

NOTE:

This case study has been used to inform Chapter 4 of the book,
Strategies for Sustainable Open and Distance Learning
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The case study has not been subjected to an editorial process.
The views and opinions expressed therein are those of the author.

COMMONWEALTH DIPLOMA IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: The UNISA case study.

1. Introduction

The Diploma in Youth Development was introduced in 1998 as a collaborative pilot programme between the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) and 23¹ education institutions in the four regions of the Commonwealth: Africa, Asia, Caribbean and South Pacific. Since the mid 1970s, the CYP had offered training courses for youth workers through residential contact sessions provided by the four CYP Regional Centres located in Lusaka (Africa region), Chandigarh (Asia region), Georgetown (Caribbean region) and Honiara but temporarily located in Brisbane, Australia (Pacific region). The 1995 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Trinidad and Tobago, mandated the CYP to investigate the development of a Diploma programme to be offered through “supported distance education” methods which will accommodate large numbers of students and also enable students to study nearer home and while working (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003).

Through a variety of regional and Pan Commonwealth consultation processes with youth development structures and selected higher education institutions, the curriculum for the diploma was developed. The end product of this process was a curriculum framework document, *Human Resource Development for the New Millennium: A Strategy for the Commonwealth Youth Programme*, which detailed the underlying philosophy of the programme, the core competencies, educational approach, content specifications, learning outcomes and assessment guidelines of each module. The selected higher education partner institutions sought approval of the curriculum through their accreditation structures on the basis of this framework.

The first offering of the pilot began in 1998 in some regions. The University of South Africa (UNISA) programme was launched on 3rd June 1999 to ensure adequate time for student recruitment and registrations for the 2000 academic year. The total number of students for the first offering of the pilot phase was set at 2000 students for all four Commonwealth regions. The Africa region was allocated 600 students from which UNISA’s allocation was 180 students.

2. Programme context

The main purpose of the Diploma in Youth Development (DYD) is to “provide workers with an underpinning knowledge on which to base work with young people, an understanding of the values and ethics of the profession, grounded in the values

and principles of the Commonwealth and the practical skills to undertake the work” (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003).

The supported distance education methodology for delivery of DYD is described as consisting of a four-dimensional teaching-learning strategy:

- Learner centeredness, which shall comprise a range of self-learning exercises, learner autonomy, pace and learning objectives and flexibility in responding to a variety of learning and cognitive styles and preferences.
- Comprehensiveness of learning experiences, which shall enable the total development of the learner through the provision of personalised, experiential and social learning experiences, using a wide range of learning processes and activities.
- Interactivity.
- The use of modern communication technologies that give an opportunity to interact or communicate with learning resource centres located at various nodes in the education network. (CYP-UNISA Agreement, 1999).

The DYD has three sources of funding: the CYP, South African government and students fees.

3. Institutional context

UNISA is a dedicated distance education university offering certificate, diploma and degree programmes. The DYD is offered as one of the programmes of the UNISA Institute for Continuing Education (ICE) which falls within the College of Human Sciences.

4. DYD content

The DYD is a two year diploma consisting of 15 modules (13 Core and 2 Region-Specific). The cost of producing the 13 core modules was covered by the CYP Pan-Commonwealth Office and provided free of charge to partner institutions.

The development of the 13 core modules was collaborative in approach. Each Commonwealth region selected writers and instructional designers to participate in the process. The draft modules were reviewed by all four regions. This collaborative approach has strengthened the materials and instructional design capacity within each region and ensured ownership of the programme. It has also ensured the relevance of content to all regions through inclusion of Commonwealth-wide examples, case studies etc; has improved the quality of the materials through participation of a wider pool of writers and the system of regional module reviews

The Africa Region-Specific modules have still not been developed. An alternative arrangement made by UNISA was to enrol students on modules with similar content from one of the academic departments. Recently through collaboration with a Zimbabwe based non-governmental organisation, the Regional Psycho-Social Support Initiative (REPSSI), two modules on psychosocial support for HIV/AIDS orphans and vulnerable children were developed, which serve as electives for the region-specific modules. REPSSI.

The choice of print for the delivery of this programme was to ensure easier access and standardisation of content. The diploma students throughout the Commonwealth learn from the same materials whether in urban areas or remote rural areas that have no access to modern information and communications technologies.

5. Who are the students and what are their needs?

The DYD students are youth workers employed by government, non-governmental, industry and community-based organisations. There are also a few unemployed students doing voluntary youth work in their communities, for example in church structures, home-based care centres and NGOs.

The majority of these students are between 18 and 35 years old and they thus fall within the South African definition of youth. There are no students younger than 18 and there are a few who are between 36 and 50 years old.

There are three categories of students in the DYD. The first category is students with learning and coping difficulties and who though committed to the programme are struggling with their learning and require more support. These students have work experience but no higher education entry qualifications. Their command of the English language is limited. The second category is of students with higher education experience and qualifications. These students are better able to relate theories to practical assignments, but are less committed to their diploma studies preferring higher degree level qualifications. The third category is of students with tertiary qualifications but no experience in youth work. These find it difficult to relate theory to youth work practices and approaches, but are motivated and aim for a career change. (Musandu-Nyamayaro 2002).

Students' reasons for registering on this course vary. The majority have enrolled because of the relevance of the course to current or future jobs. Some are testing the suitability of the course prior to finding permanent employment. Others were persuaded by employers to register and the fees were paid by these organisations. There are also students who are interested in certain modules only (the most popular being Project planning and implementation and Gender and development).

6. Assessment

The components of the DYD assessment strategy are:

- Continuous assessment through in-text self-help exercises with feedback; tutor marked assignments/ learning journals. The tutor marked assignments include projects / case studies / interviews etc that assess students' understanding and application of youth development theory, approaches and practices within their own local or national contexts. These assignments contribute 50% to the final year result. 10 Modules are assessed through tutor marked assignments/ learning journals.
- End of year or semester examinations in 5 Modules. These contribute 50% to the final year results.

7. Learner and learning support

The learner support provided at UNISA covers face-to-face tutorials, telephone tutorials, peer study groups, placement and mentor support, support visits by ICE staff

during orientation sessions, guidance notes, materials hand-outs, tutor marked assignments, timed-tests, learning contracts and learning journals and one-to-one student and tutor talks and counselling. UNISA full-time academic staff members oversee the teaching and quality assurance of the DYD while local tutors who have youth development knowledge and practical experience support students locally. The evaluation of the DYD has found that this system ensures that both the tutor and student get support from the university and effective learning takes place. The timely diagnostic comments and feedback from assignments marked by UNISA academics and local tutors are well appreciated by students.

The pool of qualified youth development practitioners that can serve as local tutors is limited and mainly available in urban areas. DYD students are geographically widely dispersed within the nine South African Provinces. As a result some students in rural and remote areas have had to travel over 800km to get to the nearest tutorial centre. These students' attendance is affected by the huge travel costs and inconvenience of unreliable or unavailable public transport. To address this problem, tutorials are organised fortnightly or monthly instead of weekly and for longer than 1 hour per week.

Financial difficulties also resulted in UNISA-ICE scaling down some of the learner support activities. Some of the changes introduced to limit costs were: reducing the duration of tutor training workshops; reducing tutorial venues, provincial capacity building activities, limiting teleconferencing and not producing a students' newsletter. The high attrition rate also helped to reduce assignment marking costs.

8. Conclusions

Students' comments on the diploma have been extremely positive. Past and current students recently interviewed by UNISA-ICE emphasised that the course empowered them to work with young people, helped them to grow as individual and that they have, therefore, recommended it to colleagues. The value of the diploma is perhaps best articulated by one of the diplomates who has recently joined UNISA as junior lecturer:

“This is a worthwhile Diploma, which requires a lot of hard work. It gets more easier if you work with youth whilst you are doing it because you can easily relate to that. This Diploma backs up the experience in youth work that we have and increases chances of better employment opportunities and growth. This Diploma is a dream come true for youth workers here in South Africa. The qualification is important to give weight to the profession. It is long overdue” (Kgomotso Mabusela from South Africa – Commonwealth Secretariat 2003)

The Musandu-Nyamayaro evaluation of the first offering also found that even though “On the basis of performance output and deficit of the first offering”, the target of 2000 diploma graduates will not be achieved by the end of the first offering cycle on July 2003, the first offering:

“has made significant achievements in terms of providing a feasible model for broadening access to professional training in youth development to Commonwealth member governments and NGOs through the supported distance education mode of decentralised institutional partnership frameworks based on Commonwealth memoranda of understanding and values”.

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REFERENCES

Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003. *Pan-Commonwealth Diploma in Youth in Development- A Report on the Pilot Phase 1998-2003.*

Musandu-Nyamayaro, O. 2002 *Mid-Term Evaluation of the first Offering of the Pilot Cycle of CYP Diploma – Africa Region.*