A UNIVERSITY OF THE AIR

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1. In the educational world, as elsewhere, technological discoveries are making a profound impact. Television and radio, programmed learning and a wide range of audio-visual aids have already brought about considerable changes. The most important, undoubtedly, is that the best of our teachers can now be made available to vastly wider audiences. A distinguished lecture that at one time might have been heard only by a handful of students, or a few hundreds at most, can now be broadcast to millions of listeners. It has, therefore, become possible for the first time to think in terms of a University of the Air.

2. A substantial network of educational institutions provide higher and further education for both full-time and part-time students. But opportunities can be still further enlarged to meet the needs of many not attracted by traditional institutions or unable for a variety of reasons, to take advantage of them.

The Government believe that by an imaginative use of new teaching techniques and teacher/student relationships, an open university providing degree courses as rigorous and demanding as those in existing universities can be established.

3. Its purpose will be three-fold. It will contribute to the improvement of educational, cultural and professional standards generally, by making available to all who care to look and listen, scholarship of a high order. Secondly, a minority of those showing general interest will want to accept the full disciplines of study and make use of all the facilities offered. These students will be enabled to acquire degrees and other qualifications as described in the Report of the Advisory Committee that follows.

Thirdly, it will have much to contribute to students in many other parts of the world as well as those studying in the United Kingdom. In the developing countries in particular, there is an urgent need not only for elementary education but for a highly trained corps of men and women, equipped to provide leadership in national life.

4. From the outset it must be made clear that there can be no question of offering to students a make-shift project inferior in quality to other universities. That would defeat its whole purpose, as its status will be determined by the quality of its teaching.

Its aim will be to provide, in addition to television and radio lectures, correspondence courses of a quality unsurpassed anywhere in the world. These will be reinforced by residential courses and tutorials.

5. At a time when scarce capital resources must, in the national interest, be allocated with the greatest prudence, an open university could provide higher and further education for those unable to take advantage of courses in existing colleges and universities. And it could do so without requiring vast capital sums to be spent on bricks and mortar.

Nor would its courses conflict in any way with teaching now provided in W.E.A. and other adult education centres, colleges of further education or on B.B.C. and I.T.A. educational programmes. On the contrary, those who left school at an early age would have an added incentive to equip themselves by such means for higher study.

6. But if a university of this kind is to fulfil its purpose, the preparations for it must be thorough and academic standards carefully safeguarded.

The Government therefore invited an Advisory Committee to consider the educational functions and content of a University of the Air, as outlined in a speech made by Mr. Harold Wilson in Glasgow on 8th September, 1963.

7. The members of the Committee were:—

Miss JENNIE LEE, M.P. (*Chairman*), Joint Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Education and Science.

Professor K. J. ALEXANDER, Professor of Economics, University of Strathclyde.

Lord ANNAN, Provost, King's College, Cambridge.

Dr. E. W. BRIAULT, Deputy Education Officer, Inner London Education Authority.

Dr. BRYNMOR JONES, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hull.

Mr. D. J. G. HOLROYDE, Director, University of Leeds Television Centre.

Mr. PETER LASLETT, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Mr. N. I. MACKENZIE, Lecturer in Sociology, University of Sussex.

Mr. A. D. C. PETERSON, Director, Department of Education, University of Oxford.

Dr. O. G. PICKARD, Principal, Ealing Technical College.

Professor F. LLEWELLYN-JONES, Principal, University College of Swansea.

Mr. J. SCUPHAM, Retired Controller of Educational Broadcasting, British Broadcasting Corporation.

Professor H. WILTSHIRE, Professor of Adult Education, University of Nottingham.

8. Discussion centred on the type of degree courses that should be offered; the nature of supporting services; and the framework of the organisation required. Broad agreement was reached as follows.

(1) The University will require its own administrative centre, and this will be the focal point of activities; but it should make full use of existing agencies, such as the Extra-Mural Departments of Universities, the Workers' Educational Association (W.E.A.) and local education authorities.

(2) The University should offer primarily courses leading to degrees, but professional, technical, refresher and conversion courses should also be included.

(3) The degree course should be of general type. Honours level should not be included in the initial stage. It should cover a group of subjects that could be taken at two levels, "minor" (ordinary) and "major" (special).

The degree course might consist of five subjects, two at major level and three at minor level, the major subjects requiring two years' and the minor subjects one year's study. The minimum length of this degree course, on the basis that two major subjects would not be attempted at the same time, would be four years, but it could be spread

over five years or more. Some members of the Committee preferred a course of four subjects with a minimum completion time of three years for the major subjects and two years for the minor subjects. Such a course would normally require five years to complete. The main consideration is that arrangements should be flexible, so that some students could qualify in a shorter time if able to do so, and others could take longer if they found it necessary. Moreover, courses in individual subjects need not be restricted to complete years; they could extend over two winter terms, with a summer residential course in between.

It is essential that students should be given the opportunity of obtaining intermediate qualifications which should be nationally recognised. Thus certificates and diplomas should be awarded to mark the successful completion of a part or stage of the course, and "credits" should be awarded for component elements of a course which would cumulatively lead to a recognised qualification.

(4) Degrees should be conferred by the University of the Air in its own right, but in the early stages it may be necessary to operate under the aegis of an existing university or a consortium of universities. The degree should carry a specific designation in the same way as B.A.(Lond.) or B.Sc.(Leeds), indicating the location of the national centre.

(5) Courses in arts and social sciences present less difficulty than those in pure and applied science, since the latter group involve a considerable amount of practical and laboratory work, and moreover demand a well-defined previous standard of knowledge and attainment on the part of the student. It is, however, important that the University of the Air should make a contribution to scientific and technological education. The subjects offered by the University for the degree course should from the outset include mathematics and the foundations of science; and it should seek, with the co-operation of local education authorities, to extend the range for students with the necessary experience and qualifications to some technological subjects, the practical and laboratory work being carried out in technical colleges on Saturdays and in vacation periods. Shorter courses in engineering, professional, and technological subjects should be provided from the start, and a Working Party should be set up to look into the possibility of establishing courses leading to degrees and other qualifications with a technological element.

(6) The degree courses would include subjects of contemporary social, industrial and commercial importance; basic subjects like English, mathematics and foundations of science; and a range of cultural subjects.

It is recognised that it will probably not be practicable to offer a total of more than ten main subjects, and some of the subjects might be grouped together as units of one main subject.

(7) The presentation of courses will variously involve a combination of television, radio (if local stations are established these would be particularly helpful), correspondence courses, programmed instruction, tutorials and practicals, short residential courses, and study and discussions at

community viewing or study centres. The main contribution of television will be to bring lecturers of distinction within easy reach of everyone, to build up the corporate feeling of a University, and to illuminate the crucial stages of a course. It will provide an added dimension, and give the University of the Air its unique impact and coverage.

The project requires peak viewing time on a television service with national coverage. On the basis that 10 subjects would require a minimum of 20 half-hour programmes each week for a 40 week year, the television time required would be at least two hours at peak viewing time on five evenings a week, with repeats during the day, early morning, late evening, and at week-ends. Programmes should be recorded for repeats on local closed-circuit television and by other means. Additional time, some of which would also be peak viewing time, would be necessary for the shorter courses mentioned in paragraph (5).

(8) Enrolment as a student of the University should be open to everyone on payment of a registration fee, irrespective of educational qualifications, and no formal entrance requirement should be imposed. It would be necessary to provide an advisory or information service for intending students, which would help them to select suitable courses, for some of which a minimum starting level of qualifications would be advisable.

(9) An estimate of the potential audience can only be guess-work, and it can be assumed that a relatively small proportion of students would complete a full degree course. But the viewing audience would be considerable, and completion of only part of a course and the gaining of an intermediate qualification could be of great benefit to the individual and to the community. If the present rate of technological and cultural advance is to be sustained, it will depend not only on those who have reached the highest educational level, but on a population that is generally literate and well-informed.

(10) The University should arrange for regular surveys to assess the effectiveness of courses, and the size and type of audiences following them.

(11) The University will require a substantial administrative centre, with a staff of about 40–50 of professional calibre.

(12) The following organisational framework is suggested:

(*a*) The University of the Air should have its own Vice-Chancellor, and a Governing Body or Council, meeting two or three times a year. The Governing Body would be drawn largely from universities and other establishments of higher education, local education authorities, extra-mural and adult education organisations, and would include representatives of the broadcasting organisations.

(*b*) The policy-making bodies would be an Academic Board and an Examining Board. In addition, it might be advisable to have an Academic Assembly, where those working in the field could express their views.

(*c*) The University will require, at the senior level, a Director of Studies who would be responsible for the co-ordination of all the various teaching approaches that were used; a Registrar, who would also be responsible for an advisory service to students; Heads of various departments, e.g., Correspondence, Research and Assessment, Publications, and Operations (television, radio, films); and a group of highly qualified Heads of Faculties, who would be responsible for the planning of courses in their own subjects and for the selection of lecturers and tutors. They will, of course, require the support of efficient administrative machinery.

(*d*) While the University will need a number of regional centres, and will make use of existing agencies, including local education authorities, the W.E.A. and Extra-Mural Departments, it will not be enough to co-ordinate the activities of a number of separate agencies. It is hoped that existing educational institutions will co-operate in the production of courses and lend staff when needed, but the University will best achieve its aims by firm central control of a fully integrated operation.

The central authority will require a nucleus of production facilities, including studios, which will be entirely at its disposal for the production of programmes; but many of the programmes will be made elsewhere. The central organisation should deal directly with outside agencies, and retain final responsibility for the planning and presentation of programmes and courses.

Tutors will be employed by the central organisation and correspondence will be centrally organised and monitored.

(*e*) The regional centres will be responsible for liaison with universities, colleges, extra-mural departments, etc., in their areas and for making arrangements for facilities such as libraries, laboratories, and viewing/listening posts.

(13) Departmental responsibility for the University of the Air, in view of the fact that its activities would not be confined to degree work, and that other than strictly university functions and arrangements would be involved, should rest with the Department of Education and Science, rather than with the University Grants Committee.

9. The Government are now discussing with the broadcasting authorities arrangements for the television and radio programmes that will form part of the structure of a University of the Air.

10. A diagram of a possible form of organisation is given in Appendix A.

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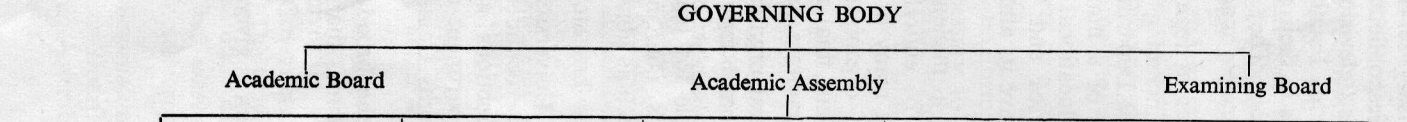
UNIVERSITY OF THE AIR. DIAGRAM OF POSSIBLE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



Functions:

Academic Direction (Director of Studies)	Administration (Registrar)	Operational	Correspondence and tutorial	Publications	Research and assessment
Co-ordination of various teaching media; academic aspects of production; responsibility for individual subjects and groups of subjects.	Central staff; relations with outside agencies; liaison with regional centres.	Production of programmes on television, radio, film.	Marking; examinations; recording of students' progress; recruitment of tutors; organisation of residential courses and of laboratory facilities. Advice to students.	Production of pamphlets and reading lists.	Research into and assessment of size and type of audience, and effectiveness of courses.

REGIONAL CENTRES

Functions—under the direction of the national centre—provision of local and regional facilities, e.g., closed circuit television, local radio (when established), community viewing centres, laboratories, libraries, etc.

APPENDIX A

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