ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 4, 5 MARCH 2010

GENERAL NEWS

There were a number of responses from Unisa staff commenting in their personal capacities on various issues in the first ODL Communiqués. Many of these responses were appreciative of the communication regarding progress made in the implementation of ODL, while other responses addressed specific issues.

Thank you for *all* the responses. These responses were forwarded to the different task teams to consider. Please feel free to send any comments on the ODL Communiqués to prinsp@unisa.ac.za and I will ensure that the task team responsible for the issue to take cognisance of your response.

PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING *TASK TEAM 1: ADMISSIONS*

This task team, under the leadership of Prof Divya Singh (Deputy Registrar), has been given the exciting brief of charting the way with regard to Admissions criteria for the undergraduate qualifications. This is an especially important mandate as it reflects the students' first real engagement with his or her tertiary studies – "Do I or don't I qualify to register for the qualification of my choice?" The first step in the process towards identifying minimum admission requirements for the Unisa undergraduate qualifications will be to determine whether the admission requirements should be (i) qualification; (ii) School; or (iii) College specific. This is the first focus that the team will address and the team will consolidate its response by 10 March 2010.

[I]   With regard to the option of minimum admission requirements *per qualification* –
   (a) This is the status quo and has proved difficult for students to understand. Students get confused with the different admission requirements and cannot understand when they are informed that they cannot register for a particular qualification in a College because they don't meet the specific admission requirements.
   (b) From an administrative point of view, this model complicates articulation between qualifications in the same College where the admission requirements vary.
   (c) Also from an administrative point of view, there is the potential for error as it is not always possible to remember the specific admission requirements for a qualification and to ensure that the Calendars are correctly reflective of any/all changes. There have been instances where the Calendar information published has proved to be incorrect.

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[II]   With regard to the option of minimum admission requirements for all qualifications offered *in a specific School* –
(a) Given the numbers of qualifications offered per School, the issues raised in [I] above apply.

[III]   With regard to the option of minimum admission requirements for all qualifications offered *in a College* –
(a) There is a reasonable level of standardization by broad discipline that assists students understand the requirements.
(b) It facilitates the administration of the students' admission to study.
(c) Articulation between qualifications in a College is made much simpler.

The above comments were general guidelines which this task team used to start the discussions. Prof Divya Singh however emphasised that there is no reason why a College may not accept a particular position; yet make provision for an exception where necessary.

PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING *TASK TEAM 2: HIGHER CERTIFICATE*

After *ODL Communiqué 3* there were a number of responses from individuals regarding the investigation into the probability and implications of offering a Higher Certificate. Prof Barry van Heerden of the School of Management Accounting shared information regarding a Higher Certificate the School of Accounting at Unisa is offering since 2007. This higher certificate consists of 5 generic modules (English Communication; End-user Computing; Elementary Quantitative Methods; Management (which also covers aspects of AIDS/African Renaissance/Black Empowerment/ Employment equity/Study Skills/Personal planning etc) and Business Administration. The other five modules are School specific and cover the four core disciplines of the School. On exit, students have the right to enroll for the Schools Diploma in Accounting Sciences and those who are successful, may be admitted to the School's Degree programmes.

Prof Anthony Minnaar (Department of Criminology & Security Science) also raised a query regarding how the envisaged Higher Certificate will differ from the previous dispensation where students were awarded different certificates at different levels of a qualification. For example, a student who was studying towards a diploma could after his or her successful completion of the first year request a higher certificate. Often students used these for promotion purposes. With the new HEQF this dispensation has come to an end.

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The new HEQF has done away with the possibility that students could register for a qualification (eg a diploma) and then after the first year's completion, get a Higher Certificate. The new HEQF only rewards students once they have completed their *final* destination. Therefore under the new HEQF students who register for a diploma will no longer be awarded anything (except an academic record) if they do not complete their diploma. The new Higher Certificate as envisaged by the HEQF will be therefore be different from the previous dispensation and fulfill a different function.

The new Higher Certificate is specifically aimed at students who cannot register for a diploma (due to having a NSC: Higher Certificate). They will therefore first have to register for, and successfully complete a Higher Certificate before they will be able to continue any further. The new Higher Certificate will consist of ten modules on HEQF Level 5 which raises the question whether students will be accredited for some of these modules should they continue with studying towards a degree. Mr Vinesh Balmakund (Registration Support) responded as follows:

> On page 15 of the Government Gazette (dated October 2007) the issue of progression in the framework is explained. In a nutshell it does allow for student to be eligible for some credits from the Higher Certificate to Diploma studies where applicable. It in fact allows for the full 120 credits to be credited for the first year of a cognate Diploma (eg. Unisa's current HSACC is the first year of the ND Accounting).
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> The HEQF further indicates that the maximum credits at HEQF level 5 *in a degree* are 96 credits. Unisa will therefore be able to consider crediting a student for modules passed in a Higher Certificate toward degree studies, although not all 120 from the High Certificate. The section on the accumulation of credits for transfer (page 9 of Government Gazette), actually states that only 50% of credits can be considered from completed qualifications.
> Thus the HEQF gazette makes it possible for Senate to confirm that modules passed in a Higher Certificate, can be considered for credit purposes toward degree studies (when the student meets the admission requirements for degree studies).

Task Team 2 is led by Prof Rosemary Moeketsi (Executive Dean: College of Human Sciences).

PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING TASK TEAM 3: ASSESSMENT

A lot of work was done by the ODL Task team on Assessment during 2009 and the 2010 team will be able to make fruitful use of the progress made in 2009. This task team will continue their investigation into alternative assessment practices and provide the STLSC in June 2010 with a number of recommendations. Task Team 3 will meet very soon for the first time in 2010. The team will be convened by Dr Gugu Moche (Mathematical Sciences) who was also the team leader in 2009.

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PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING TASK TEAM 4: STUDENT SUPPORT

Task Team 4 under the leadership of Dr Japie Heydenrych (DSPQA) started to define the notion of "student support' in the specific context of Unisa as ODL institution and a draft definition will be finalised soon and sent out for comments. As part of their scope and mandate, the team must also investigate the use of video-conferencing and satellite broadcasting in support of students. Members of the team will visit the video-conferencing and satellite broadcasting facilities next week to harvest first-hand information regarding the opportunities and challenges to use these facilities even more optimally.

PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING TASK TEAM 5: TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED TEACHING, LEARNING AND STUDENT SUPPORT

The convenor of Task team 4, Mr Deon van der Merwe (ICT), convened the team's first meeting on 1 March and proposed that the team works in four separate working-groups in order to be able to meet their deadlines.

Group 1 will develop a conceptual framework for technology enhanced support to students taking into account myUnisa, pod casting, video, satellite, DVD, etc. This working group will be lead by Mr Deon van der Merwe (ICT).

Group 2 led by Ms Marinkie Madiope of the DCLD will compile a comprehensive guide for all stakeholders regarding the type of technologies/media, the requirements and specifications, support required for implementation/use, support required by students to use, contact persons, processes, etc.

Group 3 will do a baseline and future-oriented assessment of technology/media use in teaching, learning and student support. Dr Leonie Steyn from the DCLD will lead this working group. Dr Japie Heydenrych, who is the convenor of the ODL Task Team: Student Support will be part of this working group to ensure maximum alignment between the two task teams.

Group 4 led by Mr Roland Mauries (Sound, Video and Photography) will be responsible to analyze the reports from several overseas fact finding visits to distance education institutions like the University of Southern Australia (USQ) and Deakin University in Australia and the University of Athabasca in Canada.

This Task Team is the biggest of all the task teams and a group photograph would have been a challenge! The following two pictures were taken during their first meeting.

PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING TASK TEAM 6: STUDENT THROUGHPUT, RETENTION AND SUCCESS

Task Team 6, under the leadership of Prof George Subotzky will meet for the first time next week, 10 March at 14:30. I will give feedback regarding their first meeting in the next communiqué.

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