



higher education  
& training

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Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **Department of Higher Education and Training's Position on Online Programme and Course Offerings**

**22 March 2017**

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## Acronyms

AQVN	: African Qualifications Verification Network
BRICS	: Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa
CAT	: Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CET	: Community Education and Training
CHE	: Council on Higher Education
DHET	: Department of Higher Education and Training
GETCA	: General Education and Training Certificate for Adults
ICT	: Information and Communication Technologies
iNeSI	: Ikamva National eSkills Institute
MOOC	: Massive Open Online Course
NASCA	: National Senior Certificate for Adults
NQF	: National Qualifications Framework
OER	: Open Educational Resources
OQSF	: Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
PQM	: Programme and Qualification Mix
PSET	: Post-School Education and Training System
QC	: Quality Council
QCTO	: Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL	: Recognition of Prior Learning
SADC	: Southern African Development Community
SAIVCET	: South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training
SAQA	: South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	: Sector Education and Training Authority
SLP	: Short Learning Programme
TVET	: Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WIL	: Work-Integrated Learning

# Department of Higher Education and Training's Position on Online Programme Offerings

## 1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are playing an increasing role in the provision of education and training. Online learning offers students<sup>1</sup> the ability to participate in a course/programme when, and in many case where, it is convenient for them to do so. Furthermore, when students engage in learning through the use of ICT, they also become more familiar with technology by using it. This is a critical skill set for everyone to acquire in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The increasingly sophisticated and technology- enhanced modes of provision on offer both nationally and internationally, from public and private institutions and workplaces, have created a significant shift in understandings of what learning and teaching mean. No longer are students confined to studying within one local institution/site<sup>2</sup>; there are now increasing opportunities to study courses online from reputable institutions, organisations and industries, globally.

Increasing demands are being placed on the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) System to respond to global trends such as online programme and course offerings, massive open online courses (MOOCs), multi-institutional online education and training offerings, increasing cross-border education and the privatisation/commercialisation of education and training.

In this position paper, online learning is viewed in the context of a shift towards open learning. Open Learning is defined in the *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training* (2014) as “an 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 learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems”.

Although distance education/blended learning/resource-based learning programmes and courses are offered at various institutions/organisations, and provision is made for

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<sup>1</sup> 'Student' refers to any person in the PSET system that is learning and is not confined to institutions of higher learning/TVET colleges only.

<sup>2</sup> In the document 'site' refers to any environment where contact/face-to-face teaching and instruction is taking place. It includes, but is not limited to campus, classroom, workshop and workplace'.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the transfer of credits between programmes and pathways, much still has to be done in order to be responsive to:

- i. the increasing demand of students and aspirant students for access to affordable post-school education and training, and the consequent requirements of educational institutions/organisations to massify education and training;
- ii. the socio-economic needs and contexts of students and aspirant students, many of whom are unable to access quality PSET for a range of reasons;
- iii. the need for improved success rates in the PSET system, and particularly among students enrolled in distance education, without sacrificing the quality of programmes and courses;
- iv. the need for the curriculum to be relevant to the world of work within a global context; and
- v. the demands of private institutions/organisations in ways that engage students in active learning, and develop higher order cognitive skill and the capacity for self-directed learning.

Open learning is an all-encompassing approach aimed at addressing these demands and needs, and a viable option to be considered and implemented in the PSET System.

Online learning, as a collection of learning methods made available through the Internet, has the potential to provide for the construction of a richer and more interactive learning environment. It can also cater for different learning styles, allow for greater diversification in learning, and afford greater access to learning. However, online learning does not equate to open learning or distance education, neither of which necessarily includes the use of online technology.

Online learning can include the following aspects (that may reflect varying degrees of “openness”): online support for learning in a variety of forms, delivery of content, learning resources, interactive learning activities, formative and summative assessment, and the recording and analysis of achievement data. However, it can only be effective if the level and volume of learning are appropriate to the purpose of the course or programme being offered, and if it is based on self-directed, interactive, learner-centred pedagogies.

Furthermore, if enrolments for online programmes are large enough to give rise to economies of scale, online offerings have the potential, through reducing the need for building additional classrooms/learning sites and taking on additional full-time lecturers/instructors, to reduce the overall cost of provision over time (though initial costs of course design and technological infrastructure are usually high). Online offerings may also be an attractive option for those who wish to access opportunities for lifelong learning without having to absent themselves from work or family responsibilities, travel to a distant learning site, step into a classroom or take on the pressures of adapting to, and costs associated with, campus life away from home.

The *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training* (2014) also emphasises the importance of workplace learning. Online methodologies offer great opportunities for upskilling employees without serious disruption to production. Both standardised and locally specific learning experiences can be offered through online simulations, to the benefit of both students and workplace.

While the power of online technology to provide learning opportunities is well understood, the realities of ICT infrastructure, specifically software and connectivity demands and costs; the limited capability of lecturers to adopt technology in their teaching methodology; the high cost of materials development; the current dearth of high quality student support; and challenges in administering credible assessment online and bringing about change in pedagogical approaches, all sit heavily on the shoulders of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and institutions.

The DHET has a responsibility to ensure that online programme and course offerings are wisely adopted to support and advance teaching, learning and accountable assessment strategies, embracing open learning principles as set out in the *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training* (2014). The DHET further has a responsibility to provide an enabling environment for institutions to deliver quality online programmes through the development and implementation of relevant policies, strategies and appropriate funding mechanisms.

The recommendations of a Task Team that was set up to develop a DHET position on online programmes support the development of a post-school sector based on open learning principles, where quality learning environments are constructed which take account of student context and use the most appropriate and cost-effective methods and technologies.

## **2. Education and Training Modes of Provision**

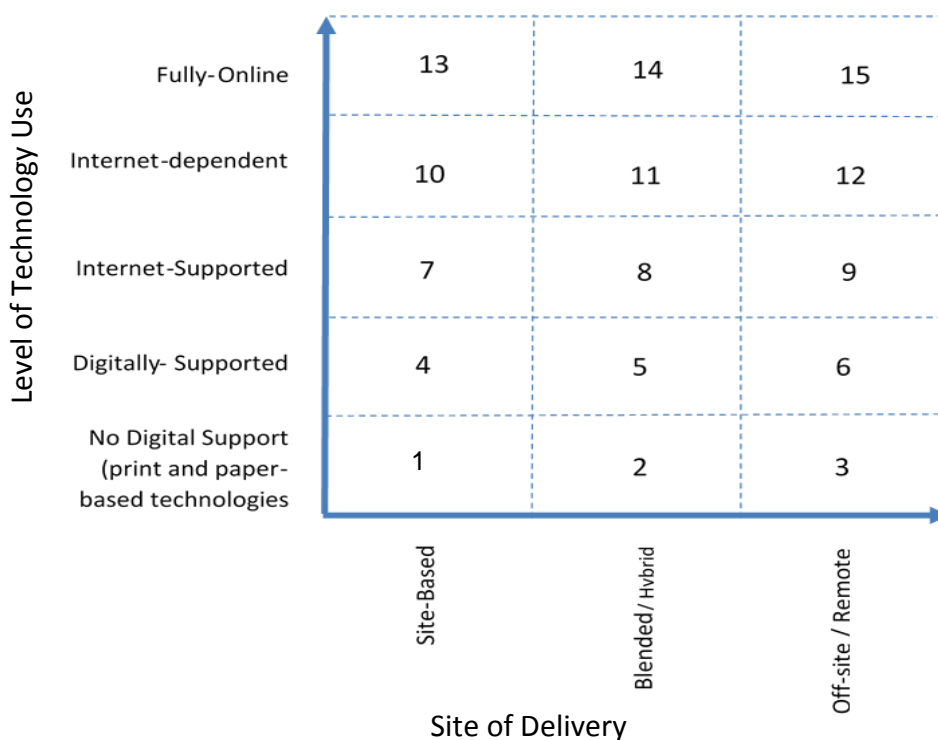
Education and training provision, especially in the context of the PSET system, is not necessarily institution-based, and can take place in the workplace, home or any other potential learning environment. This accords with the open learning principle of flexible learning – enabling learning to take place in a variety of places or settings.

In the *Concept Framework for an Open Learning System in Post School Education and Training in South Africa* (2013) and the subsequent *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (2014), the traditional one-dimensional notion of education and training provision as lying somewhere on a linear continuum between full contact, site-based provision and remote delivery through distance provisioning (see horizontal axis in Figure 1), is expanded to a two-dimensional model that overlays the impact that digital technology/ICT has on education and training provision and delivery (see vertical axis in Figure 1). Figure 1 illustrates the broader range of possibilities (in the area of the graph), and shows that modes of provision for courses and programmes can be chosen that draw on the opportunities afforded by

digital and online technologies. It is important to recognise that in the PSET environment, site-based offerings include campuses, workplaces and community settings.

In the PSET environment, it is possible for programmes and courses to be offered in a variety of modes. Even within a programme, module or course, parts may be offered on-site and parts off-site, and rely on the range of technologies from face-to-face and/or print-based technologies to the use of digital technologies and online learning. The South African PSET system has evolved far beyond an exclusive reliance on the traditional contact, paper-based technologies represented by cell 1 in the figure above, to embrace the full range represented by cells 1-15.

**Figure 1: Education and Training Modes of Provision**



A variety of arrangements and a diversity in approaches and arrangements are applied within PSET institutions, entities, organisations and industry with respect to online offerings.

The following arrangements can include:

- i. South African institutions offering programmes and courses online;
- ii. South African institutions offering programmes and courses online where companies can be contracted to support online execution/implementation;
- iii. South African institutions offering online programmes and courses in partnership with other institutions or organisations through agreed memoranda of agreement;
- iv. South African institutions offering online Short Learning Programmes (SLP) for companies/organisation/entities, as part of accredited continuous professional development; and

- v. Non-accredited online programmes and courses, e.g. SLP offered by South African institutions, industry and organisations.

Important questions that need to be critically explored include the following:

- i. Whilst access is likely to be enhanced through the wider range of modes of provision, including online learning, is sufficient attention being paid to quality, including student support?
- ii. Do current policy, resourcing and funding adequately recognise the range of modes of provision and support them effectively?
- iii. Do existing accreditation policy process and procedure regimes adequately regulate online programme and course offerings by South African institutions and organisations, and by those based outside of South Africa?
- iv. Is sufficient research being conducted into the use of the range of modalities, to generate the evidence and knowledge needed for their enhancement and effective use in South African contexts?
- v. Do online technologies offer value for money and so enable many more people to access learning opportunities. What are the conditions that must be satisfied for this to be the case?
- vi. Does online learning suit learning in all fields, or does it lend itself best to certain fields?
- vii. Does online learning provide the means to improve the skills and competency base of the South African population?

### **3. Current Situation**

The following sub-sections outline the current policy and legislative environment, and online programme offerings already in the PSET system.

#### **3.1 Current Legislative and Policy Environment**

This section gives a short synopsis of the current legislative and policy environment in place to regulate and direct online programme offerings.

##### **3.1.1 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training**

The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014) supports the development of a PSET system based on open learning principles, where quality learning environments are constructed which take account of student context and use the most appropriate and cost-effective methods and technologies.

In the White Paper the DHET commits to building an expanded, effective and integrated PSET system. Furthermore, in Chapter 7 of the White Paper the DHET also commits to working towards creating a PSET landscape based on open learning principles. These include



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 learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems.

This undertaking includes building a network of education providers supported by learning support centres and appropriate technology. Digital technology should be used where appropriate to enhance access, improve communication and generally optimise student engagement. The DHET encourages all PSET providers to establish collaborative partnerships and networks (where appropriate), and increasingly make use of available technologies, again giving careful consideration to its appropriateness.

The White Paper however acknowledges that to date, conceptions of how learning programmes and courses are designed and delivered, and the application of ICT and open learning principles, have tended to focus mainly on face-to-face, campus-based programmes and on the periphery, on distance education offerings. It is envisaged that as digital technology becomes more accessible in South Africa, a dimension of e-learning may be incorporated into different modes of provision. The DHET encourages providers to collaborate in sharing infrastructure, learning resources and staff capacity in order to improve access, quality and cost efficiency of provision.

The DHET intends to improve ICT access by developing an integrated ICT plan to improve access to technology for the PSET system and by collaborating with the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services and the Department of Science and Technology to facilitate increased bandwidth and reduced costs for educational purposes. Further mechanisms to build capacity for staff and students to use technology effectively, will also be supported.

### **3.1.2 University Education**

As in the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014), the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (2014) recognises the impact of ICT on the provision of education in the higher education sector. It supports the creation of an enabling environment for appropriate integration of ICT to enhance distance education provision, the utilisation of ICT to improve the quality of distance education and the need to expand distance education provision in an orderly manner in which access and quality issues are at the forefront.

Most universities have adopted some or all of the modalities outlined in Section 2 above. The framework reflected in Figure 1, is a useful mechanism that informs current modes of provision in the system, which would enable the development of a database of online courses and programmes in South African higher education.

It is also important to note that while the policy recognises the possibility of multiple delivery options within a two-dimensional matrix, the higher education system for public universities continues to differentiate simply between contact and distance provisioning, solely for funding purposes. A truly differentiated provisioning system would likely need a more nuanced funding system, which is proposed in the policy for the provision of distance education.<sup>3</sup>

Section 38.1 of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997) supports collaboration and partnerships in higher education between public universities. In alignment with the Act, the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (2014) signals the intent of the DHET to draft a policy on partnerships and collaborations that will likely also formalise opportunities for institutions to collaborate on the offering of programmes, including online programmes.

### **3.1.3 Technical and Vocational Education and Training**

The Continuing Education and Training Act (Act No. 16 of 2006) commits to “ensure access to basic adult education, further education and training and the workplace through continuing education and training by persons who have been marginalised in the past such as women, the disabled, and the disadvantaged”. It further commits to “provide optimal opportunities for learning, the creation of knowledge and the development of intermediate-to high-level skills in keeping with international standards of academic and technical quality”. The Act furthermore emphasises the provision of opportunities for life-long learning.

The traditional way of providing education and training through face-to-face modalities is not sustainable in the current resource-constrained environment. Thus sustainable, alternative open learning approaches and methodologies such as online learning have to be considered.

In order to reach the 2030 target of 2.5 million enrolments set for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014), the DHET has to rethink how institutions work, the long-term impact of technology advancements, and how TVET colleges need to structure themselves around increasing the employability of their students by considering additional, technology-based means of education and training delivery.

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training (2014). *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System*. Government Gazette No 535 of 7 July 2014.

### **3.1.4 Community Education and Training**

The Continuing Education and Training Act (Act No. 16 of 2006), as described above, has also relevance to Community Education and Training (CET) colleges. The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014) describes CET colleges as a new type of institution that will be provided with adequate infrastructure to be responsive to the need of local communities, including empowering communities to embrace technology effectively to access the world of work and to embark on life-long learning.

The *National Policy on Community Education and Training Colleges (2015)*<sup>4</sup> provides a framework for the provision of a diverse range of programmes, including different modalities for delivery. In the long-term, online programmes are going to be one of the critical modes of provision for delivery of community education and training programmes.

### **3.1.5 Skills Development and Workplace-based Training**

The Skills Development Act (Act No. 97 of 1998) requires that learners have access to high quality and appropriate education and training, and skills development opportunities accessible in a work-integrated approach. It emphasises the relevance of education in the workplace and learning “on the job”. Online modalities open a world of simulations and real world applications to support and reinforce theoretical training. The Act also provides clear directives as to the functions of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) in providing education and training opportunities.

According to the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) III<sup>5</sup>, people have to be capacitated and empowered to create their own opportunities in developing sustainable livelihoods. Online methodologies provide the opportunity to the entrepreneur to learn while earning his/her livelihood.

The Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142), and Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195)<sup>6</sup> encourages the development of education, training and lifelong learning, including policies that promote and sustain public and private investment in the infrastructure needed for the use of information and technology in education and training. It further promotes the expansion of workplace learning through the organisation of on- and

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<sup>4</sup> Continuing Education and Training Act, 2006. (Act No. 16 of 2006) National Policy on Community Colleges.

<sup>5</sup> The NSDS is the overarching strategic guide for skills development and provides direction to sector skills planning and implementation in the SETAs. It provides a framework for the skills development levy resource utilisation of these institutions as well the NSF, and sets out the linkages with, and responsibilities of, other education and training stakeholders.

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Office (2004). The New ILO Recommendation 195. Human resources development: Education, training and lifelong learning.

off-the-job training with public and private training providers, making greater use of information and communication technology.

### **3.1.6 Registration of Qualifications and Accreditation of Providers and Programmes**

With the promulgation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act (Act No. 67 of 2008), three Quality Councils (QCs) were established to ensure the accreditation of qualifications within their respective sub-frameworks. Any qualification, regardless of mode of provision, has to be registered on the NQF through the standard established processes.

The QCs are also responsible for the quality assurance processes relevant to their sub-framework, and the institutions which deliver their qualifications. Private higher education and training providers which offer Council on Higher Education (CHE)-accredited and NQF-registered qualifications, and private colleges which are accredited by Umalusi to offer their qualifications, have to be registered with the DHET. Public higher education institutions and colleges that offer qualifications on the Occupational Qualifications Sub-framework (OQSF) also have to be accredited by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). Currently private providers of qualifications accredited by the QCTO on the OQSF, do not have to be registered but will have to register once the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014) on PSET is implemented. This measure will provide a means of ensuring the credibility of private providers.

All public and private higher education institutions, TVET colleges and CET colleges have to be accredited by the QCTO if they offer qualifications on the OQFS. Non-formal provision, though, is not accredited or registered. This means that online providers of not-for-credit short courses currently do not have to be accredited by a QC or registered with the DHET.

The quality assurance regime has a responsibility to consider online programme and course offerings, and to consider how to ensure that programmes and courses offered online have the same structure of quality assurance as other means of provision.

### **3.1.7 Transfer of Credits of Offerings done through Online Offerings and Massive Open Online Courses**

The DHET developed a draft Articulation Policy (No. 373, Government Gazette No. 39867, 30 March 2016) to provide purposes, principles and recommendations for articulation to inform the articulation practices of role-players in the PSET system. Once finalised it will facilitate the access, progression and mobility of students between and within the three sub-frameworks of the NQF.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has already developed a *Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework* (2014), which is binding on the three QCs and institutions, as per the National Qualifications Framework Act

(Act No. 67 of 2008). This policy must also be tested against the offering of online programmes and courses.

It should be noted that even though the CHE has developed a Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) policy, the SAQA Credit Accumulation and Transfer policy has precedence in terms of the “status” of policies and Acts as per the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008).

The policies which exist, such as the CAT policies, are enabling, but the implementation of these policies is being hampered by traditional approaches to teaching and learning.

### **3.1.8 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Articulation**

With the introduction of online programmes and courses from national and registered international institutions, companies and organisations, the implementation of RPL became a necessity to enable students to be acknowledged for what has been learnt through open learning means or through any other system, irrespective of the mode of provision.

The Minister has published the Recognition of Prior Learning Coordination Policy (No. 381, Government Gazette No. 39876, 31 March 2016), which is a clear statement and indicator that the DHET supports and recognises the need to open access to education for students, and acknowledges that RPL is an important component of addressing this need. SAQA has published the *National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning* (2013), which provides for the operational implementation of RPL by the three QCs, professional bodies and education and training providers. The three QCs will need to align their RPL policies within these policy frameworks.

Many institutions have policies on RPL for admission to, and advanced standing within, a qualification. Candidates entering a programme, who completed online courses, should be provided access through RPL.

### **3.1.9 Quality Assurance Mechanisms**

The QCs have the executive responsibility for quality assurance in education and training, and the promotion thereof. They develop and implement a system of quality assurance for education and training, including programme accreditation, institutional audits, quality promotion and capacity development, standards development and the implementation of the relevant qualifications sub-framework. They also have to monitor and report on the state of the education and training system, including assessing whether, how, to what extent, and with what consequences the vision, policy goals and objectives for education and training are being realised. They contribute to the development of education and training through engagement with key national and systemic issues, including international trends, producing publications, holding conferences and conducting research to inform and

contribute to addressing the short and long-term challenges facing education and training. In addition the CHE, as per the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997) has the mandate to advise the Minister on any aspects of higher education at the request of the Minister.

The QCs have a responsibility to ensure that online course and programme offerings through various blended learning and delivery methodologies should be accredited in order to promote quality education and training in South Africa.

### **3.1.10 Cross-Border Education**

Because the development of the Internet and associated telecommunication avenues affords almost instant access to a huge amount of information, the way is open for formal learning programmes and other learning resources to be distributed on a global scale. Unfortunately, it also opens the way for opportunistic purveyors of dubious information as well as those who unscrupulously exploit the unwary.

Online learning greatly increases the possibility of cross-border offerings, both for the offering of programmes and courses to South African students by providers outside South Africa, and for the provision of courses and programmes beyond South Africa's borders by South African providers. Although online programme offerings have to be seen as a viable mode of provision, the provision of courses and programmes in South Africa by private and foreign institutions or companies must be regulated in accordance with South African law. Likewise, programme and courses offered outside of South Africa's borders by South African-based institutions must be properly regulated by the appropriate bodies in South Africa.

In the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2014)*, the DHET commits to supporting the international exchange of research, scholarship, academics and students, as well as academic partnerships between South African and other universities.

According to the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System (2014)*, the DHET is in a process of developing an agreed framework of principles and guidelines for action by all bodies and institutions in South Africa concerned with offering and receiving cross-border university education, and offering joint degrees within a range of diverse partnership models. It is further recommended that cross-border education be aligned to the new policy on the internationalisation of higher education.

### **3.1.11 Southern African Development Community Protocol on Education and Training**

Although there is an increased demand for higher education in the Southern Africa region, levels of higher education provision and enrolments rates in the Southern African

Development Community (SADC) countries are amongst the lowest in the world<sup>7</sup>. The decline in the number of academic staff, deterioration in the quality of higher education and higher demand for education have not been met by increased levels of funding and government investment. The problem is further compounded by the lack of physical infrastructure needed to accommodate the increased demand for access to and accommodation in higher education and training institutions.

An objective of the government-ratified *SADC Protocol on Education and Training* (1997) is to work towards the reduction and eventual elimination of constraints to better and freer access by citizens of Member States to good quality education and training opportunities within the region. Member States agreed that distance education (and by implication online programme and course offerings) may reduce the cost of education and training by maximising on the economies of scale offered by this modality. Member States further agreed to promote cooperation among institutions in the design and production of teaching materials.

The DHET endorses distance education across Southern African borders<sup>8</sup>. The SADC Protocol supports the international exchange of research, scholarship, academics and students as well as partnerships between South African and other universities. It is understood that the cross-border distance education system could be expanded and transformed by expanding distance education provision through online programme offerings. It will, however, require significant investment in and development of large scale, modernised ICT infrastructure, and the development of programmes and support mechanisms.

### **3.1.12 Other International Agreements and Treaties**

“Recognised” qualifications remain the “currency” of the PSET system. Directly related to online programme and course offerings, are a number of international agreements which have been signed with the intention to enable improved comparability of qualifications and student mobility to study in the respective countries. Such agreements include an agreement between South Africa and Russia<sup>9</sup>; an agreement between South Africa and Cuba<sup>10</sup>; and an agreement between South Africa and Malaysia<sup>11</sup>.

SADC Education Ministers approved the SADC Regional Qualifications Framework in September 2011, and the SADC Recognition of Prior Learning Guidelines on 30 June 2016.

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<sup>7</sup> Kotecha P (2012). Higher Education in the Southern African Region: Current trends, challenges, and recommendations. Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) presentation to the Extraordinary Meeting of Ministers of Higher Education and Training, 5 June 2012, Johannesburg, South Africa.

<sup>8</sup> *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014).

<sup>9</sup> SAQA memorandum of agreement between SAQA and Russia (2014).

<sup>10</sup> Draft Bilateral Agreement documentation - Cuba, SAQA (2015).

<sup>11</sup> Draft Bilateral Agreement documentation - Malaysia, SAQA (Date unknown).

The recently approved Addis Convention<sup>12</sup>, which will enable Africa-wide student mobility and recognition of qualifications across Africa, has been submitted for ratification.

SAQA is a signatory to the African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN) which will provide a feasible and secure process to verify qualifications with fourteen other African States. SAQA is also a signatory to the Groningen Declaration<sup>13</sup> which comprises members from over ninety countries worldwide, with the purpose of enabling qualification verification and comparability, to be done according to clear and agreed principles.

Although all of these agreements attempt to promote quality education and training, irrespective of mode of provision, it is imperative to ensure that the credibility of qualification awards is managed and recognised locally.

### **3.1.13 Gaps and Duplication**

The DHET acknowledges that there are gaps and duplication in the legislative and policy environment when specifically looking at online programme and course offerings. The DHET will, based on this position, carefully analyse the environment, make recommendations for streamlining legislation and policies, and address the gaps that exist.

## **3.2 Online Programme Offerings already in the Post-School Education and Training System, or on offer in South Africa**

### **3.2.1 University Education**

Whilst there is a range of online courses and programmes offered by higher education institutions in South Africa through a combination of all modalities identified in Section 2, a consolidated and comprehensive database that provides information about these, and that is maintained and updated to record changes in a rapidly evolving environment, is not in place. It is therefore impossible at this point in time to provide an accurate, reliable and comprehensive picture of online course and programme offerings. If this is deemed to be something that is important to establish, then a process for establishing and maintaining such a database needs to be developed, and funding needs to be allocated to enable the work to be done.

There are no fully online South African universities at present. However, several universities are increasing their online footprint, through their expansion of blended learning modalities as per the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the*

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<sup>12</sup> UNESCO (2015). Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.groningendeclaration.org/>



*Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (2014), and through non-accredited short course offerings.

The emerging Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) universities partnership and the proposed Pan African University are likely to include universities collaborating to offer programmes, which will necessarily rely on online offerings.

As part of their application to the DHET for inclusion of programmes on its Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM), universities have to nominate the mode of provision that they will use for the programme, including whether the programme will be offered using online, digital and/or distance modalities. As already indicated, delivery modality will affect the manner in which the DHET allocates funding for the programme, with distance programmes and contact programmes receiving different levels of funding.

All South African higher education institutions offering qualifications in South Africa must have their programmes accredited by the CHE. The CHE requires that the application must demonstrate that the institution has a deep understanding of the chosen mode of provision and has the capacity in place to use it effectively. For example, in considering approval for distance, online and/or digital delivery modalities, the application will have to fully describe support elements such as ICT infrastructure, connectivity, student access to the required resources e.g. online access to digital libraries, a comprehensive and convincing description of the pedagogical model and so on. Institutional reviews and site visits are used to verify that the described components are in place.

South Africans also have online access to programmes and courses offered by institutions based outside South Africa. These institutions and offerings ideally have to be registered, accredited and quality assured by authorities in the country in which the institution is based. Whilst this may be the case for reputable organisations and institutions, online access to study opportunities opens South Africans up to the threat of predatory organisations and “degree mills” that offer low quality programmes and courses that have no standing or recognition. SAQA, together with the relevant QCs, have to develop mechanisms that regulate and assure the quality of online programme offerings from institutions based outside South Africa, which are in accordance with South African laws and policies. It is further recommended that the DHET invests in research that would likely point the country in the right direction in terms of adopting appropriate measures to respond to the threat of predatory organisations and “degree mills”.

In a constrained funding environment, universities increasingly look to expand their third stream income. Several universities have developed components, sometimes as stand-alone structures that take responsibility for the provision of selected courses and programmes. These are often offered through online modalities.

A number of universities have also partnered with other institutions or companies to deliver their accredited programmes, often with the justification that the partner institution simply plays a management role to ensure that students have access to/receive course information, materials etc. timeously, and this is done using online modalities. There are concerns however, that in some cases, the support extends beyond logistical support by taking responsibility for academic components of the programme such as curriculum and assessment. The DHET does not support these arrangements.

There are several instances of university-university collaboration to offer postgraduate programmes using online platforms.

While policy on mechanisms such as minimum admission requirements, CAT and RPL exist and are being strengthened, implementation remains a challenge. Students experience articulation and progression barriers in the system as a result of poorly designed RPL mechanisms. This is the case for courses and programmes studied through the range of modalities, but may be even more of a challenge for programmes and courses studied through online modalities.

### **3.2.2 Technical and Vocational Education and Training**

Distance education is currently offered on a small scale as a variety of initiatives in fifteen TVET colleges (as at June 2015<sup>14</sup>), for different reasons such as allowing for the completion of studies, and demand from local communities and working students.

The most common distance education methodology in colleges is the use of paper-based resources, combined with tutorials and contact sessions and using traditional communication (postal services, manual submission and collection of materials). Limited initiatives exist to use electronic management systems, online resources, online assessments, recording of results and online feedback to students on assessments. The 2015 survey (that determines the extent of distance education in TVET colleges) revealed that of the fifteen TVET colleges which participated in the survey, five colleges indicated that their distance education models included some form of online offering, developed in their own capacity to increase access and enrolment.<sup>15</sup> These include technology infrastructure such as video conference facilities and equipped computer rooms. However, limited Internet access is available to support teaching and learning at most college campuses.

Distance education in a broader context, and online offerings in particular, are currently provided in an uncoordinated and non-supportive way in TVET colleges. Colleges mostly make decisions on offering distance education only for specific subjects and not for

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<sup>14</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training (2016). Report on TVET Colleges offering Distance Education.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

programmes as a whole. Distance education enrolment numbers in these subjects are low, and a limited number of subjects are offered across all colleges.

Various private colleges are making use of online programme offerings.

Current challenges in offering online programmes and courses include access to sufficient bandwidth (broadband), stable connections to the Internet, funding to sustain infrastructure, maintenance and running costs (especially the cost of bandwidth), and college infrastructure. Colleges also do not have technical expertise (instructional designers, media experts and materials development experts), subject matter expertise, and the support mechanisms and infrastructure necessary to develop content, conduct assessments, and support students. These challenges are further amplified by a lack of understanding of the value of using ICT on the part of management, lecturers and students, and a lack of ICT skills and access to ICT outside the college campus.

The DHET has to engage in a structured engagement with colleges and the relevant government departments/agencies to assist colleges in increasing access to affordable broadband connectivity, and to establish a mechanism for developing and supporting online programme offerings. This is especially needed where there are limited teaching resources as alternative ways of teaching the curriculum without reliance on numbers of highly qualified staff, fully equipped laboratories and associated equipment.

Another specific challenge for TVET colleges that are registered as distance education colleges, is to comply with current examination guidelines where students must present a year mark. Present guidelines further compel students to complete assessments under controlled circumstances, which is difficult or expensive to conduct through distance/online learning modalities. The guidelines also stipulate that students have to attend 80% of their classes as a prerequisite to entering for the examination. It is impossible to comply with this requirement if programmes and courses are delivered online. The DHET must thus review the prerequisites for entrance to examinations for students registered for distance/online programmes and courses. The DHET should furthermore consider allowing TVET colleges to enter into agreements with registered exam centres to accommodate distance education students for the sitting of national examinations.

### **3.2.3 Community Education and Training Colleges**

The CET Sector is currently being reconceptualised, and new programme offerings are being considered. Currently, there are no online programmes within the CET sector.

The General Education and Training Certificate for Adults (GETCA) and the National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA) has been designed so that students will not be required to attend full-time classes.

The CET Branch is considering online modalities for resource-based teaching, learning and support for the GETCA and the NASCA.

### **3.2.4 Skills Development and Workplace-based Training**

The new occupational qualifications registered on the OQSF provide an ideal opportunity for the use of online modalities to deliver both theoretical and some practical components of the curriculum by means of video materials, simulations and interactive applications.

Information on the use of online methodologies in learnerships, apprenticeships and skills development programmes for management, lecturers and students is limited. Two examples are the occupational qualifications offered by the Institute of Certified Bookkeepers (ICB) that are registered with the Financial and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority (FASSETA), and the Wealth Management Course offered by iCollege, which is accredited by the Insurance SETA (INSETA).

### **3.2.5 Initiatives by other Government Departments**

Online programme and course offerings are actively being used or pursued in various other government departments. The following two examples illustrate how online methodologies are used in other government departments.

The National School of Government, established through the Public Administration Management Act (Act No. 11 of 2014), is using technology extensively to select, design, deliver, administer, facilitate and support learning (eLearning). A partnership with selective universities is being pursued to offer accredited formal qualifications.

The Department of Telecommunication and Postal Services is in the process of establishing the iKamva National e-Skills Institute (iNeSI) that is strategically focused on addressing the eSkills demand, thereby increasing the eSkills levels of the country. It is working with the DHET to ensure that education and training respond to the demands and needs for eSkills. The iNeSI mission is therefore to enable eSkills at all levels, including:

- i. e-Leaders;
- ii. ICT Professionals;
- iii. Information knowledge workers (users of ICT); and
- iv. Communities (digital literate individuals).

## **4. The Department of Higher Education and Training's Position on Online Programme Offerings**

The DHET's position on online programme and course offerings is:

- i. The DHET supports the development of a PSET System based on open learning principles, where quality learning environments are constructed which take

account of student context, and use the most appropriate and cost-effective methods and technologies. This approach responds to the competing imperatives outlined in the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014), viz. increasing enrolment, and improving throughput and curriculum relevance within a system and infrastructure that will continue to be under strain despite the plans to expand it substantially.

- ii. The DHET also acknowledges that ICT is increasingly becoming a critical ingredient for meaningful participation in a globalised world. It is also an indispensable infrastructural component for effective education provision, and is central to the notion of opening learning opportunities in the PSET System.
- iii. DHET sees online qualifications, part qualifications, and programme and course offerings as a viable mode of provision that has to be pursued and supported in the PSET system. It recognises its benefits, especially for those who want to study while working or those who are in other circumstances that prevent them from attending site-based education and training.
- iv. The provision of online programme and course offerings in South Africa by public, private and foreign institutions or companies must be regulated in accordance with South African law and policies of the DHET. Legislation and policies have to be aligned to support the online offering of programmes and courses. Specific attention has to be given to quality and quality assurance within the current three sub-frameworks of the NQF.
- v. Online programme and course offerings have to adhere to all the norms and standards applicable to delivering quality education and training in the PSET system. Where gaps exist, the DHET will develop norms, standards and guidelines for the offering of online programmes and courses.

## **5. Open Learning Principles**

As stated in paragraph 4 above, the DHET supports the development of a PSET system based on open learning principles.

Synthesising descriptions in the *White Paper on Education and Training* (1995) and the *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training* (2014), the key principles underpinning open learning are:

- i. students are provided with opportunities and capacity for lifelong learning;
- ii. learning processes centre on the students and contexts of learning, build on their experience and encourage active engagement leading to independent and critical thinking;
- iii. learning provision is flexible, allowing learners to increasingly determine where, when, what and how they learn, as well as the pace at which they will learn;
- iv. students have access to learning opportunities and unnecessary barriers to access have been removed;

- v. prior learning and experience is recognised wherever possible;
- vi. arrangements for credit transfer and articulation between qualifications facilitate further learning;
- vii. providers create the conditions for a fair chance of learner success through learner support, contextually appropriate resources and sound pedagogical practices; and
- viii. provision of open learning is working within legacy systems. This means that open learning will be embedded in, as well as enhance and expand, the current education and training system, and not be an add-on to the current system.

## **6. Issues for the Department of Higher Education and Training to Consider in Online Programme Offerings**

The following critical issues around Online Programme Offerings in South African have been identified. These include:

### **6.1 Systemic Issues**

#### **a. Policy, Legislation and Enabling Environment**

Legislation, policies and funding have to be aligned to support the online offering of programmes and courses, and to ensure that they are quality assured. Careful consideration should be given to the different modalities outlined in section 2 and how it can be applied within the PSET system. Specific attention has to be given to the quality of courses and quality assurance of provisioning within the current three sub-frameworks of the NQF, and to the ability of the PSET system to adequately and confidently recognise learning transfer with and across its three sub-systems through effective implementation of CAT and RPL. Whilst policy is emerging in this area, its implementation across the system is weak.

Guidelines and directives have to be developed by the SAQA and the three QCs to guide and direct institutions in the design, accreditation and implementation of online programme and course offerings.

#### **b. Funding and Costing Model for Online Programme Offerings**

There is international evidence that distance education can, under certain conditions, provide high quality educational opportunities more efficiently and cost-effectively than traditional face-to-face provision. This is also true for online programme and course offerings. The DHET is committed to exploiting the potential of large-scale provision to reduce per-student cost, and to the funding of quality online offerings.

Funding frameworks and mechanisms will be developed to accommodate the high costs associated with the development of quality learning programmes and materials, as well as the cost of providing support to students. However, it will use economies of scale to ensure

that online learning becomes a viable and cost-efficient option for delivering education and training in the PSET system.

### **c. Registration of Qualifications and Accreditation of Providers**

Accreditation requirements for online programme and course offerings must be customised to speak to the peculiarities of online programme offerings. Consideration must be given to developing bespoke accreditation requirements for such programme offerings. A key issue is to ensure equivalence of learning experience and exit-level expectations across a much more diverse student body and a range of learning contexts.

Programmes with Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and practical components will require additional investment in design and support processes. This investment and the efficacy thereof need to be captured in formal assessment processes in order to inform not only appropriate funding models but also the minimum requirements for future accreditation.

### **d. Programmes and Courses offered Online as part of Public Institutions' Programme and Qualification Mix**

The DHET acknowledges that online offerings might be part of any course, programme or qualification/part qualification offered at a public institution. The DHET has to provide direction and funding support to institutions that want to use online programme offerings.

Public institutions offering qualifications, part qualifications, programmes and courses online through sub-contracted companies as part of their PQM, have to report it to the DHET through the annual reporting cycle in order to maintain quality offerings. Additional accreditation must be sought for on-line offerings.

### **e. Partnerships between South African Post-School Education and Training Institutions and other Institutions**

Currently there are several institutions offering online programmes and courses in partnership with other institutions. Specific to universities, the tendency of establishing university-owned companies to offer online programmes and courses has been observed. The DHET will provide clear guidelines to universities and other potential PSET institutions wishing to follow this path, as well as to communicate clearly to the public the difference between qualifications and non-formal offerings offered by universities and university-owned companies.

### **f. Transfer of Credits for Offerings done through Online Offerings and Massive Open Online Courses**

In South Africa it is widely recognised that articulation across the PSET system is poor, with many universities not recognising courses taken at other universities. This dilemma is exacerbated by international institutions offering online courses and programmes.

Although institutions may have valid reasons for not recognising students' credits, every effort in developing and supporting an articulated PSET system must be made, and institutions must make every effort to avoid unfair and irrational barriers to acceptance and credit transfer.

#### **g. Recognition of Prior Learning**

The SAQA and the three QCs have to consider a framework and a system for recognising learning that has taken place through online offerings and how to manage the process. The RPL Coordination Policy (2016) establishes coordinating and funding mechanisms for RPL implementation. The DHET will provide initial oversight and guidance to ensure that a national coordinating institute is eventually established. It will be supported by a RPL Reference Group.

#### **h. Articulation**

The implementation of CAT and RPL and other access policies in the delivery of MOOCs will need to recognise the way in which teaching, learning and assessment take place in a MOOC and/or online environment. The barriers and challenges that exist in the formal teaching and learning environment will need to be dealt with by SAQA and the QCs. The current SAQA policies provide an enabling environment for the simple application of the principles of CAT and RPL in these teaching and learning environments.

#### **i. Cross-Border Distance Education**

The *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (2014) (p17) states that provision in South Africa by foreign providers "must be regulated in accordance with South African law to ensure that acceptable standards are maintained, students are protected and the democratic transition of South African university education is sustained." The policy also requires that "South African providers offering cross-border services must uphold standards at least as rigorous as they are required to observe at home."

The policy also signalled that the DHET has embarked on a "process of developing an agreed framework of principles and guidelines for action by all bodies and institutions in South Africa concerned with offering and receiving cross-border university education, and offering joint degrees within a range of diverse partnership models" (p17).

#### **j. Quality Assurance**

The SAQA and the three QCs have to consider a framework and a system for quality assurance of online programme and course offerings and how to manage the process.



The design of all qualifications and part-qualifications registered on the NQF are premised on a learning outcomes-based approach. They are also all aligned to one of the ten levels of the NQF. The level descriptors in turn comprise ten elements which describe the profile of a student and/or a graduate from a learning programme at any of the NQF levels. These two instruments are particularly helpful when assessments are designed and when quality assurance of the teaching and learning process is applied. The level descriptors and learning outcomes are applied generically in assessment processes, irrespective of the mode/modality of provision. This enables new ways of teaching and learning, such as massive open online courses and other e-learning modes, and RPL assessments, to be comparable. It also provides credibility in assessment and eventual award processes.

#### **k. Online Learning: Research and Knowledge Generation**

The implementation of online learning as a mode of provision in South Africa must be informed by evidence generated through research. A knowledge base must be created, and the work of a research community focused on this area of specialisation must be developed and supported.

### **6.2 Implementation Issues**

#### **a. Technology Infrastructure and Connectivity**

ICT infrastructure and access to broadband is indispensable for delivering online programme and course offerings.

The ICT infrastructure required to support and sustain an effective online education and training system includes sophisticated networks, effective and efficient connections to national and international bandwidth, and advanced security systems and devices capable of running and sustaining learner, learning and content management platforms. Access to bandwidth must be sustainable, and must provide adequate and consistent Internet access. Staff and students also have to have access to affordable end-user devices such as laptops and tablets for their own use.

In fully-online programmes and courses, all interactions with staff and students, educational content, learning activities, assessment and support services are integrated and delivered online. Therefore, in addition to hardware and software, technical and administrative support for both students and lecturers are required around the clock. The DHET is committed to creating a network of education providers supported by shared learning support centres and/or connectivity for students. A network of such centres has the potential to be a shared resource for the PSET sector to ensure access to the Internet for learning purposes, for all registered students.

In an online learning environment, lecturers and students must be capacitated to use ICT effectively for teaching and learning. This may be achieved through appropriate training and development programmes conducted at shared learning support centres.

#### **b. Capacity of the Department of Higher Education and Training to support Online Programme Offerings**

The DHET has to build its own capacity in the understanding and implementation of open learning, and in specific online qualifications, part-qualifications, programmes and course offerings. The DHET has to have dedicated staff supporting the system to deliver at national, regional and institutional levels. This should form part of the teaching and learning support provided.

Student support for online programmes and course offerings at institutional level includes but is not limited to:

- i. Academic support refers to a wide variety of instructional methods, educational services or educational resources provided to students in an effort to help them accelerate their learning progress, catch up with their peers, meet learning standards, or generally succeed in their learning endeavours. Academic support includes but is not limited to face-to-face tutorials, remedial interventions and library services;
- ii. Counselling support refers to support for students in the form of career guidance, study skills and computer skills training and assistance for students facing crisis situations and adjustment issues;
- iii. Administrative support refers to providing students with timely, accurate and accessible information to assist with all phases of the learning process; and
- iv. Technology support provides 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, discussions for asynchronous and synchronous interaction with lecturers and tutors, and assignment drop boxes.

#### **c. Institutional Capacity to Deliver, Administer and Manage Online Programme Offerings**

There are similarities and differences in the configuration of the staffing structure between traditional face-to-face programmes and online programmes. The staffing mix required to implement an online education programme includes the following:

- i. A programme/course management team to manage the offering of the programme/course, and to support staff in offering programmes/courses. This includes reviewing the curriculum and updating resources; supporting administrative personnel in providing advance reminders of impending deadlines with respect to issues such as uploading learning resources, assessment plans and assessment instruments, and monitoring and evaluating the programme;

- ii. Subject matter experts to support students and to manage the learning and assessment environment;
- iii. Instructional designers that translate course content into ICT-enabled material;
- iv. ICT technical staff to assist academic staff and students with ICT-related matters, and to ensure that the technology does not form a barrier to learning;
- v. Administrators and managers to administer and manage the online learning environment, student records, call centre cases and communications with students and staff, as well as to provide support to staff;
- vi. Call centre personnel to receive calls/communication from students and to direct cases appropriately; and
- vii. Assessment support staff to monitor the progress of students and to manage and conduct the assessment of students.

The DHET recognises the need to diversify staff as well as the need for increasing certain levels of staff in proportion to increasing numbers of enrolments.

The DHET will invest in professional development programmes for the management of institutions to manage and support open learning, as well as the professional development of full-time and part-time staff in various aspects of distance and online programmes.

#### **d. Investment in the Development of Quality Learning Materials**

The DHET recognises the value of investment in the development of quality learning materials, in specific for TVET and CET colleges.

The DHET supports the collaborative development of shared high quality learning programmes and resources and the use of Open Educational Resources (OER). The DHET is committed to pursuing the adoption or adaptation, in accordance with national needs, of an appropriate Open Licencing Framework, such as Creative Commons, for use by the PSET system. In line with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) *Paris Declaration on OER* of 2012, learning resources developed partly or wholly using public funds administered by the DHET will be published under an open licence that encourages their use and adaptation for re-use and redistribution.

The DHET will, however, provide support for the production and sharing of learning materials as OER at institutions in the PSET system.

#### **e. Quality of Provision**

Currently, the quality criteria for the accreditation of conventional programmes and distance education programmes at PSET institutions are the same, but with different norms. However, distance education programmes face additional challenges in terms of enhancing the quality of delivery.

The key challenges in distance education, and therefore also in online programme and course offerings, include providing opportunities for students to interact with and get support from lecturers outside of normal hours; providing timely and appropriate interactive learning materials and feedback on assessments; providing technology support to staff and students to ensure a working learning environment, and making available expert guidance and support in order to derive maximum benefit from the learning materials.

These challenges must be addressed during the course design phase through the application and integration of ICT, as well as during the implementation phase, by engaging qualified and experienced lecturers, developing appropriate and sufficient learning materials, and creating effective and efficient student support systems.

It is acknowledged that the quality assurance standards of conventional programmes may not be fully applicable for online programme offerings. The DHET will update the 1996 document: *A Distance Education Quality Standards Framework for South Africa (1996)* to support institutions in the deployment of distance education offerings.

#### **f. Effective Online Pedagogy**

Instruction and interaction in an online learning environment may be either synchronous or asynchronous, or both – the latter providing the more mature/adult student with a better opportunity to balance personal or professional demands with academic responsibilities. As a result of the nature of online learning, the most important transition to the online learning mode for the lecturer and student alike, is that of adjusting to the online communication medium and the freedom of learning at one's own time and pace.

An effective online learning environment requires the use of teaching and learning strategies that incorporate self-directed, learner-centred learning, facilitation of learning, support to students in synchronous and asynchronous ways, and a range of media as part of the pedagogical design.

Online learning further needs to grapple with quality issues such as appropriate learning resources to support more independent learning; the development of staff to enable effective teaching and learning through online provisioning; support for remote and widely distributed students; and assessment strategies with a strong emphasis on frequent formative feedback to encourage active engagement and retention.

The DHET will invest in professional development programmes for staff in various aspects of open learning programmes, including online learning delivery and course design using open education resources.

## **g. Advocacy and Communication**

The understanding of what good online programme and course offerings are, what to expect from such offering, etc. is sketchy and mostly driven by commercial enterprises. The SAQA and three QCs should consider developing an advocacy and communication strategy to build the understanding of the public about online programme and course offerings and how to ensure that they are being offered legitimate programmes and courses of high quality.

## **7. Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

1. A legislative and policy environment is created to support the offering and recognition of online programmes and courses, but also to ensure that students are not exploited by inferior programme offerings. These include international offerings and cross-border education and training;
2. Relevant accreditation and quality assurance processes that are in place embrace online programme offerings, and are effective;
3. The DHET develops a more nuanced higher education and training funding system for public institutions that accommodates a differentiated provisioning system.
4. The DHET honours its commitment in the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2014)* to create a network of education providers supported by shared learning support centres and connectivity for students;
5. The DHET establishes appropriate institutional capacity to support colleges in the implementation of online programmes and courses. The White Paper has called for the establishment of the South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAIVCET) to support programme and curriculum development, learner support and monitoring and evaluation;
6. The DHET and PSET institutions commit to providing access to free broadband for all students and staff in public PSET institutions;
7. The DHET and the PSET community work collaboratively towards staff and students in public PSET institutions having access to affordable end-user (mobile) devices;
8. The DHET actively promotes open learning in the workplace. SETAs must actively promote the use of online methodologies amongst their employer base;
9. The DHET commits to establishing a mechanism to develop and support online programme offerings in public institutions, especially TVET and CET colleges;
10. The DHET commits to updating the 1996 document: *A Distance Education Quality Standards Framework for South Africa (1996)* to support institutions in the deployment of distance education offerings;

11. The DHET invests in professional development programmes for management and staff to design, manage, offer, support and administer online programme offerings;
12. The DHET supports the collaborative production and sharing of learning materials as OER at institutions in the PSET system;
13. The DHET develops a specific assessment strategy for distance education students, especially in TVET and CET colleges;
14. The SAQA and QCs ensure that the provision, recognition and support of online programme offerings adhere to good standards of practice and to suitable accreditation criteria, and are embarked upon with responsibility and integrity;
15. Quality criteria for the delivering of online offerings in an open learning environment be published by the DHET and QCs that embrace online programme and course offerings;
16. The SAQA and QCs communicate the position on online programme and course offerings to the public and ensure that institutions offering online programmes and courses give full and correct information to students and the public;
17. The DHET, in collaboration with public PSET institutions, develops a database of information about online programme and course offerings in the PSET system;
18. The DHET supports the establishment of research chairs focused on online and digital learning; and
19. The DHET supports processes that enable collegial dialogue on the subject.

## Glossary

Asynchronous interaction is the learning or sharing of information within a group outside the constraints of time and place. For example, as is the case with the use of email, bulletins and discussion forums, lecturer or tutor and learner(s) do not have to be communicating with each other at the same time.

Blended learning refers to the provision of structured learning opportunities using a combination of contact, distance, and/or ICT-supported opportunities to suit different purposes, audiences, and contexts.

Distance education is a mode of provision based primarily on a set of teaching and learning strategies (or educational methods) that can be used to overcome spatial and/or transactional distance between educators and students. It avoids the need for students to discover the curriculum by attending classes frequently and for long periods. Instead, it may use a combination of different media, tutorial support, peer group discussion, and practical sessions.

The term “distance education” as a mode of provision therefore refers to provision in which students spend 30% or less of the stated notional learning hours in undergraduate courses at NQF Levels 5 and 6, and 25% or less in courses at NQF Level 7 and initial post-graduate courses at NQF Level 8, in staff-led, face-to-face, campus-based structured learning activities.

e-Learning (also referred to as “technology-enhanced learning”) uses ICT to access education or training outside of a traditional classroom. E-learning involves the use of a computer or other electronic device (for example a mobile phone) to provide or access educational or training material. E-learning can involve a greater variety of equipment (for instance CD-ROM or DVD) than online learning, which specifically involves using the Internet or an intranet. E-learning utilises technology to mediate synchronous (qv) as well as asynchronous (qv) learning and teaching activities.

Internet is the global system of interconnected computer networks that uses the Internet Protocol suite (IP) to link billions of devices worldwide. It is a network of networks that consists of millions of private, public, academic, business, and government networks of local to global scope, linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless, and optical networking technologies. The Internet carries an extensive range of information resources and services, such as the inter-linked hypertext documents and applications of the World Wide Web (WWW), electronic mail, telephony, and peer-to-peer networks for file sharing. The Internet has no centralised governance in either technological implementation or policies for access and usage; each constituent network sets its own policies.

Learning management system (LMS) is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of programmes and courses.

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

Mode of provision refers to the dominant mix of methods by which institutions mediate their curricula. In a single-mode institution, all courses and programmes are mediated either by distance or contact-based methodologies; in a dual-mode institution courses and programmes may be mediated by either distance- or contact-based methods and often equivalent forms of the same course or programme may be offered in either mode; in a mixed mode institution, all courses and programmes involve a mix of methods associated traditionally with distance- and contact-based provision, with the blend of methods varying from context to context. However, individual programmes are currently accredited either as content or distance provision.

Open (and) distance learning (ODL) refers to the use of distance education methods to support the realisation of open learning purposes and principles. Omission of the "and", as in "Open Distance Learning" implies erroneously that ALL distance programmes offered are based on open learning principles.

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 learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems. Open learning is not synonymous with distance education, e-learning, online learning or blended learning.

Open Content is content that is licensed in a manner that provides users with the right to use the content in more ways than those normally permitted under the law, and at no cost to the user. This is of particular importance at the post-graduate level where the "learning" materials are mostly primary sources and journal articles. This term, which is more encompassing than OER, allows for other resources such as open data and open access journals to be considered as Open Content, to which students and lecturers ideally will have access.

Open Educational 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, re-use and redistribution by educators and students without an accompanying need to pay royalties or licence fees. Openly licensed content can be produced in any medium: text, video, audio, or computer-based multimedia.



Online Learning is any form of learning conducted partly or wholly over the Internet. This means that students will use a computer, tablet, smartphone or other digital device for their learning, and it also means that at some point in their learning, they have to go online – through the Internet – to access information, to communicate with a lecturer or tutor or other learners, and to do assessments or to submit assessments. Online learning is primarily a mode of delivery that can support a wide range of teaching methods.

Provider means an institution, which may/may not be accredited with the relevant body, and which offers learning programmes, courses, qualifications or part-qualifications that may/may not be registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF), and that manages the assessment thereof.

Qualification means a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose or purposes, and which is intended to provide qualifying students with specified applied competence and a basis for further learning; it also means the formal recognition of the achievement of the required number and type of credits and such other requirements as may be determined by SAQA.

Quality refers to the interrelated demonstration of fitness of and for purpose, value for money and contribution to social transformation in line with the intent and values of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) involves formal identification, assessment and acknowledgement of the full range of a person's knowledge, skills and capabilities acquired through formal, informal or non-formal training, on-the-job or life experience.

Student support can be divided into four elements, namely academic support, counselling support, administrative support and technology support.

1. *Academic support* may refer to a wide variety of instructional methods, educational services or educational resources provided to students in an effort to help them accelerate their learning progress, catch up with their peers, meet learning standards, or generally succeed in their learning endeavours. Academic support includes but is not limited to face-to-face tutorials, remedial interventions and library services.
2. *Counselling support* refers to support for students in the form of career guidance, study skills and computer skills training and assistance for students facing crisis situations and adjustment issues.
3. *Administrative support* is about providing students with timely, accurate and accessible information to assist with all phases of the learning process.
4. *Technology support* provides 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, discussions for asynchronous and synchronous interaction with lecturers and tutors, and assignment drop boxes.

Synchronous interaction is learning or sharing 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 participating online.

Technology-enhanced 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 on-line and synchronous (e.g. real-time conferencing), on-line 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 distance programmes.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a component of a learning programme that focuses on the application of theory in an authentic, work-based context. It addresses specific competences identified for the acquisition of a qualification which relate to the development of skills that will make the learner employable and will assist in developing his/her personal skills. Employer and professional bodies, together with academic staff, are involved in the assessment of experiential learning.