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Report on Academic Programme Development: 2018 onwards, NWU Strategy Alignment and Distance Education (v.6)

1) Background to the matter

NWU has an established reputation in the offering of distance education programmes, particularly in teacher education. For over 15 years it was second only to Unisa in teacher education enrolments and was at some points, the primary contributor with Unisa to the sector in terms of the upgrading of teacher qualifications (NPDE) and the further qualifications of already qualified teachers (through the ACE, the BEd Hons and the PGCE). Distance education from a strategic perspective was and remains an important feature of the PQM related planning undertaken by the University. As early as 2010 the DHET indicated that within a 5-year period the NDPE and the ACE qualifications would have served their combined purposes in terms of the upgrading and upskilling of teachers within the sector. This direction was motivated additionally to there being concerns that, with the requirement of the MRTEQ having been met, there remained issues about the quality of the qualifications. Furthermore, for new teachers as well as under-qualified or unqualified teachers in the sector, more attention had to be focussed on the quality of new programmes to replace the NDPE and the ACE which should address still existing shortages in the scarce skills subjects (and Foundation Education inclusive of the Grade R) in schools. While the Faculty of Education at the NWU had thus to respond to the phasing-out of DE programmes from 2012 in terms of new programme development, the strategic imperative to develop a more diversified and more financially sustainable plan for DE, was relevant also to the wider University.

Figure: 1: New Distance qualifications developed in the Faculty of Education from 2012 to 2017

Qualification	Year of accreditation
Diploma (Grade R Teaching)	2012
BEd (Senior Phase and Further Education and Training Teaching)	2014
AdvCert (Intermediate Phase Teaching)	2014
Adv Dip (Special Needs Education)	2014
BEd (Foundation Phase Teaching)	2014
Adv Dip (Senior Phase and Further Education and Training Teaching)	2015
Postgraduate Certificate in Education	2015
Adv Cert (Further Education and Training Teaching)	2015
Adv Cert (Intermediate Phase Teaching)	2015
PGDip (Special Needs education)	2016
BEdHons (Life Orientation)	2017
BEdHons (Business Science Education)	2017

In recognition of the above context, in early 2018, NWU academic leadership convened to consider the importance of distance education at the NWU¹. The outcomes of that meeting were threefold and stretched well into 2020, from the perspective of academic planning: first, was the generation of The UDL & ICT Integration Plan and Criteria², second was

¹ This initiative was approved by UMC at its meeting 21 February 2018.

² This document was tabled at the SMC meeting of 5 March 2018 and then at Senate for noting as an input into the finalization of Faculty FITLPs approved by Senate in October 2019.

the generation Faculty Integrated Teaching-Learning Plans (in which DE Programmes would feature as aligned with the NWU Strategy), and third was the separation of the teaching-learning component of the then SALA-UODL³. **The workshop focussed on situational analysis and guidance towards the inclusion of high-income generating niche programmes with a view to ensuring that the programme and qualification mix within each Faculty was diversified so that the risk of dependence on the Faculty of Education to generate distance education related income for the University, was reduced⁴.** That noted, as mentioned above the Faculty of Education was long aware of this impending eventuality and began to design and implement a series of replacement programmes in Education that began in 2012 and was able to launch the BEd Foundation Phase as a pilot aligned distanced education programme (aligned with the BEd Foundation Phase for contact education) from 2014 (senate approval was obtained in 2012).

In the February 2018 meeting the NWU Strategy and NWU TL Strategy emphases were noted in relation to the need for urgency with regards to the expansion of the NWU academic offering via the distance mode of delivery, inclusive of integration of appropriate ICT for blended and online education opportunities. The urgency in 2018 arose from a recognition that the NWU traditional footprint or niche in teacher education would greatly diminish in the short term, given the DHET intention to phase out the NPDE and ACE qualifications in recognition that these had been instrumental in assisting unqualified and under-qualified teachers in the sector. The last NDPE cohort phased out in 2019 and the remaining ACEs phased out in 2020.

2) Strategy alignment and development for Distance Education (DE)

The 2018 strategic planning workshop affirmed NWU's commitment to multimodal and multilingual provision and emphasised Faculties adherence to the NWU strategic agenda and market directions i.t.o TL innovation, financial viability assurance, sustainable target markets, better mix of SET and Commerce offerings, ICT planning and necessary financial investment, focus on student access, retention and success⁵. At the time, the emphases above made financial sense because the STEM subjects are also those high-income-generating CESM categories (when compared to teacher education, for example). In relation to UnivPrep programmes the same approach was adopted in relation to niche, scarce skills as a means of widening participation in programmes.

2.1) Challenges identified for the development of new DE programmes

In addition to the phasing-out of the Education diploma and certificate programmes, in the distance mode, additional risks were identified in terms of enabling the University to respond in a nimble manner to the challenges of phasing-out of Education programmes and the need for a more diversified DE PQM. These **challenges** were listed as follows:

1. Lengthy external approval processes.
2. Capacity constraints – both academic and in terms of support.
3. Time-consuming process of curriculum planning and module development.
4. Slow movement on development and availability of appropriate ICTs for development of a blended learning approach.
5. Lack of planning from all Faculties to participate in the growth of the distance offering.

The table below indicates the percentages of programmes offered in the distance modality as a percentage of the total programmes for each of the 8 faculties, as well as for the Business School:

Figure 2. Numbers and percentages of programmes offered in the contact and distance modalities

Faculty	# Contact programmes	# Distance programmes	# Total programmes	% Contact programmes	% Distance programmes
NWU Faculty of Law	51	1	52	98%	2%
NWU Faculty of Theology	59	23	82	72%	28%
NWU Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences	159	1	160	99%	1%
NWU Faculty of Education	77	41	118	65%	35%
NWU Faculty of Humanities	207	2	209	99%	1%
NWU Faculty of Engineering	43	2	45	96%	4%
NWU Faculty of Health Sciences	110	2	112	98%	2%
NWU Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences	216	2	218	99%	1%
NWU Business School	5	1	6	83%	17%
Total	927	75	1002	93%	7%

2.2) Planning for DE

From the 2018 process, a series of **planning guidelines** were adopted which were to be manifested in the Faculty Integrated Teaching-Learning Plans. The planning perimeters were identified as follows:

The programme identification process:

³ This document was tabled at the UMC meeting of 13 March 2019 after which a processed commenced culminating in the establishment of the UDL-T-L in 2020.

⁴ This planning guidance is evident in Memo 9.2018 (2018-03-09) Feedback to Deans about Contact and Distance Programmes with Potential for ICT Integration.

⁵ The scarce skills are Engineering, Life & Physical Sciences, Initial Teacher Education, Health and Animal Sciences.

1. Identify scarce skills academic offerings and occupations in high demand per faculty when planning for new qualifications.
2. Of special interest is the DHET occupations in high demand lists published bi-annually.
3. Strong focus on an in-depth situation analysis for planning purposes. Important to determine the viability and market appetite for each planned offering. Q&APP inputs of great value in this process.
4. Use the knowledge and insights from Marketing and Student recruitment when planning for market demand.
5. Use the inputs from Career Services on national and international trends in career opportunities and on employer demands.
6. The MRTEQ guides the development of new qualifications within the Education environment (as noted earlier this has commenced from 2012).
7. Investigate possibilities of marketing and offering into Africa, not only Namibia but look to countries such as Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi, etc.
8. Financial sustainability of the investment in development of qualifications for distance offering, and integration of ICT into programmes, presupposes sound financial planning.
9. Plan for modules to be offered via ICT or fully online learning modules within contact programmes (max 30% of any contact programme) while bringing the applications for ODL offerings.
10. CTL and UODL restructuring necessary to accommodate planning for ODL expansion and ICT integration. CTL restructuring completed.
11. UODL capacity to deliver on logistical and administrative support essential if growth is required.
12. Investigation into the possibility of re-instating more than one intake per year in an effort to regain the “openness” and flexibility characteristic of distance learning.

Medium to longer term planning steps in relation to the distance education provision:

1. In Years 4 and 5 all external approvals and accreditations to offer qualifications identified in Years 1 & 2 should have been obtained and pilot programmes will be launched.
2. Staff implication for the temporary budget planning process for Years 3 – Year 10 and onwards for the re-allocation of workload for existing contact staff to temporary staff.
3. Faculties to engage with the DVC TL and DVC Integrated Planning in terms of student-staff sustainability of contact programmes to identify further development opportunities for ODL.
4. The class fee structure of STEM programmes.
5. Bringing Fundraising/ Business Development closer to programme planning.
6. Investigate the possibility of dual/joint degrees and qualifications.

In order to give effect and expression to the directions articulated above it was expected that newly unified faculties would integrate planning for distance education programmes into their newly developed Faculty Integrated Teaching-Learning Plans.

Faculty Integrated Teaching-Learning Plans were anticipated to adhere to the timeframes articulated as follows:

1. Development from March to June 2018.
2. Progress report recommended by the SCTL on 11 April 2018 for noting by Senate on 11 May 2018
3. Workshops offered on 7 and 15 May by Office of the DVC TL
4. First draft of FITLPs submitted on 7 June 2018
5. NWU (SMC) Bosberaad presentations of FITLPs by Executive Deans on 19 June 2018
6. CLT and Q&APP analysis of FITLPs presented at the SCTL on 12 Sept 2018 for recommendation to Senate
7. Faculties to present progress on implementation of FITLPs at SCTL on 1 October 2019.

Given that the first iterations of the FITLPs were developed in 2018 (and finally approved late in that year), budget and other resources planning to support curriculum development was realised in 2019 when work on new programme development began in earnest. In May 2019 a further workshop on Qualification planning for distance mode provision: 2019-2025 was held to report on and consolidate the conceptual thinking of the 2018 workshops and directions adopted. That workshop noted the capacity constraints under which faculties were operating in relation to the development of programmes in a distance modality; capacity constraints in the UODL were also noted. That noted, the University committed through its budget processes to support new high-income generation curriculum development going forward on the basis that this was an investment in the future and some guarantee against declining enrolments in the distance education modality.

3) Covid-19 and programme development approvals processes

Covid-19 had an enormous impact on the capacity of the University to push through with new programme development initiated in 2019, or which had to be initiated in 2020. In 2020 and 2021. That noted, Figure 3 describes programme development in the period from 2019 onwards.

Figure 3: New cutting-edge qualifications, programmes and modules at the NWU

Highlighted areas are those programmes aligned with the STEM emphasis of the NWU Strategy

Formal qualifications and programmes	
Master of science in occupational hygiene (contact) Contact	Accredited 17 September 2019
Bachelor of mechatronic engineering (contact) Contact	Confirmation of accreditation received on 3 May 2019
Master of education in environmental education (contact) Contact	Accredited 8 November 2019
Diploma in early childhood care and education (distance)	PQM cleared on 30 January 2020, accreditation outcome pending
Master of Arts in Development and Management with programme e-science (joint degree with Wits) (contact)contact	Approved by Senate (SCAS) on 7 May 2020
Postgraduate diploma in Geopolitics Distance	Qualification development in process, Form 1 (Situation Analysis) approved by Senate (SCAS) on 7 May 2020
Master of environmental management with programme conservation leadership (contact)	Approved by Senate (SCAS) on 7 May 2020
Higher certificate in health promotion (distance)	PQM cleared on 16 January 2021, accreditation outcome pending
Master of environmental management with programme air quality and climate change (contact)	Approved by Senate (SCAS) on 18 June 2021
Master of science in computer science with programme e-science (joint degree with Wits) (contact)	Approved by Senate (SCAS) on 18 February 2021
Doctor of philosophy in social sciences with programme: ageing and development (contact)	Approved by Senate (SCAS) on 7 May 2020
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Sciences with programme social inclusion and development (contact)	Approved by Senate (SCAS) on 29 April 2021
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Sciences with programme: relational dynamics and development (contact)	Approved by Senate (SCAS) on 7 May 2020
Bachelor of education in early childhood care and education (contact & distance)	PQM cleared on 23 May 2021, accreditation outcome pending
BEd (senior and further education and training phase) (contact and distance) Postgraduate certificate in education: (contact) Robotics is included in the module outcomes of INTE122 (Information technology education: data presentation and graphical programming) for BEd and DIGD521 (Digital technology methodology) for the PGCE.	Approved by Senate (SCAS) 14 June 2021
Bachelor of education honours in language education where students can specialise in any of 7 languages: Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana. (contact)	Accredited on 3 August 2021
Short learning programmes	
The Centre for Industrial Automation was established in the School for Electric, Electronic and Computer Engineering via investment from Siemens. Several SLPs were developed to give prospective students insights into industry application of automation equipment. (contact)	Approved by Senate (SCAS) 14 June 2021

The above noted, what has also become evident arising from the positive experiences and learnings from Covid-19 is that it is possible to present contact programmes for a new market in the distance education modality. This insight has coalesced

with the strategy directions of the 2018 and 2018 workshops in which continued alignment to the NWU Strategy emphasis on the STEM subjects, features. Figure 1.2 articulate this renewed energy following the abatement of Covid-19 as threat in early 2022.

Figure: 3.1: New Qualification and/ or new Modality of Offering Applications in process at the NWU

2022 New distance Qualification requests			
Faculty of Engineering Contact	New qualification_BEngSci	Distance	New qualification
Faculty of Health Sciences Contact	New qual: MSc (Risk Analytics (full dissertation))	Distance	New qualification
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences Contact	New qual: MCom (Accountancy)/ (Taxation) / BComHons (Fin Acc)	Distance	Already offered in the contact mode
Faculty of Health Sciences Contact	New qualification_PGDiP (Health Professions Education)	Distance	New qualification
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences	New qual: BCom (Management Sciences)	Distance	Already offered in the contact mode
Faculty of Humanities Distance	New qualification_BA (Criminal Justice and Police Science)	Distance	Similar programme already offered in the distance mode
Faculty of Engineering	New qualification_PGDiP (Industrial Engineering)	Distance	Already offered in the distance mode
Faculty of Education	New qualification_BEEdHons (Gr.R and Foundation Phased Education)	Contact & Distance	New qualification
Faculty of Education	New qual: _AdvDip (FP,IP,FET)	Distance	New qualification
Faculty of Education	New qual: _BEEdHons (ITE/CATE)	Distance	New qualification
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences	New qualification_BComHons (Management Accounting)	Distance	Already offered in the contact mode
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences	New qual:_MCom (Management Accounting)	Distance	Already offered in the contact mode
Faculty of Health Sciences	New qualification_PGDiP (Trauma Interventions for Social Workers)	Distance	New qualification
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences	New qualification_Master of Social Work in School Social Work	Distance	Already offered in the contact mode

4) Distance Education enrolments at the NWU

Figure 4: Distance enrolments per faculty 2018-2022

Faculty	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
7500 NWU Faculty of Law		56	31	40	50
7700 NWU Faculty of Theology	368	331	257	225	185
7800 NWU Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences		62	222	363	0
8000 NWU Faculty of Education	17 225	18 319	10 781	9 342	7 909
8200 NWU Faculty of Humanities	165	181	180	151	158
8400 NWU Faculty of Engineering					21
8600 NWU Faculty of Health Sciences	36				0
8800 NWU Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences		75	169	202	240
8900 NWU Business School					369
Grand Total	17 794	19 024	11 640	10 323	8 932

Figure 4.1: Distance enrolments per qualification type 2018-2022

Faculty	Qualification Type	Year				
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
7500 NWU Faculty of Law	Postgraduate to master's level		56	31	40	50
7500 NWU Faculty of Law Total			56	31	40	50
7700 NWU Faculty of Theology	Doctor's degree	33	32	21	15	5
	Master's degree	7	6	4	2	
	Occasional student	31	29	16	17	22
	Postgraduate to master's level	67	44	39	31	20
	Undergraduate degree	230	220	177	160	138
7700 NWU Faculty of Theology Total		368	331	257	225	185
7800 NWU Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences	Occasional student			2		0
	Postgraduate to master's level		62	220	363	
7800 NWU Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences Total			62	222	363	0
8000 NWU Faculty of Education	Advanced Diploma	1043	1480	1035	881	649
	Occasional student	4	7	9	6	2
	Postgraduate to master's level	2485	2584	596	371	369
	Undergraduate degree	1340	2016	2206	2460	2679
	Undergraduate diploma	12353	12232	6935	5624	4210
8000 NWU Faculty of Education Total		17225	18319	10781	9342	7909
8200 NWU Faculty of Humanities	Postgraduate to master's level	47	31	18		20
	Undergraduate degree	118	150	162	151	138
8200 NWU Faculty of Humanities Total		165	181	180	151	158
8400 NWU Faculty of Engineering	Postgraduate to master's level					21
8400 NWU Faculty of Engineering Total						21
8800 NWU Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences	Occasional student			0	1	0
	Undergraduate degree	36	75	169	201	240
8800 NWU Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences Total		36	75	169	202	240
8900 NWU Business School	Postgraduate to master's level					369
8900 NWU Business School Total						369
Grand Total		17794	19024	11640	10323	8932

5) Critical questions for the future of DE at the NWU

Possible questions to discuss at a further workshop on DE planning at the NWU:

- Q: Do we know if there is a cap by the DHET on the size of our distance offering?
A: There is a cap on the enrolment targets yes.
Q: Are the TL and assessment strategies distinctive between the contact and distance mode and is this evident in the study guide?
A: It is. Even in aligned programmes like the BEd the assessment strategies have to be different because of the modality differences and is evident in the study guides.
- Q: Have our academic staff been sufficiently trained in distance pedagogies?
A: Yes, this is undertaken by the UDL and also Faculties with cooperation from CTL where needed.
- Q: What role will the LSCs play in the expansion of the distance offerings?

A: Learning Support Centres (LSCs) or remote centres, (non-campus based centres) are opened where there is an evident need (ie concentration of distance students in one or more areas in proximity to the LSC), especially for paper-based programmes where additional support sessions are provided. Remote centres are similarly closed where student numbers may no longer justify the need. There is, however, a definite shift to Learning Hubs (LHs) instead. A LH is a technology-rich learning environment at a remote centre with both physical and virtual components that provide formal and informal opportunities for learners to come together with peers, to discuss and help each other. The following is offered at a typical LH:

- > Delivery of study material
 - > Access to lecturers in support session (Interactive whiteboard) at a Learning Hub
 - > Administrative support
 - > Access to a computer and relevant literature (both hard copy and e-learning material)
 - > WIFI
- Q: Do we have a repository on relevant literature? On distance education?
A: Yes, in the Faculty of Education specifically. Adequate literature at campus-based, as well as non-campus based centres, for student support, then also Yes. This is supplemented by the UDL from Faculty library budgets where needed in terms of the programmes offered by the NWU. The UDL make use of resource centres and appoints a resource centre person at the remote centre to assist with this need. The NWU LIS is also very functional in providing resources for use by students and facilitators at a remote centre. Access to wifi and computers at the remote centre adds to this need.
 - Q: Referring to the PQM Review: Has the NWU considered the offering of existing contact programmes and modules in the distance mode?
A: Yes, the Faculty of Engineering started with the process to deliver two programmes, which were originally earmarked for contact and has been delivered in the contact mode in the past, in the distance modality going forward.
 - Q: Is it of value to consider whether to offer a programme either in the contact or distance mode?
A: Yes, careful consideration must be given to the modality as a programme offered in the distance modality gives access to more students, while a programme offered in the contact modality create more income. Therefore, a fine balance needs to be kept between the two offerings when programme offerings are considered.
 - Q: What would enhance the marketing of UDL programmes?
A: The establishment of a communication office within the Quality Control office might go a long way in rendering much needed support to distance students for the purpose of word-of-mouth marketing as the lack of sufficient support to students costs NWU valuable students opting to go to other HEs instead.
 - Q: Do we have enough information about Distance opportunities to expand our footprint in Africa?
A: If necessary, strategic funding can be made available to explore Distance Markets
 - Q: Do we need minimum numbers in the Distance programmes to make it financially sustainable?
A: Integrated planning can assist with viability models

6) Way Forward

NWU needs to submit its new 2023-2025 enrolment plan in mid-2022 to the DHET, therefore the strategic decisions taken should be informed and supported by in-depth planning for implementation, leading up to the next cycle, after 2025. This is a good time also to reflect on the last 5 years because assumptions made about enrollments need to reflect better the connection between market responsiveness and the vision of the NWU for DE alongside CE. DE numbers at NWU in teacher-education have dropped arising from the phase-out of the old, funded programmes (ACE and NPDE). Arising from slow approvals times for new programmes, and from the impact of Covid, reduced demand and uptake in new DE programmes (not in Education alone) has not been able to compensate for this drop - at least not in the five-year period of 2018-2022.

There are 3 strategic questions for which our collective inputs are needed to help plan forward:

- 1) What do we see as the role of DE at NWU going forward? (implicit in this is the matter as to whether we should pursue (enrollment) numbers in DE programmes where any new programme development must occur within existing staffing capacity constraints).
- 2) OR should we rather expand facilities and provision for contact education (CE) given the better subsidy potential, easier absorption into already existing niche areas (the financial [fees and subsidy] picture for the NWU in the annexure is critical information for the answering of this question. OR
- 3) Or should NWU follow a more selective DE with CE mix (the criteria for which we can re-evaluate) with more modest expectations and another rationale for the offering (other than numbers) but which is financially sustainable.

Our overall purpose with the May 2022 DE workshop is to consider the above questions in light of the ongoing sustainability of the NWU through a programme offering that is attractive to students and bursars, affordable to offer, and which sustains us. APP Goal 1 provides the overall strategic driver for a continued focus on the multi-modal teaching-learning programme offering of the NWU- affirmed and aligned also with the Teaching-Learning Strategy (2021-2025).