



UNIVERSITY
OF
JOHANNESBURG



QA REPORT ON THE TRANSITION TO REMOTE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Report compiled by the Division for Academic Planning, Quality Promotion and Academic
Staff Development
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ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------|--|
| ADC | Academic Development Centre |
| ADS | Academic Development and Support |
| Bb | Blackboard |
| CAA | Central Academic Administration |
| CAD | Computer-aided design |
| CAT | Centre for Academic Technologies |
| CAPQP | Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Promotion |
| CASD | Centre for Academic Staff Development |
| CHE | Council on Higher Education |
| DHET | Department of Higher Education and Training |
| DU | Disability Unit |
| DVC | Deputy Vice-Chancellor |
| ERT | Emergency Remote Teaching |
| FYE | First year experience |
| HE | Higher education |
| HoD | Head of Department |
| ID | Instructional Designer |
| ISSI | Integrated Student Success Initiative |
| ITS | Integrated Tertiary Systems |
| KPA | Key Performance Area |
| LIC | Library and Information Centre |
| LMS | Learning Management System |
| MCQ | Multiple Choice Questions |
| MECA | Management Executive Committee: Academic |
| NRF | National Research Foundation |
| PDRF | Post-Doctoral Research Fellows |
| PG | Postgraduate |
| PsyCaD | Centre for Psychological Services and Career Development |
| QA | Quality Assurance |
| SRC | Student Representative Council |
| SSE | Senior Student Experience |
| T & L | Teaching and Learning |
| UG | Undergraduate |
| UJ | University of Johannesburg |
| USAf | Universities South Africa |
| VD | Vice Dean |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Review methodology

The report and its findings drew most heavily on interviews across all dimensions of stakeholders at UJ (Annexure A). Extensive and inclusive interviews were held with all levels of academic and support staff. Logistics and time constraints meant that interviews were possible with only a small sample of students in which the SRC was nonetheless well represented. The focus of interviews was on how the move to remote teaching and learning had been experienced and managed by both staff and students. Interviews were conducted in the spirit of learning from the experience. An important and unintended benefit was that, through the interviews and discussion processes, many reported and reflected on the experience as being ‘therapeutic and cathartic’. It was reported that this pause for reflection enabled a critical reflection on an intense period of activity and was welcome.

No broad generalisation of interviewees’ experiences can do justice to the depth and richness of staff accounts, but triangulation with more objective data brought a measure of rigour to generalisations. The QA review draws on the richness of data which was analysed systematically. Triangulation data were drawn from expert analysis of the quality of online modules as well as from a formal survey of the student experience. Multiple written inputs were also provided and analysed for integration into this report. The focus was on the undergraduate experience primarily. It is recommended that a similar model of review be applied to postgraduate students and other student support services.

Management and planning for remote teaching and learning

UJ’s robust structures, systems and processes provided the kind of infrastructure on the basis of which a comprehensive plan for Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT)¹ could be engineered. Management’s agility enabled plans to be drawn up and communicated to all sectors of the community in an exceedingly short space of time. Crucially, systems to support online operations were already in place. For example, this was in the form of sophisticated LMS, well developed support systems in CAT and a shift to blended learning in many departments.

But the radical nature of change required meant that the operationalisation of plans could not simply be engineered from a command centre if staff merely continued in a spirit and mode of ‘business as usual’. The reality of the pandemic had necessitated ‘working remotely’ and revisiting conventional ways of operating. Staff rose to the occasion in a multitude of ways with the focus on ensuring that ‘no student was left behind’. There was clear evidence of collaborative teamwork, sharing and wide dissemination of useful information that aided and shaped the University response.

Ecosystems of communication and support

Existing University systems of operation and support were bolstered by collegial self-reliance and resourcefulness. It was clear and confirmed in interviews, that the leadership of the University consistently provided clear direction even when the ‘waters were murky’ and this translated into all academic and support domains. New ecosystems of communication were developed and layered onto systems already in place. Existing formal lines of responsibility and support were supplemented by new ones through the resourcefulness of individual responses to new needs. Deans, Heads of Department (HoDs) and vice deans (VDs) were key intermediaries at the intersection of formal and less formal flows of information.

¹ This describes the rapid shift to online teaching and learning from contact teaching precipitated by COVID-19

This phenomenon of staff taking on new roles is no better exemplified than by the role of a small number of 'champions' in faculties. With energy and drive, they used personal and positional power in entrepreneurial ways to lead staff development and helped equip staff to do what had to be done. There was no time for them to ask who should take responsibility for handling things urgently. They simply assumed responsibility. Support staff too found new avenues for purposeful collaboration beyond the divides of formal hierarchy and space.

Academics were appreciative of University support. Many also reported a new-found appreciation for units and groups that support teaching and learning: in particular, Centre for Academic Technologies (CAT), Academic Development and Support (ADS), Centre for Psychological Services and Career Development (PsyCaD), Centre for Academic Staff Development (CASD), Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Promotion (CAPQP), tutors and assistant lecturers.

CAT's Blackboard (Bb) training was key. In March 2020, the focus was on departmental interventions to create modules and get them ready for online. In addition, 214 attended workshops. In April more than 944 staff were trained; in May, 647 and in June, fewer workshops with 177 attendees. The focus was on provision of assistance for setting up and marking assessments.

Challenges faced by academics

Academics with professional identities rooted in contact teaching obviously faced the greatest challenge. Some reported having been traumatised by the lockdown including working remotely and feeling isolated.

A key enabling factor is that at the outset there was a threshold of expertise in blended learning at UJ. This considerable asset was in place partly because of

- the personal interest in technologies for enhancing teaching approaches on the part of certain individuals and departments; and
- UJ's Strategic Objective 2 specified KPAs in respect of the number of blended learning modules offered in contact programmes across the years 2017-2025.

But the greatest challenge for all academics was the 'suddenness' of the shift to remote teaching. There are strong indications that this was the greatest cause of stress. The timeframes from the announcement of lockdown to the initiation of ERT was impossibly tight but required in order to save the academic year and to leave no student behind.

Staff responded to the challenge of mastering and managing new pedagogies through new technologies by working harder and keeping much longer hours. Transitioning modules online required a massive effort but it occurred, nonetheless. Assessment was a particular challenge. Even those with a background in blended teaching had little or no experience of online assessment. Remote teaching greatly added to the burden of staff with large classes.

The digital divide

CAT's securing of devices and data for students in a very short space of time enabled the commencement of teaching. Nevertheless, equality of provision was never a possibility. Some students had only mobile phones. Inequality was compounded by the home circumstances of many students, many of whom had homes that were not conducive to study.

Difficulties with connectivity emerged as the central issue – and obstacle – to equity and quality. It impacted on students most directly, and staff could only mitigate its effects by measures such as:

- accepting calls at all hours of the night from students reliant on night owl data allowances (in line with the principled position that no student should be left behind);
- finding out about and using platforms other than Bb if those enabled students' learning and communication.

Curricula offerings and assessment in particular become governed by staff awareness of the limitations of students' data packages and the vagaries of connectivity. The use of non-official platforms for official communications between staff and students presented a risk.

Students

Compared to staff, students appear to have experienced even greater difficulty with the new pedagogy managed through new technologies, especially given the different disciplinary and teaching approaches across the modules. This could be attributed to the devices, data, connectivity and bandwidth issues or insufficient time to prepare for remote learning.

The Student Representative Council (SRC) demonstrated maturity in their reflections on the University's transition and flagged issues that had surfaced while at the same time recognising that the University had responded actively throughout the period.

Nonetheless, staff accounts in more than half the interviews depict students as being more determined to succeed than ever. Like the University, they were firmly set on rescuing the academic year and their university and career aspirations along with that.

Student stress appears to have been severe which was clear from interviews with staff and students. Appreciation for the work of PsyCaD was noticeable across student accounts.

Care and compassion

By far the majority of participants (students and staff) in the review process talked about the importance of showing care and compassion during the pandemic. Staff expressed concern and talked about the challenge of developing teaching that was as engaging in the online environment as face-to-face while at the same time being supportive of students who were dealing with a number of difficult challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Academic staff who intentionally demonstrated an Ethic of Care as defined by Corbera et al (2020)² ensured that teaching and learning was not only informed by engaged pedagogy but also with infusing a culture of care and compassion. This involved amongst others being flexible with deadlines, using accessible platforms, and addressing issues of wellbeing. In the majority of interviews, staff reported that they were acutely aware of the challenges

² Esteve Corbera, Isabelle Anguelovski, Jordi Honey-Rosés & Isabel Ruiz-Mallén (2020) Academia in the Time of COVID-19: Towards an Ethics of Care, *Planning Theory & Practice*, 21:2, 191-199, DOI: 10.1080/14649357.2020.1757891; <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2020.1757891>

that students faced as a result of the inherent inequities in South Africa and took this into consideration in their teaching and learning approaches by being adaptable and flexible.

The success of emergency remote teaching

The instrumental aim of remote teaching and learning was to allow the academic year to proceed. Notwithstanding the many challenges, the first cycle of remote teaching and learning has been successful based on the indicators. This success becomes a remarkable achievement given the constraints which this report will demonstrate were circumvented in multiple ways. The sophistication of UJ's remote teaching far exceeds that of the CHE's depiction of ERT as that of digital mirroring of business-as-usual teaching from a different platform.

Lecturers have learnt a great deal about both the art and the science of teaching. Many report that new techniques of teaching – together with a new sense of possibilities – means that their practice will not be the same as before. There have been advances even in the fraught area of assessment. The online format has been an impulse for assessment weighted more heavily on students' ability to interpret and apply knowledge. This will undoubtedly initiate a future imperative in both pedagogy and assessment.

A significant advance is greater staff understanding of their students as individuals. This came about because they literally Zoomed into students' own homes. Without a sense of the circumstances under which students live and work, the principle of learner centredness itself becomes a remote possibility.

The cost of success

The full cost of success is yet to be weighed, barring in student participation in teaching and learning and module success rates. At this stage there is only certainty that the health and well-being of staff and students has been severely tested.

Constraints relating to the connectivity issue, assessment challenges, ongoing worries about fulfilling the requirements of a programme, and uncertainty about the future surface in this report. There are also gaps to be filled in areas of 'practical work', especially in regard to qualifications carrying professional requirements (see Section 2.7).

It was asserted that staff research was marginalised by the immediacy of the teaching programme and its demands.

The University and its community

Notwithstanding the costs of success, gains from the remote teaching experience have surely strengthened the University as an institution.

- Processes followed were both top down and bottom up. There was a convergence of formal and informal structures. This blending of institutional culture with decisive management has served UJ well. It has surely been strengthened.
- This has been an immense learning experience. It leaves a legacy of enhanced expertise and systems in place to manage whatever the new norm lockdown regulation allows for. It also leaves UJ in a stronger and more informed position to decide on future directions and strategy. UJ can trust its staff.

- A pronounced loyalty factor emerged from interviews. On the part of staff, and certainly some students, there is a renewed and deeper sense of what it means to be part of a University community. This was further reinforced by personal knowledge of what has (not) happened in other universities.
- Finally, there is an eagerness to be back on campus. For students too, this seems to more than just a wish to be in an environment that is more conducive to personal study. Even those who favour online teaching seem to concur that, in the words of two academics:
 - “A University is a space where people meet – without which the idea of a University would disappear rapidly. Lockdown has shown the importance and value of a meeting space such as the University.”
 - “On campus experience is invaluable and magical.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Achievements and strategies implemented indicate that the University should have full confidence in its systems and staff to adapt to the exigencies of any permutation of lockdown regulations. This agility and responsiveness should be encouraged within all segments of the University.

2. Students

(a) Findings indicate that students are particularly eager to be back on campus, and all relevant departments and services should prepare to meet this need when permitted.

b) In-depth research is needed into the student experience of remote teaching and learning in order to develop a more nuanced understanding. Such research will enable the University to ascertain and prioritise student needs.

3. Working remotely has increased staff workload and changed the nature of their work-life balance. The University should explore ways of mitigating the effects of this. Staff who were interviewed suggested two such possibilities:

(a) Revised performance management indicators for research production.

(b) Greater flexibility in respect of staff working from home at agreed times.

4. Good practices such as collaboration and teamwork across sectors evident during remote teaching should be enhanced and encouraged as these foster the alignment and integration of functions.

5. Blended learning approaches

(a) Although staff appeared in general to be supportive of blended teaching approaches, the scope and nature of blended approaches should be left to departments and faculties in line with the specificity and fitness for purpose needs in their own fields of study.

(b) The review found strong evidence of the reported efficacy of technology that makes it possible for students to replay and review staff explanations and/or case studies and demonstrations in their own time. Such techniques should be encouraged as ongoing good practice to enhance student learning.

6. Staff development in teaching and learning at the generic level

(a) CAT's contributions in respect of staff mastery of Blackboard should be expanded; as should its work on training in technology as a means of hosting and supporting pedagogy and assessment. Greater collaboration between CAT and CASD will further improve staff development initiatives.

(b) Curriculum design that builds continuous assessment into its various developmental phases should be encouraged. It is recommended that both CAPQP and CASD assist with implementing this across the University.

7. Staff development in teaching and learning at the disciplinary level

(a) For quality teaching and learning, academics should be encouraged to find ways of utilising the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)³ and examine the role of technology in relation to this.

(b) Remote teaching offers flexibility in relation to the spaces where teaching takes place. Staff development could capitalise on the greater openness that was fostered in terms of module review and facilitate discussion on ways of improving curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment.

³ PCK here is understood as the most appropriate methods of teaching the key concepts inherent in the uniqueness of each discipline. It is opposed to the idea that general teaching methods can be used effectively across the board in a 'one size fits all' manner.

- (c) There should be sufficient resourcing and encouragement for assistant lecturers and tutors to continue to play valuable academic and pastoral care roles in supporting students and staff.
- (d) The advice and support of IDs at faculty level is vital and should be encouraged and resourced.
- (e) Online teaching and learning must be underpinned by principles of effective pedagogy and assessment. These need to be developed together with technological expertise.

8. The vexed issue of devices, data and bandwidth/connectivity requires a national intervention. At University level there could be merit in exploring ways of utilising mobile technology to support teaching and learning.

9. Careful consideration should be given to the role of online and face-to-face in engaging students and providing them with a meaningful teaching and learning experience. The University should consider exploring the value inherent in a hybrid model.

10. The remote experience showed the value of 'champions' in supporting a completely new venture. 'Champions' had some formal power but did not fit into a clear position in the hierarchy. In innovative new initiatives, the University should consider encouraging promising 'champions'.

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Rationale and purpose of the review

As per the requirements of the CHE⁴, universities are expected to ensure QA, especially for the period after lockdown was imposed, during which the institution transitioned to remote learning. In this regard, in consultation with DVC: Academic, a QA process has been developed, and approved by MECA on 24 June 2020.

The COVID crisis precipitated the implementation of remote learning across the HE sector that, while designed to salvage the academic year, has the potential to impact on quality, particularly as contact learning is the dominant mode of delivery.

The purpose of the review is:

- to identify areas of good practice that may be shared; and
- to identify areas in which support may be needed during the next phase.

This review covers the period of remote teaching and learning from 15 March 2020 to 31 July 2020.⁵

In line with the CHE's directive for institutions to apply CHE guidelines "with due consideration to their own context", UJ marshalled existing policies⁶, structures and processes into a purposeful and coherent Quality Review plan.

1.2 Review plan and methodology

Scope

There is a strong focus on the undergraduate level, but insights into the postgraduate level are also included.⁷

Methodology

Individual and group interviews were held with a wide range of UJ staff (see Appendix A). Interview guidelines were provided to the interviewers, and addressed a number of areas identified broadly in the CHE guidelines for review, viz:

- Programme management
- Teaching and learning
- Student support
- Staff capacity development and well-being
- Formative and summative assessment.⁸

Interview templates were not, however, structured according to these guidelines. Interviews were based on the specific areas of interviewees' roles and operations.

⁴ CHE. June 2020. Quality Assurance Guidelines for Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning and Assessment during the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020.

⁵ Quality Assurance of Remote Teaching and Learning Approved by MECA 24 June 2020

⁶ Most notably the Quality Promotion Policy (14 March 2019) which provides for quality assurance of teaching and learning to ensure that provision is continuously enhanced.

⁷ Motala, S. & Menon, K. (2020) In search of the 'new normal': Reflections on teaching and learning during Covid-19 in a South African University. *Southern African Review of Education*, 26(1): 80–99.

⁸ CHE, June 2020. op. cit. p.1.

There was a good response to letters of invitation sent out to interviewees. Each interview was prefaced with the explanation that the exercise was being facilitated by the Division for Academic Planning and Quality Promotion and Academic Staff Development, and that it would focus on how the move to remote teaching and learning was experienced and managed by both staff and students in this period. The approved MECA process for the review was provided to all participants. It was emphasised that the approach to interviews was a reflective exercise. Interviewees were aware that interviews were being recorded and were invited to submit additional comments or observations via email or in the chat function on Microsoft Teams. All interviews were held remotely.

A total of 67 group and numerous individual interviews were held between 21 July and 6 August (Appendix A).

The representivity of the large sample of interviewees (academic staff, support staff, assistant lecturers, tutors and students) is a strength of this review. All interviews were recorded, and interviewers kept detailed notes lodged in an online repository.

The limitations of the report are:

- Although the same template was used for each cognate group, interviews were not standardised in the sense that questions were not treated as questionnaire type items. The intention of the sessions was to gain the best possible understanding of interviewees' experiences by giving them the opportunity to speak freely about the experiences that mattered to them in their particular contexts. Interviewers did not 'nudge' interviewees into rigid frames designed to enable data comparison across each cognate group.
- Data analysis identified similarities and patterns across responses. The actual number of similar responses was not formally counted, however. Generalisations are based on impressions of the frequency of utterances clustered around a particular theme.
- As with remote teaching, events took place within narrow timeframes. There was very little time lapse between the last interview and the production of this report.

The present section of this report is the first of five sections.

- *Section 2*, 'Staff experiences and judgements in transitioning to remote teaching and learning', is structured along the lines of the interview template for lecturers. It is complemented by the views of Vice Deans (VDs): Teaching and Learning, Heads of Departments, Instructional Designers and Tutors. The rationale for this structure is that it facilitates a consolidated, comprehensive coverage of issues at the heart of teaching and learning.
- *Section 3* covers the perspectives of those in management positions in their faculties: HoDs, VDs, and a group that will come to be called 'online champions'. Apart from most VDs, these staff also teach.
- *Section 4* focuses on sets of qualitative and quantitative data that can be used to triangulate inferences and conclusions drawn under sections 2 and 3 above, and includes institutional and faculty reviews, module review, students' evaluations, and interviews with a small sample of students.
- *Section 5* is the Overview and Conclusion.

The roles and contributions of support staff are infused into all the sections that follow.

The background context provides the necessary prelude to the review findings.

1.3 National context and UJ context

A brief profile of the University enrolments by faculty and by undergraduate and postgraduate is provided to illustrate the extent of the endeavour undertaken to ensure that teaching and learning continued during the period under review:

Table 1: Headcount Enrolments per Faculty/College

| FACULTY | Undergraduate | Postgraduate |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------|
| CBE | 14 815 | 2 983 |
| EDU | 3 095 | 1 210 |
| FADA | 1 066 | 259 |
| FEBE | 6 946 | 1 902 |
| HSC | 2 888 | 1 217 |
| HUM | 4 543 | 1 062 |
| LAW | 1 534 | 202 |
| SCI | 3 867 | 1 005 |
| Total | 38 754 | 9 840 |
| Grand Total | 48 594 | |

Additional useful data is presented in the Table that follows, which provides a sense of the extent of the management of the transition to remote teaching and learning needed:

Table 2: Summary Data on Enrolments

| | |
|--|--------|
| Number of headcount undergraduate students registered in 2020 | 39375 |
| Number of headcount undergraduate students that deregistered in 2020 (cumulative) | 617 |
| Number of remaining undergraduate headcount registered students | 38758 |
| Total number of course (module) enrolments taken by undergraduate students enrolled in 2020. | 288718 |
| Number of headcount post-graduate students registered in 2020 | 10134 |
| Number of headcount post-graduate students that deregistered in 2020 (cumulative) | 314 |
| Number of remaining post-graduate headcount registered students | 9820 |
| Number of Permanent staff in 2020 | 3992 |
| Number of Permanent instruction/research (academic) staff in 2020 | 1094 |

It is worth noting that approximately 30% of the undergraduate students are registered for programmes with work integrated learning, practicals or some form of experiential learning.

The period 15 March to 31 July 2020 spanned three levels of lockdown regulations that triggered remote teaching and learning in the first place. After the announcement of a National Disaster on 15 March 2020:

- Alert level 5 was in effect from midnight 26 March to 30 April.
- Alert level 4 was in effect from 1 to 31 May.

- From 1 June 2020 alert level 3 was in effect.⁹

In the CHE's description of the higher education sector's response,

HE Phase 1, from March to May 2020, aligned to the national lockdown levels 5 and 4, was therefore a time of *emergency planning* for access: for administrators to provide access to physical devices and access to data for both students and staff, and for academics to create digital learning material for their students, mostly in the form of digital lectures,¹⁰ digital tutorials and additional digital text-based material.¹¹

The image of mirroring normal activities is continued across descriptions of ERT [Emergency Remote Teaching] in the CHE document. While limited in terms of the actual transition for the University, it does provide a useful yardstick for measuring UJ's progress in this regard.

The higher education regulatory context

An important legally enabling development in terms of the accreditation of qualifications is that:

the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) on 7 April 2020 approved that, in order to accommodate the necessity of emergency remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, all higher-education qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that were previously accredited for the contact or distance mode of delivery are now regarded as also accredited for the blended and online modes for the duration of the 2020 academic year.¹²

Similarly, all universities were required to provide the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) with a comprehensive report on the transition to remote teaching and learning as well as a Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Campus Readiness Plan in May 2020¹³. In addition, Universities South Africa (USAf) in collaboration with the DHET, played a role especially in regard to understanding the implications for work integrated learning, practicals and experiential learning.

UJ in context

The following brief account covers key features of UJ's history that represent a relevant background to the present case.

Structures and a University culture have been built up systematically and organically since UJ's founding as a comprehensive University in 2005. The focus within faculties is explained in terms of the balance between research and pedagogy that characterises a successful comprehensive University.

Strategic Plans over the years have been based on six primary objectives, all directed towards achieving an overall goal of 'Global Excellence and Stature'. The two most significant objectives for present purposes are:

- Excellence in research and innovation
- Excellence in teaching and learning

In order to achieve its global ambitions of excellence and stature, the University had to ensure that the necessary conditions were in place. There was a focused effort to align every facet of the

⁹ <https://www.gov.za/Coronavirus>

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that this description depicts a minimalistic version of online: it is matter of migrating lectures onto digital platforms.

¹¹ CHE, June 2020, op. cit. p.5.

¹² CHE, June 2020. op. cit. p.5.

¹³ UJ COVID-19 Report on the Management of the Move to Remote Learning and Teaching, May 2020.

University's operations and activities towards this single goal. To this end, the Global Excellence and Stature (GES) Initiative was launched in 2014 as an integrated and structured approach to catalyse institution-wide change across the University's structures and functions¹⁴. This initiative has since grown in the scale of its operations and impact.

Although a simplification of the realities, this brief background is an indication of the fact that when Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) arrived in March 2020, UJ had in place an infrastructure from which ERT activities could be planned and carried out in a coordinated and cohesive way. Two features of initiatives to improve teaching stand out as providing a solid foundation for remote teaching.

First, under "Strategic Objective Two: Excellence in Teaching and Learning", the Revision of Strategic Plan 2025 for 2018 included a "Focus on and Experience in blended and learning".¹⁵

Table 3: The blended learning KPA and targets

| KPA: INNOVATIVE UG AND PG PROGRAMMES | 2017 TARGET | 2017 ACTUAL (OCT 2017) | 2018 TARGET | 2020 TARGET | 2025 TARGET |
|--|-------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 34. Number of blended learning modules offered in contact programmes | 100 | 250 | 300 | 500 | 1000 |
| 35. Number of students enrolled in online programmes | 100 | 15 | 100 | 4,000 | 10,000 |

Second, structures and initiatives were put in place as a mechanism for achieving this KPA. UJ has always taken student success seriously and has implemented initiatives such as the FYE, SSE, massive tutor interventions etc. to support student success. A good example in the present context is the Integrated Student Success Initiative (ISSI).¹⁶

The ISSI is an institutional and data-informed student success initiative aiming to improve student success in selected priority modules. Faculties select modules for inclusion.

The Academic Development Centre (ADC) and other support services, then work closely in conjunction with the various VDs Teaching and Learning in each Faculty as well as the module lecturers to develop and implement agreed interventions.

The following two quotes indicate the way in which ISSI helped prepare the ground for ERT (although this was of course not the intention) and aspects of which could rapidly be harnessed in the service of ERT.

- ... (ISSI) implementation teams led by ADC senior staff in collaboration with module lecturers, intervened in 43 modules during Semester 1 of 2020 (p.1).

¹⁴ Global Excellence and Stature Catalytic Initiative 2018

¹⁵ File: 2018 UJ Strategic Plan.pdf

¹⁶ File: The Integrated Student Success Initiative for CHE.docx

- The ISSI at UJ has remained a highly successful student success initiative. The strong collaborative approach that started during the on-campus implementation phase has remained intact during the off-campus implementation. The situation caused by the COVID-19 outbreak has also led to the speeding up of online student support and the optimisation approach used in the ISSI has focused strongly on effective online learning (p.2).

As will be seen in section 2, support units and collaborative networks were an important asset to ERT. Structures and cultures went hand in hand.

In pursuit of ensuring excellence in teaching, over a period, there were massive investments into the CAT as UJ commenced with using a blended approach to teaching and learning. CAT circulated a contingency plan for the possibility of remote online learning during the first week of March 2020. A high-level summary of activities of CAT is provided which is salient to the overall success of the University's transition to remote teaching and learning:

- UJ's blended approach to T&L meant that the vast majority of UGs already had one or more modules on Bb.
- During the FYS CAT introduced first-year students to Bb.
- Towards the end of 2019 and in January 2020, CAT IDs visited every department to introduce a Bb template that could be customised. This meant that before lockdown, 96% of UGs modules with the suggested structure were already on the LMS; the rest were created in March.
- CAT developed and designed two Bb modules to support students and staff for remote online learning and teaching. The modules included help files, good practices and UJ specific leaflets with guidelines for going fully online.
- Data from the LMS were crucial in tracking Bb activity by academics and students. At the start of Term 2, 85% of students were active on the LMS. After receiving free data, activity increased significantly. By the third week of Term 2, with the exception of just under 350 students, all UGs were busy online.
- Sending 4000 mini-laptops to students in need (in addition to 1740 devices to first year NSFAS students in March) also improved access to learning material.

1.4 Institutional measures to plan, institute and implement ERT

The mass of documentation and communications relevant to the story of ERT at UJ is vast and detailed and a comprehensive survey of this alone is beyond the reach of this review. A *detailed* summary of everything that has taken place is simply not possible within the scope of the review and consequently a broad coverage which highlights key points from different perspectives is presented.

UJ governance in the context of the pandemic

Following the declaration of a national disaster on 15 March, UJ immediately commenced preparing for what was likely to unfold.

From a week before the formal declaration of the national disaster, various mechanisms were put in place to manage the anticipated lockdown (which took effect at midnight on 26 March 2020), many hurriedly. At the University of Johannesburg (UJ), an urgent review of all business continuity plans (BCPs) in domains

across the University was conducted to make provision for the national lockdown measures. This crisis review at UJ and other institutions resulted in the rapid containment of on-campus risk.¹⁷

The University established governance structures to actively steer its activities at the outset of the pandemic and lockdown.

The lockdown took place just before the March/April 2020 University break and, overnight, the entire complex organisation of the University was on high alert. Leave arrangements were cancelled, a COVID-19 Coordinating Committee was established that met weekly and, together with the Management Executive Committee Academic (MECA), planned the shift to remote teaching and learning. For an institution with 50,000 students, this was a mammoth task. In the leadership of this were members of the Management Executive Committee, the most senior leadership group in the institution. Committees were replicated across all support structures and within faculties.¹⁸

The processes for making things happen

UJ's decision-making processes show the interrelationship of decision-making nodes with feedback loops. The nodes are:

- Direction from government and DHET
- Management Executive Committee
- University-developed remote teaching and learning strategy
- COVID-19 Co-ordination Committee
- MECA: all academic matters discussed
- Deans discussed with Faculty academics
- HoDs discussed with individual academics
- Module owners worked with CAT in reviewing modules and translating them into online format
- Modules active on Bb
- Student experiences module
- Student experience addressed (with the final feedback loop linking back to direction from government and DHET under the first bullet point).

Even with governance and strategic processes in place, the pace of events meant that the University had to make decisions that impacted radically on all its operations. This called on the University to act in a way that was rapid and responsive, while not losing the deliberative, iterative and thoughtful ways in which academic decisions are made. The decisions taken were made on the basis of the best available knowledge with due consideration for the nature of proposed change and its implications for the University community, and with due regard to proper process.

1.5 Framework for changes in time and space to enable remote teaching

Time

In respect of time, Table 4 shows the changes and revisions necessary in the 2020 Academic Calendar, all of which was changed at very short notice.

¹⁷ Motala and Menon, op. cit. p.81.

¹⁸ Motala and Menon, op. cit. p.86

Table 4: Changes in academic year calendar during lockdown level 5: Midnight 26 March – 30 April

| Amended 2020 Academic Calendar: 18 March 2020 ¹⁹ | Amendments to the 2020 Academic Calendar: 8 April 2020 |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The autumn recess will start on Saturday, 21 March 2020, and has been extended until 13 April 2020, following the suspension of all contact classes, tests and practicals since 16 March 2020. • The academic programme for the second term will commence on 14 April 2020. • As the extended autumn recess has implications for the academic calendar, the mid-year recess has been shortened. The first semester will now end on 19 June 2020, and not on 15 June 2020. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The academic programme for the second term to commence on 20 April <i>with online teaching and learning</i> • The first semester to end on 26 June; • The mid-year recess planned for two weeks (27 June to 12 July) |

The rapidity with which UJ responded is evident in that the first amendment on 18 March was in place just three days after the State of National Disaster had been declared. With Semester 1 originally scheduled to end on 15 June, that date was shifted in quick succession to 19 June and then to 28 June 2020.

The level of detail accompanying these changes is far greater than is apparent in this table. In each case, dates of all attendant events right through to Second Semester supplementary assessments were moved to the second week of January 2021. The Registrar and the CAA worked in a consultative manner to ensure that these changes were effected.

Space

A fundamental change to the academic calendar relied on confidence in UJ structures and the capacity of all sectors in the University to align themselves to the new context. The changes would also rely on all operational sectors being ready for online teaching and learning, which was to commence on 20 April 2020. Under lockdown level 5, staff and students were at home, not knowing how long level 5 would remain in force, or even when and how it might be amended.

The interviews make clear that for all staff working online was a new experience, as was carrying out all communications and meetings from their homes. Communications with students, all at their varied and dispersed home bases, were a different level of challenge. Learning to work remotely was in itself a learning experience. The UJ community would have to be advised of changes and, in addition to pastoral care issues, they would have to be trained and supported for changes in pedagogy and online assessment. To enable these conditions, both staff and students would need to have proper mastery of the technology, and of Bb in particular. In addition, connectivity, appropriate devices and data issues needed attention.

¹⁹ This has reference to the UJ COVID-19 UPDATE 03 issued on the 18th of March 2020.

1.6 Actions to operationalise plans

What needed to be done

The list that follows summarises at a high level the range of activities.

- Making available guides and toolkits for remote teaching and learning for both staff and students;
- Implementation of a week-long student orientation on how to learn remotely using Bb;
- Revision of modules to take into account deferring practicals, laboratory sessions or clinical training;
- Assessment of which modules were online and how best to transition all undergraduate modules for Semester 1;
- Revision of assessment for remote learning;
- No summative assessments for first two weeks to allow students time to settle;
- Ensuring that all academic changes to modules including assessments were submitted through faculty governance structures and to Senate.

What was done, in an exceedingly short space of time

Principles of implementation

Finally, the entire process of migrating to ERT was underpinned by a set of clearly enunciated principles. These were:

- No student left behind
- The safety of students and staff to be maintained
- Decision-making that is data-driven
- Students and support staff involved in the creation of an enabling environment for remote learning/teaching/research working
- The maintenance of good governance and reporting
- Open lines of communication to students and staff
- Anticipate and address challenges
- Responsiveness to change
- Minimal disruption to teaching and learning.²⁰

On a constant basis, the University was appraised by weekly updates from the Vice-Chancellor and when required, information as acquired was communicated expeditiously. These were placed on the [UJ COVID-19](#) website to enable ease of access for staff and students.

A [Letter to Academics](#) from the DVC: Academic and the DVC: Research and Internationalisation (3 April 2020) informed academics that

[A]s communicated, the UJ academic term will resume on 20 April 2020, although based on all indications from government and given the nature of the pandemic, we have taken the decision that all teaching and learning will be online until the end of Semester 1.

This letter advises staff on the matters summarised below:

- Students have been notified of the shift to online teaching. Staff are urged to communicate with students and to take their circumstances into account in all matters.

²⁰²⁰ PowerPoint file. 4IR and COVID-19: Recalibrating for an Uncertain future

- Senior tutors, tutors and assistant lecturers should be included in the teaching and learning processes. The (CASD) is available for additional training requirements.
- 'The UJ Online Teaching Toolkit' is available to assist staff in navigating the Bb environment and in matters of online teaching. Relevant IDs in the (CAT) are also available to assist.
- Given that it might not be feasible to replicate the standard final assessment (examination) in an online environment, academics were offered advice on how to manage assessment, e.g. disaggregate larger assignments into smaller continuous assessments, or possibly combine two semester modules into a single year module. Appropriately, staff were advised to discuss strategies within their own faculties.
- Attention was drawn to the value of short 3-6-minute videos in which lecturers address their students directly. This came with links to resources useful for carrying out this task.
- The fraught issue of practicals, lab work, clinical placements, WIL and all other forms of direct contact sessions was addressed with indications of further steps to be taken in this regard.
- Advice and updates on research matters was given, such as PDRFs, postgraduate supervision, research funding, and online training for students wishing to apply for NRF bursaries.
- The library continued to provide training programmes for everyone. Academics were reminded of the Library App and the online accessibility of all library functions.
- The Division of Academic Planning, Quality Promotion and Academic Staff Development was available to assist with amendments to existing programmes and any concerns related to effecting these. The Division for Academic Development Support was available for teaching, learning and support for students.
- All committees, University processes and closing dates for the various meetings remain in place and will take place through Bb Collaborate.
- UJ is working closely with telecommunication providers to zero rate UJ websites. The list of zero-rated UJ websites was provided.
- Online applications commenced on 1 April 2020, with a record number of applications (4 000) received on the first day.
- Given the likelihood of increased stress, staff were advised of the need for rest breaks and reminded of the service provided by PsyCaD for students, and the Employee Assistance Programme for staff.

The communication was dated 3 April 2002, which gives an indication of the short space of time within which UJ operations had been adapted to the new context. In itself, it does not communicate the intensity of work and inter-communications across the entire University community that had put these arrangements into place. Some of the enabling actions carried out include:

- CAT methodically reviewed approximately 1,500 undergraduate modules to check for online readiness using the following markers: (a) a structure student can easily follow, (b) a learning guide, (c) evidence of activities in Week 6 of Term 1, (d) presence of assignments, and (e) presence of online assessments.
- Critical to enabling teaching and learning in the weeks that followed the lockdown was a rigorous monitoring of students' participation on Bb (the primary learning management system [LMS]) with high-level data presented for analysis to the management of the University, deans and faculty members. The role of big data was foregrounded as never before, as students' log-in times, log-in frequency, and the when, where and how are monitored, shared, diagnosed

and acted upon to ensure that maximum participation was achieved, and to facilitate communications to achieve this.

- [F]ood parcels were organised for students living off campus in privately owned accommodation, and ramped-up psychological services provided for students who were exhibiting high levels of anxiety and stress.²¹

The first two bullet points provide a good indication of measures that helped to make sure that quality was built into teaching at the *input* level. This is an important part of the background to lecturers' accounts of their actual teaching experiences in section 2 that follows. Bullet point 3 above is evidence of a different dimension of quality. In a pressurised, stressful environment in which the main instrumental objective of saving the academic year was in everyone's sights, UJ did not lose sight of the health and wellbeing of students.

Communications to sectors of the University community

As in the case of academics, all measures that had been put in place were communicated timeously to all sectors of the University. Examples of this are:

- 9 April 2020 - Amendments to academic calendar sent to staff and students
- 16 April 2020 - [Letter to Tutors](#) (from DVC Academic)
- 17 April 2020 - [Message to Academics](#) (from the Registrar, asking academics to translate University policy into the essence of teaching and assessment in each of their own modules).
- 7 May 2020 - [Letter to Students](#) UJ Teaching and Learning (from DVC: Academic and DVC: Research and Internationalisation)
- 14 May 2020 - [Updates on UJ Remote Teaching and Learning](#) (to Academics).

The UJ website <https://www.uj.ac.za/coronavirus/> was created early and serves as a central repository of all communications and guidance for staff and students. The site is comprehensive, providing updates and links to useful resources, both internal to UJ and externally to the Department of Health.

Major sections of the webpage are:

- *Update on return to campuses*
- *Access to campuses*
- *Learning remotely*
This section for students has resources that include: 7 May Letter to students; Off-campus Learning; Important Points to Note for Term 2; Student Online Readiness; Disabled Students Learning Remotely info; FAQ for Students; Shortcuts for Success
- *Resources for teaching remotely*
This section has many guidelines, pointers, tips and toolkits to help guide online teaching.
- *Resources for researching remotely*
This comprehensive document has sections covering all aspects of research grants, training, and support at all levels for staff and students. Internationalism is also addressed. In regard to the Library and Information Centre (LIC):
The librarians created short two-minute online videos to help you navigate our online library resources. The videos are available to download from our library's website: <https://www.uj.ac.za/library/library-services/Pages/online-training.aspx>
- *Health and wellbeing*

²¹ Motala and Menon, op. cit. (p.89).

This section has information, resources, and detail of on-campus support for staff and students.

- *Working remotely*

This offers advice in respect of available technologies: VPN – Access UJ systems Remotely (FortiClient); Microsoft Teams; and Bb.

This section has three further links:

- *UJ COVID-19 Statistics*
- *UJ COVID-19 Discretionary Fund*
- *COVID-19 Corona Virus South African Resource Portal.*

A good indication of support measures during the period of preparation is evident in the fact that by the end of the cycle, UJ was able to furnish the CHE with 43 short PDFs each providing guidance on matters that students would find helpful. ‘Self-directed learning’ is a good example. All other documents that were developed in a short period of time in the form of toolkits or guidelines were sent to the CHE as a shared resource for the higher education community. In addition, provision was made for the USAf website to be updated directly from the UJ COVID-19 website as and when resources were made available.

2. AT THE COALFACE: STAFF EXPERIENCES AND JUDGEMENTS IN TRANSITIONING TO REMOTE TEACHING AND LEARNING

The purpose of this section is to cover experiences and judgements in ways that (a) allow for themes to emerge, and (b) also capture the range of different opinions. As would be expected, differences were basically rooted in the uniqueness of disciplines, the individuality of lecturers, and the nature and circumstances of their particular students. But of course, many other professional and personal issues could be layered onto these basic factors.

At the outset, it can be said that clear themes become apparent. In the case of some, there was clear consensus. In the case of others, majority views were nuanced by individual differences.

Background note: Interviewers recorded and kept notes at every interview session. Some notes include short quotes (not necessarily indicated as such), but for the most part interviewers paraphrased points that lecturers made. This report strives to present the essence and the intensity of lecturers' views by recruiting their *paraphrased* statements. All such instances are reported in italicised font. The paraphrased statements of HoDs, VDs, IDs and tutors are demarcated as such; all other quotes are those of lecturers.

2.1 Characterising the experience of the work involved in transitioning module/s to remote teaching and learning

This suitably open-ended, general question worked well at the commencement of interviews. In providing opportunity for interviewees to identify issues that mattered *to them*, many jumped straight into the most pressing issues, especially challenges. Interviewees' issues that related most clearly to the specifically targeted questions that follow have been re-assigned to the relevant questions that follow. Technical issues related to students' devices, data, bandwidth and connectivity is a case in point. These issues were at forefront of topics raised by lecturers here.

As presented here, this first sub-section focuses most strongly on the context and circumstances within which lecturers began the journey to remote teaching. It frames the more substantively targeted questions that follow.

From the starting blocks

The metaphor of a race implied by this sub-title is not inappropriate. There is strong evidence that, for all teaching staff, this has indeed been a race against time.

Many reported having anticipated the need for transition to some form of remote student learning. It was

the unexpected suddenness that caught us unawares.

Lecturers wasted little time in creating online content and moving tests online. In a succinct response, one lecturer captured the views of many by noting that this had been:

a quick process, a learning curve. We did not want to disadvantage any students. Thus, we organised access to phones, ran Collaborate classes, support sessions at students' convenience. Divided students into smaller groups.

Other typical statements included:

- *There was intense pressure from the outset.*
- *Lots of extra work was needed to translate curriculum to online. Especially so quickly.*
- *It's been fascinating and nerve-wracking.*
- *It was a challenging experience but also very rewarding because we learned a lot.*
- *The new module was done in 3 weeks (the pressure was insane) unlike when we are given a new module to teach – would have been 6 months to prepare a contact module [HoD]*
- *We're learning more and more although at first [we were] intimidated.*

Some starting blocks were ahead of others

A significant overarching issue is that across all UJ staff, there was unevenness in capacity to tackle the immediate need to move their modules onto online learning platforms.

Lecturers' accounts drew attention to the advantage of those with some experience in blended learning. A large number of interviewees fell into this category. Against that background, many reported having been more daunted by timeframes than by the nature of the challenge.

- *We had transformed modules before, and tested Bb.*
- *.... used to work blended before, smooth transition. Learnt a lot more now.*
- *Not entirely new to us – that gave us a good head start.*
- *Content was on Bb already.*
- *2015 in the faculty – asked to move online and develop a hybrid course. In our case we have had a couple of years, I was online before the year started. I managed without disruption except for moving dates.*
- *Here were modules converted to continuous assessment to remedy the COVID-19 situation. Mine was already that.*
- *FEBE was ahead in that we had many on Bb already for a while.*
- *Our faculty started new degrees – we were encouraged to go online. For most of us this was not something new. Faculty has been instrumental in helping – students provided feedback.*
- *Agree with others, not new to the practice. Now increased frequency online.*

All such sentiments were captured aptly by the academic who sent an email:

One of the things that seemed very effective in our faculty was having a few colleagues with experience and enthusiasm about online learning, and especially our CAT representative [name of staff member]. These colleagues attended multiple workshop sessions, actively contributed in the chat and in presenting, and in many cases spent quite a lot of time providing offline and individual support to colleagues with questions and issues. Having a group of "expert" colleagues made the sessions and activities very collegial, so that the environment was very much a collaborative "let's learn and do the best we can together" rather than a training guided by experts.

Nonetheless, even with background experience in blended learning, some academics still felt overwhelmed.

- *I was offering a lot of blended learning at the University but to then change drastically ... to just remote learning – it was [an] apocalypse.*
- *I had an opportunity to implement a fully online programme – it took two years to do it and set it up – and now we were supposed to do it overnight.*

Such comments were reinforced by a good number of HoDs.

- *We didn't have many problems switching to online modes as we have a lot of online programmes in the department.*
- *Foundation phase is going online from next year, so we have been planning already for two or three years. The initial shift wasn't such a big deal it was more the nitty gritty admin issues. I actually found that because my department has a lot of younger staff – they led the way in guiding the older staff.*
- *We were piloting for online to go online next year. This thrust us into be able to pilot it for real.*
- *With the drive towards the new BA we were already there – we had workshops with staff. We shared and drew on experience.*

Those who had not been involved in blended learning approaches would obviously have been disadvantaged in respect of gearing up for remote teaching and learning. As one HoD remarked:

Some are still used to chalk and talk – asking that person to go online – we obviously cannot expect perfection.

The most dramatic example of a lecturer with no prior experience in blended learning was provided by the interviewee who recounted the experience of suddenly having to redo the study guide and build it into Bb.

This was like being hit with a brick. I wouldn't have managed without UJ support systems, e.g. CAT and tutors ... felt I had lost academic freedom. Felt I was being monitored and micromanaged, at the beginning. But it's improving. The redesigned course is more built into Bb.

Many others, completely new to any kind of online learning or blended learning, were faced with the immediate challenge, under great pressure of time, to rework their modules into the template CAT provided.

Notwithstanding differential skills sets, staff who were interviewed all appeared to have set about the task in a methodical way, using the support available, simply doing their best under great pressure of time and in spite of their also having to deal with the lockdown.

Staff who had expertise in the relevant technologies still had to reflect critically on their pedagogy. Staff who reported being 'tech savvy' and familiar with Bb indicated that this is what enabled them to make what one called "a fairly straight forward transition" to ERT. Disciplines involved in digital media have a self-evidently obvious advantage.

HoDs offered the following comments:

- *[Name of discipline] had no online learning before – in the middle of March we tried different tools for staff meetings. We also developed ultra-low data for socially just and highly inclusive teaching. It helped that I was techie.*
- *We had to play catch up – the nature of our discipline – but academics were tech savvy. We spent time discussing the process of going online.... planned for a low data environment. Pushed out of necessity to be mindful of the need for that. One of our staff members developed PP and podcasts with minimum data.*

Both categories of staff – those lacking online experience and the ‘non techies’ – provided clear accounts of how they had been supported by the University, by senior staff in their departments/faculties, and by colleagues. There is a very clear picture of staff being able to make up for lost ground through teamwork.

- *I relied a lot on our colleague [name of colleague] and her team to direct and support me.*
- *I come from a more traditional understanding. Once I started working online, I became quite adept at it – not good, but we and students and colleagues are working together [HoD].*

Predispositions that favour (or do not favour) remote teaching and learning

Interviews revealed a small segment of antipathy and/or resistance to online teaching. This appeared to be rooted in personal and professional identity rather than in lack of experience in blended teaching.

In the blunter expression of an ID who had encountered some staff resistance: *“People, not technology, are the biggest challenge.”*

The challenge is evident in cases where lecturers view the classroom as a private space. From a number of ID accounts in particular, some *“lecturers did not want to have their space invaded.”* In such minimal number of cases, lecturers resented *“too much reporting”*, which they regarded as intrusive and some are simply *“not comfortable to share with each other.”*

A small number of interviewees indeed presented themselves as traditional lecturers. One said:

I like rules and I don't like change – and I had to change and there were no rules, nightmare for me.

Antipathy to the online environment, however, did not necessarily translate to perversity, or to an unwillingness to make the transition. Lecturers in some fields of study and practice have justifiable professional reasons for favouring face-to-face teaching. In teacher education, for example, lecturers’ ‘model’ the practice they encourage novice teachers to follow. ‘Modelling’ is most effective when it takes account of the kind of classroom environments for which they are preparing their students. Most South African classrooms are not equipped with technology. Teacher training must also prepare student teachers for the kind of environment in which children learn, which is mainly from contact teaching. This may well account for utterances such as:

- *But what I could reflect on was that it was particularly difficult to adjust to not having faces/bodies to teach to. I still find that a challenge – I teach communicative skills to students who will teach in a classroom with children sitting there and it is challenging.*
- *For over 35 years I have taught by seeing my students, looking at their reactions, having fully informed conversation with one-to-one or one to a group – at my age to start yesterday to teach remotely – almost impossible for me.*

- *I'm accustomed to traditional methods of teaching with people you can see and interact with physically. I can check facial expressions and respond to that. Impossible in online.*

There is a perception that teaching based on constructivist approaches is also not easily amenable to online pedagogy:

I lecture in a constructivist classroom in which students talk to each other, I really want to get people's opinions and feelings. It doesn't happen online – slightly senior students haven't quite caught onto the game-type situation. I found it quite difficult, and they found it quite difficult.

Disciplines built on, for example, empirical and systemic forms of knowledge, are often more amenable to online teaching. As the mode of delivery at UJ has always been mainly contact, it is par for the course that staff see themselves as face-to-face teachers.

At the personal level: effects of the context of profound uncertainty

HoDs in particular provided telling accounts of the context of profound uncertainty within which teaching, and learning has taken place. Three themes emerged very strongly.

(a) Anxiety

The initial transition meant that staff were incredibly anxious – the pandemic, anxiety for family, and second was the transition from face-to-face to remote.

(b) Anxiety heightened by uncertainties.

Electricity supply, problems with connectivity. National regulation and University decisions.

(c) Fatigue.

Staff are incredibly stressed and fatigued. There's been no mutiny – but they are incredibly exhausted.

(d) Fatigue compounded by unrelenting pressure.

[Staff are] bombarded by emails from students – who are anxious and over-enquire.

The pressure of much increased communication (with colleagues, seniors and others) could be added. These communications and 'meetings' were essential for progress in remote teaching. Everything possible to enable remote teaching to take place was in place and was happening – but it came at a personal cost to staff and was exemplified in their express commitment and dedication to the students.

Support staff are alongside academics in having experienced increased workloads. A clear indication of volume increase is depicted in the table below:

Table 5 OSTicket (CAT Helpdesk) number of queries per month (March – June 2020)

| Month | Number of tickets/queries dealt with |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| March 2020 | 593 |
| April 2020 | 3 739 |
| May 2020 | 3 545 |
| June 2020 | 2 580 |
| Total | 10 457 |

- July 2020 not included, due to recess of two weeks.
- One ticket might have several recurring 'interventions'; number per month given is thus the *closed tickets, PLUS the reopened tickets.*

This sub-section has, in broad terms, provided a contextual framing for the specifics of remote teaching that follow.

2.2 Challenges experienced in migrating to remote teaching and learning

Background note: Interviewees' comments on curriculum and assessment offered in response to this question have been assigned to question 2.8 below. Comments identifying the pressure of time commitments and deadlines have likewise been reported under the substantive issue to which they were linked. Many also commented on the suddenness of the shift to remote teaching, which has already been discussed above.

Connectivity

Difficulties and uncertainties with regard to 'connectivity' is the central thread running through staff response to the question of challenges. It also has significant quality implications for what lies at the heart of teaching itself: curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. This will be evident under question 2.8 below.

Typical of the many comments on connectivity include:

- *The challenge is that we were not prepared, nor were the students. We had to juggle everything at the last minute. The main challenge was the student connectivity.*
- *One of the problems was data – for the lecturers and the students' connectivity. ... a lot are from rural areas where online is tough.*
- *Being able to adapt quickly to students' needs – connectivity, technology issues and systems would crash.*
- *[My module] has been on Bb for some time – we were not using it the way we are using it this year. Transition was a bit challenging, in terms of connectivity.*

In addressing the problem of connectivity, staff did the best they could by utilising the kinds of platforms that worked for their students and for their disciplines. A number cited the mantra "no one size fits all". Creative individual solutions were used alongside Bb, as the official learning platform.

- *Preferred WhatsApp/Skype rather than Bb. Bunch of reasons – data or devices. Many of my students also complained about Bb access. Apparently, Bb is harder to connect to than email.*
- *I have to use two networks now – if Telkom is down, I switch to Rain ... must guarantee connectivity.*
- *Difficult to use Bb Collaborate. I used Zoom meetings.*
- *Major challenge: internet connectivity. I had to switch from Bb to Zoom sometimes. Doing it has already made a big difference.*
- *Bb used data. I created a WhatsApp group but couldn't share the exam on WhatsApp with 73 students. I met some small groups on Zoom.*
- *I had to alternate between Bb collaborate and Zoom – students prefer Zoom –faster and in 45 mins I can do a class without wasting time. The issue was student connectivity.*
- *WhatsApp groups worked very well. Increased accessibility.*

Connectivity challenges are even greater in more specialised areas. As one lecturer said in relation to a postgraduate course:

The only problem we had was when students presented proposals online and some of them had poor connectivity/problems with laptops/when some of them had big files. We had one yesterday and today – telling them we might be using Zoom. With Bb one can record – this is the advantage. Does Zoom have that facility? Could UJ assist with this?

Alternative means of ensuring connectivity because of their lower demand on bandwidth and data usage have led to other challenges.

One colleague decided to do a WhatsApp group and students posted inappropriate content – have to deal with it – WhatsApp is not a University platform. This is pushing us into different boundaries [HoD].

The main boundary in this regard is that between a lecturer's work and privacy. Many staff noted that while WhatsApp afforded students immediate answers to their queries, it intruded into lecturers' private space and time. Academics reported responding to student queries or WhatsApp messages at night due to students having Night Owl data. Anecdotal evidence from academics interviewed reveals that some would put alarm clocks on to be awake and available for students at midnight. Students and academics indicated that daytime data was used for attendance at synchronous sessions or for live assessments.

For students and for the University itself, the challenge of connectivity has implications that are as serious as those for staff. In commenting on the impact of uncertain connectivity on research by dissertation, one supervisor noted that:

this has affected most of our students – they want to change their registration status to part-time to give them extra time.

Devices: A sub-set of the problem of connectivity

- *CAD, for example, typically cannot be done online – device challenges – we know we are going to get stories.*
- *Our biggest challenge was that some students only had access to smartphones and/or tablets and not to personal computers. This was an issue because the software that we use in this module can only operate on a computer.*
- *Devices are a problem. Data limited. One student could not participate at all.*
- *Computer labs with the latest technology are available on campus. Not so with devices provided. Students do not have the necessary access to software licenses.*
- *High specs computers needed for CAD etc. Students had to do hand drawings instead. Time consuming: had to extend deadlines.*

Unlike the problem of connectivity – which is common across all programmes – the suitability and appropriateness of devices is programme specific.

In sum, challenges in respect of both connectivity and devices, have been met by staff devising their own creative stopgap solutions. Some alluded to having acquired a renewed sense of agency in doing so. But what one lecturer described as *walking the road while making it* may not be sustainable, even in the short term. A robust University-wide solution is needed which may open the door for the University to explore utilisation of mobile technology for teaching and learning.

Large classes: more challenging than ever

As would be expected in a situation in which staff are called on to respond to the heightened uncertainties of students as never before, large classes pose ever greater challenges. One lecturer was able to cope with a class of 831 active students because most were on Bb. But without 30 tutorial groups it would have been impossible. Similar comments included:

- *Large modules – staff coped only because of tutors.*
- *I think that small class online learning was effective. I foresee this being a huge challenge with large class numbers [HoD].*

2.3 Positives that emerged

Background note: Positive comments related to substantive issues such as University support (question 2.4), student response (question 2.5), successes in remote teaching (question 2.6) and curriculum (question 2.7), are reported under the relevant sub-sections.

Advantages at postgraduate level

The following paraphrased comments speak for themselves.

- *I struggled a lot with undergraduates – with postgraduates, we are using the online a lot; apart from us not being able to go to the lab, we did all the discussion forums and discussions online.*
- *Postgraduate students appreciate the courses online. A lot work around the province and so it allows them to do their work when they travel.*
- *Honours students adapted well. New ways of presenting concepts worked well. According to the external moderator: quality is the same as before.*
- *Very positive for international students.*

A dissenting voice was that of a supervisor whose favoured teaching approach is clearly face-to-face.

PG supervision is not the same, we need to meet, not test and assess; monthly meetings- have different groups in five groups – based on research either with PDRF etc. a major aspect of non-contact – my group is known for liveliness and love of interactions and gathering and mingling.

Staff working from home

The new experience of working from home drew mixed responses. Academics spoke of the difficulties of managing multiple responsibilities, including household responsibilities, children at home, managing their online activities for schools and the stresses that accompanied the COVID-19 lockdown. Academics reported anxiety levels regarding teaching, marking and research commitments. The gender bias further exacerbated the situation for many. Positive comments included:

- *I can jump out of bed into a meeting.*
- *Time management and research are better working from home. Work will be different from now on.*
- *Some staff feel that they do not need an office on campus anymore [HoD].*
- *Work circumstances at home: you miss traffic – miss the commute – work from home in comfort. But this also came with a challenge – had to learn to manage time – I ended up working three or four times the amount of time I spent in my office.*

Students: at a distance, but better connected at the personal level

Common sense logic would probably suggest that staff are connected optimally with students when all are present in time and space – in one classroom.

A most surprising finding here is that in many cases remotely connected staff and students in fact developed closer connections. This is best explained in McLuhan's expression: "The medium is the message."²² Each medium, independent of the content it mediates, has its own intrinsic effects which are its unique message.²³

Lecturers' experiences as paraphrased below suggest that the message of the new medium of remote learning to UJ students is: You can be yourself, freed from the peer pressure you may experience in the physical classroom.

(a) Online connection, out of the lecturer's physical classroom, promotes greater openness:

- *... when you are a lecturer in class, to have class involvement – for them to speak and take part, [you encounter] intimidation, shyness. In the online environment, students were more forthcoming, more brave. In the discussion board, they ask questions.*
- *... in the discussion board they were coming forward and getting involved – the things of being shy and intimidated is gone.*
- *A lot of student in class do not talk. The dynamics in class impacts on their feeling competent to voice their opinions. ... when we moved online and did peer evaluation, I set up the criteria, and used it as feedback. Now they had power to voice their opinions based on the criteria. Dominant personalities had to allow for others.*

The latter bullet point is one of the many indications that the online platform works well for postgraduate study in some disciplines.

(b) More personalised, interactive engagement with students:

- *The move to online learning – usually a 4-hour class – made me feel close to students. Gave them personalised feedback.*
- *Very interesting discussions with students, really connected with students. Engagement and participation good (better than many previous face-to-face session), students thrive. Some prefer online.*

There is, however, no uniform picture of levels of interactive engagement having increased across all faculties. One reported:

- *There was not much interaction on discussion forums.*
- *It was hard to engage students, struggled to get feedback from students.*
- *Communication: Students felt very lost.*
- *Discussions on Bb were not used, and there were few emails to lecturers and tutors.*

²² McLuhan, M. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Mentor, New York.

²³ <https://www.marshallmcluhan.com/common-questions/>

(c) 'Netiquette' appears to encourage more appropriate interactions

A group of students [who had previously been rude in class] became polite and would ask relevant questions – actually became the set that asked questions during lectures. They transformed from rude to very active in class.

Students who were interviewed presented a very different view on this, suggesting that in some (what appear to be relatively isolated) instances it had in fact led to unruly communication (see section 4.2 below).

(d) Some students explored avenues beyond the textbook

- *Very interesting ... some are reading beyond the scope of reading lists. Some sourced other readings. There's been an advance in students' initiative.*
- *In a class debate one student asked the lecturer: "I am not sure if you have read this stuff I came across" and then we had engagements on that. [This was not the kind of engagement that had taken place in the lecture room.]*

More research would demonstrate how widespread interactions of the above kind have been. Even if they happened on a limited scale, the 'message' of the remote learning medium has had some unintended consequences that are beneficial to quality.

(e) Although increased workloads were a common experience, ERT may help reduce workloads. One HoD pointed out that:

Unexpected advantages included a more equal distribution of work, as lecturers who repeat classes over different campuses now only have to record one class and have consultations with students in the class timeslots. This saved on work and allowed greater focus on better assessment.

This could well apply to other staff teaching using the same course material across campuses.

2.4 The effectiveness of University support for staff and students, and how it could be improved

University support was effective and appreciated

The overall picture was one of widespread agreement that University support had been helpful and appreciated. It was notable that some lecturers had experienced and benefited from the support of more than one unit, and for this reason a range of views are reported below. The active and engaged role of CAT was especially noted and appreciated.

- *CAT support was brilliant.*
- *CAT is very active and for me to upload to external – it was quickly done, colleagues from Durban had access in 24 hours. Thumbs up for that.*
- *I consider CAT and Bb as one – they have been very helpful.*
- *Communication from ITS has been useful. The module on Bb useful. CAT was great. PsyCaD – we could direct students there.*
- *ADC has been instrumental in putting tips out there.*
- *Made use of CAT "very supportive" - indebted to CAT.*
- *PsyCaD was good.*
- *Fortunately, we had some training on Bb.*

- *Used ICS: exceptionally helpful. CAT very useful and provided prompt responses.*
- *Communication from UJ good.*
- *Bb: online toolkit and [name of person]: good.*
- *We had a meeting with the ID and she talked about the different approaches – gave us feedback. The Science librarian also helped.*
- *Library has been instrumental in making information accessible – how to access literature.*
- *Staff challenges: The main issue was books. Students came and said we were asked to leave their residences and had left books at residence. Luckily the library made some of the books available (there are problems as publishers don't want their books to be copied) [VD].*
- *CAT was very helpful when I struggled with reconciliation of marks.*
- *Library provided great support with training for students.*
- *I feel disconnected from students. The positive was that we used the retention centre on Bb – to assess what was working for them.*
- *ICS helped with VPNs.*
- *Library inter-loans – good.*

It is worth mentioning that frustration was experienced by academics as they did not have administrative rights to their devices, and it was difficult to resolve these issues remotely. Some academics indicated that the technical specifications of the UJ official laptops or devices did not have sufficient memory or speed to contend with the multiple platforms required for remote teaching. Other divisions like CAPQP continued providing ongoing support for academics. Nonetheless, the level of support reported above signals a functional and supportive University environment, as reported under section 1 above.

Leadership played a supportive and enabling role

A major theme was the support forthcoming from University leadership and from senior faculty staff. Lecturers' comments included:

- *DVC (Academic) was excellent. When I had a problem, it was resolved. I had a few problems with MAMS but would have had anyway.²⁴*
- *I want to say thank you for support. It was excellent.*
- *Support from the Deanery: encouraging.*
- *Faculty provided support.*
- *Consolidation of information from the Deanery was excellent. They put things together and suggestions about what works went out to all. There were good suggestions about, e.g. compressing videos. I appreciate it.*
- *There was a lot of support from Deanery. Bb needs to be more responsive – was a bit slow*
- *Faculty did a great job.*
- *Our faculty started new degrees – we were encouraged to go online. For most of us this was not something new. Faculty has been instrumental in helping – and students provided feedback*

Some HoDs were similarly appreciative of support from faculty management, and VDs in particular.

- *... always ready on their phones, any issues. Getting answers back to them - always solution oriented.*
- *.... took a huge leadership role, supported by the Dean and another senior member of faculty.*

²⁴ Other lecturers also expressed concerns about MAMS, e.g. *Integration of BB and MAMS is very problematic. Class lists are not in the same order on three systems.*

Communication

Good lines of communication were key to support. This is best captured in a single quote: *We were all kept in the loop – in general we were.*

Given the volume of information, some of it through new channels created under conditions of crisis, there was consensus that there were few breakdowns.

The problem for lecturers is that a good number experienced being what one called *overburdened with information*. There was widespread appreciation for the purposefulness of an increased number of meetings which also provided a forum for discussion and sharing of experiences. A downside mentioned was more reporting to be done:

- *We're reporting to so many structures!*
- *A lot of reporting expected!*

Some HoDs noted the additional burden:

- *Too much was expected from HODs and to make things even worse – we were new and really things were complicated for us in the Department.*
- *UJ knows we do delivery – they push and push. It's not sustainable.²⁵*

University support bolstered by IDs, Assistant Lecturers and Tutors

The role of IDs in this crisis period has been one of supporting and enabling lecturers in adapting their modules for remote teaching. Where necessary and possible they have also supported the shifting of mind-sets. In their own accounts, this has involved

- *loading content; setting assignments/assessments to limit cheating; ways of dealing with limited data. Technical and pedagogical support (60%; 40%).*
- *[supporting the] move from content transmission to a new way of teaching, trying to introduce the collaborative, reflective, flipped classroom.*

Interviews with IDs provided insights into their valuable contribution in supporting lecturers to meet their deadlines. From the lecturer's side,

We do not have enough IDs – literally not enough to help us go through this so we can do a better job.

Tutors have supported the teaching of modules. Ongoing support for tutors was provided by CASD through WhatsApp groups and a tutor community on Bb. In some cases, they have also expanded this responsibility into pastoral care for students in distress. Lecturers affirmed the value of the roles tutors played. It was noted by both academics and tutors, that the data provided by the University was insufficient for both their own studies and managing their work as tutors.

- *I'm lucky to have 9 tutors. They could do what worked for them. It was flexible. Some did email. The Zoom value of tutors comes out strongly*
- *I had a big class of 1 300. It's difficult to do live classes – I have only 3 tutors. They had to work closely with students.*

Another lecturer lamented the *cut in tutor budgets although tutors are extremely important and helpful*. The valuable role of tutors was also emphasised by HoDs.

- *We had good tutors and they were very supportive.*

²⁵ Both of these statements came from within the same faculty.

- *Tutors became middlemen. They took on a huge load in being second level of lecturing.*
- *Senior tutors and tutors learned technology and they taught us features that we were not aware of. They went an extra mile.*

In one case where an HoD had insufficient tutors, class representatives were appointed to take their place.

Our class reps have also been amazing. We only have tutors at first year, so for the other three years, class reps took on those middle-person roles.

The role of assistant lecturers must be mentioned. During interviews, many reflected on the difficulties of balancing their own studies and assisting with the teaching and learning online. Some commended the work of the academics, tutors and the leadership of the University. They also commented on the willingness of students to help each other recognising the difficulties experienced in terms of connectivity, bandwidth or devices.

One commendable thing that my students did was that some took it upon themselves to copy content from blackboard and paste it on the class WhatsApp group in order to assist some of their colleagues who found it difficult to access WhatsApp. They answered each other's question on the WhatsApp group on many occasions. I only needed to affirm their answer when it was correct or bring the right answer when it was wrong. The students took responsibility to teach one another

Sections that follow below highlight the value of IDs and students, as will be seen, strongly affirmed the value of tutors.

University support bolstered by collegial self-reliance and resourcefulness

As effective as it was, 'top down' support can never be sufficient, especially when challenges will inevitably also be faculty/disciplinary-specific. Lecturers looked for their own solutions and shared ideas with colleagues.

[Name of staff member] volunteered to have sessions on Bb Ultra for many who wanted to register and take in webinars, giving lots of tips to set up assessments etc., using rubrics. Many sessions were provided by Faculty.

One HoD remarked:

I have had to rely on people beyond my department for assistance – our faculty VD and her team have provided wonderful assistance.

Several HoDs had established WhatsApp groups to coordinate exactly this kind of collegial support.

I set up a WhatsApp app group [so that staff] help each other. Collegiality was amazing.

Other departments promoted the same kind of teamwork through normal channels.

We had a short weekly meeting with staff online and that was incredibly helpful.

One particular faculty stood out with its policy of decentralisation and trust. Five HoDs in this faculty reported that:

- *We relied heavily on support staff. We had good admin support: [name of member of admin staff] was extremely good. She kept colleagues calm.*

- *Lecturers took charge and initiative. A strong management team provides enough oversight. Staff are improving daily. There's a high level of connectivity through WhatsApp and Bb. Staff are amazing.*
- *They planned scenarios and reporting lines prior to lockdown. Admin staff are amazing.*
- *We facilitated communication amongst staff of different modules. ... We decentralised as much as possible and had to trust people.*
- *Staff took over as lockdown started. Staff took the initiative and put in great team effort.*

HoDs in other faculties made similar comments such as:

You need to trust people.

Need for more focussed training

Despite their appreciation for the training and support that had been provided, several lecturers identified the need for further, more focussed training.

- *I needed additional training that should be continuous, and it cannot be ad hoc.*
- *We need continuous and consistent – I am talking about really hands on -training on how to navigate through the remote platform working from home.*
- *We do need ongoing sustained training. There's a lot of assumptions that we know how systems work.*
- *It still takes me two hours to make a video because I feel the support that I required is not there – for specialised instructional design to move forward.*

These suggestions came from staff who appeared to have accepted remote teaching – or perhaps blended approaches – as the new norm. But as indicated above, a small number of staff have not. One said:

I want to feel like I'm talking to some students. I would prefer a situation where I stand in front of my students – I would like to find a way for my lectures to be recorded – standing in front with the board and actually writing and jotting as if I am in front of my students. Some were recorded in 2013 but I had to hire someone from my research account who came to varsity and videoed me. I was alone – I would like that – that is all I can do.

Apart from impracticality in terms of bandwidth, there are pedagogical reasons why this kind of lesson has been found to be unsuitable for remote teaching. However, this kind of approach is not illegitimate. It simply belongs to a different model of teaching or the demands of a particular discipline where it may be an exemplar of good practice.

Future training will need to be sensitive to the variation in professional identities, not all of which are adjustable to remote teaching approaches.

What type of training should there be?

While staff were almost uniformly appreciative of the support and training, they had received, a number of points made are noteworthy. There was the matter of the speed and context within which training and support had to occur:

- *I would not say the support was there per se because it was mostly it was “you must do this and do that” and “not do that”.*
- *.... you end up feeling inadequate because of all the instructions.*
- *It wasn't training, it was instructions. Too much information can be overwhelming.*
- *Even with instructions, I had to find my way around Bb.*

With future training in mind, a promising direction was proposed by the lecturer who argued that there *needs to be meaningful ongoing training suited to everyone. Now it's a one glove fits all – but doesn't work that way. Content [i.e. across disciplines] is different, so methods of presentation should be different.*

This academic is drawing attention to the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). PCK advocates the need to find the best methods of teaching the key concepts inherent in the uniqueness of each discipline. It is opposed to the idea that general teaching methods can be used effectively across the board. If there is indeed merit in PCK – and much current scholarship says there is – then training for moving modules online should not only be generic, it should also be disciplinary specific.

Concluding comment on support. Bearing in mind that Bb has been the key hub of online learning, perhaps the best testimony to the effectiveness of UJ support is the lecturer's comment that:

a lot of people found out about Bb probably from a reactive perspective, but it was certainly an innovation that helped a lot of people.

2.5 Students' responses and interaction levels: challenges or highlights

Responses to this question focused mainly on highlights, probably because the challenges of connectivity and data had been exhaustively covered under question 2.2 above. That picture of the technological challenge for students remains in the background to this section which focuses on the academic project and not on the technology to enable it.

An overarching observation is also necessary. Faculty responses varied in relation to the levels of student interaction they experienced. The themes that follow below are generalisations.

A generally encouraging response

Staff portrayed a general picture of students who, like themselves, and despite the suddenness of change with all its attendant stresses, retained their commitment to the academic project. In some respects, student commitment seems to be stronger than ever. This was evident in the fact that many did not wish to be overtaken by events that left them behind in their studies.

A critically important element in student responses was reported above under question 2.3, 'Positives that emerged'. This was the unexpected finding: that remotely connected staff and students in fact developed closer personal connections and relationships. The significance of this for the learning experience cannot be overstated. It was manifest in comments staff made in response to the present question 2.5.

- *Some students were insistent that 'they did not want to be left behind'. This made them work harder and more intensely.*
- *Very positive engagement. Students came up with their own solutions; if you challenge, then they rise.*
- *Students must take responsibility to learn and equip themselves. We encouraged them to do that and they did.*
- *All have participated. They have performed really well. We specifically had a student from the EC – no access to online; no access to medication; some medical problems – kept on communicating with her – kept on encouraging her.*
- *Well-equipped students working consistently. Some students showed improvement in work output.*

- *Students spending more time [on their work]: quality of work higher.*
- *Very successful, except for access and equipment issues.*
- *I lecture years one, two and three and postgrad – they have really embraced this platform – when I do have challenges, they almost believe that I am human – I have been able to be more far accepting of them not being able to log on etc. I know it is real. I do feel that I am letting them down when I do not have the skills to make happen.*
- *Students were more willing to communicate. In the evaluation they said that they had good assistance from the tutors.*

The most surprising example of improvement came from a VD:

... the level of achievement has also improved - much higher final marks than previous years. Cancellations have dropped for some reason- by almost 23% for the faculty. That's big! For some reason there was a much better attendance to this type of learning than face-to-face and the [percentage of] distinctions has improved.²⁶

Reasons for student success included:

- *On demand content works better because students can work and review by themselves. Should be incorporated going forward.*
- *Students like flexibility, maybe also in the curriculum.*

First year students present something of a caveat to the above finding. It was mentioned above that remote teaching seemed, generally, to offer some advantage to postgraduate students. At the other end of the scale, first year students seem to be most 'at risk'. Being new to the University environment – in fact, having only just stepped into it – they have an obvious vulnerability. Many lecturers confirmed this.

- *We had different experiences with honours and undergraduate students: but it was a quite terrifying experience for, e.g. first years.*
- *Lecturers experienced extra responsibility to keep in contact with especially first year students.*
- *Students wanted reassurance all the time – especially first year students. Had to engage with them one on one.*
- *We have a range of students from 1st to 4th year. I tend to find that the more senior students were better in terms of being able to cope with what we gave them – they had a stronger knowledge base.*

A further caveat is that an online environment may be alienating for students in certain fields. In nursing, for example, students are

hospital based, and are used to the patients... In the hospital they do not use computer/online platforms. It's difficult for them to adjust. So, we supported them with WhatsApp and Teams. Nursing is a practical domain – so online in places like a simulation lab was challenging.

Home (and work) circumstances from which students responded

Students' academic response as above must be contextualised from within the contexts from which they responded:

²⁶ Questions of academic integrity are being explored by the University.

An HoD's comment provides a good background and overview.

65% of students are first generation students. There's a big difference when that student is on campus. Now they're back at home where no one had been to University and had very little understanding of University. This brought many challenges to lecturers and HODs. Many lecturers realised this for the first time: What are the students' circumstances?

Several staff reported that remote teaching afforded them their first insight into the home's students come from. They literally 'zoomed' into their homes. In so doing they came to know more about students as individuals and as human beings. Three staff summarised the general picture reported also by a number of their colleagues.

- *Circumstances at home were not conducive to learning large families, and some parents sold the laptops.*
- *Context/spaces of student learning is problematic.*
- *I didn't realise before COVID that students had these issues. These issues were rather hidden in blended – when we still had face-to-face. When it became 100% online, students' difficulties became prominent.*

Accordingly:

Students were driven to work harder – wanted all the more not to get left behind.

But at the same time:

- *Expectations of students: some were angry, wanted to get back on campus. They struggled with working from overcrowded houses.*
- *Students needed psychological support. PsyCaD helped. Some struggled with increased mental health after lockdown, and one deregistered.*

Student difficulties were manifest in the following staff observations:

- *The challenge was to maintain engagement and enthusiasm: students cut off from group interaction, discussions, and they could not measure progress against their peers.*
- *Participation with students was patchy – they lost motivation at times. Became difficult to contact them, and practicals are compulsory. ... I don't know if the students have the self-discipline to maintain pacing their studies.*
- *There was a decline in the motivation of the students – some students did not submit anything at the end. The quality of the work was not what we wanted. Like half an answer in a test. They would respond to one-word answers but no longer responses.*

Implications for teaching staff

Home circumstances not conducive to learning was furthermore compounded by issues of connectivity and data constraints, as described under question 1 above. This had implications for staff. As an ID pointed out:

IDs were expected to respond at all times even during the night. Students were working on 20GB night owl – so they were working and then any problems encountered would surface at night or weekend.

In similar vein, other academics noted that:

- *We are dealing with a generation that requires quick answers. There is a big problem with students – emailing and WhatsApping me at all hours of the day and night. If I didn't answer then they would phone even if it is 10pm at night.*

- *Students expected 24/7 availability, partly because night-time data is cheaper. Staff had to restrict available hours.*
- *We engaged with students much more than before. The negative of the online is mental health issues. Students WhatsApped at all times and days [HoD].*

This has taken its toll on staff.

- *I haven't been to the office for 6 months, but I'm absolutely exhausted. I've never needed a holiday as much.*
- *I'm totally fatigued, totally drained.*

The latter comment was made by a lecturer with around 800 students (which yet again also emphasises the point made earlier about the strain on those with large classes being much greater than in face-to-face teaching). But this lecturer was driven by *the constant message: "Don't leave students behind"*.

A heart-warming instance of UJ itself upholding this first principle of its remote teaching strategy was reported by one lecturer as follows:

An LLB student sent the lecturer a photo of herself writing an exam by candlelight on her phone. The lecturer escalated to the dean and to MECA. Solar panels were then installed for the student and her family with support from UJ.

There are reports of students having responded with gratitude to staff 'going the extra mile':

Many students sent thank you notes.

Final note: Interviews were held with a small number of students (see section 4.2 below). As will be seen, students confirmed much of what academics report above. At the same time, however, their judgements were more qualified by particular kinds of difficulties they had experienced.

2.6 How would you evaluate the success of the transition compared to face-to-face teaching?

Responses are based mainly on overview estimates of success. While such estimates provide useful 'ballpark' indicators of success, deeper insights into the academic quality aspect of success are discussed under question 2.8 below.

Academics' estimates of success

Lecturers in one faculty offered judgements that included "highly successful" alongside more cautious variations of "relatively successful" and "fairly successful". Others offered quantitative estimates in the range of "75%-80% successful" and "70%-80% successful".

A more pragmatic judgement was:

It's not a score – it has happened – we did it!

Others produced generalised judgements such as:

- *Older staff/some staff were caught off-guard. But some were prepared. Yes. It's working well.*
- *By any metric, not just student performance, this has been a success.*

Some judged success in terms of what it was possible to do, or in comparative terms.

- *I don't think we could have done it better.*
- *We could have done it better, but we have done it better than other universities.*

Other judgements were based on student performance.

Their [the students'] level of interaction was impressive. Almost every one of the 69 had said something about [the] course. Every student was afraid of being left behind. This has been a blessing in disguise, students rose to the occasion. It was easier for them to comment on /evaluate lessons.

One judgement was based on student trust in staff.

We have played open cards and generally the students trust us – we are not going to do them in. As far as possible we will do what is in their best interests. They could have thrown their hands in the air and they haven't so we can be proud of the students we have – other universities do not have that.

Possibly the best indicator of longer-term success is the extent to which this experience has shifted lecturer views on what constitutes best practice. As many commented on this, a number of extended views are reproduced below.

- *When University resumes, I will continue to use the online because it serves to get our students together – some are outside the country – it's easy for them to meet because we meet at night – better for working students – helps to do PG supervision.*
- *We were anxious about moving to the blended space – we have seen the value now. There is a realisation that face-to-face is not always the best [HoD].*
- *Online ... we have to be ready for this. It is part of where we are going*
- *It will be difficult to go back to the normal teaching situation.*
- *Life has changed: blended learning should be embraced in future.*
- *I enjoyed the interaction more as time passed and I believe that hybrid learning may be possible in the future (a mix of online and face-to-face) and may actually be the future of education in tertiary environments. It became exciting as time passed.*
- *Overall, I think that small class online learning was effective.*

Some were more cautious:

Some modules can stay online in future.

Success for others was based on a blend of the pedagogical and the personal.

I must admit that I enjoyed working from home. I got more done and I was able to plan the course module in my own space, which allowed/developed my creativity. I am really enjoying the online environment now, setting tasks online, interacting with students in their comfort zones (behind a screen). But as I said before, I really miss the personal side of course delivery; seeing the student faces; watching out for facial expressions that tell me they understand or not; looking out for the "A-ha" moments that can only be seen in a face-to-face class setting and the social environment of the University environment.

One lecturer concluded on a note regarding what most lecturers surely aspire to:

I believe that I learned as much as the students did. They taught me things and we learned together, which ended up being fun in the end.

And on an instrumental note:

We cannot replace face-to-face teaching – no doubt about it – but the online has saved us and students the year.

Staff: Device data distress

It was pointed out above that problems around connectivity, data and devices permeate experiences reported on all issues covered in this report. Some staff however were not immune from the same difficulties' students experienced. Some felt frustrated by the processes involved in securing data.

- *Total distress – no data, no connectivity – flooding of emails and it was immediate responses expected, right now, I am in distress.*
- *Everyone at this stage is teaching online and using some sort of data. Some could not claim because of the way they paid for it [for example, buying airtime online to convert to data which is cheaper].*
- *Devices for staff not appropriate, need better memory and programmes. Printer, scanners needed at home.*
- *it has been a challenge from our side with claiming etc. especially with an existing contract. I was told – the money you save on petrol should compensate for data. Not a nice comment – the claiming process has been difficult.*
- *Can the University provide us with data as we are struggling? Students got data – what about us?*

On the topic of staff claiming for data costs, an HoD observed:

Given that the faculty has agreed – why the hassle? Those who are using it really, really need it.

The cost of success: health issues

Many accounts indicate that the success of remote teaching has come at considerable personal cost. This was evident in direct references to health concerns resulting from long hours, fatigue, anxiety, and the immediacy of University deadlines, especially in regard to assessment.

Juggling academic work with children and the space. This overwhelmed me – I got sick from the stress.

HoDs were most acutely aware of this problem as they experienced it personally as well as seeing it in their staff.

- *I have not relaxed and spent time with family. I am neglecting family life but can only work in family time.*
- *Emotional strain of working around your family, people getting sicker – the assumption is that as you are at home it is okay. You can have your head amputated and still be in a meeting.*
- *The remote way of doing things is taking too much time from the family. There is literally no time when you are not doing UJ work.*
- *Unfortunately, as the pressure is not easing, I find it difficult to balance the balls – we need to find a way to go back to balancing.*
- *My life is a computer – since the online move. I'm on the laptop all day – meetings or something else, have classes, postgrads, undergrad. Almost 24 hours on the computer – till 10/11 at night.*
- *The emotional toll has been immense. Staff are burnt out.*

Stress is exacerbated when individuals feel things are out of their control and they experience a sense of loss of agency. This was alluded to by the HoD who observed:

- *Another thing outside UJ control is load shedding. It's a big issue. Load shedding means no Wi-Fi.*

As one would guess in any context, there are some exceptions to what seems to have become a 24/7 norm.

How do you track colleagues and make sure they are doing what they are supposed to be doing? For some it was just a holiday – can't get hold of them, don't email, don't answer calls – I get complaints from students [HoD].

Research: a casualty

Several lecturers expressed discomfort about having had to neglect their research and whether their KPAs would be revised:

I have an article just before lockdown – almost 90% complete but I have not been able to do anything. One is always at work [HoD].

In respect of KPAs, another HoD had noticed that journal review processes, like everything else, were taking longer.

The valuable legacy of remote teaching

Apart from having been, by and large, as success in its own terms, remote teaching leaves a valuable legacy.

- *The instructional videos that we created were really useful. We will continue to use these even after things turn back to "normal".*
- *I really think that situations like these force people to think more innovatively and this leads to interesting solutions to problems.*
- *Teaching remotely forced a complete revision of the kind of material and how it is taught. We need better control and focus.*
- *We have really achieved a lot – another thing is maybe we can use a blended approach. I will be using both from now on – face-to-face and online. I travel a lot so I can still be in any part of the world and lecture.*
- *It's forced us to learn new technologies that can be integrated in future [HoD].*

Additionally, a valuable legacy arises from the way in which staff have risen to the occasion. There are stellar examples of staff resourcefulness and 'going the extra mile'.

- One academic purchased a whiteboard and transformed his garage into a classroom which he videoed;
- Academics marking pictures of essays/or responses to assessment tasks sent to them on WhatsApp;
- The academic whose husband was in IT – he helped her students to figure out how to use their devices to optimally use Bb;
- The academics who sent maps by courier to every single student and asked the police station near UJ to hand out maps to students on a list in order to teach map skills for a module;
- Adaptation of a film course to enable students to make mini videos on cell phones – as opposed to the equipment available;
- The academic who accessed campus with a permit and filmed each experiment in the laboratory so that students could see the experiments live.

Blended or face-to-face learning in the future?

From staff collectively, there is clear evidence of a widespread preference for blended approaches. The following lecturer could have been speaking on behalf of many. After having been traumatised by the challenge at the beginning, at the end of experience she could write:

- *We didn't have a choice. We had to do it – it was done. I will never go back to chalk and talk.*
- *One of the lessons I and others learned is the fact that the UJ has been talking about blended learning and a lot of us have been scared – flip the classroom. We had to learn quickly and efficiently in a short period – a big lesson for us. We are also getting more comfortable with online going forward – there are great efficiencies in respect of using technology [HoD].*
- *The way one teaches will never be the same – in the clinical domains especially. The amount of teaching we can now do in our clinical sessions will always be better than before [HoD].*

There is now a realisation – or confirmation, in many cases – of the advantages of remote teaching or online teaching. But face-to-face contact seems to be an essential ingredient of successful and rewarding teaching.

- *Can't wait to get back into the classroom.*
- *I miss my students. I love interaction with students. There's a loss.*
- *I miss classroom interaction with students more than they do!*

Students had a very strong wish to be back on campus – some because their home circumstances made study extremely difficult, others expressed the need for social interaction and there was also the general missing of campus life (see section 4.2 below).

Overall, there is a picture of academics consistently saying that while they value or even prefer face-to-face teaching, the shift to remote teaching provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their pedagogy – and it will not be the same when they return to normalcy. They could see the benefit of using multiple modes of technology to integrate teaching and learning differently.

2.7 Practicals, WIL or experiential learning in modules

This sub-section covers only the responses of academics, but some background to their responses is necessary. For the sake of brevity, the term 'practical' is used to cover all categories of WIL, experiential learning, clinical placements, etc.

As was the case with all substantive issues, UJ issued timeous institutional guidelines beginning with a comprehensive list of all such programmes.²⁷ This was followed by 'COVID-19: Guidelines for Programmes that have Workplace or Experiential/Practical Components'.²⁸ Because 'practical' programmes are of such a faculty- specific nature, and are the core business of individual faculties and departments – in conjunction with DHET, professional boards and industry, in certain cases – the COVID-19 Guidelines address:

- Types of programmes and their faculties;
- Principles;
- Range of possible strategies.

²⁷ File: UJ Programmes with Work Integrated Learning – DVC(A) 24 April 2020

²⁸ <https://www.uj.ac.za/coronavirus/teaching-remotely/Pages/Guidelines-for-work-integrated-learning-and-practicals.aspx>

Interviews provided much evidence of in-depth thought and planning on the part of lecturers, HoDs and VDs. There has also been much consultation with partners in industry and with professional boards.

Industry was very involved and tried to assist [HoD].

Reliance has been placed on two main strategies: rescheduling the component; and finding substitute activities for the real experience.

Rescheduling the component

- *We have a lab component, but we will do catch up with the missed labs (BEng Tech) – the lab component is assessed separately in the prac itself.*
- *Pracs could be demonstrated online. But some devices were not suitable for online pracs.*
- *Geography – GIS – we agreed that we will have a block practical when students are able to return [VD].*

There was one case of fortuitous timing of the practical in a way that meant that the 'practical' had been completed before the lockdown commenced. However, that reprieve did not solve the problem for students across other years of study. The lecturer responsible found it *incredibly frustrating* to have set up plans only to find these had to be revised in succession in a context in which parameters of time and space were uncertain.

- *Had a plan put in place – and then the president's announcement; now we are at plan z at the moment!*

The ramifications for meeting professional requirements can be serious, as one lecturer said:

First and second years we may recoup. Third and fourth years: I am not sure if we can certify them to be teachers.

One HoD argued that there are:

Some very good ways of substituting for classroom practice – students teaching one another in microlessons.

But in general, as described, rescheduling 'practical' components has not yet proved to be a successful strategy in terms of quality considerations. In addition, some lecturers indicated that while they may have saved the practical sessions by deferring them, some effort would then have to go into realigning the theory taught online with the practical – once completed.

Substitute activities for the real experience

- *Practicals were converted to online tasks using videos, simulators, and relevant websites that students could use (activities not characteristic of face-to-face classes).*
- *We made instructional videos to illustrate how the practicals were supposed to be completed.*
- *.... used virtual excursions.*
- *Scoured the internet for videos that might be useful to demonstrate practicals and changed the assessment strategy. Instead of focusing on the mastery of skills in the laboratory, students were asked to write reports on the experiments. In other words, we were teaching a different set of skills.*

- *Migration of practicals to online in Zoology. We would normally be doing field trips etc. and we had to change this to online exercises. We did so without compromising the skills transfer. But: most of us had problems with practicals – the second term is usually microscopic work. We had to give them pictures and examples to work from substitute activities for the real experience. I do not think the students grasped the concepts totally. We showed them videos and pictures – but without handling the equipment they will not be able to use the equipment.*

Substitute activities provided the students with a learning experience however, it was not the intended activity. If academics had more time for planning, more authentic substitutes could be devised. The suddenness of the migration to remote teaching limited the amount of time faculties had for planning the most difficult curriculum component to put online. As one lecturer pointed out:

Laboratory practicals is a challenge. We are in engineering and not much time was given there to think things through as to how credits and the practical part can be restructured.

There were some successes reported:

- *Online worked well even for cooking and hospitality.*
- *Surprisingly, Graphic Design can be taught entirely online – many students would prefer this option [HoD].*

In some accounts there appeared to be no solution

Lecturers reported difficulty even with skills development curriculum components that did not require off campus student placements. One reported the challenge of developing students' communication skills across multiple platforms such as Teams, Bb and WhatsApp.

- *We used to have an oral component, but it's tough now to conduct it. We have to find a way to do this.*
- *For moot court, students work in teams, in gowns etc. This cannot happen online. Proper court experience is lacking.*
- *In a faculty like ours there's a line in the sand you cannot cross. If you can show me how to put up a drip online – then show me.... some modules just won't be completed [VD].*

Similarly, an HoD lamented that

Our skills-based classes were lost even though we used multiple ways to reach students.

Laboratory work has suffered with no clear solution is sight.

Many modules require students to be on campus for experiments. Online is good ... but the experimental work is not happening.

Almost intractable challenges arise when students are required to be in off-campus placements and/or when the 'practical' requirements of professions are at stake. The following HoD comments make this problem clear.

- *Honestly the HPCSA seems to be pushing it to the Universities to decide. It's a big headache. Those in internships are not meeting those requirements.*
- *How do we make sure that the assessment is in line with the ECSA guidelines, and assessing the Graduate Attributes? We cannot do workshops online.*
- *Internships and WIL are extremely challenging. Some industry partners may not be willing to accommodate interns in future. Some guidelines from professional boards are helpful.*

A problem of a different kind, that of keeping records, was pointed out by another HoD.

There's a problem with interactions on different fora: the problem is of course that they also use the WhatsApp app to try to get them [records] onto Bb. But they need the record for accreditation.

The overall situation seems to be as one lecturer described it:

Crisis management and damage control: trying to put in place arrangements that cause least damage.

Without doubt, the domain of 'practical' learning emerges as the single biggest hurdle in remote teaching. Missing a 'practical' component can mean missing out a lot more as well.

- *Students are battling to integrate the stuff into the practical classroom – to integrate theory, clinical practice, anatomy etc. which are all part of the same subject – the patient.*
- *Practicals: it was difficult as we are used to face-to-face. We didn't know what to do: students needed skills, so we googled and used videos, Students were not happy. We are not sure whether they are going to get the same skills. You actually need to work with the lab equipment [HoD].*
- *Students apparently are going to be allowed to go to any school of their choice [for Practice Teaching]. Staff cannot be forced to go [to that school] for assessment. If students are forced to be there for three or five weeks and we are not going, then what message do we send to students? Is my life more important than yours? Some of the debates to take in the team: We will not put staff at risk, but we will put our students at risk.*

The decision of the Department of Basic Education to re-open schools and the DHET guidelines on in-service training proved to be difficult to navigate. Academics had a responsibility to ensure the safety of their students whilst adhering to the need for practice teaching.

There was evidence provided of out-of-the-box thinking and innovation by academics as they worked on framing and reimagining practicals and WIL.

2.8 Observations on teaching, learning, and assessment

Curriculum content

The overall picture is of no major changes in curricula – even though the University had put in place processes for recording and approving changes to both course content and assessment. There were some indications of adjustments within the scope of existing curriculum specification. One lecturer, for example, reported that much of the course was about COVID-19 which was used as the topic for exploring a range of ethical issues specified in the curriculum.

Students enjoyed that – it's lived experience.

COVID-19 has had implications in terms of new content for curriculum in specific disciplines. Academic staff indicated that they were considering the implications for new developments in the curriculum. This speaks to the relevance and dynamic nature of curriculum development and the enthusiastic willingness staff displayed in embracing these changes.

Another lecturer used this opportunity afforded by COVID-19 in terms of linking the abstract with the concrete as education theorists advocate:

Didn't bring COVID in (Semester 1). I will do this in the next semester.

Others were giving thought to changes that needed to be made:

We're rethinking curriculum in relation to planning in tourism, restaurants.

Connectivity limitations did inhibit some adjustments:

- *It was all challenging for me – I had to make sure that I had to change my thinking and the curriculum to suit what students could do off campus.*
- *I had to make the lectures very short because of data. The course is developed, so I now have to cut [the total time] into 15-minute chunks.*
- *YouTube lectures [have the advantage] that students can revisit and watch them. But it's still not the same. Even these have to be short, 6 – 10 minutes, maybe max 30. It's not easy, not the same as meeting them [the students].*

Dividing courses into 'chunks' or segmenting content for online teaching required careful planning. Any kind of atomisation runs the risk of segmenting coherent wholes into parts that do not cohere.

Another course adaptation reported by a lecturer signalled the difficulties of teaching with students who did not have access to the necessary equipment in the labs on campus. Students, of whom only 3 out of 60 had cameras, had to make films on their cell phones. The lecturer had to teach differently and focus on reshaping the tasks that the students needed to undertake given these limitations. An innovative feature was reducing the length of the film, locating the films in the contexts that students found themselves in and using mobile technology for editing and visuals.

Pedagogy

Learning from negatives

Lecturers reported significant modifications in pedagogy. In doing so, they were in the position of being able to draw on the well-developed resources offered by CAT, and then specifically on the resourcefulness of IDs. Academics also reflected on the evolving shaping of their pedagogy as time went on and they finessed skills on multiple platforms for teaching.

A small number of lecturers soon encountered the limitations of posting traditional lectures on a digital platform.

- *I also made the mistake of uploading data-intensive lectures. But I've worked on it!*
- *I avoided Zoom and synchronous lectures because of data. I've used detailed notes and voice messages instead.*

An early benefit of loading content onto the Bb template was that it revealed some of the weaknesses in pre-COVID pedagogy. Lecturers discovered this for themselves, but IDs also encountered instances of modules that could be improved. For example:

When you look at the modules – there was very little interactivity. ... We asked them to use certain tools to prompt interactions. There are some who are now doing excellent work [ID].

The much-advocated principle of 'learner-centredness' can mean many things. At its most basic level it means not much more than being sensitive to the issues such as the amount of data that students have. A common thread in this report is examples of lecturers modifying practices taking into account the circumstances of the students. This includes their experimentation with a range of channels of communication to best meet the students' needs.

Learner centredness

Learner-centredness also depends on a teacher's awareness of students' home and living circumstances. As reported under question 5 above, lecturers learnt a very great deal from Zooming into their students' homes. There certainly is evidence of this knowledge having influenced their interactions with students.

- *I used to just leave lectures, now I'm more there for students.*
- *We adapted our lecture slides by adding narration to them. We also made instructional videos which accompanied our practical and tutorial worksheets.*
- *Interaction levels picked up when we started making use of WhatsApp. We found that communication only through Bb was not effective at all.*
- *[I've found it's] really important to have feedback loops with students: make sure that students enjoy, understand.*

Some lecturers pointed out the inherent strengths of learning materials posted online in ways that make it accessible across time and space.

- *Part-time students benefited from online. They could work in their own time. Also, pre-recorded lectures can accommodate load shedding etc.*
- *Students could work at their own pace, in their own time, especially part-time students.*
- *It gives the student the opportunity to catch up if there is an emergency etc. Using [the example] of my daughter – she loves the idea of stopping, recording, listening, etc. [In face-to-face situations] accents are a problem, and speed of delivery is a problem. She says that for her it is handy to stop – slow down – rewind – repeat [HoD].*

A factor that greatly facilitates student learning is the simple fact that the structure of online learning materials and processes, including criteria for assessment, is clearly visible to students. Some lecturers further enhanced this feature by guiding students' use of time in working through learning materials.

A planned lecture for study skills during the first term was put online with tips on how to manage time and study large volumes of work. This proved to be beneficial.

For staff, there is also a comforting form of security in knowing that learning materials are safely online, especially in times of emergency.

Now, we're recording stuff, and you know it's there! [HoD].

Circumstances: a spur to creativity

A number of examples are cited below because a good number of lecturers made the point that remote teaching had been a spur to creativity.²⁹ In so doing it had led to personal development (perhaps to a level that formal staff development programmes could not begin to aspire to).

- *You can only become creative if you are forced to think out of the box [HoD].*
- *Remote teaching forced staff to try things, new methods, new media. This added value and led to exciting new creative ways. Staff are learning to make learning more fun.*

²⁹ Methodological note: This is one of the topics on which generalisation can be made with real confidence.

- *It gave us a chance to open up the internet. We've expanded outside the classroom and the textbook.*
- *Gave me chance to rethink my lectures – will continue to use online resources. I was forced to use this. It opened up new approaches for me as well.*
- *I have newfound expertise, I use different apps, make the video/reduce the size/voice over a PowerPoint. It's amazing in terms of innovation in the teaching.*
- *Even laptops kids have/do not handle the software we need/use. I'm busy with something now – how to do a remote viewing into the lab on campus. It works on a lab machine via the students' machine [HoD].*
- *The greatest benefit of this period would be innovation. Really, I have seen some of my colleagues have gone the extra mile in the pursuit of improving what they do [HOD].*

Remote teaching has encouraged lecturers to be more reflective teachers

Lecturers could not have become more creative unless they reflected deeply on their practice in relation to the context. Two HoDs formally affirmed that they had indeed become more reflective.

- *Lecturers are more reflective [HoD].*
- *This process has spurred us to reflect far effectively on our own knowledge and abilities and teaching processes and strategies [HoD].*

Promising pedagogy, but connectivity constraints

Developments in pedagogy surpassed expectations. Success here is best captured in the comment:
I believe that I learned as much as the students did. They taught me things and we learned together, which ended up being fun in the end.

But this is yet again set against the backdrop of the connectivity issue.

- *We had to adjust to when students were able to go online – considering their data etc. – that was an adjustment for the curriculum also.*
- *Also, the issue that one cannot have lectures every week because of data.*

Assessment

As with pedagogy, there was some evidence that lecturers were reflecting more deeply on assessment and drew on the understanding of assessment principles to make relevant adjustments.

I still stick to Bloom's [Taxonomy] and other principles, but different types of assessment are needed.

The difference, however, is that the universal problem of connectivity seems to have weighed even more heavily on assessment than on pedagogy. Consequently, many lecturer comments suggested that lecturers were finding ways of managing constraints rather than creatively exploring new possibilities, as with pedagogy. Often, there was a strong focus on finding new ways of assessing for applied skills.

Online assessment is time consuming

Lecturers were effusive about the time-intensive assessment which has severely impacted staff workload.

- *The time given to complete assessments was increased substantially to cater for student challenges.*

- *It's very time-consuming designing online; especially assessments.*
- *I found that I had to buy in more markers for colleagues with big groups [HoD].*
- *It takes more time to set than normal; the academic integrity of assessments is in question. Despite controls, students still breach these [HoD].*
- *I converted all modules to continuous assessment. I planned a lot of assessments. Too much work, so I had to reduce the number of assessments.*
- *The ten-day turnaround time including moderation (internal and external) was not enough and became extremely pressured.*
- *Assessment added very considerably to staff workload and pressure on staff.*
- *I now have to mark every learning task on a weekly basis – the workload –so much – the adjustment for the lecturers to be able to mark has not been taken into account.*
- *Online marking takes much longer so ... I tried to tone down too ambitious questions. I have large classes [HoD].*
- *The big classes ran later than expected [HoD].*

Monitoring student progress is a subset of formal assessment. This added staff burdens more than before.

- *Monitoring student participation leads to monitoring fatigue: we're accessible to students at all hours. Students do not use discussion forums, prefer individual contact [HoD].*

Monitoring also became more demanding as academic progress was infused with personal issues as never before.

Some lecturers voiced a concern.

- *Mainly because of concerns for data [UJ was] hugely flexible in dealing with students, to a fault. But there was no leniency for the lecturers re the marking deadlines. We were already pressurised by teaching hours, more meetings etc.*
- *There was too much entitlement – all about the students. We have load shedding – I can't prove it. I must just yield.*

In addition:

- *UJ took it for granted that staff have data – none was provided to the teachers.*
- *There was no accommodation for lecturers for their data integration and their costs (I don't buy the argument that we can use what [we] save on fuel costs).*

There were some suggestions that students were also affected by the demands of continuous assessment (possibly in conjunction with connectivity issues).

- *Our interaction with students has become a transaction. Anything not for marks is not important. This undervalues our efforts at learning in different ways due to having to do things differently.*
- *Student engagement was limited. They only became very active when it came to submission of assessment tasks. They didn't take the learning tasks as seriously.³⁰*

The integrity of assessment

³⁰ More detail would be needed to process these two statements. One would have to ask how what is described here differs from the norm.

The need for flexibility to allow for unforeseen contingencies was stressed in UJ's planning for assessment. While unquestionably necessary from the perspectives of students' home circumstances, social justice and the realities of data issues and power outages, etc., it just as clearly enhances the opportunity for the risk that everyone thought about from the start – academic misconduct.

On the question of how much malpractice there had been, there was far from consensus as there is as yet little hard evidence. There is however a keen awareness of students having the opportunity to engage in practices that would not be possible in invigilated examination rooms. On the one hand, lecturers said:

- *Academic honesty was perceived to be different for online.*
- *[The marks achieved] do not give us a picture about the students - moving into online assessment – there is a lot of work to be done.*
- *Students were found to be quick to use excuses, difficult to verify.*
- *Students did not respect time limits. They claimed problems with connectivity.*
- *Students did not know what to expect from open book assessment without invigilation. They copied from external sources, and even gained assistance from other people, even though they had to express views and analyse cases.*
- *We could sense that there is a communication behind the scenes that we cannot monitor.*
- *The legitimacy of assessment: [There is a] need to lock students into a fixed timeslot to prevent collaboration.*

Others were of the view that

- *Most were honest without having to be told. We had fewer cases of plagiarism.*
- *There were no problems with assessment. No cheating was experienced.*

To add to an uncertain picture, two HoDs in the same faculty reported different experiences.

- *We use plagiarism checkers ... our transgressions office is overwhelmed.*
- *We also had very few plagiarism issues with our exam assignments.*

Another HoD said

Interestingly, our plagiarism cases only occurred in our Diploma qualification.

As in other areas, academics have made attempts to rectify problems. Some departments have communicated repeatedly with students on ethics and malpractice. One reported some success by having bluntly (and humorously) warned students of the dangers of copying blindly and in so doing copying the wrong answers.

Even if you do communicate with each other, you need to learn to filter what you see!

Interviews did not yield anything substantively new on this topic. But lecturer's experiences certainly reinforce the need an issue that has already been carefully thought about to remain high on the agenda.

As one lecturer said, looking ahead,

Turnitin can be used effectively, and then Bb also has some interesting tools. ... We have to be prepared – be better at this next year.

Academics in specific disciplines reported that they were being careful with regards to future assessments having had the experiences of the past. New solutions were being explored with the respective Deans, HODs and in some cases with CAT.

Questions that minimise student opportunity for cheating

It was obvious that lecturers had given much thought to styles of questions. Many see the value of application type questions, not only because such questions are better for testing students' understanding of theory, but also as a means of minimising students' opportunity for malpractice. As one lecturer explained:

Assessment had to become more application-based to prevent students from regurgitating the textbook.

There is as yet only limited information on the success of such measures. Some report success.

We realised that the marks were too inflated, so we made it challenging, those who gave it their best and did the research, they did well.

On the other hand, some had found that application questions were beyond many students.

When it came to assessment, students were cutting and pasting from slides. This was a huge challenge. So, for the exam we gave them application questions. They struggle with that. We have long way to go.

Others, too, commented on the tension between the kinds of questions that mitigate malpractice but that students find too difficult.

Discussion under 1.5 above drew attention to particular remote learning difficulties experienced by first year students. Assessment adds to that picture.

You need to build up a knowledge base for students before they can apply knowledge – first years don't yet have that knowledge [HoD].

How successful was assessment?

On the subject of what had been successful - as would have been expected – success in postgraduate sector is most pronounced.

My [postgraduate] module was an open book exam. Students had struggled previously. But with the move to online they realised that any resources that can assist – this opened their eyes to what could be used. Personally, this was one of the best things that could happen to my curriculum.

However, general indications were that assessment had been satisfactory. Some were more positive than others:

- *Type of feedback was given using rubrics ... A detailed feedback document was also posted on Bb. Individual feedback was appreciated by students.*
- *Assessment was not affected a lot. Students designed webpages, rose to the challenge.*
- *Students took it seriously. There was a WhatsApp group for immediate response to problems.*

A greater number expressed more guarded satisfaction.

The challenge was assessment, especially the online questions for calculations. Even though they can upload screenshots or scripts; but at the end of the day – we did manage.

However, for fields of study with a strongly practical focus as in some of the Health Sciences, online assessment may be completely unsuitable.

The theory part is okay – we have learned from CAT how to use online assessment for theory, but for prac – it is really, really difficult.

External examination

- *The external examination was fine. They did 30–40-page portfolios that were downloaded and marked online and saved on to Google Drive. This then was sent to the external examiners on Google Drive.*
- *Our module was externally examined through Bb. The moderator was given access to our module through CAT. We found that this process worked extremely well.*

While some others felt the same way, several lecturers focussed on logistical issues not yet overcome.

- *All our final year modules are externally moderated. It was quite a mission to liaise with moderators sending stuff electronically - previously physical documents. Others were not so happy – we are pushing items on emails or Dropbox or Google Drive – territory they are not familiar with.*
- *Moderation is a challenge. Previously we had the moderators look at questions before and after – with responses. It's not been the same way as normal [HoD].*
- *PG reviewers for exams in my experience are taking longer than in the past [HoD].*
- *Exit level modules: Papers were sent to external moderators as before. They found it difficult to write comments electronically. Moderators had to work on online as well. Moderators did well.*

Some staff found their own ways of facilitating external examination. One who was apprehensive about the process of letting moderators into Bb found that Turnitin allowed him to download graded papers as PDF to the moderator.

Challenges

Although assessment has indeed been accomplished there are significant challenges:

- (a) Staff workload. Assessment process are far more time-consuming than before, and in online format, continuous assessment becomes continuous work.
- (b) Uncertainty about the integrity of online assessments.
- (c) Communications with external examiners were difficult under the circumstances of everyone working remotely.
- (d) The situation with regard to first years and large classes needs particular attention. In the case of the latter, for example, a short-term measure such as hiring extra markers may introduce further work and management of the markers.
- (e) As with Pedagogy, the 'chunking' of knowledge runs the risk of impoverishing theory and complex concepts. The atomisation of knowledge is exemplified in the following account.
 - a. *Adaptation took place in assessments because of data limitations. There were short quizzes and Yes/No answers. This took only little time and data. We made sure we had short and medium range questions, but this was different to long essays in the past.*

Final note:

Compared to teaching and learning, assessment has been a far greater challenge for staff. Among several reasons for this, lack of time to prepare stands out. In regard to teaching and learning, many staff had a head start because of their prior experiences in blended learning, and an even greater number had their modules on Bb. Online assessment, although supported by UJ guides, had to be fashioned from scratch. Some uncertainty was inevitable. The following quote is an example of the consequence of lack of time to consolidate understandings of online assessment.

There were mainly two challenges which both related to assessments. In the first place that Faculty adopted a conservative attitude in that it interpreted online assessments to mean electronic assessments. The former type of assessments means these can be set, completed online and marked online, while the latter envisages that assessments will be set offline, placed online for download, then completed offline and then re-uploaded or emailed to the assessors. Where the option of emailing answers was chosen, as happened with the summative assessments (exams), it created massive challenges for lecturers as no support was given to lecturers. Lecturers were expected to print hundreds of submissions and many were missed during the printing process which resulted in many mark-change forms being filled for students who had had written the exam but had no marks.

As an HoD said:

Assessment must be rethought very carefully.

While such rethinking needs to take account of the difficulties and challenges that have emerged, sight should not be lost of an important positive: there has been a strong shift to questions based on more interpretive and applied skills and competences, a point that was noted repeatedly by lecturers in interviews.

2.9 Learnings, insights and innovations

Comments in response to this final interview question generally elaborated on issues discussed earlier. In such cases these comments have been added to others in the relevant sections.

3. A PERSPECTIVE ON THE ROLE OF MANAGEMENT IN FACULTIES: HoDs, VDS AND 'CHAMPIONS'

3.1 HoDs

With some exceptions, HoDs teach as well as manage their departments. Their experiences in both capacities have been represented above under 'Staff experiences and judgements in relation to transitioning to remote teaching and learning'.

This brief subsection focuses specifically on their role as managers. With the transition to online learning their main task was clear to all. In one typical comment:

- *We planned for Armageddon...we had to keep the department together and to keep people positive. Keep staff calm and see what we could do to keep things afloat.*

In this capacity they experienced the lecturers' burden of communications overload and meetings even more acutely. At the intersection of multiple lines of responsibility and accountability, over and above their own teaching, they personally had double reason for stress and uncertainty. One described the difficulty of carrying out a balancing act as follows.

- *It was a balancing act of informing, advising, and guiding – but not overloading.*
- *The risk is everyone [is] on such a different page. I felt like I was lecturing on all the modules in the entire department.*

This was while they were indeed overloaded themselves.

- *There were urgent online meetings at the same time as we had deadlines via emails. While in a meeting you cannot attend to emails and then you are not meeting the deadlines set by faculty.*
- *Emails are ridiculous. There is a hectic admin load.*

Their accounts attribute the fact that they were able to cope to two main factors. First, like lecturers, they felt that University communications and guidelines together with support mechanisms had set them up well to meet the challenges. Second, as one summed it up,

Communication between staff members improved and there was more collaborative work.

It was their own actions that improved the teamwork from which they benefited. One strategy reported to be successful was de-centralisation. Five HoDs explained that

- *We decentralised as much as possible. We had to trust people.*
- *Lecturers took charge and initiative. They were bought in from the first day. A strong management team provided enough oversight.*
- *They planned scenarios and reporting lines prior to lockdown. Admin staff were amazing.*
- *They took over as lockdown started. Staff took the initiative and put in a great team effort.*
- *We relied heavily on support staff. There was good admin support.*

HoDs highlighted two kinds of changes that took place in their customary roles.

An intensification of work in customary roles

Pastoral care is a traditional role. With remote teaching it has become far more intense.

- *Staff need much emotional support and time to ventilate and share feelings.*

- *We had to become mentors or psychology consultants to staff and students*
- *Another role - comforter or assurer*
- *I had to act as psychologist to [help staff] overcome the shock of the situation*

HoDs have had to micromanage as never before.

- *I was much more involved as you would be in face-to-face classes. It was micromanagement. If there was an assessment, I would phone the lecturer. When we went online, I went back and asked each lecturer to give feedback – they all did – on a weekly basis. Monitoring each module. Are all online, are the students there, are you assessing? There was much bigger involvement and it was extremely time consuming.*

New roles

HoD roles have expanded in new ways.

- *My role completely changed. It's not a question of monitoring, but whether the department is able to cope with the learning curve from scratch. Everything was different, tools etc., and also getting the lecturers up to muster: to have the courage to go onto online in the new world.*
- *There was managing who could come back to campus; the sharing of good practices; using Bb with formal and informal communication. Students routed information to many platforms.*
- *Research projects – we had to reconceptualise.*
- *We had to reorganise the role of admin.... within our department of 70 individuals.*
- *Everything was an innovation – everything we did – new ways of drafting exams – access to all sources by students.*

And there was a fundamental shift that will have lasting benefits:

Suddenly the focus changed from what, to the how to teach and learn.

Despite the many challenges and setbacks, HoDs were generally positive about what had been achieved.

The move to online can considered to be very successful. Staff performance was amazing and impressive.

3.2 Vice Deans

Overview note: Many of the experience's VDs cited in interviews refer to departments and sections within their faculties. This section can thus not be understood in any way as being a basis for comparisons across faculties in relation to success in remote teaching.

This section identifies a number of themes across VDs' experiences.

All interviews present a picture of VDs working very closely with academic and support staff. Some in fact teach as well (with beneficial effects, as one noted). The explicit and implicit roles of the VDs run throughout the account of lecturers' and HoDs' experiences as represented above. Their utterances mirror the themes in lecturers' and HoDs' accounts – but in some instances, in a more demanding form. The VDs and HoDs concurred that they were always kept abreast by the Deans and this enabled them to 'keep up with the pace'.

At the most mundane level, VDs had to do more of the kind of 'busy work' they always do in terms of monitoring, meetings, reports, records and the like. Two reported a new need for more

micromanagement. At the same time, one VD while understanding the need for accountability was concerned about

the element of unnecessary micromanagement by senior management.

Report writing picked up immeasurably.

- *There was more with HoDs. On a weekly basis they had to send a report on the online activities – and we were measuring the time spent, kind of assessments given, kinds of issues encountered, and then I had to compile a high-level report for the Dean.*
- *So, I had to regularly get reports on the number of modules on Bb, whether people are using Bb, how they are using Bb, and report back to the Dean and the Dean cascaded it up.*

But at the same time VDs were also central to the heightened teamwork reported by lectures and HoDs.

- *Staff come with ideas to us, and we go with them to them. There's lots of collaborative learning. Staff learned from each other.*
- *[The move to online teaching] was a sudden move. ... the deanery had to coordinate the process. Support staff in faculty admin played key role.... Much of the work was done by staff. I'm very proud of [name of faculty] staff.*
- *Colleagues were encouraged to talk to each other – find solutions. My overall view is to feed colleagues with information and how to adapt to this.*
- *I said, "let's work together" and some really cool things there were two individuals –they really, really – nothing was a problem for them; there was no department they wouldn't help.*

As with lecturers and HoDs:

Time was a big problem: everything takes longer.

As with lecturers and HoDs, the problem of time was compounded by the suddenness of the transition to online learning. This propelled VDs into a particular style of management and leadership. In commenting on the different models of management that exist, one observed that

[The style in this case] was purely operational. It was a case of going online – with no discussion regarding whether it was good idea or bad idea.

The point was simply that VDs did not, in this case, have the option of thoughtfully and carefully weighing up options and making informed decisions.

In this situation VDs were very much in the middle between, on the one hand, their accountability to UJ Deans, management and professions; and on the other, their obligations to staff and students. What lecturers experienced as challenges were dilemmas and tensions that VDs had to cope with.

Quality Concerns

In the accounts of lecturers and HoDs the most serious concerns lay with assessment and in the area of 'practical' work. VDs commented on the practical and moral dimensions of these problems. But they were also close to the legal responsibilities of awarding degrees and the attendant implications for students and society – in addition to the standing of UJ.

VDs confronted concerns about the integrity of assessment and advocated for better and more robust systems if the present circumstances continued. VDs were grappling for answers to questions on

integrity, reliability and validity of the assessments. It is clear that they are taking steps to find the data that will provide pointers. As yet, though, there are no clear answers, and there has not yet been time to process data.

On the learning side, I do not think we have the answer completed – we are doing an analysis now of the results. If we believe there were appropriate assessments, then we would know how much learning took place. Student surveys are not yet all in – we may have done too many surveys. It may be good to aggregate the data.

Despite strategies such as deferring ‘practical’ work or creating simulations (as outlined under section 2.7 above) VDs were the ones who had to confront the hard ‘legalistic’ reality of the prospect of some students not being able to complete the academic year. Accounts of the obstacles being faced were so detailed that it is not possible to quote examples here. At one level, many courses required practical work that could not be done without access to laboratories, specialised equipment, studios, powerful computers, etc.; or to interactions with the lecturer and/or fellow students. Registration requirements for fields of study such as Tourism require WIL; and professions are accountable to bodies such as SANC and HSPCA for ‘practical’ requirements. The description of long negotiations with the DHET in relation to the requirements for teacher education highlights the tensions inherent between balancing safety concerns with the need for students to complete the requirements of the qualification. Vice deans had to confront a situation that was beyond their control and that posed the single greatest threat to students’ plans and dreams as well as to the UJ aim of completing the academic year – in a way that does not jeopardise quality.

Tensions

Vice deans were subject to at least two major tensions.

The first is a local version of the broader national picture in which COVID-19 is exposing and deepening existing levels of inequality. Social justice is a key principle in UJ documentation and in the accounts of lecturers and HoDs, as all strive to achieve it. But to achieve it there has to be way of compensating for the poor home circumstances of many students; and there are corresponding divides across students’ access to devices and connectivity. As seen earlier, UJ has certainly done what it can to provide those in need with devices and data. But even that significant measure cannot counteract systemic inequality. This is another area in which VDs are taking steps to get a better understanding of the nature and extent of students’ difficulties.

Students’ positions relative to advantage/disadvantage were exaggerated [in the sense of being exacerbated by the crisis]. Some were privileged with study and Wi-Fi. There were others in rural areas with no signal etc. It’s a great concern of mine – the already uneven playing fields became even more uneven.

A second tension arises from strong awareness of the University’s main immediate mission to complete the academic year. At the same time, with reference to the troubling situation in relation to ‘practical’ work:

We do have a responsibility to the public and professional – it may happen that some students do not finish the year and may have to repeat. I will make it workable for our students in the best way I can that doesn’t compromise them or their accreditation.

Departments that had previously engaged blended learning; and those that had not

The account of lecturers' experiences was framed by the major difference between those were already engaged in blended approaches, and those for whom it was entirely new.

In managing departments that had not yet engaged blended learning VDs were perforce spending much time ensuring that academics were familiar with the technologies of learning. Some even had to build on the work of CAT by making sure that academics had an understanding of the mechanisms and capabilities of Bb. As one VD reported,

Some modules were online – but Bb was used as a dumping tool rather than as an LMS.

There are VDs who report having to spend time organising workshops for those insufficiently familiar with Bb Collaborate, changing modules from exams to continuous assessment, and so on. This was accompanied by more stringent monitoring and lines of reporting. In these cases, VDs were required to don 'managerialist' mantles.

Those kinds of situations are very different from that of the VD who could report that:

One big plus was the flexible BA [that the faculty had been working on].

Departments that had already had experience in blended learning afforded VDs more scope for engaging the deeper issues around teaching and learning beyond the technologies of making it available. Two excellent studies undertaken by CBE and Humanities³¹ show that some have reached the point of being able to review their experiences.

Managing the outliers

Within an overwhelming picture of almost unbelievable staff commitment and innovation in online teaching, VDs also became aware of the outliers.

I would like to say I have learned some things [about] people and some things [about] processes.... There were committed academics that love teaching and learning and remain committed and took it seriously. And there are those who see it as sheltered employment and do as little as possible at the best of times and became even more dysfunctional [when working from their homes].

In making the same point, another said:

The Bb audit gave me a very good indication – the same culprits – those who were not on board, and those who were flying.

Although dealing with a small number of such cases, VDs had to expend even more energy than in cases where staff simply lacked experience in blended learning. Leadership was required as there were instances where academics were not familiar with the LMS and the knowledge required to teach online. There are some instances where academics did translate their modules to the online mode but without sufficient attention to data constraints and the pedagogical implications of the transition.

³¹ CBE 2020 Survey Results and Faculty of Humanities Report on Online Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Tutoring in the 2nd Quarter, 2020

New insights were positive

This has been a significant learning experience for VDs as it has been for lecturers and HoDs. Examples include:

- *I needed to learn quickly that departments are very different, but also similar in some ways. Despite the confusion and difficulties, this has been a real opportunity to improve teaching and learning in our faculty.*
- *I specialise in technology and I was impressed with the performance of the LMS.... I know the challenges of technology. Especially when students are submitting assignments or lecturers are submitting marks. The system was robust and sturdy. I was surprised.*
- *I think we appreciated how wrong I was about a certain unit – I felt we could do without them, but specifically with CAT and IT, we are blessed. I hear how some [other institutions] have struggled. From my perspective – if you do not invest in these techs and people, when a crisis hits you are not going to bootstrap yourself without them. We would have had a torrid time.*

With reference to an education support unit in the faculty, another VD made a similar point.

When we transitioned, because of having that already in the faculty makes it a little bit easier. Someone understood what it meant; what people needed to do quickly to get up to speed. So, I think the role of that position is immensely beneficial for the faculty in allowing us to catch up with online.

Others commented on new learnings about teamwork and a quality that is becoming an ever-increasing rarity in our world: trust.

Verdict on success

Despite the dilemmas they are working through, VDs conveyed a sense that the objective of remote teaching has been achieved. In the pragmatic judgement of one:

There's nothing more that UJ could have done. I believe UJ responded fairly quickly – I have colleagues elsewhere – and in the professions – we came out quickly.

3.3 The 'champions'

The term 'champion' occurs often in accounts of free-standing projects that have a single aim. Typically, such projects may be donor-funded, or profit driven in commercial undertakings. According to one account, the characteristics of a 'champion' are:

- personal and positional power in the organisation, and willingness to use that power to benefit an initiative
- use of power somewhat non-traditionally and entrepreneurially
- energy and drive in going well beyond expectations and traditional responsibilities.³²

'Champions' have little or no place in the literature on higher education. Nonetheless, it is an epithet that aptly depicts the significant role of three academics who were interviewed on the basis of their contributions in assisting and supporting their colleagues in transitioning to ERT. This is of course not to suggest they were the only ones who played the role of 'champion'. The interview with these three academics did not follow a 'template' format. It was free ranging. It is not possible here to do justice

³² Pinto, Jeffrey & Slevin, D.P. 1989. The project champion: key to implementation success. *Project Management Journal*. 20, pp.15-20.

to the full richness of their accounts. It must also be noted that given the constraints of time, only three were identified for interview purposes.

All three had been very much involved in the promotion of blended learning in their own faculties before COVID-19 burst onto the scene. One, in particular, had been doing this on a more formally structured basis than the others. Because this faculty had set up a task team on online teaching as early as 2106:

When the transition came, it was not such a big shock. The year before we had designed a flexible design template that all modules had to use. Student support, module outcomes, plagiarism, etc. were all set out and customised.

The other two 'champions' had less of a structured start, but all three took on the role as depicted above. This is evident in following examples taken from their accounts.

(a) The assumption of responsibility

'Champions' wasted no time in stepping into the breach and taking on responsibility in a situation in which many of their colleagues were stressed and daunted. In one account:

... the approach I took – and none of this was in anyone's portfolio really – it was very much a question of what are we going to do about this? There was no time to be organised and ask, "Who should be responsible?" My approach was that we needed to go about handling things urgently.

(b) Lines of communication with staff were immediately set up, and subsequent communications were part of a thought-out plan for promoting staff readiness.

In the faculty with an infrastructure in online teaching, staff were contacted and given guidelines from day one. Others, more mindful of the existing readiness across all staff, had to proceed a little more cautiously.

(c) Guidelines and support were provided in the most immediate areas of need.

We hosted virtual workshops on whatever topics I thought would be useful re moving teaching and learning online did two or three a week when we came back from hard lockdown ready to start classes again. These included a series of introductions to Bb, different ways of assessing students, and tolls on Bb for the tracking of students.

(d) Flexibility and adaptability in devising innovative solutions in conditions of uncertainty

- *Several things evolved as we went about it ... We thought Bb would be zero-rated, then it wasn't, and so we had to compress videos. We had to adjust as we went along.*
- *We have a few highly innovative lecturers. In our incubation groups we try new tricks etc. For example, we use Bb Teams with 300 students rather than Collaborate. Teams is not as data heavy. We used the innovation/incubation space for how to reach students using different pedagogies. We wrote high level guidelines for use of WhatsApp and we were very successful using it for large classes.*

(e) Networking within faculties (and some across faculties) with feedback loops to CASD and CAT

There was a high level of collegiality in the sharing of expertise. One faculty relied on, and built on, its already existing ecosystem that involved academic, IDs and CAT.

Through these weekly meetings – [name of academic from another faculty] came and did a session for us. We identified our champions in the Faculty that could be peer champions – not just me and [name of colleague] – although we were there. Faculty champions facilitated the different themed sessions.

(f) The interest of students was strongly emphasised in training sessions

I think everybody was really at the coalface in respect of trying to work out what is best for the student in meeting learning outcomes without compromising the quality of what needed to be done.

Student centredness was carried from module design through to monitoring.

Once we could start tracking, we could present evidence. Every week we tracked twenty modules' access rates [to see if students were accessing content which in turn meant they had sufficient data]. We used data to address fears and allay concerns.

Tutors communicated directly with students and staff in this flow of information.

(g) In dealing with staff, 'champions' were as forceful and directive as the situation allowed

In the case of staff being at a lower stage of readiness ERT:

We communicated with staff regularly and gave pointers. We tried not to overwhelm them and moved step by step.

This went hand in hand with ensuring the continuity of the timetable partly in order to maintain the security that routine can provide in an abnormal situation.

Another 'champion' was confident in adopting a more forceful strategy of quality maintenance by introducing an openness to module development and review. For example:

- *We did a high-level audit on each module and rated it out of ten – it was an open audit – all could see each other's ratings – this ruffled some feathers. We had a departmental discussion and made findings available to all*
- *The lesson learned: We didn't keep any prisoners – nobody could hide if you did not do the work or preparation. We used the argument that it's about what is best for the student. It's not about you and your discipline specific issues.*

This openness in module development and review enabled this 'champion' to adopt a strategy that is well known in teacher training but almost unheard of in higher education: the modelling of good practice.

- *We found staff with a low rating [for the quality of their module]. We picked the best module and made it an exemplar. All staff had access to look at it. We could say: "This is your aim – what it should look like or can look like – look at communications, how personal it is, look at content, is it vibrant?"*

Final note: The crisis that led to new and enhanced roles for 'champions' also created the conditions that made their sterling contributions possible.

Initially there was no time for staff resistance, we had to get out of that mode. This was the new normal for teaching and learning. [Name of colleague] and I go a long way back in terms of trying to champion the online experience in the faculty and for the learners. Prior to lockdown

there was an enormous amount of resistance. [Name of colleague in another faculty] also mentioned that in the open audit, people were stuck in their ways, not ready or willing to move or be creative. I think the lockdown forced every single person to get rid of the resistance because we needed to.

Their names were frequently mentioned by teaching staff in their faculties, often coupled with an adjective such as 'fantastic'. Because, like true 'champions' going well beyond expectations and traditional responsibilities, they did not simply support lecturers with individual issues: they created structured support programmes for teams of staff. In this way, they created productive ecosystems that connected with and fed into the larger UJ ecosystem that connected management, support staff and academics.

4. A TRIANGULATING VIEW FROM STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE AND FACULTY MONITORING

This section focuses on sets of data that can be used to triangulate inferences and conclusions drawn from views expressed by teaching staff and faculty management under sections 2 and 3 above.

4.1 Institutional review of the quality of module design

This subsection of the review follows MECA's brief that

The Division for Academic Planning, Quality Promotion and Academic Staff Development (DAPQPASD) will conduct a review of a sample of Semester 1 modules.³³

Normal practice is that CAT IDs provide technical support to assist academics in achieving the pedagogical intent of the module at the stage of module design before modules are uploaded onto Bb.

Because of the need to adapt modules for ERT, CAT staff reviewed 1500 undergraduate modules to prepare for 'online readiness' using the following markers:

- A structure student can easily follow;
- A learning guide;
- Evidence of activities for week 6 of Semester 1;
- Presence of assignments; and
- Presence of online assessments.³⁴

A sample of 90 modules across all faculties was reviewed for the purposes of this report. This sample is representative of all faculties and is proportionately weighted in favour of CBE whose modules represent 23% of the total sample. It must be noted that while modules were reviewed on Bb, there is evidence indicating that other platforms were used extensively for teaching and learning that fall outside the purview of this report.

The review provides qualitative and quantitative data, each set of which is addressed separately below.

Qualitative responses

The summary that follows is based on the judgements of expert reviewers in respect of their analysis of

- Curriculum design (2 questions)
- Pedagogy (2 questions)
- Assessment (1 question)

Detailed comment on each of these categories was provided on the spreadsheet titled 'XL count'. Comment across the line items is not simply judgmental: it is based on key purposeful educational insights.

³³ MECA, op. cit., p.1.

³⁴ MECA, op. cit., p.1.

Curriculum design

(a) How effectively does the online version of the module address the module's purpose?

There were only few cases of module purpose being obscure (such as not being on Bb). In some cases, purpose was fairly clear; but in most cases, purpose was clear. This was particularly evident in cases where descriptions were 'user friendly'.

(b) Alignment of the content of the module to the learning outcomes

Alignment was generally clear. In cases where it was not, this could be explained in terms of outcomes being more readily specifiable in clear technical terms in some fields of study than in others.

Pedagogy

(a) How readily do the activities provided in the module engage students in active learning of the materials?

There is a clear picture of blended learning principles being utilised. Two points are noteworthy:

- While there certainly is engagement with students on Bb through Collaborate, lecturers used multiple platforms to reach students: there were WhatsApp groups, email communications, and engagements on Skype, Microsoft Teams and Zoom. This again highlights the way in which lecturers have (appropriately) dealt with connectivity constraints in ways that best suit their students. But for present purposes, the full extent of communication in spaces other than Bb is inscrutable. It cannot be reviewed.
- Class size, as lecturers pointed out in describing their experiences, emerges as a significant factor. Present circumstances mean that staff often have a need to communicate with students at an individual level. Large classes are not hospitable to this.

(b) If feedback was provided, comment on its appropriateness

Evidence of feedback is less clear here than in other questions in this module review. Here the picture is divided between a group of modules offering 'good/ extensive' feedback and another providing little or no feedback. A number of cases in the latter group were adjudged to be "not applicable". But this category also included a greater number of comments to the effect that feedback was not on Bb, e.g. "I was not able to see any feedback - perhaps it was done via a different platform."

Again, reviewers could not comment on what was not on the official Bb platform. The extent of feedback may accordingly be greater than it appears.

Assessment

(a) Comment on how effectively the assignments/tasks/activities allow the students to practice or acquire skills, to integrate their learning, or to assess their own understanding as aligned to the module learning outcomes and NQF level?

Here there was a relatively uniform picture of formative assessments aligned to module outcomes.

The principle of continuous assessment is evident. Although there were some instances of lack of evidence, the factor of discipline-specificity or level of study may account for this. Continuous assessment also has little applicability at honours and masters' level.

Quantitative responses

Three items called for straight Yes/No answers. These are represented in tabular form below.

Table 6: Responses to Yes/No questions

| QUESTION | "NO" RESPONSES | "YES" RESPONSES |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| Is there evidence that feedback on learning was provided to the students? | 34% | 66% |
| Is there evidence of the use of forums for teaching and learning or discussion? | 35.3% | 64.7% |
| If there are forums, were they moderated by a lecturer or a tutor? | 34% | 66% |

Cases of all three responses being either "No" or "Yes" across all three questions tended to be clustered in pockets, thus suggesting that there may be disciplinary specific explanations. For example, "No" responses across all three questions are found in:

- Mathematics for Foundation Phase 2 A
- Mathematics for Intermediate Phase 3 A
- Engineering Management
- Mechanics of Machines 4
- Mechanics of Machines 4
- Mine Surveying 1A
- Mine Surveying 1A
- Operations Management
- Actuarial Science 3 A

"Yes" responses across all three categories are found in fields of study that arguably offer more of a home for interactive contention and debate. "Yes" responses across all three questions appear in

- Law, in 7 out of 8 modules
- Humanities, in 8 out of 11 modules.

In short, "No" responses do not necessarily imply a lack of quality. The converse may well be true. They may be based on what is most fitting in particular fields of study.

4.2 Faculty and individual monitoring and review of ERT

Detail of all monitoring and review activity is too extensive to report in detail. It is possible only to report on the most prominent measures that have been taken.

Faculty

Two faculties have produced valuable reports.

- *CBE surfing technodemic waves* (PowerPoint)

The slides in this report provide a high-level view of a survey of CBE students' perceptions of online innovations during lockdown, as well as future expectations. The survey, conducted in the last week of May 2020, attracted 5 862 respondents.

- *Report on Online Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Tutoring in the 2nd Quarter, 2020* (Faculty of Humanities)

This is a comprehensive but succinct report on how the Faculty of Humanities transitioned to and executed online teaching, learning, assessment, and tutoring, following the closure of campuses as part of the lockdown measures to contain the Covid-19 pandemic. While lessons learnt are faculty-specific, some will have broader relevance.

Individual monitoring and review

In interviews, a good number of academics referred to their own personal monitoring of student progress. Presentations at the UJ Teaching and Learning Symposium: Sharing Good Practice – Assessment with Integrity (19 August 2020) organised by DAPQPASD provide an indication of the range of activities that have been undertaken.

- 'Evolution of Assessment in a Large Engineering Design Classroom: From paper-based to fully online' (Dr Muaaz Bhamjee)
- 'Cultivating Integrity with 4IR Accountability' (Dr Frans F Blauw)
- Online invigilation done for Actuarial Science 3 (Mr Soshan Soobramoney)
- Sharing good practice –Assessment with integrity (Dr Tebogo Mashifana)

Collectively these presentations confirm earlier findings in respect of the value of University support, and that provided by CAT specifically; the shift to assessments that call on students to explain, analyse, create, compose, evaluate, to demonstrate mastery of course content; and the need for individual ingenuity in addressing disciplinary specific challenges and larger classes. New insights highlight accountability; strategies for promoting online integrity; and the importance of basing assessment plans on parameters obtained from students in respect of the physical space in which they work, and detail of their data and devices.

The 'Botany 3B Module Assessment Report' (Prof Michelle van der Bank) is a comprehensive but succinct overview of the entire online teaching process from beginning with communication through to evaluation and student feedback. It is the kind of review that could be used as an exemplar in staff training.

4.3 Student evaluations and experiences

Evaluations

CASD carried out an evaluation of 1594 undergraduate modules during this cycle. A total of 52 146 responses were received with an overall response rate of 28.95% for the institution.

Reports were constructed per faculty (for their own development purposes) and for the institution as a whole. The latter, 'UJ 2020 Module and Teaching Evaluations - Semester 1: Term 2' is summarised as follows.

The purpose of this first-semester electronic module and teaching evaluation was to gather honest, anonymous feedback from students regarding their experiences on a variety of aspects of teaching, learning and assessment in the institution. This report provides a summary of the analysed quantitative data for all evaluations within the institution.

The following Likert scale was used in the evaluation forms.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|---|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable (N/A) |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Cannot Rate [Not included in norm/average calculations] |

In interpreting results, high scores (3+) signify student consensus indicating a strength. Low scores (2 or lower) signal a weakness that requires attention.

Table 7. Mandatory Module Evaluation questions: Institution-wide Score Analysis

| Question | Mean |
|--|-------------|
| I understood the changes made to my module when teaching and learning moved to online/remote learning. | 3.28 |
| The learning outcomes for the module are clear. | 3.21 |
| A variety of learning activities were used to help me achieve the module learning outcomes. | 3.18 |
| The assessment tasks were linked to the module outcomes. | 3.32 |
| Self-assessment activities helped me track my learning and progress in the module. | 3.17 |
| A variety of assessment tasks were used in the module (e.g. quizzes, short exercises, paragraphs, essays). | 3.20 |
| I can apply knowledge from this module to real world situations. | 3.26 |
| Overall | 3.23 |

Affirmation of quality can be drawn from three inferences.

First, the overall mean of 3.23 is favourable in its own right.

Second, scores across each criterion here are not comparable with the counterpart evaluation of Semester 2, 2019. That is because questions for the current cycle were adapted to the new ERT context. Nonetheless, the mean for all criteria compares well with the mean for Semester 2, 2019. That figure was 3.28%, a mere .05% higher.

Third, there is consistency across all seven criteria. Institution-wide, all criteria fall above the 3+ threshold indicating strength. Similarly, the mean is equally consistent across faculties.

Table 8: Mandatory Module Evaluation questions: Score Analysis across faculties

| CBE | Education | FADA | FEBE | Health | Humanities | Law |
|------|-----------|-------|-------|--------|------------|------|
| 3.3% | 3.18% | 3.32% | 3.29% | 3.24% | 3.29% | 3.4% |

Within faculties there is also a picture of uniform strength across criteria. With one exception, all faculties bar one have scores of 3+ across every criterion. In the case of the exception, that Faculty has two criteria below 3+. But in the case of both criteria, the scores of 2.98% and 2.93% are so close to the threshold that they barely cause a ripple in the pool of consistent strength.

Final note: There is much affirmation of consistent quality across and within all faculties in the sample of modules reviewed.

Students' experiences

Individual and group interviews with a small sample of students were carried out in rounding off the data collection for this review.

Problems of connectivity and social inequality for the SRC

As with academic staff, experiences and activities were subject to the vagaries of the problem of connectivity and the availability of data – but in an even more acute form. The advantage of interviews was that it allowed students to identify what was important for them personally – in a way that the formal evaluation survey could not. Interviews were a good avenue for students to express their difficulties arising from connectivity challenges. Several did so with a depth of feeling born of frustration and hardship. One terse and possibly extreme statement was:

I had no laptop. I worked on mobile phone. We used NSFAS to buy food at home.

Another explained that

Where I stay there are network problems, and load shedding caused connectivity issues. So, I go to the sports club/park and then climb the chairs and access uLink and then go home after classes. And my friend in KZN goes to the mountain for the same reason.

Connectivity obstacles were a particular source of grievance when assessment was compromised, as a member of the SRC explained.

Sometimes the network would be gone while they are writing a test and lecturers would give them only one attempt – and then if you are still busy you fail -that was one of the complaints I got.

It is very likely that the views of SRC members would be somewhat distorted by the fact students do not generally take their success stories to the SRC, they take their problems. Clearly many of those problems centred on connectivity.

Starting at the very beginning, one SRC member described the suddenness with which everything changed.

The University rushed into this idea of saving this year.... We sent countless proposals to management it could not happen until certain procedures were in place and that happened only after we went to the media with #saynotoelarning, but we still felt there were students still being left out.

When things got under way SRC members were particularly affected by not being on campus. They no longer had access to offices they needed to access so as to be able to help students.

Then it looks like you are not doing your job.

While students had difficulty contacting the relevant parties, they also had a looming problem of a very different nature. Too many other parties could easily contact them.

I switched on my phone and literally got 100 notifications from Bb – it was overwhelming.

Being off campus exacerbated the effects of social inequality, and SRC members were at the forefront of trying to mitigate its implications.

- *We need to understand it is remote learning and it should be equal for everyone.*
- *Remote learning presented/exposed inequality in our society. Moving online has shown we live in an unequal society.*

Students' learning experiences

As a broad generalisation, one student's pithy statement captures the student experience:

Lecturers were helpful. The problem was my connection.

The sample of students was too small to warrant the identification of 'themes' as in the case of lecturers (section 2 above). Nevertheless, issues identified by individual students had a strong resonance with certain 'themes' that emerged from interviews with academics. These are:

(a) Support from the University and from lecturers

As seen under section 2, teaching staff had the benefit of strong support from the University. Students commenting on this were appreciative of UJ support – but some such accounts were also qualified with instances of slippage.³⁵

- *More than anything, our lecturers have been the most supportive. If there are a couple of students who cannot write they move the test date, very accommodating and understanding.*
- *Tutorials happened – they were able to help us... PsyCaD also helped students cope with mental issues. The library provided online access to e-books.*
- *They came to the party with assisting us with what we needed and with resources and if we had complaints or queries – they would assist in navigating the whole thing. Faculties – we experienced a bit of a problem – emails sent out and time taken to respond would be long. Support from finance has not been enough. Response came 5 days to a week later.*
- *Support came quite slowly. There was slow response to emails (4-5 days).*

However, the latter student also added:

Support was enough. WhatsApp groups with tutors to ask questions. When we asked for extension for assignments, lecturers were understanding, support was great. Lecturers were quite accessible. Material was helpful.

Some videos were too long: lecturers shortened it.

In commenting on University support some students did what some lecturers did: they compared UJ with reports from their peers at other universities.

- *Considering that other universities are still in the dark – some are coming back; some students have no laptops, Because of our support, data was amazing – if it hadn't had been for this, I would not be able to communicate with anyone. Greatest support was the data – a priority – it was amazing that the University was able to negotiate with the network providers and provide us with laptops and so on.*
- *In some universities the academic year is dead: UJ did all they can to rescue the year. I get emails from CAT every day.*

The work of the Disability Unit (DU) within PsyCaD was praised. Every student registered with the unit was individually contacted and support provided. In reflecting on the difficulties experienced by

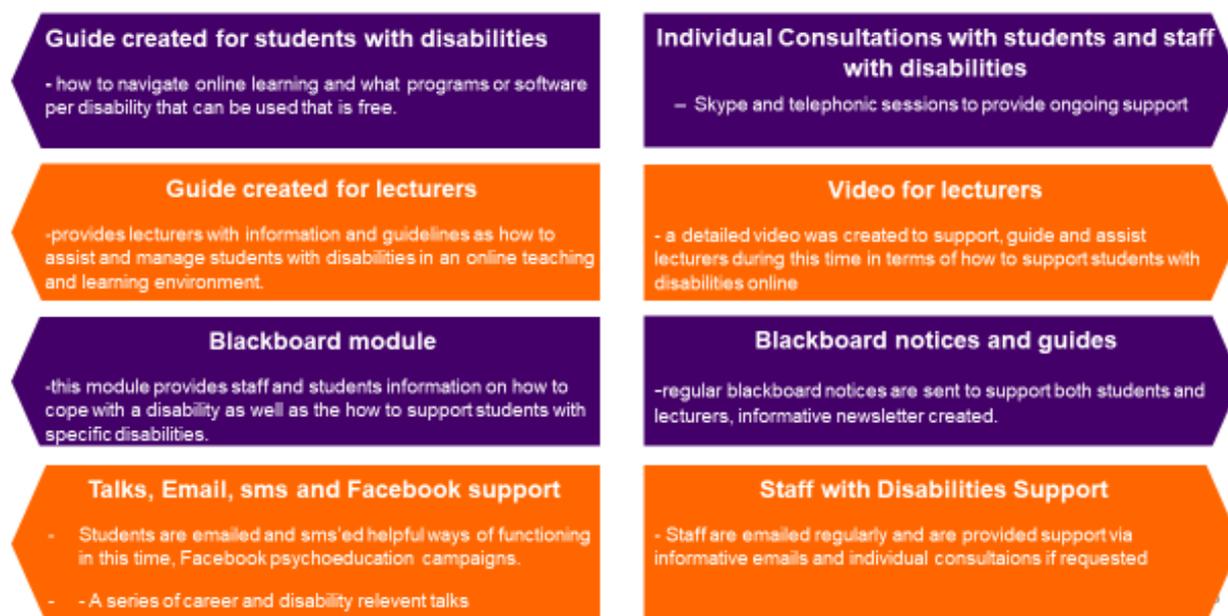
³⁵ Realistically, it can only be expected that the University would be better positioned to be in close contact with staff as opposed to the far more widely dispersed student population.

the students, the Head of the DU spoke of the intense closeness of the team working towards a common goal. Useful materials were developed, and communiques sent to students. The first guide was created for students to assist them with disability software and hardware in this period and in addition a dedicated Bb module that was created to assist both students and staff with disability related matters.

The personal contact was appreciated by students who were beneficiaries.

| Number of sessions in 2019 (March till July) | Number of sessions in 2020 (March till July) |
|--|--|
| 181 | 578 |

Disability Unit feedback-Covid -19



(b) The importance of Tutors was reaffirmed

Students expressed great appreciation of the work of tutors who very clearly have an enhanced role in online teaching. Students in this new learning zone naturally have new uncertainties and questions. Some seem to find it more comfortable to approach tutors rather than academics in respect of personal matters. This was only applicable where tutors were assigned to modules.

(c) Some aspects of online learning are more effective

- *I loved the fact that a lecture would be recorded. I could go back to that session and hear questions even if you were not there, and before an exam or test you go back again and again.*
- *Lecturers do online recordings: can re-listen to understand better.*
- *Video assignments were very interesting.*

(d) Concern about the integrity of assessments and students' marks

Like staff, students were concerned about the integrity of assessment. Indeed, their concerns were based on the kind of 'insider' knowledge to which staff are not privy.

- *What is the UJ doing about academic dishonesty? We have seen cases of this increasing and it is very worrying re our integrity. The same group I am in there are a number of things that are wrongly done by students.*

- *I'm worried about the end of year exam: students who are cheating will benefit if a clever plan is not made.*

(e) Mental well being

This issue, prominent in staff experiences, came into even greater prominence in student interviews. Like tutors, PsyCaD assumes a role of much greater importance in the context of online learning.

- *Some students from poor backgrounds and unconducive environments and GBV wanted to de-register, I was able to refer them to PsyCaD and to remind them of why they started studying – and not to use the pandemic as an excuse. ... Feedback is that PsyCaD has been good and they [the students] are doing very well too!*

PsyCaD was also said to have helped students who were difficulties in being prioritised in the returning to residence.

Even more than staff, students expressed eagerness to be back on campus.

New insights from students

Section 2 carried accounts of staff experimentation with teaching approaches and ingenuity in using devices and strategies most amenable to students' circumstances and data constraints. Students appreciated this. At the same time, some alluded to what seemed to be an unintended downside for students.

Every lecturer has wanted to find workable solutions for everyone. WhatsApp is best and most efficient, but it then has its own disadvantages – students are normalised into being ungovernable in WhatsApp groups [SRC member].

This was followed by another member of the SRC saying that:

Students need to be made aware of how to communicate.

These comments allude to the consequences of official communications between staff and students taking place on non-official platforms on which most interaction is usually personal. In contact teaching, at least lecturers' teaching approaches are conducted on the same basic platform – the University campus. Individual differences in teaching approach are likely to widen and proliferate in online teaching where lecturers are experimenting with both the technology and the pedagogy.

A lecturer was cited earlier in saying that:

[Staff are] bombarded by emails from students – who are anxious and over-enquire

The present report suggests that some of the uncertainties and anxieties experienced by students may well be based on the probability that students are coping with different technologies and new pedagogies in not just one module but *across the range of modules* they are studying. This hypothesis draws some credence from students' comments such as

- *There needs to be a set of uniform rules for students – this would help with how online learning is conducted.*
- *We need to find out how we can standardise the level of support. Each and every faculty should have a standard way to communicate.*
- *Faculty should consider going back to a fixed timetable.*

It appears as if students would welcome greater regularity. Perhaps there is a parallel here with the 'champion' reported under 3.3 above. This champion took an early step in trying to stabilise the continuity of the timetable. The intention was to maintain the sense of security that routine can provide in an abnormal situation.

If a degree of regularity can help promote feelings of personal security, one can only guess what many first-year students must have gone through in this semester.

How to balance stability derived from regularity with the need for experimentation and innovation? This is an area that merits research based on keener insight into student experiences in this regard.

5. OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSION

5.1 A judgement on the success of remote teaching and learning

MECA's brief states that

The purpose of quality assuring the remote teaching and learning is to provide the opportunity for reflection on the University's transition to remote teaching and learning. The purpose of this quality review is thus primarily developmental and is designed to identify the ways in which the University can support, enable and enhance quality.³⁶

The present review has the advantage of being based on extensive and representative data that are both quantitative (eg summary of Bb usage) and qualitative analyses. The review was designed to be comprehensive, and assessed changes to the actual teaching and learning practices, and the reflections on these changes by the academics. The intention of the analysis was to account for the richness of the data; and the conclusions were formulated to guide future development and to benefit from further discussion and debate.

Actions for the further development of ERT must first take account of a key question. How successful has this first cycle of online teaching and learning been?

Against the instrumental objective of keeping the academic year intact, the first cycle of remote teaching and learning has been successful. In light of the radical change and suddenness of the need for its implementation, it can be regarded as a remarkable success. The sophistication of UJ's response far exceeds that of the CHE's depiction of ERT as that of digital mirroring of business-as-usual teaching from a different platform.

Reasons for this conclusion are:

(a) At the most fundamental level, online teaching and learning took place; assessments were carried out; marks were recorded. Staff from Corporate Governance confirm that everything is in place to enable non-graduated students/alumni to obtain academic records or transcript supplements on the digital platform. A virtual graduation has been held. The cycle has been closed. Echoing the views of many, one lecturer said:

This year will go on - we [are] not going to lose this year.

Universities are not often associated with agility however, UJ's transition to remote teaching and learning could be the most radical (and perhaps arguably successful) complete change of mode of delivery in the shortest space of time in South African University history.

The key issue of quality is addressed below in terms of gains and costs.

(b) Staff judgements on effectiveness range from 'fairly' to 'very' successful. These were thoughtful judgements, and seemingly as objective as participants can be. Comparison with other universities is not a helpful measure of success. Nonetheless, many staff – and the small sample of students interviewed - drew comparisons with other institutions they knew. By comparison, they found that UJ looked very good, and several took pride in this.

We kept our reputation – for the University of Johannesburg.

³⁶ 'Quality Assurance of Remote Teaching and Learning'. Approved by MECA. 24 June 2020.

(c) Instrumental aims were achieved with due attention to ethical fitness and the need for social justice. The first of UJ's institutional principles for remote teaching and learning was: No student should be left behind. Staff did not simply follow the rules: human concern is very evident in their interview accounts which could explain why so many have gone the proverbial 'extra mile'. There was also keen awareness of human rights issues and of attempts to redress inequities wherever possible.

5.2 Main reasons for success

This short summary captures the essence of all that has happened in a short space of time and in such a cohesive way.

(a) UJ's robust structures, systems and processes provide the kind of infrastructure within which an ERT plan could be managed. Management was resilient and agile.

(b) UJ's Strategic Objective Two (Excellence in Teaching and Learning) includes KPIs for the number of blended learning modules offered in contact programmes. That, together with the professional interests of lecturers, meant that there was already a useful threshold level of experience and expertise in blended learning across campuses which enabled the sharing of expertise across teaching staff. Collegial relationships and networking combined well with formal training and support offered by CAT, CASD, tutors, assistant lecturers and faculty IDs. Many lecturers testified to the value of CASD (mainly at the pedagogical level) and CAT (mainly in merging the pedagogy with the technology that enabled its transmission). By having earlier created a partnership between faculties and support staff, the ISSI had helped to promote a culture of sharing.

In respect of networking, 'champions' within three faculties in particular created productive ecosystems that connected with and fed into the larger UJ ecosystem that connected management, support staff and academics.

Institutional policy and support thus combined with institutional culture. People across sectors found each other - and lecturers found the students. Staff found the media and means of communication that best suited their students. Unity of purpose was marshalled around the best interests of the students. One summed it up thus: *"We learnt to meet a student where they will be found"*.

(c) Crucially, much to support online operations was already in place in Central Academic Administration. A fully fledged online application and selection process was effective. CAA was *"close to 70% ready for a fully online academic administration"*. What needed to be put in place to enable remote teaching and learning was soon put in place. For example:

- All support had to move online. With the help of CAT, a lot of courses were assessed in Bb environment.
- ITS required substantial changes
- The biggest challenge, changing from one assessment model to another, was accomplished on the system in a way that facilitated all the requirements between the faculties.
- Academic regulations governing entrance and exam requirements were amended.
- Changes were made to allow faculties to apply more flexible rules.

The resilience and agility of systems is evident in the work CAA did with CAT and ICS to get the resources in place for equipping students with data. It was first necessary to contact all students,

“verify cell numbers, get into networks, get their data”. This was accomplished in a week. CAT went through the process of “identifying students who had received devices in year 1, 2 and so on, and then prioritised the students in terms of categories – NSFAS, middle, international, bursary ... etc.”. As a result, 5900 devices were distributed.

(d) There was much communication across hierarchies. A staff member new to one of the support units commented on the “opportunity to collaborate more than ever before because we were not bounded by walls.” Previously, space and hierarchy went together. ‘Bubbles’ of informal staff networks were important in the sharing of expertise. As a formal structure, the CAT Helpdesk acquired a new importance as an operational hub for communication connecting staff, students and administration.

(e) At all levels there was evidence of adaptiveness, resourcefulness and initiative. Some support staff described the changes they had brought to their modes of operation in response to new needs, and new ways were found of doing things more effectively.

(f) If UJ systems had not had the data required for decision making and monitoring, these could soon be generated. Crucial statistics were on hand. In respect of use of Bb, for example, UJ knew that: “As of 2019, approximately 90% of undergraduate modules had a presence on Bb with more than 50% actively using the blended approach”.³⁷

(g) In respect of students, there were many indications from staff that notwithstanding connectivity problems, students were more personally ‘driven’ than before – perhaps in response to realisation of the precariousness of their situation in the COVID-19 crisis. When facing collapse in many spheres of society, it would not be surprising that students seized with determination the only available avenue for salvaging their University and career aspirations.

(h) Underpinning everything was the enormous amount of work put in by all sectors across UJ. This issue is discussed in more detail below.

But no account of success can lose sight of the fact that apart from what had been planned, unintended beneficial consequences – often in the form of surprising anomalies like for example, increased student attendance on Bb sessions – contributed greatly to a successful outcome.

5.3 Gains and Costs

Success in online teaching and learning was a formally planned objective. However, staff experiences highlighted successful outcomes beyond instrumental aims. They also provided clear insights into the costs of success. This sub-section is based on outcomes not written into policy plans. These outcomes were a consequence of the way in which planning was carried out: the **effort and strategies** of those carrying out the plan in particular contexts that have their own enabling and disabling features.

Gains

(a) Staff across all sectors must surely have acquired a greater sense of *agency*. This would come from working more closely across sectors, sharing ideas, and the fact that ‘meetings’ – although more

³⁷ Motala, S. and Menon, K. 2020. In search of the ‘new normal’: Reflections on teaching and learning during Covid-19 in a South African University. *South African Review of Education*, 26 (1).

numerous – had a real sense of purpose in fulfilling needs that participants became aware of.³⁸ Staff experienced a sense of agency in finding ways of meeting students' needs of which they had been previously unaware.

(b) There is a new appreciation of leadership.³⁹ Many staff mentioned that they were proud to be at UJ. Some were almost laudatory in describing the contribution of VCs (Academic and Research), the 'deanery', HoDs – and one or two even missed direct communication from MECA and the VC. Academics across almost all universities refer to their own University as 'the University', as though it were an abstract outside entity; but here there seemed to be realisation on the part of staff members that they are part of it. There were clear indications of greater realisation that they are active agents who can draw on and contribute to the University's systems.

(c) A major factor that can only enhance the quality of teaching is that staff report having 'discovered' their students in new ways. They Zoomed into their homes. In so doing they learnt more about their students as human beings and about the contexts in which they work. Learner centredness is not really possible without a grasp of learners and their contexts. Support staff too have learnt more about the human factor. One noted that "*Random acts of kindness are really heart-warming.*"

(d) Academic staff have learnt more about what *good teaching* is and can be. Some of this came with new experiences within the online mode of delivery and its technology. Some of it came from deeper levels of interaction with students. A great many remarked that because of what they had learnt, teaching will not be the same again. An asset going forward is that there is now greater openness in discussion about what constitutes good module design. Teaching is seen less as an activity that takes place in the private space of one's own classroom.

Online assessment has also been an impulse for assessment based on interpretation and application of knowledge – rather than recall. Although this has had mixed results, it has rather forced a number of staff into doing what they knew they should be doing anyway. Training within faculties has undoubtedly led to advances in this regard. As one 'champion' explained:

A consistent issue was authenticity of assessment. ... We found that there were a lot of staff just using basics of assessment with no thinking out of the box in trying to set up cases studies for example, instead of MCQs etc. We are still trying to grapple with achieving real authentic assessment for all the disciplines.

The review of 90 modules provided an indication of some of the areas in which it is difficult to evaluate quality. Nonetheless, in broad terms, the review was strongly affirming of advances in quality that emerged from the interviews.

(e) There are some indications that module development has also led to a tightening up of module content in relation module purpose.

(f) Higher levels of more open communication have sharpened understanding about roles across hierarchies. As one tutor remarked: "*Tutors are interfacing – they ask pertinent questions to module*

³⁸ But of course, more lines of communication open up frustrations too. When dealing with novel difficulties that needed immediate resolution, support staff could not expect lecturers and management to be able to respond 24/7 (or perhaps they were working on something else at the time).

³⁹ This despite some irritation at the amount of monitoring and the number of reports to be written.

owners about exactly what role tutors play there.” This should contribute to a strengthening of integration across sectors.

(g) Collectively, the above gains have surely strengthened the University as an institution. A strong loyalty factor also emerged from interviews.

These are the factors that strongly suggest that quality has been enhanced in this cycle of online teaching, and that there will be enduring effects. This phase of UJ history, has prompted changes in culture and has enhanced collegiality. In addition, several unexpected advantages have in the course of the review emerged and require further investigation:

- new scholarships of T and L
- staff collaboration patterns
- changing leadership roles
- expanded definitions of excellence
- learning/curricula adapted to integrate rurality, and the lives of students
- future orientation
- prioritizing curriculum innovation
- multi-systems of delivery beyond Bb
- involvement of international teachers in undergraduate courses
- pockets/growth points of innovation to be recognised and rewarded
- T & L to be authentic and responsive
- Expanded resources for learning remotely will have long-term benefits.

Quality Concerns

(a) Connectivity, data and devices

Connectivity constraint was the thread running through all interviews. Students without reliable connectivity simply cannot study; they are students in name and number only. Staff concerns about the possibility that some of their students do not have connectivity can have damaging effects on pedagogy and assessment. Curricula offerings become governed by and narrowed down to perceived limitations of students’ data packages, an impoverishing principle for curriculum design. Greater flexibility in the time students are allowed for tests – making provision for possible unexpected contingencies – creates greater scope for student misconduct.

Staff have found innovative ways of connecting with students by using multiple platforms. An attendant risk arises that communications that should be on the official University Bb platform are in the unofficial private domain.

(b) ‘Practical’ work (the umbrella terms for fieldwork, WIL, clinical and other placements)

With some exceptions, strategies of deferring ‘practical’ work or substituting it with simulations either did not work or had limited success. Licensing requirements of professional bodies are not negotiable,

although there have been some minor limited concessions. VDs are confronted with this problem in its starkest legal terms. Qualifications cannot be awarded while curriculum components carrying credit points are outstanding. Particularly in the early stages, attempts at resolution were bedevilled by the uncertain context. As explained by an HoD:

We didn't and don't even now have a clear consistent approach to handling pracs, partly because - especially in early parts – we didn't have a clear idea of how long things/conditions would last."

(c) Uncertainty about the integrity of assessment

Apart from expressing concerns about the scope online assessment affords students a range of opportunities to access sources and information in ways that would not be possible in invigilated exam rooms, academics offered different views on how to interpret student performance. In the first place, comparison of results with those of previous years is an imperfect measure of quality. There is no standardisation of assessment across successive years. Second, even if student performance has improved, there is no certainty about its cause. Students may have cheated; or online teaching and learning may be better than we think it is; or students may have been carried through by the 'pedagogy of care'; or students may be more personally committed to their studies (and there are strong indications that many are).

We simply do not know. Until we do, we cannot be sure of the comparative value of a UJ module obtained prior to, during, or after lockdown, nor will it be known precisely how to direct quality improvement measures.

However, this is a time of uncertainty and flux. More settled circumstances might allow students to return to campus under certain conditions and for certain purposes – such as tests and exams. In which case concerns about online assessment would not be an issue (even though teaching may have been remote).

(d) Staff fatigue

Staff expressed feelings of anxiety and fragility, but many revealed inner strength. A number of HoDs found this puzzling because some lecturers they would have expected to manage well confirmed their expectations. But the converse was also true. What is certain is that academic and support staff are very tired, if not fatigued. This was evident in the many comments such as: *"I certainly can see a level of fatigue kicking in for both students and staff"*; *"There was an energy level, it was exciting. Can we sustain this?"*

All of the above underpin an HoD's view that: *"What we did is sub optimal – but we couldn't have done better."*

(e) Research and other University work

Academics said enough about their personal research having stalled to justify an inference that research has been a casualty of remote teaching and learning. An HoD's lament was typical of others: *"My research ... I have no time to move ahead in terms of that."*

5.4 Going forward

Discussion about ways of moving forward would best be mindful of the unintended consequences that in this case complemented formal planning.

Interviews can yield insights that are beyond the purview of questionnaire surveys. In the present case, it is notable that those interviewed drew attention to the unintended consequences of planned action and expectations. Outcomes were often unexpected, or even anomalous. The following are examples of beneficial unintended consequences.

- Staff and student interactivity are often posited as the main rationale for contact teaching and the reason why it is widely regarded as the gold standard. One would expect interactivity to be a serious casualty of remote teaching. But in a good number of lecturer accounts this is not so. The converse can be true. In these cases, spatial distance has been accompanied by putting teaching and learning into a more human frame with enhanced interaction between teachers and taught.
- The above point is related to the fact that physical distance was overcome by staff and students working in a new space with new challenges. New-found solidarity through commonality was reported by some staff.

After the first two weeks of the new term were over, I felt that I had almost adjusted to the new way the course was delivered and I believe that students started to feel more comfortable as well. I enjoyed the constant interaction and discussion on the WA group, and I felt that I got to know my students a lot better.

- The fact that teaching now took place in a different space – not the lecturer’s space – seems to have heightened lecturers’ understanding of individual students and their home/ work circumstances. This contrasted with the ritualism of just going to one’s classroom and then just leaving at the end of the lecture. Lecturers now literally Zoomed into students’ spaces.
- One would expect a sudden non-negotiable change in mode of delivery to invoke negativity and resistance on the part of staff, but there seems to have been little of that. There were more reports on the converse effect of the crisis having fostered creativity and innovation.
- Unsurprisingly, high levels of student anxiety were reported. This had positive as well as negative academic effects, in the view of some lecturers. Students were afraid of being left behind, and many went to great lengths to ensure this did not happen. In academic terms, one lecturer said remote teaching was a “*blessing in disguise*”. (On the other hand, students also provided accounts of considerable personal turmoil quite at odds with a blessing.)
- The instrumental aim of continuing the academic year has had developmental benefits that could leave a meaningful legacy. The need to cope with new circumstances encouraged staff to try new approaches and methods.

It was an insightful experience which is going to influence the way I teach in the future as well. There were things that I always wanted to try in the past and I was forced to try these things thanks to the lockdown. I have really learned so much!

- As a beneficial unintended consequence, some VDs also confirmed what many lecturers reported that: *It has created a new enthusiasm for teaching.*

The baseline situation

Assuming that a way can be found of circumscribing workloads, discussion and planning ahead should be mindful of three baseline factors.

- (a) The suddenness of transition to remote teaching and learning had allowed very little time for preparation.

(b) While there was a threshold of experience and expertise in blended learning, there were those who were at a disadvantage because they had had to start the process from scratch. Expertise in online teaching is now more evenly spread across all faculties.

(c) Much has now been put in place, and staff have learnt much. Conditions are in place to do better, certainly at the level of individual lecturer practice. Systemically, support systems have been strengthened, and VDs and HoDs have a sense of new possibilities. As HoDs said:

- *We have all had the opportunity to go through Semester 1. We can use these lessons for Semester 2.*
- *Now that we have the experience behind us, we have expertise and there is more calmness. It also means that staff can focus more on pedagogy, less on the technology.*

This is a solid platform from which to plan ahead. On this basis, UJ is well positioned to face the future levels of lockdown and permutations of rulings that may be presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Higher Education ministry.

Considerations for planning

The first consideration must be for the immediate future. Amongst staff there is some speculation and anxiety. “...the level of uncertainty makes the lecturers more anxious”. Staff expressed the need to know what the future would look like though admitting that the future was uncertain.

Deliberations about improvement measures could be marshalled along two channels of thought.

(a) Areas in which there seems to be a clear linear path from experiences to ‘solutions’

- The most obvious need is to ensure student connectivity in respect of devices and data. UJ has done really well so far under emergency conditions, but for online teaching there self-evidently needs to be certainty that all students have stable connectivity and suitable devices. The first-rate CBE survey found that 95% of its students were connected with the University, 63% by phone and 32% by laptop.⁴⁰ There is however, an important caveat. The need for *all* students to have suitable devices and stable connectivity endures for the duration of emergency remote teaching and learning. The utilisation of mobile technology to support teaching and learning could be explored. Beyond that, it is a matter of UJ policy in regard to mode of delivery. This is touched on below.
- In-depth research is needed into students’ circumstances and experience. CASD evaluations and the CBE survey provide a good start in the identification of pointers towards issues that should be explored. This is an opportunity to deepen the understanding of the knowledge students bring to courses, how such knowledge is exercising knowledge rights of communities and can enrich or be integrated in university courses. The inclusion of knowledge plurality/multiple knowledges in the curriculum will in the long run impact relevance and authenticity of what we do as an institution.
- Training for staff has (very effectively) focused on the technology. There could be great benefit from a training focus on curriculum design and pedagogy. Ways of more purposefully integrating assessment into curriculum design and pedagogy stands out as a key topic. This

⁴⁰ CBE surfing technodemic waves (PowerPoint)

would need to be faculty-specific or even department-specific. One of the major lessons the Faculty of Humanities drew from its excellent study⁴¹ “is that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to online teaching and learning. What works in one Department may not work in another” This ties in well with the suggestion of an ID:

“We need grow learning communities of academic and ID staff.” One could add tutors to the package.

- Academics’ experiences point to the need for particular attention to the situation regarding first years and large classes.

(b) On other issues, it becomes a matter of finding a balance between options, each of which has positives and negatives.

- How to balance immediate and uncertain measures brought about by circumstances, with UJ identity and long-term policy? The review produced many varied opinions on the merits of contact, blended, and online learning. Many staff value and enjoy face-to-face teaching. However, many would include themselves in the clear majority there seems to be in favour of blended learning. Blended learning offers a compromise between offering the pedagogical advantages of online teaching in ways that also align with UJ identity and the strategic objective that promotes blended learning. It would also remain hospitable to those academics whose identities are embedded in contact teaching. Even those who favour online teaching seem to concur that we need to keep in mind that a University is:

a space where people meet – without which the idea of a University would disappear rapidly. Lockdown has shown the importance and value of a meeting space such as the University.

Another quote drew attention to another dimension of the University space:

Be careful not to eliminate all face-to-face. On campus experience is invaluable and magical.

- Academics reported benefits from more lines of communication and (remote) contact with other staff. However, together with an increase in reporting, this also ate into their time. If this becomes the norm, it adds to the burden of workloads.
- Student numbers is a perennial issue. The online mode of delivery is neither cheaper nor easier, and in the medium term at least, it adds to staff workload. From a quality perspective it may even mean that the staff: student ratios would need to be adjusted to manage the larger classes.

In the short term, spilling over into the medium term, there is a matter of finding opportunity and space for the essential ‘practical’ work that has had to be bypassed. As an HoD said with reference to clinical placements:

The University needs to recognise that potentially we will have students at the end of the year where we will identify gaps – we are going to have to plan for next year to plug those gaps.

5.5 Conclusion

This conclusion began with and now moves beyond the MECA brief with an overview of remote teaching within the broader University context.

⁴¹ Report on Online Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Tutoring in the 2nd Quarter, 2020.

Remote teaching and learning were put into place in a context of emergency dictated by circumstances and exigencies. The aim was to allow the academic year to continue with minimal disruption. This aim has been achieved. The first cycle of remote teaching and assessment has been completed. The academic year has continued and can proceed.

Remote teaching and learning have thus achieved its instrumental objective of keeping the academic year intact. However, in so doing, it has achieved more than that. In sophistication it far surpasses the CHE's description of ERT as "a temporary solution mirroring normal activities – the study of text, primarily the textbook, attending (digital) lectures and attending (digital) tutorials."⁴²

But while there have been quality gains, quality concerns also arise. These take the form of student connectivity, 'practical work', assessment and staff fatigue. All of these might have been expected.

An account of unexpected outcomes in the form of beneficial unintended consequences was sketched above. A significant overall unintended consequence is that what started as 'damage control' (in the words of one academic) has led to conditions and new capacities that can in fact enhance the quality of teaching and learning and assessment at the heart of the academic enterprise. Indications that it has already done so await in-depth research for confirmation. But the accounts of academics and a review of modules collectively provide a weight of opinion showing that University systems have been strengthened, and that lecturers have learnt a great deal about both the craft and the science of teaching.

At its source, the success of this cycle of remote teaching can be attributed to cohesive, integrated action on the part of University management and the different divisions and departments. Section 2 of this report highlighted alert leadership; monitoring of the data and staff and student needs; communication with staff and students through communication networks; and supporting academics in what they do best: working within functional institutional frameworks in enacting disciplinary-specific teaching and learning activities. In the middle of bubbles of communication were various levels of support staff who did an amazing job of putting in place all that was needed to merge technologies and arrangements to enable staff and students to carry out their roles. 'Champions' in some faculties went beyond formal hierarchy and the call of duty in assuming positions of leadership at the intersection of academic and support staff, and students. UJ has a well-developed tutor programme which has tutors who are senior students who play a pivotal role in teaching and learning. CASD adapted training in order to support tutors in the transition to online teaching and learning.

Processes followed were thus both top down and bottom up. There was a convergence of formal and informal structures. This blending of institutional culture with decisive management has served UJ well.⁴³ This is a rare feat: "In universities, formal structures and procedures, even if numerous, rarely favour cooperation and coordination."⁴⁴

⁴² CHE, June 2020, op. cit. p.5)

⁴³ Berger and Luckmann (1967: 59) define the concept of 'institution as the "habitualised action of types of actors". It is not simply a bureaucratic edifice. This definition fits UJ well.

⁴⁴ Musselin, C. 2006: Are Universities specific organisations? in Krücken G., Kosmützky A. et Torck M. (eds.): *Towards a Multiversity? Universities between Global Trends and national Traditions*, Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, pp. 63-84. P.12. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/35311021.pdf>

Interviews provided evidence of strengthened bonds of trust across all sectors of the University, including students.

But there is also a very clear picture of successes and gains having been achieved at a cost to staff. Exhaustion was a frequently used word. There has been a cost to their personal and family lives and, it seems, to their research and service commitments too. In turn, this points to the fact that there has been a loss to the University too. A University is more than just about teaching, important though that is. It is very likely that students would agree. For many, social life and friendship are arguably a key part of their University experience. The small sample of interviews with students strongly suggested that many are wearied from extended isolation rather than from the exhaustion that staff have endured.

In the words of one SRC member: ***“I miss my social gatherings at UJ – lecturers, book discussions, I miss conversation and the VC’s book thing, I miss the girls from the residences”***.

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ANNEXURE A. INTERVIEW PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

PROJECT TEAM

| NAME | DESIGNATION |
|------------------------------|---|
| Dr Kirti Menon | Senior Director: Division for Academic Planning, Quality Promotion and Academic Staff Development |
| Ms Gloria Castrillon | Director: Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Promotion |
| Ms Kibbie Naidoo | Head: Centre for Academic Staff Development |
| Prof Gert van der Westhuizen | Retired: ex UJ Faculty of Education |
| Prof Ken Harley | Retired UKZN Faculty of Education |
| Dr Renjeni Joseph | SABPP, ex UJ College of Business and Economics |
| Prof Moyra Keane | Part-time UJ PGS |
| Dr Andre van Zyl | Director: ADC |
| Dr Jameson Goto | Instructional Designer: CAT |
| Mr Mthu Vongo | Coordinator: Quality Promotion: CAPQP |
| Ms Ina Pretorius | Coordinator: Quality Promotion: CAPQP |

INTERACTIONS DURING QA PROJECT TO GAIN INFORMATION

1. Modules reviewed on Bb: 90
2. Teaching and Module evaluations: 52146 responses
3. Interviews

| INTERVIEW GROUP | INTERVIEW SESSIONS | DETAIL | NUMBER OF INTERVIEWEES |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Academic staff | | | |
| Lecturers | 16 sessions | | 113 |
| Heads of Department | 9 sessions | | 90 |
| Vice-deans | 8 sessions | | 8 |
| Assistant Lecturers | 1 session | | 26 |
| Tutors | 5 sessions | | 6 |
| TOTAL | 39 sessions | | 243 |
| Support staff | | | |
| ADS | 2 sessions | ED + 6 | 7 |
| | | Director PsyCaD | 1 |
| Library | 1 session | ED | 1 |
| Central Academic Administration | 2 sessions | Registrar, ED | 2 |
| | | Corporate Governance | 2 |
| International Office | 1 session | ED | 1 |
| CAT | 1 session | Senior Director +2 | 3 |
| | 4 sessions | IDs | 6 |
| | 1 session | Helpdesk staff | 2 |
| TOTAL | 12 sessions | | 25 |
| Students | | | |
| SRC and students | 5 sessions | | 39 |