who dropped out from the 2000 cohort either studied for non-certification purposes or found the programme unsuitable for their needs or other factors discouraged them from completing their studies.

![Figure 7.5 Annual Ideal Retention Rates](image)

7.3.2 Organisational issues

Organisational issues fall into two groups: those relating to user organisations and those of providing organisations.

7.3.2.1 User organisations issues

DEASA member organisations decided to enrol their staff members on the CDEP because they believed it would provide suitable ODL staff development and training or according to Angeline, a Director in one of the participating organisations:
Figure 7.6 Angeline’s view on CDEP and staff development

All the staff in my organisation had no professional qualification in ODL. The opportunity to register staff on the CDEP was very appealing. In fact at that time the CDEP was the only course available at that level. The decision to register staff was also part of the organisation’s staff development strategy. A UNISA course was an obvious choice for me since my experience of studying with UNISA made me confident that it was a good course. I did not know that a similar course was offered by the Open University of Tanzania, but I am not sure I would have allowed people to enrol on a course and institution that I had no adequate knowledge of.

This staff development strategy was certainly supported by all the DEASA organisations that participated in the CDEP over the four year period 1997 - 2000 and it continues to be supported by all current DEASA members. The positive responses regarding various aspects of the delivery of the CDEP confirm the value of the CDEP to its stakeholders. They also indicate the contribution to the DEASA members’ staff development strategy and improvement of the quality of ODL provision in the region.

However, there are three closely linked issues concerning the role of organisations participating in the CDEP that have emerged from this study. These issues are the need for enabling institutional policy on ODL staff development, recognition, reward and currency of the CDEP and financial issues.

a) Enabling institutional ODL staff development policy

An enabling institutional policy environment is crucial for programme implementation but as Lentell (2004: 251) notes:
in both the north and the south there is a remarkable absence of coherent, joined up, policy on implementing open and distance learning with the aim of achieving the policy priorities governments have identified for themselves, despite much genuflection directed at its supposed effectiveness and relevance.

Chapter 4 has described the ODL policy situation in DEASA member countries mainly in broad general terms. The emphasis of the discussion in this section is on the ODL staff development policy environment in DEASA member organisations that participated in the CDEP, and the focus is on implementation and not mere “genuflection”. The position presented by CDEP participants corroborates the view that:

At the finer level of grain, there are issues of implementation – just how should one train staff or arrange for quality assurance - that belong more clearly to individual distance-teaching institutions (Lentell 2004: 253)

And that this level is as important as the upper level policy decisions falling within the framework of general education and training policy at national and institutional levels.

CDEP participants have raised issues about this finer level of CDEP implementation and indicated that the DEASA member organisations policy decision to enrol staff on the CDEP as part of their staff development and training strategy is often not supplemented at organisational level with concrete steps to support learners effectively during the course of their studies and
after completion. Figure 7.7, an extract from an interview with Angeline, shows that a staff
development policy covering financial support and study leave exists in her organisation.

**Figure 7.7: Angeline’s organisation’s staff development policy**

Interviewer: How do you support them (your staff) during their studies?

Angeline: We have an agreement to support staff through a 2 day study leave per month to enable
them to study and write assignments. Our policy is clear, namely that staff should get these two
days and extra day for examination leave. They are also entitled to ask for additional leave if
necessary. Our human resources department also motivates staff by sending them good luck with
studies messages during or before exams. These are all incentives to encourage them to study.

Interviewer: In what way has your institution recognised successful completion of the CDEP?

Angeline: We did not give any special recognition. Therefore we need to think about this and do
something about it. We ask staff to report on progress with their studies and normally motivate
them to continue studying. We award no salary notch for qualifications. Salary increases are
linked to performance only.

Discussions with CDEP learners from her organisation, however, indicate that this policy is at
variance with what CDEP learners regard as essential elements of implementation, see Figure 7.8
for comparison of the two viewpoints.

CDEP learners from this organisation confirmed the existence of a staff development policy
covering a loan for enrolment on courses provided by different institutions nationally and within
SADC. In the case of the CDEP, the COL and institutions’ 75% and 25% sponsorship
respectively means that learners study without charge. But, CDEP learners’ concern is that
though encouraged by their organisations to enrol on the CDEP, there was during the course of
their studies and after completion very limited encouragement and support from organisations.
Neither were there concrete ways in which their completion of the course was recognised and
rewarded. Successful learners expect something to be “coming” after completion and not just verbal acknowledgements that they were carrying out their duties in an effective and efficient manner, as Yoliswa in Figure 7.8 says.

**Figure 7.8: Yoliswa, a Namibian learner’s view on need for follow-up support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer: In earlier discussions with learners and also from the responses on the questionnaire sent to learners earlier in this evaluation, some people felt they were not getting support and/or reward for doing the certificate. Is this the same with you or is there a difference?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yoliswa: Ya, I am one of those that raised that question, because we were informed or were recommended by our supervisors to do this course and then after completing the course, there is nothing coming. People did not even come back to us about whether we have completed the studies. So, I was really questioning that. Why should we in the first instance do the course because after completing the studies there is nothing coming, except for knowing what to do in our offices? There is no salary increment after completing the studies so what is the need for doing it? Is it just to help our learners or what? I do not know of someone who got a salary increase after completing it.</td>
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This shows that, for these learners, financial support for enrolment and good luck messages during examinations are inadequate. Institutional encouragement for staff to enrol and complete the CDEP should be complemented with some form of recognition and reward after completion.

The evidence given above on organisational staff development policy and implementation are from an organisation providing secondary level ODL programmes. However, the situation is not different even in tertiary education DEASA member organisations. Learners from these organisations have also supported the above views in their responses to the questionnaire and in interviews. Administrative and support staff, particularly, have indicated that there are clear
policies on study leave and that the COL / DEASA sponsorship covers their enrolment fees, but, that support and encouragement from line managers was not provided during and after study.

b) Recognition, currency and reward

From the views above, it is clear that CDEP learners want acceptable staff development policy to be coupled with recognition and/or reward for the qualification gained. The current situation has shown no tangible recognition and reward for successful completion of the CDEP by DEASA member organisations though the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained from the CDEP contributed to the quality of work done by staff. In contrast completion of a degree that might have no direct relevance to the organisations’ operations, was recognised and rewarded by some organisations through a thirteenth cheque or even considered for confirmation of tenure. The learners’ unhappiness about lack of recognition and reward for the CDEP was also evident in questionnaire responses to the question on how the CDEP had not met participants’ expectations where learners stated that this was one of the weaknesses of the programme. This view was also supported during field visits, see figure 7.9.

**Figure: 7.9: CDEP learners comments about recognition and reward**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i) Comments from questionnaires</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some of my colleagues are asking if the certificate can in any way place them at a slightly higher paying job, i.e. if employers are aware of this course and its benefits (a 1998 learner from Botswana).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The certificate course is great, but what next? At this stage the certificate was actually just a self-enrichment course – it means nothing on the salary scale. (a 1999 learner from Lesotho).</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>ii) Comments during field visits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have had no promotion/no salary upgrade since completing the course (a comment from a 1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Promotion to higher positions and monetary reward for completion are, thus, regarded by learners as crucial indicators of recognition and currency of the CDEP within organisations and their absence shows a weakness of the programme.

But monetary and/or promotion are not the only expectations cited by CDEP learners. The currency of the programme with regard to creating pathways for and articulation with further studies, have also been raised as issues needing attention. Comments from the questionnaire have included:

**Figure 7.10: CDEP learners’ comments on further studies**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It does not provide access to further studies (Botswana learner)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Though it is not as detailed as the Postgraduate Diploma in Distance Education, the Certificate covers a large area of what DE is and I feel it should at least count for one module towards the PGDDE studies at UNISA (South African learner).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The only problem I have is with the name “certificate” – most of the candidates are graduates and a Diploma will make more sense to their employers (Swaziland learner).</td>
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</table>

But where learners had the right undergraduate university entry qualifications, the CDEP encouraged them to study further as noted by the earlier Lesotho interviewee, Bontle, who said
the CDEP had opened doors for her (empuletse monyetla) and she had enrolled for an Adult Education Degree. For those without these qualifications, on the other hand, the CDEP, as an undergraduate certificate, currently provides no clear career paths, nor articulation with other courses. The articulation suggested in Figure 7.9 is with similar post-graduate qualification like the PGDDE, but such articulation would not be possible for learners without graduate qualifications, because of the CDEP level and institutional requirements for entry to post graduate studies. Also the limited content coverage of the CDEP makes it difficult to provide credits for complete Modules of the new programmes like BA ODL (UNISA-ICE 2006)

c) Limited resources

DEASA member organisations are hampered in their attempts to enrol staff members on the CDEP by limited financial resources. The COL 75% sponsorship has partly alleviated this problem. However, COL’s resources are also not limitless and COL’s assistance is required by all members of the Commonwealth. The fact that DEASA during the period of this study had membership in only five of the 14 SADC member countries thwarted attempts to get increased sponsorship as DEASA was seen as not adequately representative of the SADC region. Thus, only once during this period, in 1998, was DEASA given sponsorship covering more than 70 learners most of which was intended to cover urgent remote and rural areas’ needs. For the rest of the four years allocations per country have ranged between 4 and 10 learners annually. Countries with more member organisations have had at most two per organisation and higher numbers in some institution have resulted from inter country or institution negotiations. Organisations’ budgets have, in the main, been used for providing the balance of 25%
sponsorship and only a few organisations have been able to enrol additional learners out of their own resources.

From the interview with Angeline in Figure 7.11, it is clear that withdrawal of the COL sponsorship will adversely affect the CDEP enrolment, but that it is possible for organisations to find alternatives:

**Figure 7.11: Angeline on strategies for continued sponsorship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer: If COL does not continue the sponsorship, how will your institution continue with the staff development strategy that you have described?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Angeline: It will be possible to do so in two ways: 1) sponsor fewer people and 2) study loan arrangement where if successful at the end of studies, the loan becomes a grant. This will serve as a great incentive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The institution will include support structures like a mentor or motivational tutor who will report on progress and motivate staff throughout their studies.</td>
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Figures 7.8 and 7.9 covering learners’ comments about recognition and reward for successful completion of the CDEP showed that Angeline’s suggested incentives will be appreciated by learners only if they are coupled with recognition in the form of promotion and/or financial reward. Whether the conversion of the loan to a grant will meet learners’ expectations is doubtful, as the current DEASA-COL sponsorship can be deemed to be a grant since most learners pay nothing for enrolment. Sponsoring fewer students will reduce the number of CDEP enrolments even further and might have adverse effects for the continued delivery of the CDEP unless other users are found as will be argued later.
Kipling, a director in another DEASA member organisation that is involved in higher education, has during an interview succinctly summarised the dilemma faced by DEASA member organisations and showed the linkages among funding, recognition and reward for successful completion of the CDEP and the bias of higher education institutions towards providing funding for full-time faculty staff and not part-time staff like tutors and administrative staff. His comments confirmed learners’ views that this bias is supportive of funding for degree studies rather than certificate programmes like the CDEP which as he says he would like to see continuing despite these problems. He believes that the bias is found mainly in dual mode institutions, but learners in dedicated ODL institutions have attested that these issues are prevalent in both types of organisations.

**Figure 7.12: Kipling on links between CDEP, funding, recognition and reward**

| Interviewer: Why do you think organizations were not enrolling more staff members on the course? |
| Kipling: I believe the answer lies somewhere in terms of the actual translation of satisfaction by the institutions into recognition in career terms by those institutions for successful completers. This might have something to do with the inability of academic institutions in Southern Africa to recognise for promotional purposes anything other than academics degrees etc and therefore their unwillingness to invest in non-degree training. To some extent this is now being catered for by the upgrade to the BA/ODL, but I think the need to give recognition in career terms to the basic course would still be desirable and necessary if the CDEP as a certificate course is to survive, which as you know, I think it should. This was certainly a problem in getting my organisation’s funds for training devoted to the CDEP. Another reason was the difficulty of persuading non-dedicated institutions to devote training to part-time staff. |
7.3.2.2 Providing organisations

Issues requiring the attention from the providing organisations cover marketing, level and national focus of the programme and management and administration matters which also include teaching, learner support and learning materials matters.

a) Marketing

Marketing is an important activity for promoting programmes to potential target audiences and other secondary users. Existing institutional records show that the CDEP was actively marketed during the first year of its introduction in 1997. Adverts were placed in the UNISA publication, UNISA News, and local mass media: The Sunday Times, Sowetan and Beeld in February and March 1997. There were also write-ups on the introduction of the programme in Beeld and the Sowetan newspapers and the latter wrote that:

This is a first for Unisa and it is appropriate that the oldest distance education institution in the world should celebrate its 50 years of existence in this way (Sowetan, March 20 1997).

From 1998 onwards, due mainly to financial constraints, this kind of mass media marketing was discontinued and the providers relied mainly on advertising the programme through DEASA member organisations and by including the programme in the annual UNISA certificates brochures. DEASA then became the main user of the programme and there were very few individual learners from the general public who enrolled. Some of the 1997 non-DEASA learners who enrolled were not working in ODL institutions and were said to have found it
difficult to do the assignments which required them to apply ODL concepts and knowledge in their work contexts (UNISA-ICE 1998). This was the reason why the providers decided to apply the entry requirement of ODL experience or work in ODL programmes more strictly and also to concentrate their learner recruitment strategy on DEASA organisations (UNISA-ICE 2004). However, the emphasis of the marketing strategy on DEASA members left out some of the major ODL providers in South Africa, namely private sector organisations and emerging distance education units of contact institutions like Pretoria and Potchefstroom universities and so forth.

This chapter has already discussed the low enrolment numbers of the CDEP in comparison with the UNISA-ICE/SACHED-DETU projections and the positive response about the relevance and overall quality of the programme. While some of the reasons for this state of affairs could be related to recognition and reward for successful completion of the programme, learners have in the questionnaires also identified marketing as part of the problem as the comments from learners in Figure 7.13 demonstrate.

**Figure 7.13: Comments on CDEP marketing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many people who need it are unaware of it or that it is good enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course is not accessible to everyone. Learners who have passed Grade 12 should be given a chance to register.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course must be made available to anyone who wants to study it, not just distance education practitioners in order to equip the nations of Southern Africa with the necessary skills in distance education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course is very good. It should be taken by senior level management so that they have a working knowledge of DE as most of them don’t have. The course may be despised as being too basic, but they don’t know what they are missing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Low registration numbers and the resultant low programme income have contributed to lack of funds for marketing the course extensively. But, one of the problems that the provider has noted is that even when the focus of the marketing strategy was on DEASA members, there was insufficient penetration of this market (UNISA – ICE 2005) in that marketing has tended to rely on circulation of promotion materials at the two annual regional meetings. No extensive individual ODL institution marketing strategies have been implemented. Also because the target audience of the CDEP has been identified as lower levels of ODL staff members employed in administrative posts or part-time tutoring staff, the marketing of the course has generally excluded the higher levels and full-time academic staff in the targeted organisations.

The comment from one of the CDEP learners in Figure 7.13 about the need to include senior level staff as another potential target audience is worth taking up seriously, especially because some of the participants of the CDEP during the period of this research have included senior administrative managers and academic staff in positions of Regional Centre Managers and Acting Vice-Chancellor in one instance. Some of these staff members have been very positive about the value and utility of the programme in their assignments and during interviews. At the September 2005 DEASA meeting in Mozambique which this researcher attended, a Zimbabwe DEASA member reported that they had decided to use their 10 DEASA/COL sponsorship to enrol all their senior management staff on the CDEP starting from the Vice Chancellor to heads of departments because, “it is crucial that the leaders know and understand ODL so that they manage their organisation effectively and establish the necessary systems and procedures for quality ODL provision.” Such comments show some of the directions that the UNISA-ICE marketing strategies should consider, namely to market the programme widely and include a
broader audience than that originally envisaged in the planning of the programme. The collaboration experience over these four years has shown that the participants of the CDEP are not merely the learners and tutors, but also ODL organisations like DEASA members and COL without whose participation, the programme might not have reached its current status and regional outreach.

b) Level and national focus
Pitso, the interviewee in Figure 6.10 indicated that the level of the CDEP was dealt with by Mosadi, the CDEP tutor-marker, in an innovative and satisfying manner as Mosadi encouraged him to work at his own level and according to his study needs and interests. Other learners have raised the issue of the level of the CDEP from three different points of view. First, a few learners who had very low educational backgrounds, that is without Matriculation exemption or O Levels, have found it difficult to cope within the current timeframes and have suggested that the duration of the CDEP should be increased to a full 12 months, that is, if they register in January they should write exams in December and not October as is current practice at UNISA. This 12 months dispensation, they have suggested, should be for people with lower qualifications and/or those who “had long been away from school and could not do as well as those fresh from school.” Second, those with higher qualifications have found the course materials “too basic” and have suggested that advanced exercises or activities or additional readings should be included. Third, some learners with higher qualifications have found the course not as basic as it might seem at face value: “the course may be despised as being too basic, but they don’t know what they are missing” and that the CDEP “commits learners to more demanding studies than can be initially suspected.” The third view accommodates Pitso’s suggestion on the role of the
tutor-marker which Robinson (1981) describes as including an ability to perceive the student’s state of knowledge and concepts framework and providing support accordingly. However, this position only addresses the needs of those learners who are prepared to at least begin to study and write the first few assignments and then benefit from the constructive comments from the tutor-marker. Those who never venture thus far are lost before the intervention of the tutor-marker.

With regard to the national focus of the programme, the comments made relate to the difficulty of understanding the South African examples given in the study materials and the limited number of examples from other southern African countries. Some learners, especially those from Botswana, found South African examples like the 1976 Soweto students’ riots not really applicable to their context and would have preferred something else from their own context. The CDEP tutor-marker, Mosadi, indicated in an interview that the problem of South African bias in the CDEP has since 2001 been addressed by prescribing the DEASA produced book of Learner Support Case Studies (Nonyongo & Ngengebule 1998) which covers examples from organisations within the five DEASA member countries.

c) Management, administration and related issues

Teaching and learning issues have also been included in this section because they have management and administration implications.

The most frequently mentioned issues are poor communication with learners, assignment turnaround time and limited provision for face-to-face support. Examples of poor
communication include the no response to e-mails which was mentioned in Pitso’s interview in Figure 6.10 and responses in the questionnaire like “UNISA should be sensitive to the problems of communication and delivery experienced by students outside South Africa” or “Someone should always be available to answer learners’ problems” or “the CDEP has not met my reasons for joining because of administration”. The no response to e-mail by the full-time UNISA-ICE staff is of major concern as this mode of communication can be relatively immediate and would offset the delays of postal communication. E-mail communication is also relatively cheaper for learners than telephonic communication. And, indeed, if a South African staff member working at one of the provider’s regional centres can experience such problems as described in Figure 6.10, international learners and those from other remote South African areas may have been discouraged by this kind of poor service and even dropped out. Postal delays, on the other hand, are outside the control of UNISA-ICE, but should be taken into consideration when scheduling support activities and assignments and other ways of addressing these problems need investigation. For a learner not to have “received back some of my assignments up till now” is, however, not good and indicates a need for regular two-way communication between learners and the providing organisation to facilitate early detection of problems.

Some of the learners have also noted that their late registration aggravated the situation because they received the materials late in the year and had limited time to complete their studies before the October examinations. Mosadi, the tutor-markers, has also commented that late approval of sponsorship was partly to blame and that some learners actually started learning after mid-year and that:
It is impossible for them to get the materials in July and write in October and do any learning; they do their best but it is much too short. And some of the people who register late do not want to write their exams the following May. They say they would rather take their chances.

This late registration might have been the reason for some learners’ comment that the duration of the CDEP should be 12 months. Late registration, the resultant late arrival of materials and feedback on assignments were noted as main weaknesses of the CDEP: “the only draw back is that I got the materials and feedback very late. So I did not have enough time to read and do assignments, so I did not give my best because of pressure” (one learner’s questionnaire response).

But, learners also need to take some of the blame because they are said to delay completing registration forms or in some instances send incomplete forms to UNISA which then have to be sent back. Others are said to refuse to extend their exam dates and would rather take their chances (UNISA-ICE 2005 and interview with Mosadi).

Inadequate face-to-face support has also been mentioned. This problem is aggravated by low numbers and the widely dispersed location of learner in the five DEASA member countries. Unlike in Swaziland, where Mzwakhe in Figure 6.7 says that the distance from the university and learning centres is minimal and public transport is good and “one can travel from North to South and East to West within one and a half hours,” in other countries the venues of tutorials are often very far or difficult to reach because of the geographical terrain, for example in South
Africa, Lesotho and Namibia. The CDEP therefore faces major challenges in providing support for learners in remote areas. New technologies like the cell phone short message service (SMS) could provide an answer, particularly with regard to communication about registration, delivery and receipt of materials and assignments and timeous notification about study events like tutorials. In a recent pilot study on communicating with learners of the UNISA Diploma in Youth Development, learners were very positive about this mode of communication which they said indicated that UNISA really cares and recognises that the learners are important (Mabusela & Nonyongo 2005).

Study materials related problems raised include the Eurocentric Module covers, quality of some of the audio cassettes and need for additional or advanced content. Learners have commented that the CDEP Module covers are “European and not African” (Questionnaire response) because they depict a European scenery with limited relevance to the substance of the programme or according to Pitso in Figure 6.10 made his “toe nails come off”. The audio cassettes, on the other hand, are said to be inaudible in some parts and the accents of some of the interviewees on these tapes are difficult to understand. The need to include additional content like more practical skills, for example script writing, recording and editing, and/or advanced content that is more demanding and challenging and include more advanced activities, were also raised. To some learners the content is too difficult while to others it needs to be more comprehensive and of a higher level. These comments show the challenges of offering a generic programme to diverse groups of learners and also of offering a programme developed for national needs to international learners without some modification.
7.4 PARADOXICAL SITUATIONS

The high regard and value attached to the CDEP and the nature of the contributions that learners are making in their organizations both of which were discussed in Chapter 6 when compared with the issues discussed in this chapter raise paradoxical situations about the delivery of the CDEP. It is perhaps ironic that a programme that seems successful in that it is highly regarded by all three groups of participants and its learners (corroborated by senior management in DEASA member organizations) say that their contributions in terms of knowledge of ODL and quality of services they provide in their organizations is as a result of participation in the CDEP, is then not patronized by DEASA member organisations through enrolments to the level that the providers envisaged. The kind of positive feedback about the programme suggests a potential for large scale participation and use of the CDEP by DEASA member organisations as a staff development strategy which would ultimately help to improve the quality of ODL provision in the participating organisations. By entering into a collaboration arrangement with UNISA-ICE, SACHED-DETU aimed to achieve “large-scale delivery” of the CDEP with the ultimate aim of “improving the quality of distance education provision” first in South Africa and later in Southern Africa through the collaboration with DEASA because as stated by DETU, UNISA had the capacity to delivery beyond South African borders (SACHED TRUST/DETU 1994, SACHED/UNISA 1996). The non-recognition of successful completion of the programme by user organisations in terms of reward and/or promotion also contradicts the high regard and recognition of the contributions learners are making in their organisations hence learners are asking why their organisations encouraged individual staff members to enrol.
A related paradoxical situation is the contrast between high regard and annual examination results and throughput rates. While, on the one hand, the annual examination results are generally satisfactory, that is 60% pass and above, there is a progressive decline in completion or throughput rates and a concomitant increase in attrition rates over the four year period under study. The positive responses about the CDEP suggests that learner retention in the programme and annual completion rates would be high because all the three groups of participants have indicated that they value and regard the CDEP highly as a staff development programme. In addition, because CDEP-DEASA learners are staff members employed in participating DEASA member organisations, the expectation would be that when they experience problems during the course of their studies, organisations and tutors will motivate them to continue studying or take a short stop-out and later return to complete the programme or systematically record the reasons for drop-out and inform the providers. This does not mean that the providing institution, UNISA, is exonerated from carrying out its duties of supporting learners, but that together as collaboration partners they should ensure minimal drop-out and provide support as required.

From the providers’ perspective, it is ironic that learners in a programme that teaches the theories and practices of well functioning ODL should experience the kinds of problems mentioned by Pitso and other learners, namely no response to learners’ e-mail and telephone queries and long delays in assignment turn-around time. Surely, the providers should practice what they preach. If they were doing so the problems raised by learners could have been avoided or minimised.
7.5 CONCLUSION

In addressing Questions 4 and 5 of this study, this chapter has discussed both the problems faced by CDEP learners in the implementation of CDEP knowledge and skills and the issues surrounding the programme’s delivery. Lack of resources and job insecurity emanating from implementation of national policy, have been identified as the two main problems adversely affecting implementation of some of the CDEP ideas. Two categories of issues have emerged from the CDEP delivery, namely general (concerning low enrolments and unsatisfactory throughput rates) and organisational issues (concerning lack of enabling staff development policy, CDEP non-recognition, currency and reward and limited resources relating to user organisations and marketing, level and national focus of the CDEP and management and administration issues with regard to provider organisations).

These issues have highlighted the paradoxical situations emerging from the CDEP delivery. On the one hand, learners and user organisations value the CDEP highly as demonstrated in Chapter 6: Figures 6.3; 6.4; 6.5 concerning reasons for learners, organisations and tutors participation in the programme, their views on the materials and relevance of the CDEP respectively and they believe that concrete and positive contributions to the quality of organisations’ provision have resulted from participation in the CDEP, see Figure 6.6: Lesotho learners group interview, 6.7: Evidence from tutor-marked assignments and 6.8, 6.9 and 6.10 covering interviews with senior managers, a tutor and a learner respectively. DEASA organisations, thus, encourage their staff to enrol and pay part (25%) of the fees. On the other hand, by not providing ongoing support, monitoring learners’ progress and recognising and/or rewarding staff for successful completion
of studies, organisations contradict this high regard. The absence of alternative ways of augmenting and/or increasing enrolments is another contradiction. Though limited financial resources is partly the reason for this, institutional bias against staff development and training for administrative and part-time staff have been cited as strong by staff in both dual mode and dedicated ODL institutions. The provider organisations, on the other hand, preach well-functioning ODL theory and practice in the programme, but the management, administration and related issues raised in this study undermine these principles.