Commonwealth of Learning

Concept Framework for an Open Learning System in Post School Education and Training in South Africa

August 2013

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Acknowledgements

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One of the directives of the Minister of Higher Education and Training, the honourable Dr Blade Nzimande, is considering the vigorous use of open and distance learning for lifelong learning for the massification of the education and training system in South Africa[1].

This document is a part of the envisaged activities to be undertaken by the DHET in order to support, coordinate and guide the development and provision of open learning in the post-schooling system. This is an attempt to provide a vision for the future delivery of open learning in the post-schooling system that are sustainable and meet the needs of a wide range of learners from the adult education and training sector, further education and training sector, university education sector and also youth who are not employed and not in education and training.

The DHET would like to acknowledge with gratitude all those who have made a significant contribution to the publication of this document.

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[1] DHET Annual Performance Plan 2012/3

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AET	Adult Education and Training
APL	Assessment of Prior Learning
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
FET	Further Education and Training
GETCA	General Education and Training Certificate for Adults
HFSP	Household Food Security Programme
LMS	Learner Management System
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NADEOSA	National Association of Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa
NAMCOL	Namibian College for Open Learning
NASCA	National Senior Certificate for Adults
NATED Report 191	National Technical Education Diploma
NC(V)	National Certificate (Vocational)
NEETS	People that are not employed, in education or training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OER	Open Education Resources
OERu	Open Education Resources University
PSET	Post School Education and Training
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
Saide	South African Institute for Distance Education
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
Unisa	University of South Africa
UoP	University of the People
UWC	University of the Western Cape

Concept Framework for an Open Learning System in Post School Education and Training in South Africa: An Interim Report

Introduction

Policy context

The 1995 White Paper on Education and Training[2] affirms the South African governments' commitment to opening up learning and removing barriers to education for those who have been disadvantaged by South Africa's' past. It envisages

> "Open learning… (as) an approach which combines the principles of learner centredness, 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." (p 34, clause 25)

Various policy papers and initiatives subsequent to the White Paper built on this theme.

Notwithstanding this commitment to removing barriers to learning, and similar to many other countries in the world, research undertaken by CHET[3] (Centre for Higher Education Transformation) based on the 2007 Community Survey, SA Statistics data identified that there were approximately 2.8 million young people between the ages of   18 -24 years old that were neither in employment nor in education and training (coining the term NEETs). This research finding was one of the key reasons why the Department of Education was split into two ministries in 2009; the Department of Basic Education (DBE) which is responsible for schooling, and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) which is responsible for the coordination of the education and training sub-systems of post-school education and training, including Universities, Vocational and Continuing Education and Training, and Skills Development. The establishment of DHET meant that for the first time specific attention was being given to establishing and maintaining a post schooling system which is responsive to the needs of South Africa.

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[2] Department of Education (1995), White Paper on Education and Training. pg. 34 clause 25 DoE: Pretoria
[3] Nico Cloete (Ed) 2009 *Responding to the Educational Needs of Post-School Youth,* CHET: Cape Town.

One of the major initiatives of the new DHET has been the release of the Green Paper on Post School Education and Training[4] in 2011 which recognises and acknowledges the need to create an integrated, coherent post school education and training system, in order to, among other imperatives, address the vulnerabilities of the NEETs group identified above. This large group includes those who have a very poorly attained matric, those who have dropped out of school before completing grade 12 and those with less than a grade 9.

In a separate Chapter of the Green Paper entitled Open and Distance Learning: Flexible and Innovative Modes of Delivery, commitment is made to broadening the models of educational provision to provide easier access to meaningful opportunities to people throughout their lives. It emphasises the importance of creating networks of providers and learning centres to open up educational opportunity, as well as the necessity to create an enabling ICT infrastructure. The Draft Framework for the Provision of Distance Education for Universities[5], also released in 2011, sees distance education as part of this wider open learning system.

The 2010/11 – 2014/15 Strategic Plan of the DHET supported the development of open learning opportunities as part of the post-school system with the intention of connecting education institutions and curricula to emerging networks and information resources; to promote innovation and opportunities for lifelong and education institutions and curricula to emerging networks and information resources, as well as to promote innovation and opportunities for lifelong learning.

Most recently, the Open Learning in Post School Education and Training Concept Note[6] prepared by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) recognises that open learning should be embedded in, enhance and expand the current education and training system.

Project process

Developing this **Concept Framework for an Open Learning System in Post School Education and Training in South Africa** is the first phase of a bigger initiative of the DHET, launched by the Concept Note referred to above. DHET requested the assistance of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to support this phase by contracting consultants to work alongside the Directorate: Career Development and Open Learning. The aim of this phase is through a consultative process, to elaborate on understandings of open learning, propose possible pilot initiatives to embed open learning principles within the existing education system, and identify related policy implications.

Four post schooling sectors were identified for consideration:

1. Adult Education and Training (AET)
2. Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges
3. Skills Development
4. University Education.

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[4] DHET (2011), Green Paper for Post School Education and Training, DHET: Pretoria.
[5] DHET (2012), Draft Policy Framework for the Provision of Distance Education for South African Universities. DHET: Pretoria
[6] DHET (2013), Concept Note: Open Learning in Post School Education and Training. DHET: Pretoria

Three workshops focussing on AET, FET and Skills Development were held with key stakeholders working at the post schooling level:

- to discuss the vision and principles of open learning in the South African context, and

- to identify large scale education and training needs at a provincial and national level, possible ways of responding to these needs, and whether a programme can be designed which addresses this need while incorporating the principles of open learning.

Participants included, among others, representatives of non-governmental organisations (Saide, JET), academic institutions (NMMU, Unisa, Regenesys, North West University, UCT, UWC, University of Pretoria, University of Limpopo)[7] the Department of Basic Education and representatives of the FET College sector including a representative of the Centre for Integrated Post Schooling education and Training (CIPSET), the AET Directorate and the Skills Development, HRD Planning and Monitoring Coordination, and the Universities Branches of DHET, as well as representatives from Manufacturing, Education and Related Services SETA (Sector Education and Training Authority). Key role players in the skills development workshop included the DHET, MERSETA and Saide. CIPSET is a recently established research centre based at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University which focusses on community, adult and post school education and training (PSET). The Centre was established in 2012 and has a number of strategic focus areas which include, among others, facilitating collaboration among educational groups, institutions and agencies to strengthen post school education and training; to establish programmes and projects that support PSET in South Africa and to build research capacity that advances the PSET system in South Africa.

Participants in each workshop were asked to propose possible pilot initiatives and interventions which could be undertaken by DHET as a means of incorporating open learning principles into post school education and training.

For the University Sector, a seminar took place on 23 July, 2013 which was attended by 45 participants, including representatives from one third of South Africa's public universities, a private provider, DHET and publishers. Given the nature of the university sector, the agenda of this was rather different. Its purpose was to:

- agree on key elements of open learning for universities; and

- assist the DHET in the concept framework and policy implications for supporting open learning in universities.

The above consultations inform what follows.

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[7] All attendance registers for each of the workshops are stored in the Dropbox folder set up and managed by DHET.

Understanding Open Learning

Across the globe, there are various understandings of open learning. These include that open learning implies no entry requirements for admission; that open education is simply about making educational resources available freely; that open educational practices are where objectives of learning as well as methods are determined and governed by learners; and, most often, that openness is a synonym for distance education. This last interpretation suggests that applying distance education as a method, and the notion of being able to reach a larger number of learners at a lower cost, makes the learning open. While distance education provides considerable opportunities for opening up learning, it is not intrinsically open. There are many examples of distance education programmes that are rigidly organized, that have onerous admission policies and processes and that recognise only regurgitation of lecturer- driven content for success.

Taking the lead from the 1995 White Paper mentioned above, this Concept Framework sees open learning

> as an approach to all education that seeks to remove all unnecessary barriers to learning, so that as many people as possible are able to take advantage of meaningful learning opportunities throughout their lives.

Thus, open learning is understood as an approach based on a set of principles, not as a method of delivery *per se*. It therefore follows that open learning should not be considered an add-on to the existing education system, but as an approach to learning which can be embraced across the existing education system. Increasingly this calls for planners to envisage the system as a whole rather than in separate silos.

Barriers to accessing suitable and relevant learning opportunities are significant constraints to opening learning for historically marginalized groups. These barriers can take many forms, and addressing the different forms will likely need to be prioritized at different times. Well known barriers are those created by distance/location, scheduling timetables, pedagogic practices, access to technology, content, fees, discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity or language and disability. It is likely that some learner groups will need to overcome more than one of these barriers to be able to participate in learning.

Open learning principles

Building on the White Paper of 1995 and the 2013 Concept Note on Open Learning in the Post Schooling Education and Training, key open learning principles include:

- learners are provided with opportunities and capacity for lifelong learning;
- learning processes centre on the learners and contexts of learning, build on their experience and encourage active engagement leading to independent and critical thinking;
- 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;
- prior learning and experience is recognised wherever possible;
- arrangements for credit transfer and articulation between qualifications facilitate further learning; and
- providers create the conditions for a fair chance of learner success through learner support, contextually appropriate resources and sound pedagogical practices.

It is important to note that the above principles can be in tension with each other. For example,

- increasing the flexibility of provision can often mean that there is not enough structure in place to encourage students to be disciplined and hence facilitate their success.
- increased access to an educational programme (and consequently an increase in learner numbers), can result in a decrease in support to individual learners, again impacting on their chance of success.
- open curricula may allow students to design their own individual learning pathways but they can also result in confusion and lack of a coherent learning experience
- open choices about assessment options could favour particular types of learning and thereby undermine accreditation of learning achievements.

Finally, it is important to affirm that these principles should apply to all education, regardless of the mode of provision. This is the central tenet of opening up South Africa's Post Schooling system.

Below is an elaboration of three key tenets of open learning.

Learners at the centre of the learning experience and afforded a fair chance of success

Facilitating students' active engagement in learning recognises the value and knowledge that learners bring to the learning process and that education is not only a one way process from lecturer to learner.

Activity-based learning places learners at the centre of the learning experience because they are involved in the on-going construction of knowledge. For this to take place effectively, a lecturer or tutor needs to mediate the learning process. The reflective process with appropriate mediation is defined as a learning pathway.[8] As learning is actively constructed, it cannot merely be transferred to another learner: what people know is heavily influenced by their own cultural and learning context.

The process of mediating learning requires a shift from the teacher led and content driven approaches, more towards resource/activity and collaboration-based approaches. This shift in turn necessitates developing the learning pathway in a very deliberate and conscious manner which facilitates the provision of adequate support to learners, both through high quality learning resources, as well as online media and face-to-face interactions. The diagram below represents the evolution of this learning pathway. The notion of guided reflection also provides a source of learner support which enables further learning.

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[8] Saide (2012) *Online Course Design Guide* (can be accessed at www.saide.org.za/design guide/), Saide: Johannesburg

... leading to new
knowledge / ideas

New activity

Guided Reflection on
activity

(discussion of issues

Learning Pathway

New knowledge / ideas ...

New activity

Guided Reflection on
activity

(discussion of issues

Content to
frame activity

(based on existing

Learning
Activity

(reading/
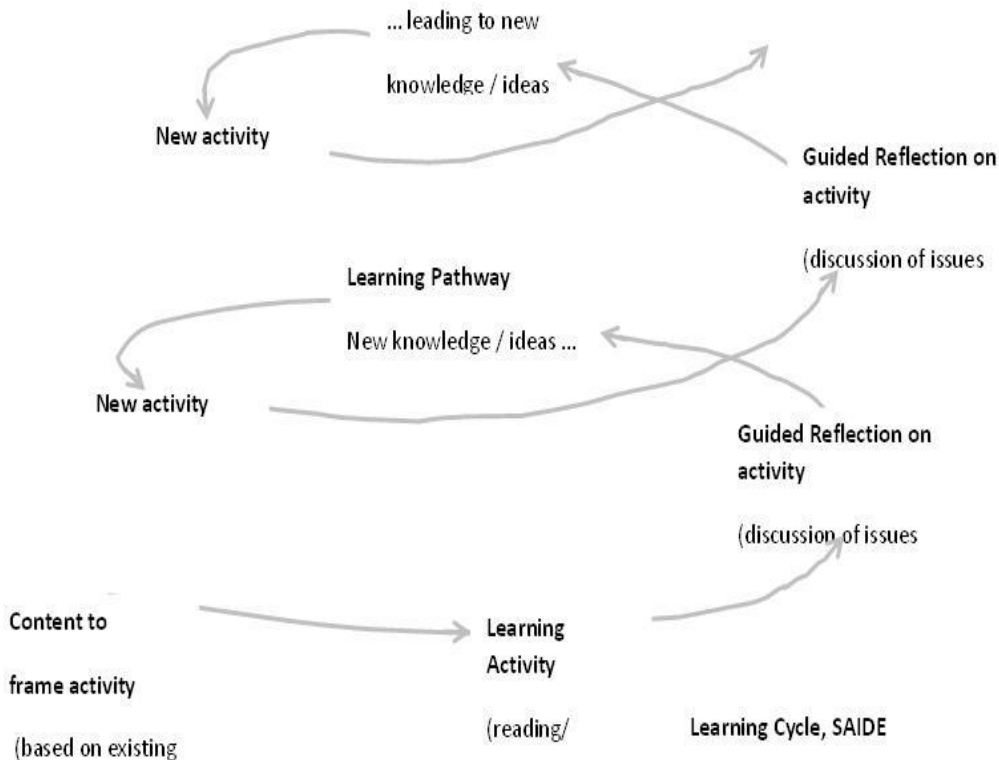
Learning Cycle, SAIDE

Figure 1: The Learning Pathway (Saide, 2004)

All learning also takes place within a context, and the nature of learning is heavily influenced by a learner's own circumstances and ability to participate. In South Africa specifically, consideration needs to be given to the poor quality of the education system and the ill-preparedness of many school leavers to enter and succeed in post-school education and training. For this reason, particular attention needs to be given to the quality of the education opportunity when designing curriculum and structuring learning opportunities, including ensuring that appropriate levels of support are available to learners.

This support can take the form of adequate guidance and advice to ensure that a learner is pursuing education and training which is relevant to their own context and needs and in line with their interests and learning choices. Support can take the form of one-on-one contact, peer-to-peer engagement, tutorials and access to high quality resources in the form of computer facilities and high quality learning materials.

Central to the above is recognizing that learner support is not a discrete teaching and learning strategy to be applied, but rather is a combination of methods and options which can either support or constrain a learner. Consideration needs to be given to the extent to which any strategy supports a learner, and the likely effect on learner success.

Debates exist as to whether educational opportunities should focus on learners, or whether it is more appropriate to focus on learning. These have been driven by the concern that if education becomes too learner-centred, it can undervalue the role and responsibilities of an educator in the learning process, as compared to creating a learning-centred system which facilitates the active engagement of both learners and educators. Concerns have also been raised that focusing too much on the individual learner

can have implications for the quality of learning, and the recognition and portability thereof, and that a learner-centred approach is best implemented where it focuses on learners as a larger group, and responds to the societal context. This imperative needs to be balanced with the risk of applying a one-size-fits-all approach that is educator-driven and does not respond to the broader needs of society.

An additional important dimension is the quality and relevance of the course or programme. While a student may complete a course or programme successfully, there is no guarantee that the qualification will make one employable or be of any benefit to the student. Ensuring a fair chance of success is not only related to mechanisms or processes within education and training, but is also related to whether available education and training opportunities can equip people for a viable future.

Lifelong learning

The notion of lifelong learning is central to opening learning. It underscores the belief that learning is a process, and not a series of discrete events. Open learning should provide learners the opportunity to learn throughout their life, and recognises that learning is not always reliant on structured, organised education systems. No learner enters the learning process without any prior knowledge or experience. In fact, each learner brings valid knowledge or experience to the learning process, whether this is generated through formal study and training or informal life experience and on the job learning. This means seeing every opportunity or interaction as a possible learning opportunity, and taking place throughout ones' life. Similarly, the active engagement and participation of learners in the learning process will assist in being able to think critically, a vital life skill which will equip learners to function in the broader society.

Facilitating progression through prioritizing articulation possibilities

Facilitating progression is crucial to removing barriers to further learning. It requires facilitating the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and credit transfer. This open learning principle is aligned to the notion of making the learner the central focus of the learning. Attention needs to be given to enabling articulation between qualifications offered at various institutional types; including but not limited to schools and FET Colleges, FET Colleges and universities, and adult learning centres. This is particularly important where learners are seeking admission to an institution based on their prior qualifications. Where the course-to-course comparison does not meet another institution's requirements, it can happen that a learner needs to repeat content for the second time before they are eligible to participate in a desired course. Facilitating progression also entails developing a process for credit transfer where a learner may wish to continue their studies at an alternative institution. In particular, a student who is enrolled in a face-to-face programme may wish to move to a distance programme as their own circumstances may have changed. This needs particular attention.

Models of Provision for Open Learning

All the above aspects of open learning are of importance in promoting access to education with a wide variety of learners in mind, including those who may not enjoy proximity to conventional physical learning centres. Moreover the predominant conceptualization of educational provision as requiring students to attend a physical, and usually central urban, place for long periods at fixed times and over an extended timeframe restricts the vision of how provision could be organized to take forward an open

learning agenda. For this reason, it is necessary to explore possible different modes of provision in a digital age.

To date, conceptions of how learning programmes are delivered have tended to be restricted to the continuum of face-to-face contact programmes to paper-based distance education.

The notion of different types of educational provision is illustrated on the continuum below which can be used to describe a range of educational practices, on which a model of educational provision can be located based on its mix of methods. The greater the use of educational methods that assume temporal and/or spatial separation between learners and educators, the more education will tend towards the distance education pole of the continuum. The more direct contact between educators and learners, the more it will tend to the contact or face- to-face pole (CHE, 2004)[9].

| Face to face | Mixed mode | Distance education |
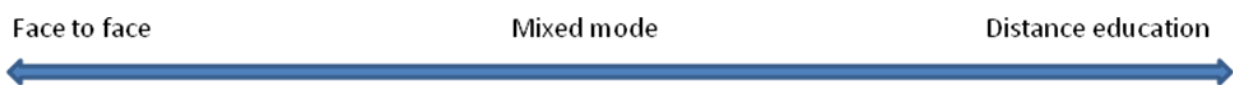
Sometimes the points on this continuum are given labels, for example, 'mixed mode'. A mixed mode curriculum is communicated through a blend of distance education methods (such as self-instructional materials provided in print or online) and face- to face methods (the face- to- face component may be offered on the central campus or at a centre away from the main institutional campus). Mixed mode may be implemented equally successfully for both *off* campus students (who cannot attend classes full-time) and for *on* campus students who do attend classes but who also receive part of their tuition/learning support through a range of more flexible means such as accessing web-based materials or tutorials conducted online.

The above does not however explicitly include modes of provision which also employ *e-learning*. As digital technology has become more accessible in South Africa, it is necessary to incorporate this dimension into our conceptualization of different possible modes of provision.

e-Learning is however a wide ranging term, so it is useful to categorise what type of *e-learning* is being referred to. One useful categorization is: digitally supported, digitally dependent, internet supported, internet dependent and fully online. These can also be represented in a continuum.

| No digital support | Digitally supported | Internet supported | Internet dependent | Fully online |
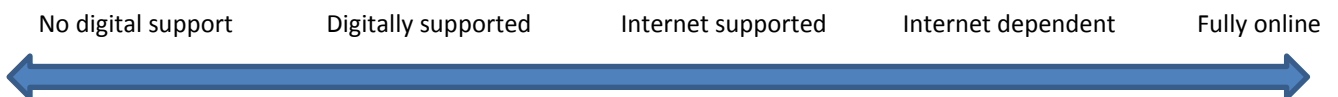
But rather than view the two continua separately, it is useful to conceptualise them in relation to each other as horizontal and vertical axes. Situating various courses or programmes on the resulting grid allows one to interrogate the degree to which each mode of delivery involves face-to-face contact, as well as simultaneously exploring the type of e-learning (if any) involved in the particular course. The

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[9] Council on Higher Education (2004) *Enhancing the Contribution of Distance Higher Education in South Africa,* Pretoria: CHE

points plotted on the graph also illustrate the notion of flexibility and exemplify a range of possible modes of provision.
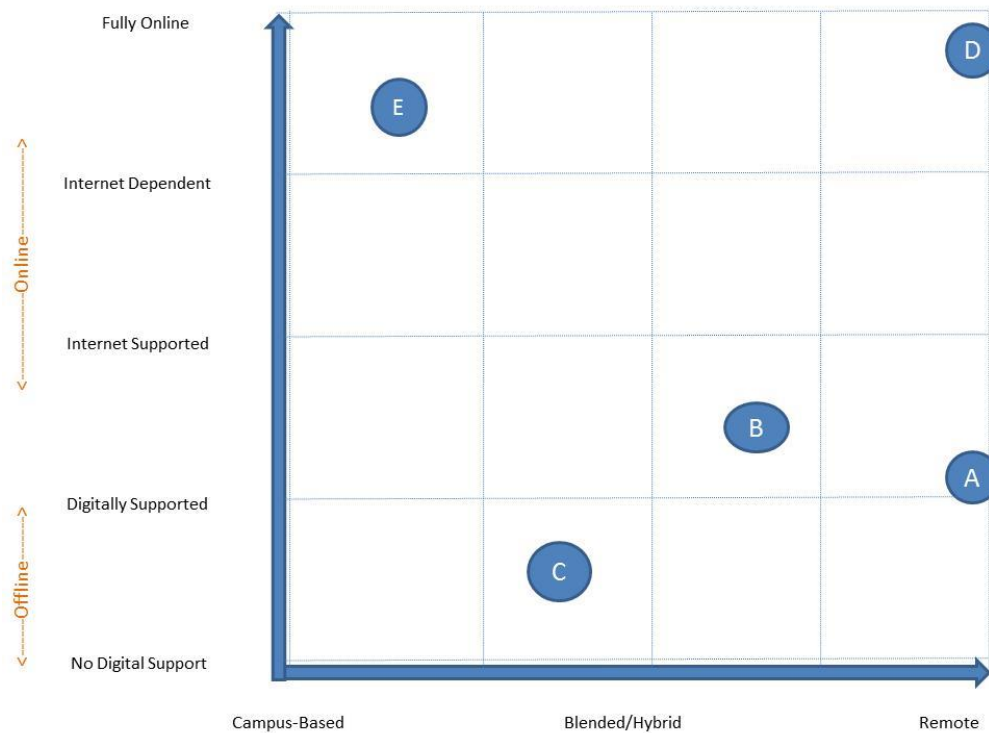
Figure 2: Learning grid demonstrating modes of provision

The grid illustrates a range of possible implementation options that could be considered. However, in all instances, the option/s selected need to take careful cognizance of the implementation context – national, provincial and institutional.

The options for provision of support can vary greatly - from face-to–face through synchronous online support to asynchronous online support. The grid also exemplifies a range of options pertaining to the mode in which the resources are distributed; these can range from print-based to fully online (recognizing that fully on-line courses could still be campus-based e.g. students access them in a campus-based computer-lab through an institutional intranet or they could be open to anybody anywhere in the world -with consequences for how examples are selected and how activities are designed among other issues).

Each labelled node on the grid refers to a particular course or programme. The illustrative details for these are shown in the table overleaf.

Table 1: Description of mode of provision at illustrative points on the graph

Structural	A	B	C	D	E
Mode of provision	Distance education /off campus /independent study	Mixed mode /off campus	Part time /on campus	Fully online/ off campus	On campus/mixed mode

Pedagogical	A	B	C	D	E
Course Materials *(Interactivity)*	Print –based materials. Tutorial letters (courier/email).	Self-instructional materials in electronic form, e.g.on CD ROM, - as well as print materials. *The use of CD-ROM allows a level of interactivity as well as the use of video clips.*	Paper-based supplemented by CD. Not designed as self-learning materials, but ordinary journal publications and textbook extracts. *Peer and lecturer interaction only on attending face-to-face sessions otherwise individualized.*	Independent study, online reflection. Access to virtual learning environment (VLE) & digital library. *Group work: blogs, forums & asynchronous social media; also sync live chat, virtual worlds.*	Independent study, online digital resources & virtual learning environment (VLE). *Group work: Multi Media Project, synchronous & asynchronous communication & media.*
Learning Support	• Some synchronous, interactive video conference sessions/lectures delivered at centres distributed nationally. • One-on-one support by lecturers per telephone and email.	• Some compulsory face-to-face workshops. • Weekly email discussions between workshops for peer as well as tutor support.	• Students attended face-to-face hour sessions twice a week over a semester. • For the rest of the time they studied on their own at home, using reading resources supplied by the lecturer.	• One-on-one online support for foundation module. • Thereafter tutor and peer support online.	• Mostly online, team teachers and peers. • F2F & video conferences each /week, everything else online.
Assessment	• Formative feedback on assignments • One assignment and one examination per module to count towards final mark; • A research project (marks equivalent to a whole module).	Assignments as well as a supervised work-based project.	• Feedback on written assignments from the lecturer. • Assignments contributed towards final assessment. • In place of examination, a structured examination equivalent task sent for external examination.	A variety of in-course online assessment activities	Formative feedback on assigned research, online participation, group Multi Media project, seen exam question.

In addition to the spatial and technological dimensions illustrated above, a third (human) dimension needs to be considered, across all forms of provision. This is the underpinning educational approach and the extent to which this is fit for purpose in terms of the target audience, the purpose and level of the course being offered, as well as the extent to which an **equivalent learning experience is offered across different contexts of learning and practice**.

Laurillard (2002) has observed that although they use different terms, educational theorists for the past 100 years or so have consistently argued that deep, meaningful learning requires active student engagement. This includes planning for interactions between students and content, students and other students, students and faculty and, when appropriate, students and workplaces and/or communities. The extent to which this is teacher or student-directed has profound implications for the ways in which programmes are staffed, and the ways in which both staff and students are oriented and supported.

Developments Opening up Learning

Below, different national and international developments and initiatives which assist in opening up learning are explored.

Open educational resources

Opening learning also entails removing barriers to accessing content. These barriers have existed in the form of licensing fees and royalties which have made the acquisition of good quality learning materials very difficult for many learners. The evolution of OER has started to overcome these barriers through licensing options which allow for the adoption, adaptation and use of resources with acknowledgement without imposition of licensing fees. The use of OER provides an accessible way of communicating the curriculum to learners, rather than relying on the historical 'chalk and talk' method, avoids the duplication of efforts across institutions and programmes, and provides the opportunity to customise learning resources to the appropriate context. Creating and using customised high quality learning resources can considerably increase learners' likelihood of success. Involving learners in the creation of OER also facilitates their active engagement in their own learning, rather than passively reading text-based learning materials.[10]

Repositories for the storage of OER are in use in many parts of the world, enabling people to share their own resources and to find resources for use in their own programmes. There are also new mechanisms for sharing OER which include the *YouTube* online video channel, Open Courseware Consortium*, and *OER Africa* among others. The process of developing OER also enables lecturers and teaching staff to develop their own capacity to generate resources, and thus reduce reliance on external and often costly learning resources which are not always appropriate to the learning context.

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[10] Mays, Tony (2012) *Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Resources* (Chapter in process of being published as part of a larger volume)

Open access to online courses

In addition to the internet- enabled growth of available OER, there are increasing numbers of courses which are open to all who have access to the internet to participate at no additional cost. These include a vast array of courses available through iTunes U, Khan Academy, and well as the well-publicized but controversial Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

The evolution of MOOCs has also provided learners and institutions with opportunities that are freely available. While much debate continues regarding the efficacy of MOOCs to promote quality learning experiences, especially at undergraduate level, a MOOC could provide a valuable opportunity for institutions to secure high quality learning content and activities which might be implemented as part of a mediated course. It should however be noted that in many cases, the content of MooCs is *not* available under an open licence. It is often only available to individual learning for the duration of the course offering. These are discussed further at http://www.col.org/blog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=170, and http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/05/20/130520fa_fact_heller

Emergence of new types of 'open' institutions

Launched in 1969, the British Open University began a trend of other open universities across the World. The UKOU placed emphasis on *open* admissions and prides itself on being *open* 'to people, places, methods and ideas'. Many other open universities concern themselves with being open in regard to when, where and at what pace studying takes place.

More recently, using the affordances of digital technologies, new types of more open institutions have emerged. Initiatives like the recently established University of the People (UoP) have emerged to overcome the financial barriers to accessing higher education. Its courses are fully online and learners who meet admission criteria are able to register worldwide. Currently, the institution has reached more than 1500 students in 136 countries since its establishment in 2009. UoP has also developed two online preparatory courses to ensure students have the required English competence and are prepared for studying at a distance. All learners are required to complete these before beginning their online courses. UoP uses course forums, online study forums, collaborative discussions and peer-2-peer engagement for learning, with assessment and exams completed online. Information on the university can be located at http://www.uopeople.org/

The OER University (OERu) is a concept that aims to increase access to tertiary education through reducing costs by making use of open source software, free content licensing and the open web. OERu has a strong focus on enabling learners to obtain credit for courses that they have completed online. The OERu intends to open pathways for learners to earn formal academic credit and pay reduced fees for assessment and credit services. OERu reports that it is targeting the 15 million students in the world today who qualify for tertiary education but due to funding issues or lack of provisions are unable to access the opportunity.

Badges

There is a relatively new phenomenon whereby learners are able to complete online courses and obtain a 'digital badge' for their completion. A digital badge (token or icon) is an online representation of a skill earned, project completed or experience had. It is a new way of recognizing learning and achievement in internet-based learning. Badges represent a different approach to credentials, one that places the focus

on individual students and their learning accomplishments. Badges can be displayed wherever required on the web, and shared for employment, education or lifelong learning. Mozilla, through Open Badges, is trying to take it one step further, to verify student skills, interests and achievements through credible organizations. And because the Mozilla system is based on an open standard, students can combine multiple badges from different issuers to tell the complete story of their achievements. These badges can facilitate progression by providing a demonstration that a learner has completed a course or module in a particular area, even if a full qualification was never pursued. This development supports an expected increase in the need for just-in-time learning as part of a lifelong learning process. Further information can be found at http://www.olds.ac.uk/badges and http://openbadges.org/

Examples of Open Learning Initiatives

Five examples of open learning initiatives are discussed below. These initiatives are all focused on increasing access to post-schooling opportunities for previously marginalized sections of the population whether by historical disadvantage, income, access to technology or location. These initiatives are all aimed at increasing chances of success through the adoption of flexible delivery models and the processes in place which facilitate progression (RPL, credit transfer within and across sectors).

These examples include the Namibian College for Open Learning (NAMCOL), The Kha Ri Gude Literacy Campaign implemented by the South African Department of Basic Education, the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system in Australia, Contact North in Canada and the Unisa-Saide Household Food Security Programme.

Open schooling: Namibian College for Open Learning (NAMCOL)

NAMCOL provide an excellent example of a regional open school that promotes access to education and training to out of school youth and second chance learners by using flexible methods of delivery.

NAMCOL has been set up as a public institution which provides an opportunity for secondary school learners to achieve a school level qualification (Junior and Senior Certificate) and other professional certificate or diploma programmes in areas such as Child Development, Local Government studies and Business Management.

The institution has a flexible implementation model which includes resource-rich individual study packs, digital media and most recently, some courses have been mounted on Moodle, an online learning platform. Programmes are coordinated from one Main Centre located in Windhoek, with smaller regional Centres across the country (significantly, many centres equipped with ICT facilities are open for use by students from multiple institutions who have collaborated to form an open learning network– NOLnet). This model overcomes some of the challenges of distance and location given the vastness of the country and the low population density. Approximately 35, 000 students are currently enrolled at NAMCOL. The institution has adopted a blended mode of delivery with more frequent face-to-face sessions for junior programmes. Implicit in this practice is the assumption that senior students are able to take increasing responsibility for their own learning. Learning Centres (some are located in public schools) are also open during weekends, holidays, during the day and evenings. These opening hours enable learners who are

committed during conventional teaching hours and timetables to engage in learning programmes and activities.

NAMCOL has also introduced a small basket of TVET Programmes as of 2013. Contact sessions typically take place within existing schools to minimize capital costs and educators who are currently employed in the ordinary public schooling system are typically employed on a part-time basis to teach NAMCOL learners. The institution uses exams which are nationally set so that learners within NAMCOL can be compared to those in the ordinary schooling system. Emphasis is placed on tutor training and development to increase the quality of the learning experience for learners. It reports better student success rates than those achieved in ordinary public school system and that this is achieved   at reduced delivery costs.

Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign

Kha Ri Gude is a mass literacy campaign managed by the Department of Basic Education. The Campaign was initiated in 2008 after two years of investigation and development. It operates at grass roots community level with limited resources and has reached a high number of learners who were functionally illiterate (previously unschooled or never having completed primary education) with low levels of dropout and generally high levels of completion. More than 2.2 million learners have enrolled in the programme since its inception in 2008, broken down as 357 195 learners in 2008, 613 643 in 2009, 609 199 in 2010, 660 924 in 2011, and 676 323 in 2012. At the end of 2012, some 635 270 Learner Assessment Plans were returned for moderation, which exceeds a 90% completion rate.

The campaign uses a distributed face-to-face mode of delivery with paper-based resources. The staffing model is lean and low cost and utilizes volunteers. Literacy groups tend to be small and self-organising. There is a provincial coordinator, who manages a smaller number of supervisors. Each supervisor monitors 20 learning groups, each comprising 15-18 learners. Within these small groups, learners are taught to read, write and calculate in their own language and are provided with attractive and resource rich learning materials which are easy to follow and which enable learners to continue to practise and engage with the content outside of the learning group. The approach of meeting informally at community level means that small groups are able to schedule their learning sessions at a time which is most suitable to the group and are not subject to the constraints of having to meet within conventional working hours. The learning approach is collaborative in nature which enables learners to bring their own experiences to the education process and focuses on learners being able to share these experiences with others.

Technical and Further Education (TAFE)

TAFE Colleges are run by state governments in Australia, and specifically target vocational tertiary and secondary education until Advanced Diploma level, which is below a Bachelor's Degree within the Australian Qualifications Framework. The theoretical components of learning programmes are provided through online learning, with support from the central TAFE College administration at state level. The central state administration delegates provision of the practical training, necessary for students to develop their required skills, to distributed sites within the state.

TAFE Colleges are also able to design and offer their own courses after submission to the appropriate Accreditation Committee. The Colleges cater specifically to individuals wishing to pursue vocational careers with structured trainee and internships facilitated by the College. There are also clear processes

for articulation, credit transfer and RPL which ensure that students are able to benefit from any prior studies they may have undertaken.

Contact North

Contact North is a distance education service provider based in Ontario, and serving primarily those in the north where there is an exceedingly low population density. It was launched as a gateway to putting people in touch with more than 18 000 courses and 1 000 programmes available online and at a distance from Ontario's public colleges, universities, literacy and other training providers, which are largely based in the south of Ontario.

Users are able to search for information about available courses, institutions, semester schedules and delivery methods online. Users of the website are also able to view examples of distance and online courses so that they are able to understand what distance and online learning is about. Contact North has a wide range of centres mostly across the north of Ontario, where students can access the video-conferencing platform, and meet support personnel as well as other students. Other services include information about student services pertaining to topics such as employment, credit transfer, financial assistance, libraries and online tutoring. This organisation addresses barriers to access by overcoming geographic isolation and making information freely available and focuses on the learner by ensuring that support services are available and accessible.

The Unisa Household Food Security Programme (HFSP)

The Unisa Household Food Security Programme (HFSP) targets individuals who are not typically deemed suitable for higher education, and provides these learners with an opportunity to earn a Certificate qualification while working with communities to improve household food security. HFSP uses a distributed learning model where learners convene with promoters (tutors) in central venues to review and discuss content, and are then given timelines for completing practical portfolio activities in their own communities and assignments which are submitted for assessment. Each student pays a nominal fee for each of the six modules as the programme is heavily subsidized by Unisa. If a learner successfully completes this certificate, the learner will be considered for enrolment into a higher education certificate programme within the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences.

The opportunity to meet for central tutorials and then to work on portfolio activities independently removes barriers to access created by location. The combination of face-to-face and distance activities also allows for the provision of learner support and provides some structure to the learning process for learners, many of whom have not participated in a structured post-schooling learning opportunity before. Learners report that the Certificate has brought them recognition in their communities, has enabled some learners to find employment and others to create their own work opportunities in food security – fulfilling the principles of increasing access, ensuring lifelong learning and facilitating progression based on previous knowledge or experience.

The five examples described above each address various open learning principles and provide ideas for possible consideration in implementing a pilot open learning initiative. Each of the examples addresses barriers of varying sorts, and aims to reach learners outside of the conventional post schooling system.

Characteristics of an Open Learning System

For a learning system to be considered open, it needs to meet the open learning principles outlined in the previous section. In addition, drawing on the principles discussed on page 4, the following characteristics have been identified, taking into account the South African context and the priorities identified in the workshops.

Freely available high quality learning resources covering identified programmes

Open Education Resources (OER) are defined as learning resources which are free from restrictive copyright requirements, in particular the need to pay licence fees for the use and distribution of the resource. OER can enhance the delivery of education by increasing availability of learning resources, removing a major cost for both learners and institutions while also facilitating the active engagement of teaching staff and students in the creation of learning resources. A range of licences now exist which allow an author to retain copyright while permitting some modification to the OER, for example use of the pictures or text in a newly generated OER or distribution of part or all of the OER. This is usually done on a non-commercial basis. The availability of OER enables learning resources to be customized to the local context and updated as required, without requiring permission or paying licence fees

It is recommended that in the South African Post Schooling System, DHET ensures that OER are available for a number of potentially high enrolment qualifications, such as the General Certificate in Education for Adults (GETCA), and the National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA), the theoretical component of the National Certificate in Vocational Education (NCV), to name a few. In ensuring this availability, use should be made wherever possible of existing OER. The resulting resources need to

- systematically and coherently cover the requirements of the identified qualification

- be activity-driven to encourage active engagement of learners in their learning

- be designed for independent study

- include regular formative and summative assessment.

It should however be recognised that while high quality learning resources are an important aspect of creating a learning opportunity, for most learners the resources alone are not sufficient. Most learners, particularly in the current South African context, require extensive support in their learning endeavours as well as engagement with experts and peers in order to be successful. The mere act of making learning materials available does not constitute an open learning opportunity, except for sophisticated and already skilled learners.

In addition to the development of OER recommended above, it is also recommended that the default position for all educational resources produced using public funds should be openly licensed.

Distributed provision, including technology enabled

Historical models of face-to-face provision are increasingly coming to be seen as unaffordable to many, and as restricting access to a large learner population who are unable to participate in education and training within the conventional learning timetable and at designated venues. Furthermore, many of the

traditional face –to –face institutions in South Africa are hampered by infrastructure and resource constraints as well.

One way of opening up learning is to organise distributed provision of learning opportunities from a centralized location, thus enabling learners who would otherwise be unable to participate in the post schooling system to do so without relocating at considerable expense to more central and usually urban locations.

Models of such distributed provision already exist in South Africa with the Kha RI Gude literacy campaign, and the Unisa ABET Certificate and Household Food Security Programmes. These examples all place great emphasis on the provision of well-designed print-based learning materials which encourage independent learning, actively engage the learners, provide regular formative assessment, as well as encourage appropriate group activities. Assessment is by way of a carefully constructed portfolio which contributes to the year end mark. Students are supported by tutors/promoters and by each other.

While in our neighbouring countries, such as Namibia (NAMCOL) and Botswana (BOCCADOL), open schooling has been implemented successfully for many years. Provision in both instances is managed centrally but offered in a distributed manner, using local schools as sites of delivery and thus promoting access even in remote areas.

With the rapid expansion in technology and the affordances it provides, opportunities will quickly develop for incorporating technology into the design of any learning programme. Learning materials can be made available digitally, allowing for easy distribution. Such materials can be studied offline or in cases where connectivity is assured, online. Where appropriate, synchronous interaction with peers or tutors can be built in. This enables real time engagement among participants in a number of different locations. Importantly, interaction with tutors or peers can also be asynchronous, enabling learners to engage at a time that is most convenient to them. Asynchronous learning can overcome barriers to access encountered by many students by virtue of unreliable and unpredictable internet connectivity (though this is changing), employment status, as well as proficiency with collaborative learning tools and familiarity with the internet. Technology enabled education can facilitate collaboration and engagement in the generation of knowledge and learning resources.

However, large disparities in connectivity and access to technology in South Africa require that programmes take into account the context of the learners and make arrangements to ensure that all learners are able to participate meaningfully. Inter-institutional cooperation in the establishment of learner support and study centres, coupled with sharing high quality resources has potential to increase student retention and throughput. These learner support centres are particularly important when implementing a distributed learning programme for underprepared students. Currently, there are a number of education centres located around South Africa that could act as sites of provision or support for learners engaged in provision that is centrally organized but delivered across distributed sites.[11]

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[11] DHET (2011) *Green Paper for Post School Education and Training*, DHET: Pretoria.

Being technology enabled is not a defining criterion for an open learning system. There is still considerable space for high quality paper-based resources, and scope to provide distributed learning using a face-to-face model.

It is important to note that even in circumstances where learners may not have access to digital technologies, the managers and administrators do. This provides the institutions with options for instituting management and administration systems that are better able to cope with a large distributed learner population as well as a wider array of teaching and learning strategies and options for generating high quality learning resources.

Comprehensive learner support

Prior to 1994, the South African education system was characterized by unequal access, weak curriculum and poor quality teaching which was structurally designed to restrict opportunities available to the majority of the South African population. The nature of the system has come to mean that many teachers who qualified during Apartheid are poorly prepared to teach learners in the current education system. The large numbers of historically disadvantaged learners in the post schooling system makes the need for comprehensive learner support and high quality learning resources particularly critical.

Much research has noted the correlation between success rates and quality of learner support. While this has typically been understood as access to course materials and interaction with an educator, when one opens learning and increases access, consideration to developing alternative sources of support is necessary. These include fostering formal and in-formal peer to peer engagement, group work, tutorials and online discussion forums or groups. This reduces the reliance on communicating directly with educators in very large programmes. By providing various kinds of learner support, diverse student populations that are often temporally separated can be able to access such support on a synchronous or asynchronous basis.

This also requires that tutors and facilitators are suitably trained and equipped to facilitate productive online interactions and engagement as a means of providing learner support.

As mobile technology and wireless connectivity continues to improve and expand, it is likely that learner support will increasingly move to online web-based approaches. In order for this to take place, investment will need to be made in upgrading existing centres and investing in new centres (as required) to be able to provide access to appropriate learning technologies and broadband internet.[12]

Programmes responsive to needs of different types of learners

The open learning principles recognise that learners have different needs and creating flexibility in the modes of provision will assist in meeting these needs. While many learners are pursuing a course or programme to achieve a qualification, there are also students who are not seeking accreditation or who are enrolled for a discrete course with no intention of pursuing a qualification. Programmes that are available should offer multiple options for students which are determined by the degree of learner

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[12] DHET (2011) *Green Paper for Post School Education and Training*, DHET: Pretoria

support, prior learning and availability of learning resources for both distributed learners (whether they are on or offline) and students attending contact institutions.

This also requires a comprehensive understanding of learner characteristics and motivations for enrolment. In many instances, distance education can provide a vehicle for learners to enter into the higher education system through alternative means or to allow for the professional upgrading of individuals who have already completed some form of post school education and training. The needs of these two groups differ, and a flexible system needs to be able to cater for both.[13]

Creating an Enabling Environment for Opening Learning: Policy and Other Implications for DHET

Policy imperatives

Below a number of policy and other implications have been highlighted which together will lay the foundations for how open learning principles can be incorporated within the existing post schooling system. Policy should be seen at three levels: high level national policy, expressed in a White Paper; national policy guidelines; and institutional policy. DHET is responsible for the first two types of policy.

The Green Paper highlights the need for flexible modes of delivery to reach a diverse student population who may not be able to attend classes regularly at a fixed venue and young people who have dropped out of the formal schooling system due to financial, social and other learning barriers to success. Creating flexible modes of delivery accompanied by decentralised student support will enhance the possibility of a student achieving success within the post schooling system. This commitment to opening up learning provides the basis for developing the White Paper which needs to create an enabling environment to students achieving success by opening up learning.

DHET open learning advocacy strategy

The adoption of open learning principles will require educational policy makers and practitioners within the current post-schooling system to understand these principles and implications for their own work.

For this to take place, DHET needs to champion open learning through the formulation of an Open Learning Advocacy Strategy which enables key players to understand the value of open learning, how it will strengthen the existing system and what is required for this shift to take place. Key players include education policy makers at national and institutional level, educators, librarians, and managers. This advocacy strategy should be led by DHET and needs to extend to cooperating with other education bodies such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), SETAs, Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), Council on Higher Education (CHE), and Umalusi who are responsible for quality assurance, as well as the work of other departments such as the e-Skills Initiative of the Department of

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[13] DHET(2012) *Draft Policy Framework for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities* Pretoria: DHET

Communication. It is suggested that DHET convene a workshop with key role players to plan this advocacy strategy and develop an Action Plan to take this forward.

This is vital as the importance of facilitating progression through the education system will have direct implications for their work, particularly in urgently formulating a clear, easily understood and accessible process for pursuing accreditation, RPL and credit transfer.

Policy on open education resources

The use of high quality OER has the potential to increase the scale of provision, reduce costs and assist in assuring the quality of provision.

DHET should consider an appropriate open licensing framework for use by all education stakeholders, within an overarching policy framework on intellectual property rights and copyright in the post schooling sector. In particular, the policy framework will seek to address the dissemination, adaptation and usage of education resources developed using public funds as OER. This will avoid a high level of duplication within the existing post schooling system, and enable learners to participate actively in their own learning, to access resources that are suitable to their own context and to shift away from reliance only on paper-based resources.

Encouraging the development of OER in key areas

This can be achieved in a number of ways:

Allocating state resources to development of OER in key areas

Allocating funding to the design and development of high quality educational resources is a vital mechanism for improving the quality of post school education and training provision. As suggested in the Green Paper on Post School Education and Training, DHET should provide support for the production and sharing of learning materials as OER at institutions in the post schooling sector. In particular, all material developed by the proposed South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training will be made available as OER.

In addition, where DHET embarks on initiatives to open learning such as the ones suggested below, it should make available funding for the collaborative development of OER and ensure that the resulting resources are easily accessible as OER.

In the university sector, funding could be made available through:

- o Competitive bids for funding for materials development for key national programmes;

- o Use of the existing Teaching Development Grants to encourage collaborative development of OER; and

- o Use of the existing Research Development Grant for research into improved teaching and learning, especially when using OER.

Facilitating the collaborative development and use of OER

This can be done through encouragement and removal of barriers, and includes:

> o making information on open learning and particularly OER easily available to educators;
>
> o engaging with the CHE to ensure that the use of (quality) OER in programmes is encouraged rather than frowned upon;
>
> o ensuring that unnecessary impediments to offering programmes across different institutions are removed. These could include funding, accreditation and enrolment planning impediments; and
>
> o identifying ways of **recognising academics** for their contribution to teaching and learning, and especially for the development of open educational resources and encouraging institutions to adopt these. Currently, at most universities, research output is the major consideration for promotion and few incentives are in place for improved teaching or OER development.

Finding OER

For the potential of OER to realised, it is imperative that educators are able to find OER easily. DHET should play a role in facilitating this process, in FET through the proposed South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training, and at university level through a ''reformatory'' (rather than a repository), possibly through the existing pan African OER Africa Initiative.

Work should be undertaken to collect and compile all available OER in the post-school sector. This includes harnessing existing content within the existing Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). The process of creating a referatory will facilitate access to a range of publicly funded materials. It is suggested that DHET negotiate with other government departments to make their learning materials available for use.

Supporting an institutional platform to take forward open learning

Taking forward an open learning agenda will be uncharted territory which will require on-going dialogue around new opportunities and lessons learnt. Policy makers and practitioners will need to come together regularly to engage with each other and chart new roads. This need was expresses by many of the workshop participants, particularly at the universities' workshop.

There already exists an association of open learning organizations – NADEOSA (the National Association of Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa) – which would be highly suited to play this role. It is recommended that this institutional platform be supported to play this vital role of providing a platform for sharing and critically evaluating experiences in opening learning.

The platform could be hosted within DHET and used to store diverse teaching and learning resources, including materials developed for adult education and training programmes.

Facilitating distributed learning

It is crucial that some forms of providers, at either provincial or national level, are tasked with managing distributed learning programmes. Such central bodies would have responsibilities for ensuring that:

- relevant teaching and learning materials, including a range of innovative learner activities, are developed, produced and disseminated;

- tutors are recruited, and trained: that their work is carefully supervised and monitored;

- appropriate assessment strategies are developed, probably through the development of a portfolio of activities;

- formative assessment tasks are received, moderated and managed so that learners receive useful feedback;

- the necessary logistics – such as distributing materials –are efficiently conducted;

- the implementation of initiatives are carefully, monitored; and

- data is collected and verified. This need exists whether or not a distributed programme uses face-to-face tutorials or online support.

The emphasis needs to be on establishing the functions of such providers. In particular, there will be a need for a central body to manage the roll-out of NASCA and the associated challenges of implementing a new, large scale and distributed programme.

The creation of such a centralised body has been successful in the roll-out of the Kha Ri Gude National Literacy Campaign which has located key functions of logistics and data management outside of the Department of Basic Education for management by an audit firm. The comprehensive and accurate data management systems as well as the smooth logistics were able to ensure that students received resources on time that class tasks were marked, that learners received timeous feedback on their progress and that attendance and participation information was accurately reported per learner. All of these processes have contributed to its high level of success.

The requirement to complete site-based assessment tasks for learners who are enrolling to complete or improve their National Senior Certificate (matric), who are typically referred to as second chance learners has proved a major obstacle to achieving the NSC. Learners need to carry their previous site-based assessment mark with them into an exam, or where no mark exists because a learner has changed their subject choice, learners are unable to write the exam. Alternatives to site-based assessment need to be considered.

A network of ICT-enabled centres and providers

An important way to accelerate the provision of post schooling opportunities is to re-conceptualise the nature of provision, away from reliance on large buildings often located far from prospective learners, and towards a decentralized network of providers and centres. For such a network to thrive, a functional ICT infrastructure is essential. This includes learners having easy access to the necessary connectivity and devices so that they are able to participate fully in learning programmes and meet course requirements.

South Africa is now in the enviable position of having a number of under-sea fibre optic cables arrive at our coastline and the Tertiary Education Network (TENET) facilitating a South African Education and Research Network. Plans are in place for all university campuses to have access to high-speed internet. DHET should do whatever is required to extend this access to all FET campuses, and evolving Community Colleges, and to ensure that the *EduRoam* facility is available to all post school students. Currently, institutions using the *EduRoam* facility are Rhodes University, the Centre for Scientific and Industrial

Research, Tshwane University of Technology, Monash, Stellenbosch and Cape Town. Students enrolled at any of these institutions are able to access high speed internet at any other participating institution worldwide. In South Africa, participation is limited to tertiary and research institutions at present. Work is currently underway to establish 30 new FET campuses in rural areas equipped with e-learning centres and access to *EduRoam* through TENET.

DHET should also join forces with all educational providers to ensure that devices become increasingly affordable.

Even with the appropriate infrastructure, issues around connectivity and availability of bandwidth can significantly constrain learners from being able to participate in a learning programme. For this reason, providers need to plan for and respond to the needs of learners affected by these challenges.

As a first step, taking the example of NOLnet in Namibia, DHET should encourage institutions to share learning centres and to create Wi-Fi networks around those centres which can be accessed by registered students of any provider.

Facilitating articulation and progression

The current post schooling system is fragmented with little to no integration between different sites and different programmes. It is difficult for learners to move between schools and colleges, between tertiary institutions, between study and the world of work.

Admission requirements for programmes offered by Universities of Technology are not always aligned to the achievement criteria within FET Colleges. This means that there are learners who have completed subjects at FET level who are unable to enter a University of Technology without remedial learning. This is a major barrier to learning as learners are required to complete catch up activities/requirements, delaying their movement through the system. There is a need to ensure that programmes are structured so that learners are eligible for some form of credit for completed courses or programmes as a student moves through the formal education system. For all of these reasons, possibilities for articulation within and across sectors need urgent attention.

The process of resolving RPL has been slow and there are currently very limited arrangements for credit transfer within tertiary institutions. This also results in a situation where learners are unable to transfer credits from one institution to another, and where such learner is enrolled in a face-to-face programme, needs to spend up to a year repeating a course so that it meets another institutions' requirements.

SAQA is currently leading major processes on RPL, learner progression and accumulation of credits. It is imperative that the Career Development and Open Learning Directorate keep abreast of these processes, make representations as necessary and then assist in any policy implementation.

Career development services

An important area of concern to both the school and the post-school system is ensuring that all people receive relevant, timeous, appropriate and adequate career information, guidance and advice; in short, that they have access to high quality career development services. This should be an integral component of the post-school education and training system, and therefore also for a post school open learning system. The DHET, in partnership with SAQA, has already embarked on an extensive Career Development

Service that includes a national Career Advice Helpline, a National Career Advice Portal and several other initiatives that support citizens to make informed career choices. However, career development services are much wider than the national service offered and teachers, especially Life Orientation teachers/lecturers, need to be capacitated to assist learners/students in making informed career choices.

As open learning develops in the post school sector, it is furthermore essential that services focusing on areas such as career and programme advice, counselling and guidance, orientation, financial aid, articulation, labour-market information, community information and links with placement agencies, are integrated into the provision of learning opportunities. There is also a need for career guidance and a communications strategy among school and college learners and teachers to build an understanding of the importance of foundational learning for planned careers.

Ensuring that career development support programmes are more evenly distributed across the post schooling system will require the skilling and training of a large number of career development practitioners, especially those who are providing first level of support/information/advice/guidance.

It is strongly recommended that the DHET creates an enabling environment for this to take place. Furthermore, a suite of learning opportunities to capacitate the large number of career development practitioners required is designed along open learning principles, with the materials being made available as open educational resources, wherever possible. This could include improving the use of the National Career Advice Portal, run by the DHET.

Piloting Initiatives in an Open Learning System

The Green Paper and the draft Distance Education Policy both acknowledge the need for urgent action to improve the quality of post-schooling options in South Africa. With this in mind, DHET has sought to identify particular initiatives that could fast track this process, and in turn achieve the buy-in and credibility from key stakeholders within government and at institutional level.

Subsequent to discussions regarding the nature and characteristics of open learning, participants were asked to propose possible pilot initiatives that embrace the principles of open learning. Various suggestions emanated from the workshops, and a number considered as immediate initiatives to be considered for Phase 1 of an Open Learning Pilot, and a smaller number as possible medium term initiatives (Phase 2).

In collaboration with the Deputy Director-General of DHET, four primary criteria were used to identify pilot initiatives. These are that

1. Pilots should be based on an existing qualification

2. Existing materials should be available for adaptation

3. There must be providers who are already offering the qualification

4. A baseline must be available or possible

Phase 1: Immediate

FET Lecturer Diploma in Technical, Vocational, Education and Training (TVET)

Given the increasing emphasis on addressing skill shortages, educators working in the TVET sector need to have specific academic and work-related knowledge. The development of a basket of suitable higher education qualifications that allow for the professional and post-professional development of TVET lecturers, will contribute to ensuring that FET Colleges are able to develop and train learners who are able to successfully achieve an occupation based qualification.

The Policy on Professional Qualifications for FET Lecturers (DHET, August 2012) clearly indicates that there are different skills and knowledge requirements for teaching within TVET compared to teaching in the ordinary schooling system. These specialist skills mean that teachers trained to teach in the ordinary schooling system are not equipped to teach at FET Colleges and vice versa.

The introduction of recognised and specialized TVET qualifications for lecturers will assist in strengthening the TVET sector. These qualifications will also include a strong workplace component which will equip lecturers to prepare students for the demands and requirements of the workplace. The requirement to achieve fundamental learning credits in ICT competence will also help equip TVET Lecturers to use new forms of technology in teaching and learning and to bridge the digital divide. Piloting the Advanced Diploma Programme across Colleges will also require that a system for RPL is carefully planned, and that the RPL process does not compromise learning outcomes. The current FET qualification could provide a baseline for assessing progress in the next five years.

A sizeable majority of lecturers at the FET Colleges are not appropriately qualified. It is therefore essential that these lecturers are able to remain at their colleges while improving their professional skills.

It is therefore recommended that the provision of the envisaged Advanced Diploma be conceptualized as a programme which meets open learning principles and which exhibits the characteristics identified above. In particular it could be offered by one or more universities but designed in such a way that lecturers are able to remain at their posts in the Colleges.

Alleviating the shortages of practical facilities by reconceptualising the implementation of practical curriculum within FET Colleges

One of the major barriers to learners being able to succeed in TVET programmes is the inability to offer the required practical skills on a large enough scale. Currently, the implementation of FET curriculum has been dominated by theory, and lecturers have insufficient time to spend on practical components of the curriculum. Existing FET Colleges also do not have sufficient practical space or equipment for all learners to be able to practise the skills that they are being taught within the current confines of safety regulations which limit the total number of learners to a maximum of 15 per workshop.

It is suggested that the sector shift towards a resource-based learning approach which will enable learners to practise such skills in alternative ways which support independent practical study. This means that learners could be able to practise skills without relying on the availability of heavy duty equipment, workshop space and availability of technicians. Simulators are one such resource which enable learners to work in groups and obtain feedback on their technique without needing to use the allocated practical equipment.

Identifying and implementing alternative learning resources, such as simulators, will reduce pressure on the workshop space and lecturers' time, and could possibility reduce the number of lecturers required per learning area.

It is recommended that DHET explore the costs of such equipment and implement this in the Welding Learning Area which requires learners to master very specific skills, but can also be taught and corrected on a simulated piece of equipment. The use of simulated equipment also reduces the risk of injury, and the on-going feedback from simulated equipment means that learners can use the simulator without the presence of a lecturer.

The current timetable in FET Colleges does not provide sufficient time to be able to integrate practical and theoretical components of the curriculum, resulting in an over emphasis on theory in many instances. The practical requirements for the NCV and NATED191 courses are also different, where NCV requires that 40% of the timetable is spent on practical activity while NATED191 has no requirements for conducting practical tasks within the timetable. This needs to be corrected to ensure that graduates are suitably prepared for the workplace and are not reliant on workplace training as a basis of certification, given that workplace training and apprenticeships are difficult to find.

Fast track ABET Communication and Mathematics

The current Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) qualification requires that beginner learners persist over a minimum of four years before receiving an exit level qualification. Completion figures show that the number of learners who complete and achieve ABET 4 as compared to those registered at ABET 1-3 are a very small proportion of those who were registered in the programme.

Recognizing this constraint the Local Government SETA developed a fast track ABET programme which covered all the exit level outcomes of Communication and Mathematics in ABET 4. The introduction of a Fast Track ABET Communication and Mathematics could accelerate completion, likely improve throughput and provide learners with the priority literacy and numeracy skills to function in broader society.

It is recommended that DHET obtain the learning materials developed for the LGSETA and pilot these materials for use in an identified ABET setting, using the decentralized, resource-based learning model suggested above. In this case the site for learner study would be the Adult Education Centres.

It is also understood that the planning and development of a General Education and Training Certificate for Adults (GETCA) within DHET is in the very early stages. DHET needs to engage on the development of this qualification and how the Fast Track ABET Programme could contribute to achieving this and vice versa.

There are existing materials which have been developed for ABET Communication and Mathematics which could be considered for adaptation. These materials could be adapted and combined for use within the programme. The adaptation process will require identifying possible gaps in the learning materials which need to be addressed.

Limited resource subjects (e.g. Physical Science in NCV)

There are limited teaching resources in Physical Science, especially in the NCV in FET Colleges, and with this being recognised as a scarce subject, there is an urgent need to identify alternative ways of teaching the curriculum without reliance on fully equipped laboratories and associated equipment. The shortage of laboratories and equipment means that some learners are never exposed to aspects of the curriculum.

It is recommended that DHET should leverage the existing *Siyavula* resources for use in the NCV in FET Colleges and investigate alternative teaching resources such as laboratory kits, videos, online lectures, CD rom which can be used to demonstrate aspects of the curriculum which are difficult to demonstrate in the classroom. In a way similar to Kha Ri Gude and the Unisa Household Food Security Programme described above, locally based tutors could be employed and trained, and an assessment strategy could be developed centrally, a portfolio system put in place, and students could be tracked centrally.

The use of locally based tutors allows for more frequent monitoring and assessment and the provision of ongoing learner support. These locally based tutors are also typically familiar with the context in which learning takes place.

Phase 2: Medium term

National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA)

There are currently a large number of individuals over 20 years (1 141 561 people in Gauteng alone) who have grade 9 or grade 10 and need grade 10 or 11, and no institution is providing any kind of learning programme to enable such individuals to qualify for writing grade 12. The NASCA has been approved by Umalusi and a curriculum development task team has been convened. The structure of the qualification is proceeding well, but the curriculum development process is still to take place. Fast tracking the NASCA curriculum, adequately resourcing its implementation and resolving the institutional arrangements will open up learning to a large number of individuals who are currently unable to participate in the formal education system.

It is recommended that the DHET considers resourcing NASCA through well-developed open learning materials and promote the use of open learning approaches in the implementation of NASCA. A centralized provider – either nationally or provincially based - with decentralized learning centres could be organized along the lines of Kha Ri Gude.

Foundation course for FET learners

Many learners transitioning from mainstream schooling to FET Colleges demonstrate very poor English and mathematics skills and exhibit very poor results. These learners are unable to meet requirements to achieve the associated FET qualification, contributing to very high levels of repetition and dropout.

Lecturers within FET Colleges acknowledge the need for a good foundation programme if learners are to have any likelihood of success. Consideration is being given by DHET to the establishment of a Foundation Course for FET College entrants.

It may be possible to link the above to developments in the QCTO of a Foundational Learning Competence Programme that will focus on the development of skills (English and Mathematical Literacy) needed to cope with the demands of occupational learning at NQF levels 2-4. Learners engaged in occupational

learning will need to have achieved this qualification before they are able to receive qualifications at NQF levels 3 or 4. The qualification has an adult and workplace focus, using English for learning and exhibits transferability to an occupational setting by focusing on the level of English and mathematical literacy required to function in an occupational setting.

It is recommended that DHET explore fast tracking this qualification for implementation to facilitate the success of FET College learners, and consequently make FET learners more employable. It should be borne in mind those learners who have not done well in the past need to believe that they can achieve this, and that this will require effort and resilience.

It is further recommended that DHET arrange for the development of well-designed learning materials to meet the skill requirements, including the design of appropriate activities and assessment, and organize professional development for lecturers to utilize these materials. A careful monitoring system would be needed to ensure that the materials are regularly improved on the basis of feedback.

Course for Career Development Practitioners

As the DHET creates the enabling policy environment for career development services to take place, and to further develop and institutionalise the national services already offered, support to teachers and lecturers should be sustained by developing career development practitioners at all levels to support learners/students in schools and colleges. Although health professional qualifications in support of career development are available at universities, much more emphasis needs to be placed on the development of general/non-health professional career development practitioners and teachers/lecturers to equip them to support learners/students. It is also essential to develop occupations and career pathways for these career development practitioners that chose to take up career development as an occupation.

It is therefore recommended that DHET, in addition to the development of a Competency Framework for Career Development Practitioners, develop occupations and career pathways for career development practitioners and explore the development of an open learning course/s, leading to a qualification, for general/non-health professional Career Development Practitioners, incl. Life Orientation teachers/lecturers.

Way forward

The DHET will take forward the pilot initiatives identified during workshops and discussed further in this report. DHET will consider the recommendations made in this report, prioritise and develop project plans for pilots and share these project plans with COL.

A workshop will also be convened with identified stakeholders to plan the Open Learning Advocacy Strategy. As part of this process, DHET would like to develop brief visual case studies of local open learning initiatives. These case studies should be colourful and accessible to a wider audience and be used in various contexts for advocacy, sharing of good practices and to showcase aspects of open learning.

DHET is also investigating various options for establishing an open learning technical platform/ Learner Management System (LMS). It is understood that COL has done some research in this regard, and is able

to share this information with DHET. This LMS would enable students to work through content in a self-directed way with automated feedback on assessment.

Furthermore, the DHET wishes to support an OER repository/referatory and a platform where OER and open learning practices can be published and shared in a local context.

Conclusion

This *Concept Framework for an Open Learning System for Post School Education and Training in South Africa* builds on DHET's *Concept Note: OPEN LEARNING IN POST SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING* of 27 February 2013 and is informed by the imperatives contained in the *Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training* released in early 2012. These imperatives are in all likelihood to be repeated in the soon to be released White Paper.

This document explores the concept of open learning; it highlights a range of open learning principles which are contained in the first White Paper on Education of South Africa's democracy; and then elaborates on several of these principles.

It then explores a way of thinking about the wide variety of methods of provision becoming increasingly possible with the growing accessibility to educational technology in the country. These could be used to open learning. It then introduces a range of new developments which could further open the system, such as open educational resources, free access to online courses, new types of institutions (OER U, Peer 2Peer University, the Free University), and the new concept of 'badges' as a form of recognition for learning achievements. It moves on to give examples of existing education programmes which in different ways open up learning beyond traditional provision.

It proceeds to identifying characteristics of an open learning system, as well as policy and other imperatives for DHET to pursue to create an enabling environment for open learning. It concludes by enumerating a range of different initiatives, identified by key actors in the different sectors and in line with the policy imperatives in the country, for DHET to pursue to take forward the open learning agenda.