



# UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN CAPE (UWC)

## POLICY STRATEGIC PLAN FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING PLAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN CAPE

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**UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE**

A place of quality, a place to grow, from hope to action through knowledge

# **Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning Plan of the University of the Western Cape**

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## **1. Introduction**

This document takes forward the goals of the IOP (2010-2014) by providing a strategic plan for teaching and learning in the institution over the next five years. While it is informed by all the institutional goals outlined in the IOP it gives specific attention to Goal 2 which aims “to provide students at UWC with an excellent teaching and learning experience that is contextually responsive to the challenges of globalisation and the needs of a society in transition”. This goal not only foregrounds the commitment articulated in our mission to strive for excellence in teaching and learning, it also gives meaning to our understanding of such excellence. It calls for a teaching and learning experience that will equip students with the knowledge and skills they will require to respond creatively to the needs of our society as critical and responsible citizens. This plan outlines those strategies that have been identified by the university as necessary to the achievement of such a teaching and learning experience for our students and which require priority attention over the next five years. It is intended to be a living document which can, on an ongoing basis, inform implementation, monitor progress and provide guidance for realignment and adjustment of activities where necessary. As a strategic plan to take forward the university’s core mandate of teaching and learning, it has particular meaning for faculties and those administrative divisions that directly support the organisation and delivery of our academic programmes. Similarly, it is intended to provide guidance to the relevant governance structures of the university that have oversight responsibility for the teaching and learning function.

## **2. A reflection on the status quo of teaching and learning at UWC**

UWC’s major strength in the area of Teaching and Learning lies in the dedicated work of its staff and their commitment to an ethic of care and social justice in teaching and learning (HEQC, commendation 4). However, the HEQC audit also identified as a significant shortcoming the lack of sufficient teaching and learning expertise and resources within the institution. The effective implementation of the Teaching and Learning strategies (outlined below) will require the development of a centralised coordinating structure for supporting and promoting teaching and learning with the capacity and profile of other such units at leading local and national Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (for example, the University of Cape Town’s Centre for Higher Education and Development; Stellenbosch’s Centre for Teaching and Learning; CPUT’s Fundani Centre; Rhodes’s Centre for Higher Education and Research into Teaching and Learning).

The previous IOP (2005-2009) identified several key issues which have been addressed to various degrees. The previous IOP notes the „insufficient attention to the transition from school to university“. This has partially been addressed in improvements in the orientation programme at the outset of the academic year; however, a more extensive orientation to the academy, linked

to supporting students" epistemological access to their particular disciplines, is required. The issue of student access and success, also a focus in the old IOP, has been addressed through successful foundation provision/ extended curriculum programmes, alternative admission routes (Recognition of Prior Learning access and portfolio development), as well as improved placement of students in appropriate programmes (3 or 4 year). There have also been interventions to improve student success at a modular level (e.g. Supplemental Instruction, SANTED-funded tutorial interventions) as well as the adoption of innovative teaching approaches (e.g. the RipMixLearn Project and in the Nursing undergraduate platform). Both the IOP (2005-2009) and the HEQC audit highlight the need to develop the notion of UWC graduate attributes and to ensure that these are included and assessed as educational outcomes in all programmes. There is currently a task team led by the Director of Teaching and Learning which has developed a discussion document on university wide graduate attributes for consideration in faculties and units.

Several structural changes have signalled the university"s commitment to the area of Teaching and Learning, including the appointment of the current DVC Academic, the appointment of the Director of Teaching and Learning, the consolidation of the Centre for Student Development and Support Services and the appointment of its Director. The Senate Teaching and Learning committee has been created, and Faculty Teaching and Learning committees have also been initiated in some instances. Some of the teaching and learning infrastructure enhancements noted in the IOP have been or are being completed (e.g. The New Life Sciences and School of Public Health buildings; equipment and upgrading of B Block generally)

The major challenge in the area of Teaching and Learning for the next five years will be to develop an outstanding centralised structure which promotes and supports Teaching & Learning at UWC. This will be crucial for the successful implementation and monitoring of the Teaching and Learning strategies (outlined below) and for the maintenance of UWC"s academic standing in relation to other HEIs.

### **3. The regulatory environment**

Both the internal and external regulatory policy environment shapes and impacts on strategic planning around the complexity of teaching and learning in public HEIs in South Africa. The external environment brings together broad *national policy imperatives* aimed at transforming and improving the provision of higher education through policy guidelines, regulatory frameworks, performance indicators linked to state funding and support, and nationally driven quality assurance processes to monitor and evaluate both institutional functioning and academic programme quality. However the internal institutional regulatory environment such as its policies and internal quality assurance systems must also take cognizance of the national frameworks in its specific *mission related goals that it aims to achieve*. The latter should also crystallize how the institution understands its teaching and learning

mandate and the vision it has for its graduates. Strategic planning around teaching and learning, therefore, is informed by both the „levels“ or contexts in which the university operates and the spectrum of issues that impact on the planning, organization, delivery and the quality assurance of its publically accountable academic programme(s).

The overarching national policy imperatives informing the core function of teaching and learning in institutions are outlined in *White Paper 3 on the transformation of higher education (1997)* and the *National Plan for Higher Education (2001)*. Although there have been substantial discussions and debates around what these documents say about teaching and learning and the shifts in emphasis that occurred from the White Paper to the National Plan, at a symbolic level they speak to the imperatives of redress and the creation of greater equity and diversity across the system. Included in the argument for greater equity is what is captured as the equal importance of “equity of access” and “equity of outcomes” which draws attention to the teaching and learning process and its importance for students’ success. What is happening within institutions with regard to teaching and learning is therefore recognized to be critical to the achievement of these broad goals. Similarly, attention is given to the importance of adequate provision of teaching and learning support, particularly academic development, as a key mechanism to facilitate improved student success.

However, the National Plan also outlines what is required of the higher education system to produce the graduates needed for “social and economic development in South Africa” (DoE, 2001). In this regard, six outcomes are listed for attention by higher education institutions. These are: increased participation rates, increased graduate outputs, a broadened social base of students, increased recruitment of students from SADC countries, changes to enrolments by fields of study and enhanced cognitive skills for graduates. These outputs are important as they have been central to defining what is expected from institutions in taking forward their public mandate and, therefore what has influenced, and, arguably, will continue to influence, the nature and form of the state’s support to HEIs and the policy and regulatory environment in which we operate. All of these outputs have meaning for teaching and learning in higher education institutions. In this regard they draw particular attention to issues of participation in the academic process and successful completion, the size and make-up of the student body and thus the implications for the teaching and learning process in responding to greater diversity (in its increasingly complex manifestations (Scott, et al, 2007)), necessary changes to what is offered at institutions, and the kinds of graduate attributes required by our society.

Using these broad parameters as a guide, the following policies, regulations, mechanisms and processes which build on the imperatives of the White paper and National Plan may be regarded as most important UWC in taking forward its teaching and learning function.

### **National and institutional admission requirements**

- Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programmes requiring a National Senior Certificate (Gov Gazette, No. 31231, 11 July 2008)
- UWC admission requirements (2009 admission)

### **National regulatory framework for academic offerings**

- Higher Education Qualifications Framework (2007)
- UWC's programme and qualifications mix (PQM)
- UWC Enrolment Planning 2000 -2010

### **State funding framework**

- The requirements and formula for the determination and allocation of the Teaching Input and Teaching Output grants
- The Teaching Development Grant (It is important to note here that in the Minister of Education's statement of 16 September 2008 an indication was given that the allocation of this grant, which was essentially a redress measure to facilitate development, was under review)
- Earmarked funding

### **Quality assurance mechanisms and processes**

- The quality assurance process of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education through programme reviews and institutional audits
- Stipulated requirements by various professional bodies relating to professional programmes and ongoing professional development
- UWC Quality Management Policy
- UWC Policy on Academic Reviews (UWC)
- UWC Policy on Programme Reviews (UWC)
- UWC Moderation and Assessment Policies

#### 4. Risk factors

A number of factors have been identified as contributing to poor student outcomes. Each of these is identified as placing UWC at risk with regard to quality teaching and learning, and consequently seriously affecting student throughput. However, it is not only throughput which should be the concern of the university, but whether students are able to attain the graduate attributes that the University develops and to which curricula and teaching and learning need to be aligned. The following factors would influence student success and their ability to attain graduate attributes:

- Lack of preparedness of students, as evidenced in the National Benchmark Tests as well as the role that system differentiation might have in addressing under-preparedness
- Lack of preparedness of academic staff, as well as the nature and organization of teaching and learning in higher education, and the conceptualization of the educational process, particularly in terms of the appropriateness of content and assessment methods. This is particularly important for a conducive environment for students to attain graduate attributes
- The extent or lack of professionalisation of academic staff
- The nature and extent of funding.
- Limited infrastructural support for flexible delivery of quality services including in the evenings, over weekends and in vacation periods.

The historical location as an Historically Black Institution (HBI) has resulted in a student profile at UWC that is predominantly working-class. This profile has a number of consequences. UWC is in competition with other, more elite, institutions to attract high performing students. Many UWC students come from schools in disadvantaged communities where they are often subjected to inferior education, and as a consequence are not sufficiently prepared for university study. The pilot National Benchmark Tests conducted at UWC in 2009 tested a sample of students in the areas of Academic Literacy, Quantitative Literacy and Mathematics and categorised students into three domains of proficient, intermediate or basic bands. The tests indicated that UWC students would require programmes which offered a great deal of support to be able to assist their learning needs to achieve a degree of quality in a reasonable time period. Students may require additional time for their induction into academic literacy at university if they are to succeed. Without this support, throughput may be severely affected.

Prevailing conceptions of teaching at UWC may not adequately respond to the needs of a varied constituency of students. For improved student throughput, a different conception of teaching and learning is also required (HEQC, 2008:30). Academic staff development with regard to teaching and learning (including theories of learning, curriculum alignment, teaching strategies, assessment and quality assurance) in this regard is implied as essential. (HEQC, 2008:31,40,42,43). Thus investment in human capacity to conduct and reward development in teaching and learning is a priority (HEQC, 2008:32, 33).

As a study into Factors Affecting Student Learning at UWC and an Audit of Staff Needs in Teaching and Learning in 2008 demonstrated, the lack of professionalisation in teaching and learning of academic staff at UWC provides a further risk to quality teaching and learning. This risk relates both to aspects of teaching (such as communicating effectively with students, providing feedback on assessment, making clear what is expected in courses) and to professionalism (such as being available for consultations at agreed upon times). Neglecting to address these identified challenges will have a serious negative effect on student academic success, and will require concerted development of an institutional identity of a „university teacher“ (HEQC, 2008:33).

Attention also needs to be given to adequate remuneration and training of competent tutors to meet students“ learning needs at UWC.

There are clear financial implications to improving throughput – investment in student development and investment in staff development as well as a conducive learning environment (HEQC, 2008:37). It is acknowledged that investment of this kind will be costly. However, it is arguable that without such a serious financial commitment, throughput at UWC will continue to be an area for concern.

## **5. Strategies for the development of teaching and learning**

### **5.1 Enhance and promote the status of teaching and learning<sup>1</sup> at UWC**

It is necessary to recognise the importance of teaching and learning as a core function which is equivalent in value to research in the institution. For teaching and learning to be taken seriously, rewards should be given for attempts to improve teaching practice such as peer review processes, use of ICTs in teaching and learning, attendance of professional development on teaching and learning, reflective practice and research into teaching and learning. The status of teaching and learning at UWC should also be promoted outside the institution on a regional, national and international level. An excellent website on teaching and learning would help to promote its status internally and externally.

#### **Outcomes**

Teaching and learning is acknowledged as an important aspect for promotion and recognition of academic status.

UWC is acknowledged as a leading institution in flexible teaching and learning strategies in the twenty first century.

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<sup>1</sup> The generic terms of teaching and learning throughout this document include the practices of teaching and learning using ICTs



## 5.2 Develop and promote the scholarship of teaching and learning at UWC

The scholarship of teaching and learning refers to that which is:

- research-led (where the curriculum is based on current disciplinary research interests),
- research-oriented (students learn about the processes of knowledge production in the undergraduate curriculum),
- research-based (the curriculum is inquiry-based; students research the subject matter rather than be given content);
- research-informed (academics are involved in researching their own pedagogical practice and basing it on prior research rather than 'common sense')<sup>2</sup>

### Outcomes

Teaching and learning at UWC is more research-led, research-oriented, research-based and research-informed concomitant with the provision of resources that support the development and promotion of the scholarship of teaching and learning at UWC.

## 5.3 Professionalise teaching through formal and informal education for academics

International experience has demonstrated that accredited teaching and learning programmes in HEIs leads to significant positive impacts on teaching and learning, and that participants become more student-focused in their practice. UWC could thus improve teaching and learning by developing a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education through regional collaboration in developing shared modules with other HEIs through CHEC. In addition to this, informal education in teaching and learning could be conducted through a centralised professional development team and faculty teaching and learning committees.

### Outcome

Teaching and learning is improved at UWC through formal and informal professional development.

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<sup>2</sup> This framework is developed from Griffiths, R. (2004) Knowledge production and the research-teaching nexus: the case of the built environment disciplines, *Studies in Higher Education* 29(6), 709–726 & Healey, M. (2005) Linking research and teaching exploring disciplinary spaces and the role of inquiry-based learning, in Barnett, R. (ed.) *Reshaping the university: new relationships between research, scholarship and teaching*, pp.30–42. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press. The following text is a classic one on scholarship which challenges the binary between teaching and research: Boyer, E. L. (1990) *Scholarship reconsidered: priorities of the professoriate*. New Jersey: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

#### **5.4 Infuse technology into teaching and learning and promote the use of e-pedagogy**

Improved and innovative teaching and learning through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is already in process through the work of the eLearning Development and Support Unit (EDSU) at UWC and needs to be further promoted. Formal professional development such as an e-pedagogy course would be important to improve teaching and learning with ICTs amongst UWC staff. An e-pedagogy course would be important to improve teaching and learning with ICTs amongst UWC staff. This course could also be developed through regional cooperation where significant experience across HEIs could be tapped on. This would further strengthen EDSU's promotion of ePedagogy; and the familiarisation and socialisation of the use of eTools –for both lecturers and students. Confidence among staff in using technology in teaching needs further development at UWC, through incentives such as teaching fellowships. Research into innovative teaching and learning using ICTs should be further encouraged. Technology could also be used to promote student-centred and flexible learning and to develop programmes to align the curriculum and to capture student evaluations.

##### **Outcome**

Technology is successfully integrated into teaching and learning for full and part-time students. An effective e-pedagogy course is developed and implemented.

#### **5.5 Develop an infrastructure for teaching and learning**

In order to give effective leadership in the teaching and learning at UWC, a structure for the coordination and promotion of teaching and learning needs to be developed. Areas such as the first year experience, graduate attributes and curriculum alignment, student evaluation, extended curricula programmes, professional development in teaching and learning, managing an interactive website for teaching and learning, promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning, training tutors, etc all need to be driven from a central structure and with human and other resources. The interactive website needs a full time manager to develop materials and promote interaction in special teaching and learning interest groups. Faculty structures need to develop strategic teaching and learning plans and to engage with these and specific issues identified as important for the improvement of teaching and learning. The idea is that the central structure for Teaching and Learning will act as a resource for assisting to improve the quality of teaching and learning in academic departments and faculties. The role of the newly established Directorate for Teaching and Learning, Deputy Deans of Teaching and Learning, Heads of Departments, academic support units (such as the Writing Centre), the Student Development Support Services, E-learning Development and Support Unit, the Academic Planning Unit and Academic Development

Officers in this regard should be aligned. The governance role of Senate and Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees, as well as the Senate Lifelong Learning Committee, needs to be consolidated and refined.

### **Outcomes**

A centralised co-ordination structure for teaching and learning is established with the necessary resources to effectively drive the strategic plan on teaching and learning. A website is developed and used by staff members. Faculty structures are set up to implement faculty teaching and learning strategic plans and respond effectively to identified issues to support and improve teaching and learning. The functioning and roles of various roleplayers concerned with the advancement of teaching and learning are well defined and aligned.

## **5.6 Embed graduate attributes into academic programmes and curricula**

Both the previous IOP (2004-2009) and the HEQC audit emphasised the need to develop UWC graduate attributes. These should be developed at an institutional, faculty and disciplinary level and curricula should be aligned to these attributes to ensure the coherence of teaching, learning activities and assessment tasks. A need to revise, develop and align academic programmes has also been identified as a priority for the institution in the 2010 framework. In addition to embedding the graduate attributes in curriculum, all programmes and services (for example Student Support and Development, DLL and HR) would need to support the development of graduate attributes. Institutional culture also needs to be conducive to enabling the development of graduate attributes.

### **Outcomes**

Graduate attributes which enhance employability and responsible citizenship are embedded in the curriculum. The academic programmes and curricula are streamlined, aligned with graduate attributes, learning outcomes, associated assessment criteria, learning activities and assessment tasks in an integrated manner. Institutional programmes and culture facilitate the development of graduate attributes. This development is informed amongst other things, by feedback from the workplace and relevant professional bodies.

## **5.7 Develop a more responsive teaching and learning environment which promotes and enhances flexible learning**

Currently students at UWC do not have access to flexible learning spaces where they could access virtual and physical spaces which lend themselves to personal, individual and group learning. A physical space needs to be developed to meet students' learning needs in this regard and to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century learners in a globalising world.

### **Outcome**

A teaching and learning centre which is conducive to flexible learning and provides spaces for face to face and virtual interactions, as well as individual learning.

### **5.8 Enhance epistemological access through responsive teaching and learning programmes and practices that adequately address students' learning needs and that improve retention and throughput for students**

Student learning needs must be identified and attended to, particularly when they initially arrive at UWC. An orientation programme which is embedded in the first year programme should be developed by faculties and academic departments in collaboration with the Centre for Student Support Services and DLL. Further support for students should be provided through ongoing curriculum selection advice by academic departments. Learning activities which increase students' responsibility, motivation and involvement should be increasingly used to involve students in the learning process and enhance retention and throughput. Foundation provision and extended curriculum programmes which enhance epistemological access are currently being provided in various parts of the university and may need to expand further to address students' learning needs. Access to competence in academic and information literacy for all students needs to be addressed. The alignment of assessment tasks and criteria, learning activities, learning outcomes and graduate attributes is needed to make the learning process transparent to students and for them to play an active role in the learning process.

The Marks Administration and Student Tracking systems should be used to monitor academic performance and give regular feedback to students re assessment tasks. These systems should also be used optimally to identify and support students at risk. Module coordinators must assume responsibility for timeous publication of continuous assessment results, lecturing staff must be available and accessible for student consultations and tutors need to be adequately trained and remunerated to address students' learning needs. Academic support and a referral system should be available within each faculty.

### **Outcomes**

Student motivation is increased and academic performance improved through close attention to their learning needs and enhanced teaching and learning practices

Improved throughput and retention rate is achieved.

Academic staff and tutors provide timeous feedback to students and involve themselves in supporting students, particularly, but not only those at risk.

## **5.9 Provide a dynamic and relevant academic programme that is contextually responsive**

Our ability to produce graduates with the kind of knowledge and skills required to participate confidently in the global knowledge economy means that we must remain committed to offering academic programmes that are contextually responsive and enabling, promoting the attributes that we aspire to in our graduates. The programmes must also be of the highest quality.

We will therefore ensure that the different elements of our academic planning and review processes, such as course planning and academic and programme review, facilitate the ongoing alignment of courses and programmes with national goals and the strategic goals of the university and promote the desired attributes. Closer alignment of the academic programme with the strategic goals of the university will enhance our ability to make more efficient use of our resources.

### **Outcome**

High quality, relevant programmes which are aligned to national goals and the strategic goals of the university Strengthen and enhance our administrative procedures and practices to better support the organization and delivery of our academic programmes and student participation.

Administrative systems, procedures and practices that impact on teaching and learning or the retention and progress of students, need to support students and staff. The Student Tracking System which is being developed has to assist relevant staff to identify and monitor students at risk and to understand student participation and throughput trends. The establishment of an integrated one-stop student service needs to be fast-tracked to minimise administrative transactions and optimise attention to teaching and learning. User friendly and accessible administrative services need to be provided through web-based applications and by adequately trained and service-oriented staff at departmental, faculty and central administration level.

### **Outcome**

Improved administrative procedures and practices which support students and staff in the teaching and learning process.

Adequately trained and service oriented administrative staff.

**It is important to note that in order to implement the teaching and learning strategic plan, an enabling institutional environment will be**

necessary. This will require dedicated resources to implement the plan as well as support from various divisions in the university. Of crucial importance will be an active engagement from the academic sector, who will be instrumental in developing and implementing plans to carry forward the project of providing students with an excellent teaching and learning experience at UWC.

**Senate Teaching and Learning Committee**

**October 2009**