


UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE			
 <p>UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE</p>	<p>FLEXIBLE LEARNING AND TEACHING PROVISIONING POLICY</p>	Council Approval Reference	C2021/05 (23 Sept 2021)
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UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

FLEXIBLE LEARNING AND TEACHING PROVISIONING POLICY

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Prepared by Academic Planning Unit (APU)

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

DRAFT POLICY FOR FLEXIBLE LEARNING AND TEACHING PROVISIONING

1. AIM OF THE POLICY

This FLTP Policy provides the parameters and offers an enabling framework for flexible learning and teaching provisioning (FLTP) within which its users can define, plan, resource, implement, monitor and evaluate flexible provisioning, in the context of full qualifications and short learning programmes.

In doing so, this policy proposes flexible provisioning that enables (a) the delivery of especially postgraduate programmes in fully online mode where appropriate and approved by Senate; (b) the delivery of programmes in blended mode as proposed by Faculties and approved by Senate; and (c) digitally-enhanced learning and the development of digital literacy skills as essential graduate attributes and core skills for academics.

The aim of this policy is to identify and define the approaches, scope, principles and procedures for Flexible Learning and Teaching Provisioning. Nothing in this policy shall imply that UWC will mainstream fully online education, and instead, the policy re-affirms the institution's commitment to providing a quality physical environment to enable the provision of quality campus-based and digitally-supported learning and teaching.

In 2021, the University and the DHET agreed, as an intermediate term target (accomplishable in one to five years), that 3% of UWC accredited programmes may be offered by way of fully online delivery. It is envisaged, that to meet this target, UWC will focus on offering appropriate postgraduate programmes in fully online mode. Undergraduate programmes will continue to be offered largely in campus-based and blended format, with varied degrees of technology-enhanced provisioning, as appropriate to the relevant programme.

2. POLICY-RELATED CONTEXTS

This policy is aligned with the following internal learning and teaching-related policies:

- Teaching and Learning Policy (2006)
- Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning (2009)
- The UWC Charter for Graduate Attributes (2009)
- Framework for Student Retention and Success (2019)
- UWC Curriculum Transformation and Renewal Framework (2021)
- UWC Assessment Policy (2021)

2.1 Institutional policy context

- a) This policy is situated within the University's mission, wherein:

It is committed to excellence in teaching, learning and research, to nurturing the cultural diversity of South Africa, and to responding in critical and creative ways to the needs of a society in

transition. Drawing on its proud experiences in the liberation struggle, the University is aware of having a distinctive academic role in helping build an equitable and dynamic society.

- b) This policy gives further expression to the Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) 2016-2020, Goal 2, which commits UWC as follows:

To provide opportunities for an excellent learning and teaching experience that is contextually responsive to the challenges of globalization and of a society in transition and that enhances the students' capacities to be change agents in the 21st century.

- c) The policy further supports the following commitment in the IOP (2016-2020):

UWC will promote enhanced learning opportunities through the innovative use of emerging technologies.

The technological advances of the 'digital age' are fundamentally changing both how students learn and engage with information and what competences they will require in a world of work equally influenced by these advances. UWC is committed to enabling its academic staff to enhance the learning experience of students by developing the multiple academic and digital literacies that inform this context and are needed to engage effectively with it.

Strengthening the informed use of technologies in learning and teaching is a central feature of the plan. This must be underpinned by pedagogical rationales which draw on the potential of these technologies to transform learning and teaching, especially by facilitating the active participation of students. In this regard, exploring less traditional digital media of learning and communication will be particularly important. The University is building its capacity to be a 'connected' campus which pursues excellent learning opportunities, among other things through facilitating the 'internal' and 'external' connectedness of its students. Digital technologies are an important vehicle to support this intention.

2.2 National policy and related guidelines

In defining key principles for FLTP, UWC endorses open learning purposes and principles, as first described in the *White Paper for Education and Training (1995)*. In this policy, which supports expanding access to more cost-effective and flexible quality education and training, open learning is described as:

An educational approach which combines the principles of learner-centredness, life-long learning, flexibility of learning provisioning, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provisioning of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the belief that learners can succeed and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support system.

The DHET's *Open Learning Policy Framework for South African Post-school Education and Training (2017)* describes key barriers to access such as discrimination on the basis of physical disability, gender, age, social class or race; a lack of qualifications necessary for admission; financial constraints; past experience of transmission type pedagogy and assessments that restrict accessibility and contribute to a loss of confidence; as well as geographical isolation of students from campuses; lack of reliable access to digital infrastructure; inability to take time off from work or family responsibilities.

In response to these barriers, the Open Learning Policy Framework provided the following rationale for the DHET's adoption of open learning:

The DHET has adopted 'open learning' as a strategy to increase access to education and training opportunities and to construct quality learning environments which take account of learner contexts and use the most cost-effective methods and technologies.

3. DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF FLEXIBLE LEARNING AT UWC

This policy uses flexible provisioning to refer to offering learning programmes through (a) fully online provision and (b) through blended learning approaches that include the use of digital learning technologies to enhance flexibility and enrich the quality of students' learning experience.

Flexible delivery also refers to an approach wherein specific modules and programmes are purposefully designed to enable the inclusion of students who are unable to attend the University full time. UWC has had a long history of offering part time and evening provisioning, as well as a recent history of offering fully online learning, to accommodate students in far-flung areas, working adults and international students to promote learning flexibility and lifelong learning.

UWC recognises the importance of equitable and effective access to ICTs to enable the full participation of all students in flexible (blended and fully online) learning experiences. Mechanisms for supporting this goal include the provision of computer labs and ubiquitous Wi-Fi on campus and in residences, and the provision of laptops to incoming first year students. Specific mechanisms for supporting students with disabilities include the provision of specialized software and services through the Office for Students with Disabilities, and the progressive realization of accessibility best practice in both online platforms and learning content.

Campus-based learning is valued at UWC as crucial to effective student growth and success. Campus life provides opportunities for students to engage with lecturers face-to-face, and with each other, as a campus community built on real-time interactions, conversations, engagements and debates. The University recognizes the value of campus-based learning supported by up-to-date physical infrastructure as crucial for student success and the successful acquisition of UWC's Graduate Attributes. UWC recognizes that a quality physical environment, which also enables comfortable access for students with disabilities/differently-abled students, is the foundation from which to enable flexible learning and teaching provisioning.

4. FLEXIBLE MODES AND APPROACHES

This policy supports the ongoing development of technology-enhanced blended learning across both online and face-to-face teaching environments in order to:

- assist in enhancing the student experience;
- support innovative teaching strategies;
- build students and staff digital skills while enhancing the digital capacity of UWC; and
- promote social intellectualization and collective/collaborative learning possibilities amongst students.

At UWC the Centre for Innovative Educational and Communication Technologies (CIECT) has played a vital role in managing digital learning and training students, educators and administrative staff in the use of ICTs and in the design of pedagogically sound learning and teaching activities using ICTs (SAQA 2015). E-learning tools and ICT resources, in particular those curated by CIECT, provide the infrastructure for flexible learning that is technologically-enhanced and allows for its expansion across the University.

4.1 Blended Learning

Blended learning refers to approaches where students learn in digital and online media as well as traditional face-to-face teaching, and can include a range of technologies and the deployment of both physical and virtual resources to suit different purposes, students and contexts. Rather than replacing face-to-face lecture delivery with online delivery, in blended learning the online component is usually used to complement the in-class lecture. The ultimate goal of blended learning arrangements is to promote active and self-directed learning opportunities for students by joining the best features of face-to-face in-class instruction with the best features of online instruction. Hybrid learning is a form of blended learning, and defines a classroom arrangement that enables some students to attend in-person while others join in virtually. Hybrid classrooms are characterized by synchronous delivery, but may also include asynchronous learning elements.

It is understood that different forms of blended learning will suit different programmes. It is recommended that as a rule, when using a blended learning approach, first-year students should be provided with more face-to-face teaching than online delivery, to facilitate their transition to university, and also to online learning.

Where Faculties adopt a blended learning approach, programme design must be coordinated at Faculty level, with individual lecturers preparing individual module plans for a blended approach. These plans should specify the percentage of teaching and learning time dedicated to contact and to online delivery; details of assessments and examinations to be completed in each mode; and logistical arrangements including the resource needs for synchronous and/or asynchronous teaching, and so on.

4.2 Fully online learning

Fully online learning involves the predominant use of the internet to learn. Students have to be connected to the internet to access and interact with learning materials, interact with peers and lecturers, participate in discussions and do assessments. In designing fully online programs, Faculties and Departments must carefully consider whether a programme or course is more appropriate to offer fully online rather than via contact or blended mode; who the target students are; what the rationale is for offering a course or programme fully online and what the implications are in terms of inclusion or exclusion, as well as specific needs of the targeted students.

5. GENERAL

- a. Any undergraduate or postgraduate module or programme can be offered in blended mode.

- b. Decisions to offer blended learning approaches must be made at a level appropriate to the scope and impact of the choices. Hence, decisions related to the balance between physical and virtual classroom instruction, within a programme, should be made at Faculty level.
- c. Requests to offer programmes in fully online mode must be submitted to the Senate Academic Planning Committee, thereafter to Senate and Council and finally to the CHE for approval.
- d. Blended and fully online learning models are chosen to enhance student engagement and learning and not to reduce the costs of delivering teaching or to reduce teaching loads. In some circumstances, blended learning and flexible delivery may require increased investment of resources to ensure sustainable delivery of high-quality learning and teaching.
- e. Security issues relating to the authentication of a student's work must be considered when designing appropriate assessments and assessment processes. The integrity of the qualification and programme should not be compromised; and the same academic requirements and standards should be applied to all students.

6. IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBLE PROVISIONING

6.1 Programme design and delivery

- a. The design of all new fully online programmes will need to take place in consultation with the relevant expertise in the Institution such as the Division for Learning, Teaching and Student Success, the Academic Planning Unit, the Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies (CIECT), the Quality Assurance Office and also the Library.
- b. Programme design must ensure that blended and fully online learning developments are student-centred and subject-led rather than technology led. The University will make available recommended design principles and guidelines for blended and fully online delivery.
- c. The learning, teaching and assessment strategies adopted in flexible (blended and fully online) delivery should be specifically designed for this context.
- d. Flexible (blended and fully online) learning approaches should be embedded in overall curriculum design and logically linked to learning outcomes. Access to quality learning opportunities should be built into the design of programmes, courses and learning materials, the design of learning itself, the graphic materials and experiential activities, and these should be imaginatively constructed with the student and their context in mind.
- e. Blended learning will not always provide students a choice of where and when they can study.

6.2 Student information and support

- a. The University creates the conditions for a fair chance of student success through student support, contextually appropriate resources and sound pedagogical practices. Blended and fully online learning and teaching is provided within the ambit of the *UWC Framework for Student Retention and Success*.
- b. Students are provided with access to learning materials and learning support, on the understanding that employment of sophisticated e-learning technology, especially in programmes that are fully online, may exclude many students who lack access to the necessary devices and/or reliable internet connectivity. Faculty Librarians should be consulted regarding provision of digital learning materials.
- c. Digital literacy is recognized as an important graduate attribute and a core skill for academic staff and students. Students are trained during orientation in using digital tools for learning, and competencies are developed through the use of digital tools in the curriculum. A key goal would be to assist students, as they progress, to become proficient in using digital tools in the areas of analytics, coding, storytelling, data visualizations and so on, that could serve them beyond graduation.
- d. Instructional materials must be easily accessible by students with disabilities via alternative instructional strategies and/or referring to special institutional resources.
- e. Prior to enrolment on a blended or fully online learning programme, students must be provided with an induction to the programme. This should include, but not be limited to, the nature and extent of autonomous learning, collaborative and supported aspects of learning, details of specified timings for synchronous learning or assessment, rules governing flexibility for students, and measures in place to protect students' right to privacy in terms of the POPIA Act.

6.3 Support for staff

- a. All staff involved in teaching should participate in formal professional development initiatives provided by the University, towards developing their knowledge and skills in flexible learning and teaching provisioning approaches.
- b. UWC will ensure staff are trained, supported, resourced and recognised for effective and innovative blended learning approaches and fully online delivery at an institutional level.

6.4 Technology support systems

- a. A quality virtual environment is provided at all times, and is firmly based on the pedagogical needs of the course and its students, is reliable and robust, is aligned to the technical infrastructure of the institution and is regularly subjected to internal evaluations, updating and improvements as needed.

- b. The University will invest in, research and support online infrastructure and learning spaces that allow for flexible (blended and fully online) approaches, including online student feedback, analytics, online submission of assignments, student sharing of content and learnings and personalized student communications.
- c. Staff and students are likely to need ongoing technological support, which should be clearly, easily and readily available to them, as should all services, information, tools and resources necessary to facilitate and enable learning.

6.5 Quality assurance of flexible provisioning

- a. The University will regularly review flexible (blended and fully online) approaches across courses and programmes of study for applicability, relevance and best practice in relation to student needs and desired learning outcomes. It is expected that FLTP will confirm to all quality related requirements of the University, the HEQC and relevant professional bodies.
- b. The University will regularly review administrative and student support systems and services to ensure their effectiveness in supporting flexible learning and teaching provisioning across the University. Regular feedback will be sought from students in all courses and programmes, and programme teams should provide evidence during review processes that they reflect on the regular feedback from students in order to enhance the quality of courses and programmes.

7. RELATED POLICY AND LEGISLATION

Internal and institutional

UWC Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) (2016-2020)

UWC Mission (current)

UWC Framework for Student Retention and Success (2019)

UWC Principles and Guidelines for the Transformation and Renewal of the Curriculum (2021)

UWC Assessment Policy

UWC Teaching and Learning Policy (2006)

UWC Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning (2009)

UWC Charter for Graduate Attributes (2009)

National Policy

DHET White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013)

DHET Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System (2014)

DHET Open Learning Policy Framework for Post-School Education and Training (2017)

National Qualifications Framework Act No 67 of 2008

South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)

SAQA: Lifelong Learning and Professional Development in Residential Universities (2015A)

SAQA: Flexible Learning Pathways: The national Qualifications Framework Backbone (2020)
SAQA and UWC: Flexible Learning and Teaching at UWC: Understandings, practices and implications (2015B)

Council for Higher Education (CHE)

CHE: Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide (2014)
CHE: Quality Assurance Guidelines for Remote Teaching and Learning and Assessment During the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020
CHE: Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment. (2016)

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Guides for *Designing Blended Learning Arrangements* and for *Fully Online Learning* to follow in 2021

GLOSSARY OF TERMS*

Asynchronous interaction is the learning or sharing of information within a group outside the constraints of time and place e.g. the access to and use of email, discussion forums etc.

Blended learning is commonly defined as a combination of traditional face-to-face and technology-based instruction delivery methods. Rather than replacing face-to-face lecture delivery with online delivery, in blended learning the online component is usually used as a complement of the in-class lecture.

Credit accumulation and Transfer (CAT) is a term that refers to the arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace.

E-Learning (also referred to as technology-enhanced learning) uses ICT to access programmes or courses. It involves the use of electronic devices (for example computers and mobile devices) to provide, access or interact with learning materials, interact with peers and lecturers, participate in discussions, and do assessments. E-learning can take place online, offline or in a combination thereof.

Fully online (FOL) in this policy refers to the delivery of programmes in 100% online mode, that are fully accessible from where students are located, and that do not require students' presence on campus.

Hybrid learning combines traditional classroom teaching with online or remote activities, and is characterized as an educational model where some students attend classes in person while others join the class virtually from home. Hybrid classes can include asynchronous learning elements as well as synchronous.

Learning management system (LMS) refers to a multi-use software programme for delivering programmes and courses to students, registering students, administering, tracking, reporting on and documenting their participation, progress, performance and achievement/results. This information is accessible to lecturers, tutors and administrators, and, in most cases, information on each student is made available to the individual concerned, enabling students to track their own progress.

Learning content management system (LCMS) is a multi-use software programme enabling lecturers, instructional designers and course/materials developers to create, develop, modify, store, re-use and organize e-learning content. It includes a centralized repository of learning materials and resources archived so as to be searchable and adaptable for use in any online course. Ideally, an LCMS should be entirely compatible and integrated with the LMS used by the same organization.

Mode of provision refers to the dominant mix of methods by which institutions mediate their curricula i.e. the method/s by which learning is taking place. There is a move away from traditional, single mode institutions to dual and mixed-mode institutions where courses and programmes are mediated by a range of online, resource-based and contact-based methods, with the blend of methods varying from context to context.

Massive open online learning course (MOOC) is an online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the Web.

Online learning refers to the predominant use of the internet to learn. Students have to be connected to the internet to access and interact with learning materials, interact with peers and lecturers, participate in discussions and do assessment.

Open Education Resources (OER) are educational resources (including curriculum maps, course materials, textbooks, streaming videos, multimedia applications, podcasts, and any other materials that have been designed for use in teaching and learning) that are freely available for use by educators and students without an accompanying need to pay royalties or license fees. Openly licensed content can be produced in any medium: text, video, or computer-based multimedia.

Open learning is an educational approach which combines the principles of learner-centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of student support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that students can succeed.

Proctoring in the context of online assessment, involves monitoring students online during the duration of the assessment, typically with the help of a webcam, mic and access to the screens of the students.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and rigorously assessed and moderated for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification or further learning and development.

Synchronous interaction is the learning or sharing of information within a group that necessitates taking part at the same time, although it could be outside the constraint of place (if supported online): e.g. a lecture in a classroom with facilitator and all students present, or a lecture via Web-conferencing with some or all students online.

Technology support for students is about providing students with access to technology, the necessary information relating to computer elements required to support course software, directions for using essential tools like email, chat and discussions for asynchronous and synchronous interaction with lecturers and tutors, and assignment drop boxes.

Technology-enhanced learning: Structured learning mediated through software applications using digital resources (usually combinations of text, audio and visual/video files) and communication, and accessed through a range of fixed or mobile hardware devices. Such learning provisioning may be on-line and synchronous, online and asynchronous, or off-line (e.g. interactive or resourced based CD/DVD/flash drive). ICT can support learning in contact, blended and fully online programmes.

Technology-supported learning refers to structured learning opportunities mediated through software applications using digital resources (usually combinations of text, audio and visual/video files) and communication, and accessed through a range of fixed or mobile hardware devices. Such learning provision may be online and synchronous (e.g. real-time conferencing), online and asynchronous (e.g. text-based discussion forum) or off-line (e.g. interactive or resource-based CD/DVD/flash drive). ICT can support learning in contact, blended and fully online education programmes.

*** The explanations provided in this Glossary are to be found in the following policies and documents:**

- DHET Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System (2014)
- DHET Open Learning Policy Framework for Post-School Education and Training (2017)
- CHE: Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide (2014)
- CHE: Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment. (2016)