UCT Online Education Policy

Final, September 2017

1   Introduction

This policy seeks to give expression to the concepts developed in the Online Education Position Paper (April 2017) and Goal 4 of the [University of Cape Town's Strategic Planning Framework 2016 – 2020](#), which is to:

> "To renew and innovate in teaching and learning - improving student success rates and well-being, broadening academic perspectives, stimulating social consciousness and cultivating critical citizens "

It is premised on the assumption that higher education in general is moving towards flexible forms of provision, and increasingly includes mixes of blended and fully online provision in various configurations; and that strengthening the University's capacity to support online delivery of courses, programmes and library content, and the use of technology-enhanced teaching and learning can result in increased access to and success in quality education.

2   Terminology

The following section briefly defines concepts that are relevant when considering the inclusion of online learning in existing offerings, and the design of new offerings.

A **course** is defined as one of the following:

- an instructional credit-bearing component attached to a qualification
- an instructional non-credit-bearing offering used for the purpose of continuing education and professional development.

  All courses are identified by a unique course code.

A **programme** is a purposeful and structured set of core and elective learning components that leads to a qualification.

A **qualification** is the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by a higher education institution.

Online education is the use of educational technologies to mediate the curriculum, and can refer to offerings where learning activities take place *fully online* as well as the use of *blended* or mixed methodologies.

Distance education is concerned with a set of teaching and learning strategies (or educational methods) that can be used to overcome spatial and/or temporal separation between educators and students.

The **mode** of a course describes the dominant mix of methods of delivering, interacting, and mediating the curriculum. UCT will use the DHET definitions as a basis for describing the mode of delivery. For funding and accreditation purposes, only two modes of delivery are recognized by the DHET and CHE:

- **Contact mode:** Interaction with institutional teachers or institutional supervisors, through lectures, tutorials, seminars, practicals, supervision, or other forms of required work, and which occurs at the institution's premises or a site of the institution.

- **Distance mode** is defined as interaction with institutional teachers or institutional supervisors undertaken through "distance education" techniques (e.g. through the use of correspondence, telematics, or the internet). It avoids the need for students to discover the curriculum by attending classes frequently and for long periods.

3 Policy environment

The two framing documents that articulate policy directions are the Department of Higher Education and Training's 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training and the 2014 Policy for provision of distance education in South African universities in the context of an integrated post- school system.

Recently the Draft Policy Framework for the Provision of Open Learning and Distance Education in South African Post-school Education and Training (Feb 2017) was distributed for comment.

The White Paper categorises e-learning "on a continuum, ranging through categories including digitally supported, digitally dependent, Internet-supported, Internet-dependent and fully online" (2014a, p. 49). It defines its vision for blended and online learning as follows:

> "The DHET will also encourage all universities to expand online and blended learning as a way to offer *niche programmes*, especially at *postgraduate* level, to those who are unable to attend full-time programmes, either due to their employment status or their geographical distance from a campus" (DHET, 2014a, p. 51, emphasis added)

The role of online learning according to DHET, emphasizes its use in the offering of niche programmes, although this may not be so in practice.

Despite the increasing convergence and blurring of the boundaries between traditional face-to-face and online / distance education, distance education provision is still seen as "a distinct subset of provision" (DHET, 2014b, p. 6). The Policy (DHET, 2014b) recognises the fact that the post-school sector has to expand dramatically, that access to ICTs is not yet ubiquitous, and that the costs of access are not always affordable to large sections of the population.

UCT has been a traditional residential contact teaching tertiary institution since its inception. Until 2014, the Department of Higher Education and Training specifically prohibited UCT and other contact institutions from offering distance education qualifications: our students had to appear on campus in classrooms, labs and seminar rooms. This strict division between face-to-face education and distance education is breaking down. Online learning and technology supported learning is now a common part of many qualifications.

It is of note that the 2014 Policy "aims to create a quality learning environment using an appropriate combination of different media, tutorial support, peer group discussion, and practical sessions" (DHET, 2014b, p. 11).

The DHET defines *distance*[1] for a programme as provision in which:

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[1] Policy for provision of distance education in South African universities in the context of an integrated post- school system, DHET, July 2014 (p.9)

in undergraduate courses at NQF levels 5 and 6	students spend	**30%** or less	of the stated **notional learning hours** in staff-led[2], face-to face, campus-based structured learning activities.
in undergraduate courses at NQF level 7, and PG courses at NQF 8-10		**25%** or less	

Table 1: Classification of distance mode by notional learning hours

The implications of the mode of provision for **input subsidy** (the subsidy received for students registered in courses) is the following:

- NQF 5-8: input subsidy is halved
- NQF 9 and 10 (Master's and doctoral study): no impact on input subsidy

The **output subsidy** (the subsidy received for students who graduate) is not affected by mode of provision.

4   Online Learning Policies

4.1 Undergraduate degrees

a. UCT is committed to **an undergraduate experience that is largely residential in character**, and we are committed to providing an outstanding learning experience for undergraduate students with significant engagement, connection and contact by UCT academics, regardless of mode.

b. UCT **strongly encourages the use of blended pedagogy** within courses and across qualifications, the infusion of the affordances of technology as appropriate to the discipline, and the development of digital literacies in graduates.

c. Without the permission of Senate, **no undergraduate programme shall consist of more than 20% of the total credits in fully online mode**. However, a student could take additional optional online courses[3].

d. However, the proportion of **notional learning hours in online mode** across the whole of an undergraduate programme is restricted by national regulations and can impact subsidy, as indicated in Table 1 above.

e. **An undergraduate course may be offered in fully online mode, and not in face-to-face mode**. There is no institutional commitment for courses to be available in both modes at undergraduate level, although some programmes may opt to do so.

f. UCT recognizes the importance of **equitable and effective access to ICTs** to enable the full participation of all students in blended and online learning experiences. Mechanisms for supporting this goal include the provision of computer labs and ubiquitous wifi on campus and in residences, and the provision of laptops to incoming first year students on financial aid. Specific mechanisms for supporting students with disabilities include the provision of specialized software and services through the Disability Service, and the progressive realization of accessibility best practice in both online platforms and learning content.

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[2] In this context, UCT understands "staff" to include tutors and other teaching assistants.
[3] An exemplar of a current programme that includes online learning is included as an Appendix.

4.2 Diplomas, certificates and Postgraduate programmes

There will be no limit on the number of courses and qualifications which can be provided as fully online offerings at a postgraduate level (NQF 8+) and for non-degree undergraduate programmes (NQF 7) that are typically designed as vocational programmes for working professionals.

Given that the typical PGDip student is working and not studying continuously and that there are rarely research requirements in PGDips, these are opportunities for online offerings and these should be encouraged where viable and appropriate.

4.3 Role of convenors

The role of programme and course convenors includes considering whether a programme or course is appropriately offered online, what the role of a specific course is within an entire programme, what the implications are in terms of inclusivity or exclusivity, as well as specific student needs. Design of a new online course and/or programme will need to take place in consultation with the relevant expertise in the Institution[4]. Academic accountability will be in line with the standard governance processes in the Institution, including Faculty Board, the University's accreditation structures, and Senate.

5   Online education governance

This policy covers the full continuum of possibilities pertaining to both *formal programmes and short courses.*

All types of online learning offerings are included because the linkages between these need to be made explicit and because it is anticipated that there will be greater articulation between credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing courses in future.

a. The responsibility for oversight of online education at UCT will lie with the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee and its sub-committees, and the Senate Quality Assurance Committee.

b. An **Online Education Sub-Committee** of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee will be formed to support and facilitate the implementation of the online education policy.

c. **A number of related UCT policies and strategies** are impacted by developments in online education and require review and update, including the Intellectual Property Policy, Continuing Education Policy, Examinations and Assessment Policy, Educational Technology Policy and Teaching and Learning Strategy.

6   Capacity provision for online education

It is clear that the expansion of online and distance education means new roles and different types of pedagogical arrangements in the university.

a. Core knowledge and expertise related to all aspects of online education must reside within the university. In-house capacity within UCT must be supported and grown.

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[4] This can include Faculty teaching and learning structures, Academic Planning in the Institutional Planning Department, the Centre for Higher Education and Development, and the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching.

b. Capacity should be **enhanced within existing UCT structures** both centrally and in the Faculties.

c. **Funding must be earmarked for courses / programmes** that should be developed in online formats for access or pedagogical reasons and **which may not be profitable**.

d. Anyone involved in direct teaching, assessment or learning support roles which **requires subject knowledge must be employed directly by UCT**. The university must avoid outsourcing of teaching and learning.

e. Recognising that the number of online education suppliers is growing, UCT should use a range of suppliers as best meets needs (which may differ by Faculty, discipline, etc.), with criteria for appointment developed by the Online Education Sub-Committee.

7 Technology

a. UCT expects educational **technology decisions to be made at a level appropriate to the scope and impact of the choices**. Decisions with limited scope may be made at the course, programme or Faculty level, while major decisions with possible long-term university-wide impact must be agreed at university level.

b. The requirements of specific learning and teaching situations should drive the selection of appropriate technology, which should be fit for purpose.

c. Innovation, flexibility and agility are encouraged. Equally, there may be services, platforms or tools where it is more effective or efficient for the university to adopt common, shared solutions ("core services"), thus limiting the choices available to Faculties or Departments. Examples may include online learning environments, tools supporting academic integrity (such as plagiarism prevention services and online assessment tools), and learning analytics infrastructure.

d. The determination of which educational technology services are core systems, and exceptions from the policy, should be made by the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee in consultation with the Director: CILT and ED: ICTS and UICTC, following recommendations from the Online Learning Sub-Committee.

Departures from this position paper should be of limited scope and duration, and reviewed every 2 years.

8 Revision and Consultation History

Date	Notes
22 May 2017	Draft by Amanda Barratt, Laura Czerniewicz, Jeff Jawitz, Stephen Marquard and Alison Meadows (condensed from the *Online Education at UCT Position Paper*).
30 May 2017	Approved at the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee
3 July 2017	Approved at Senate Executive Committee

15th September 2017	Approved at Senate; to be published in a Principal's Circular
September 2017	Published in Principal's Circular September 2017

Appendix – Exemplar of an existing undergraduate programme that includes fully online courses. Fully online courses are underlined.

Courses that *could* be redesigned and offered as fully online appear are <u>**bold underlined**</u> to provide an example of an undergraduate programme that could include up to 20% of its credits in fully online mode.

First Year Core Modules

Number	Course	NQF Credits	HEQSF Level
ACC1006F	Financial Accounting	18	5
<u>**BUS1036F**</u>	<u>Evidence-based Management</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>5</u>
ECO1010F	Microeconomics	18	5
MAM1010F	Mathematics 1010	18	5
ACC2011S	Financial Reporting I	18	6
ECO1011S	Macroeconomics	18	5
<u>**INF1002S**</u>	<u>Information Systems I</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>**STA1000S**</u>	<u>Introductory Statistics</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>5</u>
	Total credits per year	**144**	

Second Year Core Modules

Number	Course	NQF Credits	HEQSF Level
ACC2022F	Management Accounting I	18	6
FTX2024F	Corporate Financial Management	18	7
<u>**INF2004F**</u>	<u>Information Technology in Business</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>6</u>
ACC2012W	Financial Reporting II	36	7
ACC2018S	Corporate Governance I	18	6
<u>**ACC2023S**</u>	<u>Taxation I</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>6</u>
CML1004S	Business Law I	18	5
ECO2004S	Macroeconomics II **OR**		
ECO2007S	Co-operation and Competition	18	6
	Total credits for the year	**162**	0

Third Year Core Modules

Number	Course	NQF Credits	HEQSF Level
CML2001F	Company Law	18	6
PHI2043F	Business Ethics	18	6
ACC3020W	Corporate Reporting	36	7
ACC3004H	Taxation II	18	7
ACC3022H	Corporate Governance II	18	7
ACC3023S	Management Accounting II	18	7
CML2010S	Business Law II	18	6
	Total credits per year	**144**	