

2.3.4 Distance Education and Open Learning

Distance education and open learning are two cornerstones of the National Training Reform Agenda and the Commonwealth Government's drive towards 'the clever country'. These services take education to the students rather than vice versa.

Distance Education

Distance education is provided in all sectors: students study through off-campus based correspondence courses using a variety of media, but predominantly print-based. Students may also use PC based electronic communications from home for mail and also for access to college library catalogues and request systems. Distance students are heavily dependent on external services, such as the postal system and the telephone, as well as local participating tertiary education institutions and local libraries.

Post-secondary distance education is provided by 24 universities, and nine TAFE institutions. Eight of the universities were designated national Distance Education Centres (DECs) in late 1989 and have since built on their strengths in quality instructional design and support services for students. However the DEC system was abandoned in late 1993 in view of the government's considerable interventions in open learning. There are six schools providing distance education for children from K-12.

Open Learning

'Open learning' is a concept that extends beyond the territory of traditional distance education and has recently been stimulated by a number of Commonwealth Government initiatives. Open learning in Australia defines educational provisions able to meet a variety of requests. For example, choice of content, choice of learning method/media, choice of a place for learning ' and choice of time to learn.

According to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training:

'Open learning' is not a precisely defined term in Australia nor abroad. It has been described as "An approach rather than a system or technique; it is based on the needs of individual learners, not the interests of the teacher or