



## ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 9, 14 APRIL 2010

### AN OVERVIEW OF THIS WEEK'S COMMUNIQUÉ

1. Some personal comments on emerging trends
2. Feedback on the second meeting of **ODL Task Team 1: Admissions**
3. General progress overview.

#### 1 SOME PERSONAL COMMENTS ON EMERGING TRENDS

Now that most task teams are in the process of finalising their proposals for the STLSC meeting of 10 May, it is very interesting how the different task teams all grapple with the different implications of ODL for admissions, our PQM, assessment, student support, how we use technologies and how we strategise to provide students with optimal opportunities to be successful and to graduate.

The teams are faced with a number of challenges of which the outcomes are still in process and less clear. This reminds of what Kahane (2010) writes in his latest book "Power and love. A theory and practice of social change" about the challenges facing organisations and society in general in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Kahane (2010, p.5) distinguishes between three different types of challenges namely dynamically complex, socially complex and generatively complex. He describes these as follows:

- *Dynamically complex* challenges arise when "cause and effect are interdependent and far apart in space and time" necessitating that we see the system as a whole and not to try to address isolated elements.
- *Socially complex* challenges are "when the actors involved have different perspectives and interests". This type of challenges cannot be addressed by "experts or authorities, but only with the engagement of the actors themselves".
- *Generatively complex* challenges are situations in which "the future is fundamentally unfamiliar and undetermined; such challenges cannot successfully be addressed by applying 'best practice' solutions from the past, but only by growing new, 'next practice' solutions" (Kahane 2010, p.5).

A number of the challenges the ODL task teams face reside in the third category – "generatively complex challenges" in which there are a number of "unfamiliar and undetermined" factors which makes it irresponsible to import "best practices" from other ODL contexts.

## 2 PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING ODL TASK TEAM 1: ADMISSIONS

**ODL Task team 1: Admissions** had their second meeting on Friday 9 April. The discussions reflected on the fact that three colleges more or less *accepted the minimum requirements* for admission to **degree studies and diploma studies** prescribed by the Policy. For degree studies:

- i. An NSC; AND
- ii. A minimum achievement rating of 4 (50-59%) in the language of learning and tuition of the University;  
AND
- iii. A Minimum achievement rating of 4 (50-59%) in FOUR subjects chosen from the recognized NSC 20-credit subjects.

For admission to **diploma studies**, the Policy prescribes as minimum admission requirements:

- i. An NSC; AND
- ii. A minimum achievement rating of 3 (40-49%) in the language of learning and tuition of the University;  
AND
- iii. A Minimum achievement rating of 3 (40- 49%) in FOUR subjects chosen from the recognized NSC 20-credit subjects.

**There is a strong mandate for Unisa to seriously consider the following pointers:**

- The impact of the fact that students with school leaving certificates are *not* sufficiently prepared for higher education. *Meeting the minimum admission requirements does not mean that these students are prepared for higher education.*
- Unisa seriously needs to address its module success rate and general throughput. This is however strongly compromised by the current under-preparedness of many students.
- Unisa should consider its admission requirements as part of a broader enrolment management strategy.
- Providing alternative pathways to students affected by the possible raising of the admission requirements may involve restricted registrations in the first two semesters of registration (an extended curriculum), additional support (possible lessons learnt from the Science Foundation Programme) and the offering of a Higher Certificate.

The participants deliberated regarding the implications of raising *both* requirements (ii) and (iii) for registration for degrees and diplomas at Unisa.

After deliberations it was agreed to propose to the colleges to, in general, keep the admission requirements of (ii), namely a minimum achievement rating of **4** in the language of learning and tuition of the University for admission to degree studies *but to require the same admission requirement (a rating of 4 in the language of learning) for diploma registrations. This is the minimum admission requirement.*

- a) Students who want to register for degree or diploma studies, and who have a rating of **5** in the language of learning *will be allowed to register unrestricted.*
- b) Students who want to register for degree or diploma studies, and who has a rating of **4** (the minimum) *will be restricted on the number of modules during the first two semesters of their registration.*
- c) Students, who don't meet the minimum admission requirements for either the diploma or degree studies, may be able to enrol for the envisaged Higher Certificate (provided they meet the admission requirements to the HC) and *will therefore not necessarily be excluded from higher education.*

If *only* the new raised requirements of **Task Team 1: Admissions** are considered, it would seem as if Unisa is no longer "open" and seriously jeopardises its social mandate. On the other hand the question need to be asked whether Unisa (and the students) can afford to be as "open" in the past when Unisa allowed students to register *who stood no reasonable chance of being successful*. **Task Team 1: Admissions** is raising the bar in service of more responsible (and managed) access. **Task Team 2: Higher Certificate** may provide a safety net for students who will really need an alternative pathway. These will be typically the students who do not even qualify for the extended (restricted registrations for the first two semesters) curriculum. But they should not be penalised for having had bad schooling. *Many of these students may have the potential to adapt to higher education if they were given an opportunity to prove themselves.* The envisaged Higher Certificate may be that chance.

### 3 GENERAL PROGRESS OVERVIEW

All the ODL task teams must submit their proposals to the STLSC of 10 May. This means that within the next two weeks the teams will wrap up their ideas and submit proposals with clear recommendations for consideration.

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