

The Role of Directorate of Information Services in Distance Education System

By

Ubaidullah Mumtaz*

This is an age of publicity. We observe that even some small factories, institutions depend upon the publicity to a greater extent. These owners get their commodities advertised in those areas, where their production is being sold. They get them advertised through *Banner, Poster, Newspapers, Radio and Television*. These advertisements are made very interesting, unique and even presented in attractive styles. The need of these advertisements not only felt by commercial sector, even different government offices, Ministries, Parliament, President House etc., have established their *Public Relations Offices*, which are working very efficiently.

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU) is a media-based institution, wherein an effective *Directorate of Information* is a basic need to meet the requirements of non-formal and distance education system. AIU had been established following the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU). The public Relations Office, established in UKOU, consists of about 10 Officers and adequate staff.

There are three basic responsibilities of *Directorate of Information Services*. Owing to burden of work, this office can be divided into three sections. Every section needs its work to be done with great concentration and wholeheartedly. Head of department in this way needs three officers for the supervision of these sections. Their responsibilities are as follows:

1. *Publicity*
2. *Protocol*
3. *Advertisement*

1) Publicity

This can be said without doubt that Directorate of Information Services is getting a lot of news published in national newspapers every now and then

* The writer is working as Public Relations Officer in AIU.

through this news coverage, much information about the activities and performances of AIOU come to the knowledge of the people.

Moreover, wide-range of publicity is being made, such as:

- (a) **Publicity of Academic Programme:** One of the major responsibility of Directorate of Information Services is to get the news item published, regarding courses, examinations, result, dispatching of books and all other news pertaining to the interest of the students. DIS disseminates all these news to all newspapers and electronic media. In this business a person has to be very careful, because a little mistake can make a big problem, which can cause a great menace and misconception not only for students but for the staff members also.
- (b) **Publicity of Admissions:** Directorate of Information gets admission notice published for every semester (twice in a year). For this purpose, different academic departments are contacted for information of the courses, which are to be presented in coming semester, detail of programmes, merit and conditions. The publicity through news is started one month before the admission opened and it continues till the last date for admission. The PRO always try to advertise university's programmes of admissions through speeches, interviews, and news.
- (c) Different functions, workshops, seminars are also held in main campus of the University time to time throughout the year. These functions can be categorised in three divisions:
 - ⇒ International Conferences/Seminars, and all those functions, which are to presided over by President or Prime Minister.
 - ⇒ National Conferences/Seminars in which mostly Ministers are invited.
 - ⇒ Internal functions related to AIOU, which are mostly presided over by the Vice-Chancellor.
- (d) For the first two categories, PRO has to send invitation cards. For this purpose, names and addresses of invitees are collected, which is a tiring task. Publicity of all these functions is also made before time through press and electronic media. Moreover, news are released for the functions along with different snaps. The PRO prepares such a

news which could leave good impression of the university and release it preferably with colour pictures. Therefore, the PRO tries to get these news + snaps printed on colour pages, which mostly cover $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ portion of the weekly educational editions.

- (e) **Clarification/Explanatory News:** AIOU is not only an important national institute, the Middle East countries also come in its jurisdiction. Approximately three hundred thousands students get admission in every semester in AIOU, and there may be possibility of some complaints of students regarding these matters, which have to be removed by press media. Moreover, news published against the University has also to be clarified and explained by this department.
- (f) **Introduction of Departments and their Programmes:** Introductory articles are written to introduce new Departments of the University and even old Departments are also re-introduced through write up, which are got printed in national newspapers. Moreover, press clipping of educational and its related news not only preserved but also presented to the Vice-Chancellor daily, and if V.C gives any direction, it is carried out.
- (g) **Liaison with media's persons:** Persons and journalist related to print, electronic media and news agencies are sensitive and influential members of the society. To keep good terms with journalist is one of the responsibilities of a PRO. He is required to maintain good and trustworthy relations with news agencies.

2) Protocol

Different delegations visit AIOU campus time to time. These delegations may be local or foreigner. Student groups also come on their study visit to this University. In this regard following duties are performed by this Directorate:

- i) Tentative programmes in consultation with different Departments, to get approval of competent authority and get it implemented.
- ii) Arrangement of transport and accommodation for foreign visitors.
- iii) Entertainment of visitors.

3) Advertisement

Different Departments of the university issue many kind of advertisements like 'Tender Notice', 'Show Cause Notice'. These are, anyhow, two important kinds of advertisement that are followed:

- (i) Admission advertisement Notice
- (ii) Situation Vacant

Public Relations Officer, who is also to perform duties as a Secretary, Publicity Committee, has to take keen interest in all these matters. He has to attend many meetings in this regard, for preparation of the advertisement. The PRO also sets the ads. in order for publication and gets it approved by the higher authority.

Payment of these advertisement is also one of the important responsibility of this Directorate. After publishing of the advertisement, this Department makes arrangement to pay its charges to advertisement agency as soon as possible. For this purpose, bills are prepared and got passed by the Audit Department.

All the above-mentioned facts reveal that in distance education system, the Directorate of Information Services plays a pivotal role. The DIS may be regarded as liaison between the students and the university. Through this Directorate people come to know about AIOU's programmes, activities, and performances.