GUEST EDITORIAL

Education for Information

A US Education Department paper issued in 1988 stated: "The world of tomorrow which would usher in an information rich and technology intensive society, calls for new approaches to learning". These words reflect the challenge ahead for educational planners in every branch of knowledge including information science.

The subject of education for information has been the focus of many seminars, workshops and conferences in recent times. Agreement on what is good, necessary and feasible in India is not easy. This is no different from anywhere else in the world. However, before discussing the subject it is necessary to be on firm grounds; to be sure of what we are talking about. Therefore, definitions must come quite early in any discussion on the subject.

There is no point in setting out on any discussion on the subject with a very narrow definition. It is best to begin by understanding the term 'information science' as a discipline that seeks to establish the principles that underlie the information processing behaviour of the humans and apply these principles for designing effective and efficient information systems.

The design of information systems and their operations at any point of time have always been influenced by the technology available at that point of time. However, there are significant qualitative differences between the nature of changes brought about by the developments in information technology and those by earlier technologies.

Since the beginning of 1980s the information sector experienced an unprecedented rate of change mainly driven by technological changes and development. While it may be difficult to quantify how the present situation differs from that of the past decades, it is possible to perceive the nature of changes that are reflected in the integration of computer technology and telecommunications technology. This has been mainly responsible for ushering in what is generally referred to as the new 'information age'. There has also been an unprecedented growth in the quantum of information that is being generated the world over in a wide variety of organisations, and the media in which such information is stored and made available.

Technological developments have also significantly enhanced our ability to access, store, process and disseminate information thereby affecting the ways in which information systems are being operated and managed. All these factors have major

implications for education and training of information professionals. Some of the major questions that need to be asked and answered are:

(a) What kind of manpower is required to work in the emerging environment? For example, it is imperative for us to know the need for training different categories of manpower such as teachers of library & information science, managers of libraries, technical services personnel, reference librarians, etc.

(b) What are the different levels at which programmes of education and training in information science should be offered and what should be the content of courses?

(c) What strategies and plan should be adopted for upgrading the skills and knowledge of the existing library and information personnel? What are the major areas in which there is an immediate need for planning and implementing upgrading programmes? What agencies should be called upon to implement these plans and programmes?

(d) What, if any, should be the prerequisites for entrants to educational programmes in information science?

(e) What strategies should be adopted for user education in the emerging context of availability of a wide range of information resources in electronic form?

(f) What is the relevance of the courses at different levels that are being offered at present ? For example, in the recent years, some of the universities have discontinued the first professional degree programme, viz., the B.Lib.Sc./B.L.I.S. degree programme and introduced an integrated two -year Master's programme.

(g) Is it desirable to offer educational programmes in information science through distance learning as is being done by some open universities and institutes of correspondence education in other universities? What, if any, will be the effect of such programmes on education and training in this area?

(h) What should be the composition of the faculty of a school of information science? Recognising that information science is interdisciplinary in nature, should we include specialists drawn from such areas as management sciences, quantitative methods, system analysis and other relevant areas in addition to the existing faculty?

Answers to these questions are not easy and simple. They require detailed discussions. The papers included in this issue of DESIDOC Bulletin for Information Technology do not attempt to provide answers to all these vital questions but merely seek to identify the direction in which we should be moving. The papers are not intended to provide ready-to-use modules that can be implemented but have, as their major objective, the identification of major issues that need to be addressed by all those concerned with education for information. It is hoped that this issue of *DESIDOC Bulletin of Information Technology* will generate wider debate on the subject.

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