



UNIVERSITY  
OF  
JOHANNESBURG

# Online Policy Framework

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## Abbreviations

APU – Academic Planning Unit

CAT – Centre for Academic Technologies

CHE – Council on Higher Education

DE – Distance Education

DHET – Department of Higher Education and Training

DIPEM – Division for Institutional Planning Evaluation and Monitoring

FPA – Faculty Programme Advisor

HEQC – Higher Education Quality Committee

LMS – Learning Management System

MECO – Management Executive Committee Operations

PWG – Programme Working Group

SET – Science, Engineering and Technology

UJ – University of Johannesburg

## Introduction

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in South Africa published two important policies in the last two years that will have an impact on distance education. The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (DHET, 2013) was published in November 2013 and the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South Africa Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-school system* (DHET, 2014) in July 2014.

The *Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (DHET, 2011) indicates that in the past decade, distance education (DE) accounted for nearly 40% of all public university enrolments. DHET targets for the sector includes the objective of increasing student enrolments from about 900 000 to 1.5 million by 2030 to meet the growing demand for higher education. There is an acknowledgement that the current infrastructure and capacity within the South African university sector is unable to contend with this need. The space for consideration of distance education as a mechanism to address national development priorities is an option.

The University of Johannesburg's (UJ) Strategic Objective 5 is germane to the decision to initiate the development of an online learning environment: "We aim to be a Pan-African centre of critical intellectual inquiry through extensive scholarship, participation in the knowledge networks of the continent". The motivation underpinning the option to use the online mode of delivery is to expand the offering of UJ qualifications to students from diverse backgrounds beyond provincial and national borders, thereby extending its reach and contributing to building a socially just, responsible and sustainable society.

University of Johannesburg	Key concepts
<b>Vision</b> <i>“An international university of choice, anchored in Africa, dynamically shaping the future.”</i>	The University wants to: Have international appeal Be responsive to African needs Have influence that is relevant
<b>Mission</b> Inspiring its community to transform and serve humanity through innovation and the collaborative pursuit of knowledge.	The attainment of the vision will be attained by producing students who are: Agents of transformation by being innovative problem-solvers who can collaboratively learn to serve humanity.
<b>Strategic Objective 1</b> Excellence in Research and Innovation	Focused advanced scholarship to attract outstanding graduates by offering a range of innovative programmes characterised by the highest level of scholarship and rigour that incorporate into the curriculum, cutting edge research developments, responsive to the pan-African context. Promote a culture of innovation that is relevant.
<b>Strategic Objective 2</b> Excellence in Teaching and Learning	Offering intellectually rigorous curricula, responsive to the needs of the 21 <sup>st</sup> century, accommodating highly diverse students, increasing growth in SET, emphasis on enrolment of outstanding students from diverse backgrounds, a significant proportion of international students, leading-edge, technology-driven programmes, excellent student success rates, improved retention and increased graduate output, and develop the scholarship of teaching.
<b>Strategic Objective 3</b> International Profile for Global Excellence and Stature	Recruitment of international students, smart institutional partnerships, increased proportion postgraduate international students through focused recruitment from Africa, increase the number and stature of our partnerships with universities, selected United Nations agencies, the African Union, and facilitate the offering of joint degrees.
<b>Strategic Objective 4</b> Enriching Student-Friendly Learning and Living Experience	Excellent teaching and learning facilities, student support, learning communities, psycho-social counselling and career counselling at exit level, students who are responsible and accountable, and respectful of human dignity, especially in relation to women, foreign students, gays and lesbians.

University of Johannesburg	Key concepts
<b>Strategic Objective 5</b> <b>National and Global Reputation Management</b>	Pan-African centre of critical intellectual inquiry through extensive scholarship, participation in the knowledge networks of the continent, profiling flagship programmes, top academic scholars and students, proactive and responsive communications systems in place, establish an active alumni base.
<b>Strategic Objective 6</b> <b>Fitness for Global Excellence and Stature</b>	Employment will build the proportions of black, women, disabled, and international staff, attracting illustrious academic staff, promoting a welcoming and caring environment, helpful and prompt attention at all service points and open communication, environmentally responsive, encouraging paperless communication, world class infrastructure and systems, and ensure principles of good governance.

## Purpose

- To define the policy framework within the University for distance education provision via the online mode of delivery;
- To commit the University of Johannesburg to the guidelines for distance education issued by both the DHET and the CHE;
- To ensure that the online learning environment is of equivalent quality to contact learning environments and is subjected to rigorous review.

## Definitions

Distance education is a mode of provision based primarily on a set of teaching and learning strategies (or educational methods) that can be used to overcome spatial and/or transactional distance between educators and students<sup>1</sup>. This definition is in line with Desmond Keegan's definition of distance education. Hence, online education is characterised by:

- the separation of teachers and students, which distinguishes it from face-to-face education
- the influence of an educational organisation, which distinguishes it from self-study and private tutoring
- the use of a computer network to present or distribute some educational content

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<sup>1</sup> (DHET, 7 July 2014)

- the provision of two-way communication via a computer network so that students may benefit from communication with each other, teachers, and staff <sup>2</sup>.

Online programmes are equivalent to on-campus contact programmes in terms of admission criteria and overall workload. The focus of UJ is to ensure equivalence of provision and thus the sole distinction rests in the way the programme is delivered.

Online students will:

- be able to study if they have access to a computer and an Internet connection
- have the flexibility to study at their own convenience
- be taught by academics working at the cutting edge of their field
- become part of a rich and diverse online community
- have access to all University support services
- earn an accredited University degree or diploma
- earn a certificate against completion of a short-learning programme (SLP).

A programme is considered to be online when 100% of the programme is available via the University's Learning Management System. Some online programmes may require proctored testing at approved testing sites and/or other programme activities such as practicum experiences.

## **Governance**

All distance education programmes at UJ adhere to the same standards, prerequisites, and requirements of identical programmes offered in the contact mode. Senate and Faculty Board approval is a pre-requisite prior to applying for external approvals/accreditation. Annexure 1 details roles and responsibilities for all activities pertinent to the online learning environment.

## **Planning**

There are seven key areas identified in the literature that the University has taken into account with regard to planning, reassembling of resources, revision of policies and procedures for the implementation of online delivery<sup>3</sup>. The following areas have been adapted for UJ and have been taken into consideration for the operationalisation of the online campus.

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<sup>2</sup> (Keegan, 1996)

<sup>3</sup> Gellman-Danley, B. and Fetzner, M.J. 1998. [Asking the Really Tough Questions: Policy Issues for Distance Learning](#). *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*. 1(1). ( 2/24/99)

These are:

Policy Area	Key Issues
Academic	Calendar, Programme integrity, Transferability, Transcripts, Student/module evaluation, Admission standards, Curriculum/programme approval, Accreditation, Recruiting/Marketing
Governance, Fiscal and Administrative Arrangements	Financial viability, Tuition fees, Technology fee, FTEs, Administration cost, HEMIS reporting, Tuition disbursement, Space, Examination centre costs, Staffing
Faculty	Compensation and workload, Development incentives, Faculty training, Class monitoring, Faculty support, Faculty evaluation
Legal	Intellectual property, Faculty, Student and institutional liability, Partnership agreements and SLAs
Student Support Services	Advisement, Counselling, Library access, Materials design and delivery, Student training, Test proctoring, Videotaping, Computer accounts, Registration, Financial aid, Labs, Specialised equipment
Technical	Systems reliability, Connectivity/access, Hardware/software, Setup concerns, Infrastructure, Technical support (staffing), Scheduling, Costs
Cultural	Adoption of innovations, <b>Acceptance of on-line</b> , Understanding of distance education (what works at a distance), Organisational values and alignment of Strategic and Operational plans

## Enrolment Planning

Enrolment planning occurs at two levels. First, enrolment targets are approved by MEC, ELG and finally Senate. The Academic Planning Unit (APU), within the parameters established by the institution's agreement with DHET, provides provisional targets. These targets are then disaggregated into faculty targets per qualification type. Subsequently, faculties plan at a more detailed level, translating the faculty targets into meaningful targets for the individual programmes, which is the lowest enrolment planning level. A realistic position in relation to past and current positions is generally sought with provisional targets for the subsequent year being considered in relation to the actual enrolments in the current year. All targets for online provision will remain within targets for distance students as negotiated with the DHET submitted plan.

“Online” or “virtual” students will be able to register and participate in online programmes remotely. A number of such students would be from other parts of Africa – these students would therefore qualify as international students. Unlike “conventional” students, these students would not be visiting South Africa “in person”, and would therefore require alternative visa-related enrolment catering.

## Learning Programme Development and Approval Process<sup>4</sup>

UJ commits to ensuring that there is a robust internal approval process for all programmes to be offered online. This includes the requirements for contact programmes. Prior to the internal approval processes of the University, an application for the intention to offer an online programme should be completed with the required approval from the faculty and the Dean<sup>5</sup>. The following areas must be addressed:

- Existing programme but new mode of delivery or new programme with both contact/online modes or new programme with online mode of delivery;
- Clear identification of student profile;
- Outcomes of the qualification are explicit and are relevant nationally, regionally and internationally;
- Teaching, learning and assessment strategies have been adapted for online learning with a clear articulation of how the outcomes of the qualification will be achieved;

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<sup>4</sup> As per the Academic Programme Policy Revised August 2015, Section 5

<sup>5</sup> Notice of Intention to Develop a New Programme – Online (DIPEM)

- The programme has been developed by a team of academics, tutors, curriculum and programme designers who are proficient in online learning;
- The programme calendar has been devised in terms of envisaged intakes and overlay of programmes from semester to semester;
  - In case of online programmes that “self-run” (for instance the case of open-online courses), the programme calendaring would provide flexibility;
  - In case of joint online/international programmes – flexibility would need to be once again designed; accounting for calendaring differences between the Northern and Southern hemisphere;
- Planning of assessment modalities;
- Provision is made for ongoing assessment of the learning process;
- All faculty members and tutors will have completed the training provided by the CAT;
- Copyright permissions are obtained where needed for any copyrighted course materials used to develop a course<sup>6</sup>.

### Approval Process for Distance (Online) Delivery

- If an existing programme is offered online the HEQC regards it as a new programme because the mode of delivery has changed. DHET, however, only regards it as changes to an existing programme and not as new programme.
  - To teach any programme in online format, lecturing staff members must have completed training with the Centre for Academic Technologies.
  - Before a distance education online programme can be offered, it must be approved in accordance with the UJ’s Distance Education Policy and programme development guidelines and procedures.
1. The programme developer of a new online DE programme should first of all contact the Faculty Programme Advisor (FPA) or the APU in DIPEM for guidance as to how to develop the planned new DE programme.
  2. Faculty approval must be obtained to continue with the development of the programme by completing the *Notice of Intention* template – the Dean of the Faculty should sign off.
  3. The signed-off *Notice of Intention* should be emailed to the APU to be registered as a new programme in the process of development.

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<sup>6</sup> Policy: Distribution of Learning Support Materials Revised January 2015

4. The actual programme design process then commences. The DHET as well as the CHE online applications in Word format guide the process. Development should be done with assistance from the Academic Planning Unit (APU) and Instructional Staff in CAT.
5. Once the programme is ready for approval, it is submitted via the faculty's programme advisor (FPA) to the PWG Cluster meeting for comments and recommendations. A UJ online/distance expert member should be co-opted when DE programmes serve at a cluster meeting.
6. Following the PWG cluster meetings, the PWG General Meeting recommends the approval of the programme to Senex. It is a faculty responsibility to submit the correct version of the recommended programme via ImageNow to Senex and Senate for final internal approval.
7. After Senate approval, the UJ online administrator in APU submits the internally approved programme to DHET for PQM clearance.
8. DHET approval could take more or less three months. As soon as this approval is received, the programme developer prepares the HEQC Online application in collaboration with UJ HEQC Online Administrator.
9. The waiting period for CHE accreditation can be up to two years. The programme may be approved, deferred or not accredited at all. When not accredited, reasons will be provided, but the HEQC online process has to be repeated as PQM approval has a specific timeframe. A deferral means that more information on certain aspects is required. This can delay the accreditation process even further. Three types of conditions are associated with a deferral:
  - a) Prior to commencement conditions:
    - Programme may not be offered until required conditions are met.
    - No SAQA ID number will be issued until conditions are met.
  - b) Short-term conditions:
    - Comply with conditions within 3 to 6 months.
    - Programme may be offered in the interim.
    - Possible site visit.
    - SAQA ID number will be issued.
  - c) Long-term conditions:
    - Comply with conditions within a year.
    - Programme may be offered in the interim.
    - Possible site visit.
    - SAQA ID number will be issued.

## Modalities of Delivery

In terms of the teaching and learning strategy, the online programmes focus on delivery of high-quality content and multiple opportunities to engage and interact with students and academics.

The University's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning is encapsulated in its vision, mission and values statement<sup>7</sup>. The vision states the scope and character of programmes offered at the University as "a mix of vocational and academic programmes that advance freedom, democracy, equality and human dignity". The commitments in the mission statement that have particular relevance for this policy are:

- a) Supporting access to a wide spectrum of academic and technological learning, teaching and research;
- b) Leading, challenging, creating and exploring knowledge.

UJ embraces the notion of "learning to be" – a view of higher education that conceptualises learning as becoming a practitioner of a knowledge and professional domain<sup>8</sup>.

This programme is designed, in accordance with the UJ Strategy for Teaching and Learning, to take into account that the outcomes of the modules and the qualification are achievable through online learning. The management of learning in this mode has taken into account the specific requirements of each module. Programme design includes interactive sessions, tasks and reading or viewing of videos or other multi-media and is furthermore designed in line with the academic calendar to ensure that students complete the requirements of each module in the assigned timeframe. Study materials are available to students with a teaching and learning planner that is available to students once they are registered and have been assigned their login details. Effective and efficient systems have been developed to interact and engage with the students. These include provision of academic support, teaching and learning support specific to each student and a robust communication system, which ensures that students are kept abreast of information specific to the programme, relevant to the University and responsive to the specific needs of each student. The Learning Content Management system is Blackboard and this is used effectively to notify all students of relevant information. The system has been designed to provide students with study materials, resources, general information and information specific to the programme. Students will be advised on the rules for engagement and how to access a range of UJ facilities like the UJ Writing Centre or the Postgraduate Centre, for example. The interactive nature of Blackboard enables an

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<sup>7</sup> University of Johannesburg, Teaching and Learning Policy, 2006

<sup>8</sup> University of Johannesburg, Teaching and Learning Strategy, 2008

immediacy of responses with built-in monitoring tools, which permit analytics of student participation, problem areas that require interventions by academics and teaching assistants.

Each module has a Learning Guide, which sets out the detailed expectations, module outcomes, assessment requirements, including examination details, activities and tasks, requirements of the student and details of all forms of student assistance and support available. Self-assessment tasks, chat rooms and group activities are embedded in the planning of the module with built-in mechanisms for monitoring of student participation. Feedback on assignments, tasks, group activities and examinations is provided via Blackboard, both individually and to the groups when required.

A variety of platforms will be used to deliver content and enable interaction. These include, but are not limited to:

- Virtual learning environment (e.g. Blackboard)
- Wikis
- Blogs
- Discussion boards and forums
- Video streaming/interactive broadcasting

An induction session is compulsory and will introduce students to the different platforms and orientation required for the programme.

Asynchronous is defined as “not occurring at the same time”. In the context of online educational delivery, asynchronous programmes are those that do not require the student to be at the computer at the same time that a lecture is being delivered. Synchronous sessions will occur periodically, either weekly or several times throughout the course if the logistics permit. These sessions will be clearly identified in the module outlines received by students.

Tool*	Purpose
<b>Webinar tools</b> (e.g. Zoom)	Online webinars. The webinars will be used as lecturing sessions bi-weekly. Lecturers will present content using presentation tools, accompanied by a voice over that is either pre-recorded or streamed live. Webinars will be recorded and made available as a learning resource post. Further, webinars will be interactive as students will be able to ask questions (as text message or voice message). Webinar tools can also be used for tutoring sessions.

Tool*	Purpose
<b>VOIP tools</b> (e.g. Skype)	Real-time consultation with individual students during consultation hours. Consultation hours may need to be set at hours that are appropriate for the student population. Students may be located across several time zones, and cognisance of this must be shown when consultation hours are set. VOIP tools are also useful for tutoring sessions.
<b>Real-time interactive communication tools</b> (e.g. Today's Meet)	Question and answer sessions. These sessions may be scheduled weekly, and serve as an opportunity for students to interact with lecturers or tutors in real time. Tools such as Today's Meet are appropriate tools, as they are bandwidth friendly, does not require a subscription, and they run on a number of platforms. Advantages of these tools are that all communication can be aggregated, and used as a learning resource. These aggregated communications will be made available to all students, post meetings.
<b>Online formative assessment tools</b> (e.g. Socrative)	Online quizzes and polling. Tools like Socrative or Naiku are online replications of classroom response systems. They enable real-time learning activities that are driven by singular questions, quizzes or polls. It can be used either for real-time formative assessments, or for learning opportunities that are driven by student responses to guiding questions by lecturers or tutors.

Blackboard Tool	Purpose
<p><b>Discussion Boards</b></p>	<p>Discussion Boards will be the primary tool by which student-lecturer/tutor and student-students interaction will take place. A discussion board is created for each learning unit, which serves as the asynchronous space for discussion of the topic. Discussion boards can be used for a number of purposes, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Questions and answers about administrative matters</li> <li>- Questions and answers about academic matters</li> <li>- As a learning activity during which contribution to the conversation is marked for points</li> <li>- For group work activities</li> <li>- Tutoring</li> </ul> <p>Students will be encouraged to seek answers to questions they may have firstly among themselves, then from tutors, and then from lecturers.</p>
<p><b>Content Folders</b></p> <p><b>Learning Modules</b></p>	<p>There are several tools within the Blackboard environment that support the provision of content. The programme will create an online learning environment that is structured into Unit Folders. Unit folders will, <i>inter alia</i>, contain a Learning Materials section, a Learning Activities section, Assessment Tasks section, and a Communication section.</p> <p>Learning materials may take the form of text documents, sound clips, video clips, mind maps, spreadsheets, or others. In this programme, the use of Open Educational Resources will be promoted, and no textbook will be prescribed.</p> <p>The Learning Activities section facilitates the structured deployment of learning activities, either in a specific order, or all at once, as deemed appropriate.</p> <p>Each unit will have an associated summative assessment task (see Section 6), as well as shorter formative quiz-type assessment tasks.</p>

Blackboard Tool	Purpose
<b>Learning Tasks</b>	<p>The primary way by which students will learn is by learning tasks. A learning task may consist of instructions to read materials, participate in a discussion, create a digital artefact, write a policy document, etc. Students' progress during learning tasks is monitored.</p>
<b>Achievements</b>	<p>"Achievements" are non-mark related markers of performance in the form of receiving "badges". They are used as a mechanism to motivate student participation. Some research shows that earning badges has powerful motivational potential. Students earn achievement badges at two levels: Firstly, for reaching certain milestones, completing tasks, submitting assignments, etc. Therefore, the compliance to submission of assessment tasks, reading of materials, etc. Secondly, for reaching certain levels of performance, for example, scoring above 75% in an assessment task. Sought out badges will be those that are difficult to obtain, like achieving a distinction in an assignment, or achieving a series of distinctions.</p> <p>Modern badge systems are ubiquitous, and a student can earn an electronic badge that remains with them for life. This badge can be added to an individual's personal social media profiles, or professional social networking sites like LinkedIn. An accredited international badge award system will be used, where appropriate, which means that students will be able to add earned badges to enhance their digital identities. Badges offer an alternative and ubiquitous form of assessment.</p>
<b>Assignment submission</b>	<p>This tool is used by students to submit their written assignments. Each assignment will be accompanied by online rubrics. The assignment tool can accommodate written submissions as well as virtually any type of computer file, and is a useful way of collecting student work. Typed work can be directly assessed online, and the facility exists where comments can directly be made on the submitted document.</p>
<b>Tests</b>	<p>This tool allows for the setting of tests using objective-type test items like multiple-choice, true and false, ranking, identifying areas on images, and matching pairs. It is foreseen that the Test Tool will be used for formative quizzes.</p>

Blackboard Tool	Purpose
<b>Student participation and evaluation tools</b>	<p>This tool allows for the monitoring of student activity in the online environment. It is useful to identify students at risk due to low engagement. Some of the functionalities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All user activity inside content areas</li> <li>- Course activity overview</li> <li>- Overall summary of user activity</li> <li>- Student overview within a module</li> </ul>
<b>Turnitin™</b>	This tool identifies plagiarism in student submissions of written work.
<b>Collaboration Tools</b>	Useful for group assignments.
<b>Journaling Tools</b>	Students can journal their learning experiences during a module. This could be an assessed learning activity.
<b>Blogging and Wiki tools</b>	These tools support student content creation.

### Carousel Model

The Carousel Model will enable UJ to offer modules in qualifications that will enable multiple intakes per semester. Qualifications that have pre-requisites will offer the required module every semester. Other qualifications that do not have co- or pre-requisites will offer all modules for the qualification every semester. The benefits of the module carousel means that students will always have access to prerequisite modules and are able to select modules each semester.

### Student Admission Requirements

Over and above the entrance requirements for the qualification, students must comply with the following:

Online students must have regular access to a high-speed Internet connection. Online students may be required to scan and upload documents, use a webcam and/or microphone or obtain specific software for completion of coursework.

All UJ students enrolled in online programmes are expected to:

- Have access to a computer with a high speed Internet connection
- Have access to a scanner to scan and submit assignments if required
- Participate in teaching and learning activities through the online provider/platform
- Regularly read their UJ email
- Review the complete list of technical requirements specific to the programme of study

### Attendance

For an online programme, attendance is measured in the following ways:

- Frequency of logging into the system;
- Participation in online discussions;
- Anonymous data gathering, allowing for advanced data analytics fostering improved teaching and learning, including the scholarship of teaching and learning, will be allowed;
- Timely submission of tasks and assignments.

### Examinations

UJ requires proctoring of examinations for distance learning (online) students. A *proctor* is an individual that administers examinations for students on behalf of the University within the parameters established by the programme coordinator. It is the responsibility of each UJ student to read and understand the policies and procedures indicated. UJ will establish the venue for the examinations in agreement with the student regarding the geographical location. A list of available venues will be published and made available to students. In exceptional circumstances, a student may request the University to assist with special arrangements. Exam centres/venues will be designated by the University, based on the geographical addresses of the registered students.

Online examinations may be administered with the required security protocols in place. These may include asking candidate-specific questions during the assessment, the use of cameras on computers throughout the assessment, and possibly fingerprinting. Alternative examination modalities, as per international practices, and project-based examination may also apply.

## Rules for Online Conduct

Students will be advised to use sites for online learning in accordance with the University's policies. This covers all interaction on the online system. Prohibitions include:

- Content that defames or threatens others
- Content that has no relevance to the programme or topic under discussion
- Statements that are bigoted, hateful or racially offensive
- Content that discusses illegal activities with the intent to commit them
- Content that infringes another's intellectual property, including, but not limited to, copyrights
- Material that contains vulgar or obscene language or images
- Advertising or any form of commercial solicitation

Any of the above misdemeanours are subject to UJ Rules and Code of Conduct.

## Annexure 1

Action	Responsible Office
Web Information	Communications and Marketing
Interface between AP and ITS	Registrar
Financial Aid Information	Financial Aid Office
Registration of students (coding of students as online)	Registrar
Training of academic and support staff	CAT
Admission and Selection Criteria – addition of information pertinent to online students and amendment to Academic Calendar rules on attendance	Registrar
Identification of point office for technical support for students	CAT/AP
Academic Support Routes	Academics and AP
Assessment Rules	Registrar and Examinations Office
Modes of assessment	Academics and AP with approval from Registrar
Library Access and online resources	Librarian
Design of course content for online	CAT and AP
Gearing of all academic support services units for online queries and assistance	Management Executive Committee operations (MECO)
Certification and graduation ceremonies	Registrar