

Proposal for generic undergraduate admission requirements at UNISA for NSC students

1. Introduction

Being an Open Distance Learning institution with a mandate to be open for **access** to higher education, as well as to ensure **success** for its students, it is imperative for UNISA to develop a set of generic minimum requirements for admission to its undergraduate qualifications, underwriting these two principles.

A careful study of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) and the statutory minimum admission requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree programmes requiring a National Senior Certificate (NSC) reveals an architecture with the following design features:

1. three entry levels to undergraduate qualifications at comprehensive institutions;
2. credit transfer and articulation possibilities;
3. the cascading principle in levels of achievement for NSC recognised subjects in determining admission to the Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree;
4. the same minimum requirement (30%) in the language of learning in all three entry levels.

In addition to the principles of access and success, the task team recommends that the basic design features outlined in 1-3 above of the HEQF and the statutory admissions requirements, should be preserved in the UNISA admissions requirements.

2. A set of requirements for admission to UNISA's undergraduate qualifications

The following principles were agreed on:

- 1) In line with UNISA's character as an open institution, all students who meet the basic statutory requirements will be admitted to UNISA (**access**), although additional requirements may be set (**success**).
- 2) Where students do not meet these additional requirements, alternative pathways or extended programmes may be put in place for students to reach their goals, ensuring both access and potential success. **Alternative pathways** in the context of this document refers to the idea that students that do not meet the additional university-wide requirements, may be given alternative opportunities to gain admission. **Extended programmes** in the context of this document means that the standard prescribed curriculum is followed by students, but that students who do not meet the *additional* university/college/qualification specific admission requirements will be limited to the number of modules they may register for and that they may be exposed to additional learner support in year one of their studies.
- 3) These additional requirements may be of three kinds:
 - a) Institution-wide generic requirements, which will be spelt out below;
 - b) College-specific requirements; and / or
 - c) Programme-specific requirements.
- 4) College- and programme-specific additional requirements
 - a) Must be based on Senate approval per College or per programme;
 - b) Should not create barriers for students, but should take into account UNISA's openness as well as throughput potential;

- c) Should have alternative pathways built in to assist students that do not comply;
- d) Should be clear and easily implementable at the point of registration by DSAR; and
- e) If Colleges cannot adhere to the principles in (1)-(d), solid motivations will be presented to Senate.

The specific university-wide requirements are spelt out per qualification below:

2.1 The Higher Certificate

The statutory minimum admission requirement is a National Senior Certificate (NSC) with a minimum of 30% in the language of learning and teaching of the higher education institution as certified by the Council for General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi).

Programme needs may require appropriate combinations of recognised NSC subjects and levels of achievement and must be approved by Senate.

No additional *institution-wide requirements* are set. Higher Certificates can therefore become the point of access for students who do not meet the additional requirements of the relevant Diplomas and Bachelor's Degrees.

2.2 The Diploma

The statutory minimum admission requirement is a National Senior Certificate (NSC) with a minimum of 30% in the language of learning and teaching of the higher education institution as certified by Umalusi, coupled with an achievement rating of 3 (Moderate Achievement, 40-49%) or better in four recognised NSC 20-credit subjects.

Programme needs may require appropriate combinations of recognised National Senior Certificate subjects and levels of achievement and must be approved by Senate.

2.2.1 Institution-wide additional requirement:

UNISA requires an achievement rating of 4 (50%) or higher in the language of learning and teaching as an additional requirement for admission to all Diplomas offered by UNISA.

2.2.2 Alternative pathways:

2.2.2.1

A student who has an achievement rating between 40 and 49% in the language of learning and teaching is allowed into the Diploma provided that he/she

- Is limited in the number of credits he/she may register for in a semester/year (extended programme); specifically, such students will be limited to 48 credits at NQF level 5 in their first year (2 semesters) of study, of which at least 12 credits must be a language proficiency module, irrespective of whether such a module forms part of the existing approved curriculum for that programme or not (cf. second bullet below); all 48 credits must be passed before a student is allowed to progress to further study.
- Completes at least 12 credits of a College-specific programme at NQF level 5, providing him/her with skills to master the language of learning and teaching. The 12 credits may be offered for NDP or as credits in the Diploma programme.
- A variety of learner determined (but not necessarily provided) by colleges must be implemented.

2.2.2.2

A student who has an achievement rating between 30 and 39% in the language of learning and teaching may be admitted to a College-specific Higher Certificate in order for them to gain the necessary skills. An outline of these College-specific Higher Certificates will be given below.

2.3 The Bachelor's Degree

The statutory minimum admission requirement is a National Senior Certificate (NSC) with a minimum of 30% in the language of learning and teaching of the higher education institution as certified by Umalusi, coupled with an achievement rating of 4 (Adequate Achievement, 50-59%) or better in four subjects chosen from the NSC designated subject list.

2.3.1 Institution-wide additional requirement:

UNISA requires an achievement rating of 4 (50%) or higher in the language of learning and teaching as an additional requirement for admission to all Bachelor's Degrees offered by UNISA.

If justified, additional *College-specific or programme-specific* requirements for admission to a particular Bachelor's Degree may be set once approved by Senate.

2.3.2 Alternative pathways:

2.3.2.1

A student who has an achievement rating between 40 and 49% in the language of learning and teaching is allowed into a Bachelor's Degree provided that he/she

- Is limited in the number of credits he/she may register for in a semester/year (extended programme); specifically, such students will be limited to 48 credits in their first period of study, of which at least 12 credits must be a language proficiency module, irrespective of whether such a module forms part of the existing approved curriculum for that programme or not (cf. second bullet below); all 48 credits must be passed before a student is allowed to progress to further study.
- Completes at least 12 credits of a College-specific programme at NQF level 5, providing him/her with skills to master the language of learning and teaching. The 12 credits may be offered for NDP or as credits in the Degree programme.

- A variety of learner determined (and not necessarily provided) by colleges must be implemented.

2.3.2.2

A student who has an achievement rating between 40 and 49% in the language of learning and teaching may be directed to complete a relevant Diploma as provided for in par 2.2.2.1 above.

2.3.2.3

A student who has an achievement rating between 30 and 39% in the language of learning and teaching are admitted to a College-specific Higher Certificate in order for them to gain the necessary skills. An outline of these College-specific Higher Certificates or Diplomas will be given below.

3. College-specific alternative pathways

To preserve the principles of **access** and **success**, students who do not meet the additional requirements (whether they are the institution-wide, College-specific or programme-specific requirements) should be given an opportunity to enrol in alternative pathways. This does not necessarily mean that the alternative pathway will be in the college or school where the student originally applied. Alternative pathways can consist of a variety of options such as

- i. additional modules for Non-degree purposes or Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) to address specific shortcomings
- ii. specific higher certificates providing access to specific qualifications
- iii. generic higher certificates where applicable and appropriate

One of the purposes of the Higher Certificate is to “provide students with the basic introductory knowledge, cognitive and conceptual tools and practical techniques for further higher

education studies in their chosen field of study.” (HEQF: 19). The proposal here is that Colleges where

- i. there exist a need for a higher certificate as alternative pathway;
- ii. capacity to develop and offer such a certificate;

to design, in addition to the *vocational* Higher Certificates, a specific Higher Certificate that will fulfill the role of providing access to Diploma and Degree students that meet the national requirements but that do not meet the additional requirements. The design and offering of such higher certificates should also be in line with the institutional enrolment planning and management initiatives.

Basic design features of such HCs could be the following:

- 1) Five compulsory NQF level 5, 12-credit modules that focus on the typical literacies required in higher education and in ODL. These could include a language proficiency module (the structure and key competencies may be generic but the application of those competencies could be college/discipline/school specific); a computer literacy module; an introduction into higher education, ODL and the discipline (including academic literacy, study skills, time and life management); numeracy literacy (very basic numeracy skills and interpretation of graphs, pie-charts, etc) and information literacy – how to search for information, how to evaluate the appropriateness of data/information, life skills, etc.
- 2) It is essential, based on current research on the success of such interventions that these skills modules are generic in structure and focus but that they allow students to apply their newly acquired competencies in the area of chosen study.
- 3) Five electives on NQF level 5 which could be any 12-credit modules from the diploma or degree that the student ultimately wishes to enrol for, or any 5 modules that the College wishes to select. For example, in Human Sciences it could be the same as the fundamental modules for the BA.

Students who fulfil the statutory requirements for the diploma or degree (and are just short of the institution-wide requirements), could be transferred to the diploma or degree of their choice as soon as they have passed the *five* compulsory literacy modules.

Students that did not fulfil the statutory requirements for the diploma or degree, have to complete the *full* HC to gain access to the diploma or degree. Once they have attained the HC and thereby access to the diploma or degree, they can transfer the five credits of the College-specific modules in 2) above to the diploma or degree. This is in line with the HEQF: 19 that “Accumulated credits may also be presented for admission into cognate Diploma or Bachelor's degree programmes.”

4. Motivation

- 3.1 The principle of UNISA as open and providing **access** to all students with a relevant NSC to Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree is retained.
- 3.2 The principle that UNISA needs to begin to put measures in place to assure **success** is retained in the additional language requirements for diploma and degree studies. There is evidence that higher-level language proficiency as well as reading and writing skills do play a role in student success, although we recognise that it is by no means the only factor affecting student success.
- 3.3 The **cascading design features** of the national system are retained by differentiating between diploma and degree requirements.
- 3.4 The principle of articulation and credit transfer can be built into the **alternative pathways** or **extended curriculum**.