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Lifelong Learning and Professional Development in 'Residential Universities'

Implementing the 'White Paper on Post-School Education and Training'

This is a compilation of key documents from the four year action research project between the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) which seeks to implement the transformational agenda of the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (MHET, 2013) which challenges education and training institutions to re-think approaches to teaching and learning. The research findings provide useful insights particularly for residential universities, but may also have application for other education and training institutions.

Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL), UWC
JUNE 2015



CONTENTS

Foreword and Acknowledgements

1. Final Project Report to SAQA, 30 June 2015

2. Research Reports:

2.1 Full Report - *Flexible Learning and Teaching at UWC: Understandings, practices and implications*

2.2 Abbreviated Report – *Flexible Learning and Teaching at UWC: Understandings, practices and implications*

2.3 Report on *Scoping UWC's B Admin Degree: The feasibility of developing the B Admin as a whole flexible degree*

3, Academic Articles

Paper1

Keeping the doors of learning open for adult student-workers within higher education? By Shirley Walters, Sally Witbooi, Mark Abrahams, in ADULT LEARNER JOURNAL, Ireland (Summer/Autumn 2015) (forthcoming)

Abstract

The Freedom Charter of the African National Congress (ANC), the triumphant South African liberation movement, proclaims that 'the doors of learning shall be open' for all. Twenty years since coming to power, the doors of the universities are struggling to stay open for adult student-workers. An action research project into implementation of 'flexible provision' at one historically black university is described in response to these realities. Rich experiences from lives of working librarian student-workers illustrate the complex issues that confront individuals, workplaces and institutions in implementing innovative pedagogies within a university.

Paper 2

Making sense of the transitional maelstroms of part-time students; confronting self, family and work, by Mark Abrahams

Abstract

This paper describes the precarious location of working adults studying at UWC within the South African context. It explores the transitional maelstroms as shared by a sample of part-time Political Studies students; it considers the roles and influence of the contextual domains of work, family and self; and examines the implications for mature students, their workplaces and the university.

The Political Studies Department at UWC is one of three pilot sites for an action research project launched to introduce lifelong learning opportunities that are conceptualised and provided in flexible ways. Here, initial reflections on the challenge to introduce flexible modes of learning and teaching revealed that the attempts may be constrained by prevailing conceptions of the trajectories

of part-time students. Instead of the traditional, linear transition into higher education – normally associated with younger learners – trajectories for mature adult learners are less linear, more complex, and include ‘stop-outs’ and discontinuities within transitions.

Paper 3

Flexible Learning and Teaching: Looking Beyond the Binary of Full-time/Part-time Provision in South African Higher Education, by Barbara Jones and Shirley Walters, in CRITICAL STUDIES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING (CriSTaL), No 1 2015, University of Western Cape

Abstract

This paper engages with literature on flexible learning and teaching in order to explore whether it may be possible, within the South African context, to have flexible learning and teaching provide a third way which goes beyond the current practice of full-time/part-time provision. This binary classification of students is a proxy for day-time/after-hours delivery. The argument is made that effective, flexible learning and teaching requires a fundamental shift in thinking about learning and teaching in higher education that moves us beyond such binaries. The paper proposes that in order to ensure access and success for students, ‘common knowledge’ (Edwards, 2010) will need to be co-constructed which understands flexible learning and teaching in ways which will meet needs of a diversity of students, including working students. It will require ‘resourceful leadership’ (Edwards, 2014) within the university that recognises, enhances and gives purpose to the capability of colleagues at every level of the systems they lead. Also, it will require the building of ‘common knowledge’ between certain sectors of universities and particular workplaces.

Paper 4

Building Common Knowledge: negotiating new pedagogies in Higher Education in South Africa by Shirley Walters, Freda Daniels, and Vernon Weitz, for a book by Professor Anne Edwards (Ed) COLLABORATING ON COMPLEX PROBLEMS: CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF RELATIONAL WORK (forthcoming)

Abstract

Discussions in this chapter are located within an action research-based study which aims at supporting the integration of enhanced pedagogies in one university in South Africa. The study recognises that even full-time funded students in Higher Education face economic pressures which mean that student employment alongside full-time study is approaching the norm. It also recognises that this situation has implications for the pedagogies that are used by university departments, whether students are preparing directly for the professions or undertaking more open-ended courses. In this chapter we focus on how one university initiative to create more responsive pedagogies has been negotiated into the practices of three departments in one university with a strong history of engaging first generation university students who are poor.

In particular, we draw on the idea of common knowledge to explain how new understandings of pedagogy are negotiated into the practices by the core team and are then deployed institutionally. We identify and discuss the political nature of organisational innovation and the building of common knowledge, through discussing an illustrative ‘moment’ from the research project and the

participatory research approach that we adopt. The chapter brings together analytic resources of cultural-historical theory, a participatory research approach and, in particular, ideas of relational expertise, common knowledge and relational agency.

Paper 5

A realist assessment of the implementation of blended learning in a higher education context: the case of the Library and Information Science Department at the University of the Western Cape by Mark Abrahams and Sally Witbooi, submitted to the JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract

Opportunities for further studies by working adults came under threat as the University of the Western Cape stopped the offering of after-hours classes in most of its Faculties. Unqualified and under-qualified librarians were directly affected by this decision. This paper outlines an assessment of the conceptualisation and implementation of an action research project initiated by the Division for Lifelong learning. Using a realist evaluation approach, the assessment focuses on the implementation of strategies aimed at showing how lifelong learning opportunities, conceptualised and provided in flexible ways, could support innovation in learning and teaching in order to enhance access and success to learning by working people in the context of the Library and Information Science Department.

4. Case Studies of the three pilot sites

4.1 Department of Political Studies

4.2 Library and Information Sciences Department

4.3 School of Public Health

Foreword and acknowledgements

This is a compilation of key documents which relate to the nearly four year, productive partnership between the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC). It is a resource and quick reference for use by the leadership of SAQA and UWC as we move to implement the *White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (MHET 2013)*. This project complements the White Paper and it has many useful insights particularly for residential universities, but also for other education and training institutions.

The impetus for the action research project was provided by a central systemic contradiction i.e. access to undergraduate programmes for working students is being limited while the policy intention is to increase access to everyone, including workers and adult learners. The key question for residential universities, therefore, is: within a lifelong learning orientation, is it possible to develop a new paradigm, to move beyond the binaries of part/full time, day/night provision, in order to achieve an inclusive conceptual framework for teaching and learning which serves the diversity of students who inhabit the higher education system? Through a participatory research approach, working with three pilot sites within three faculties, the team has attempted to address this question.

Outcomes of the project include: 5 academic articles; several reports; a Masters Thesis; all of which have been produced in close cooperation with many people. In the interests of openness, we have posted several of these documents onto the dedicated blog: uwcflexiblelearningandteaching.blogspot.com

We wish to express deep appreciation to the leadership of SAQA and acknowledge their financial and advisory support. We wish also to acknowledge all those at UWC, who participated in the SAQA-UWC research project, in particular leadership, staff and students of the 4 research sites – Library and Information Sciences, Political Studies, School of Public Health, and B Admin, each in turn supported by their faculties; the specialist teaching and learning units and staff; the Senate committees; and the various international scholars who provided guidance and solidarity.

The Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) staff, particularly, Mr Vernon Weitz, Ms Barbara Jones, Dr Mark Abrahams, Ms Freda Daniels and Ms Tania Oppel all contributed to the collective effort through their diligence, integrity and humour. The ground has been laid for UWC and SAQA to continue to build on the foundations laid – we know the research outcomes are in good hands!

Professor Emerita Shirley Walters

Research Project Leader

28 July 2015

LIFELONG LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

An action research project into flexible provision at

University of Western Cape (2011-2015)

**Final Research Report Prepared for South African Qualifications Authority
(SAQA) and Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL), UWC by**

Shirley Walters

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June 2015

BACKGROUND

RESEARCH OUTPUTS

This is a multi-faceted, complex, institution-wide action research project. It is concerned with the relationships between the student, the workplace and the university. The underlying rationale for the research is that by understanding more closely what the barriers and affordances are in articulating these relationships, we will be in a better position to ensure professional development and work/learning integration. In this section, we present a brief summary of deliverables and then elaborate particularly on the research papers.

In summary, the following there have been the following deliverables:

- (i) 5 academic articles [Appendices 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5]
- (ii) 1 Masters Thesis
- (iii) Annual targets reached for each pilot site
- (iv) 3 pilot site case study reports and reflections on 'motives within practices' [Appendices 6, 7 and 8]
- (v) Scoping study of B Admin as full degree to be implemented using flexible learning and teaching principles [Appendix 9]
- (vi) 12 page research report on *Flexible Learning and Teaching Provision at UWC* with a 70 page abbreviated report which has been adopted by Senate [Appendices 10 and 11]
- (vii) Seminars: 2 x series of workshops and seminars at UWC with visiting professors; ad hoc seminars; 5 x national seminars for SAQA; 'thinkwell' with national delegates
- (viii) Colloquium to report back on the findings of the research
- (ix) Conference papers delivered in England, Scotland, South Africa, Canada
- (x) Policy briefs for SAQA, and other additional publications
- (xi) Blog for encouraging communication and sharing materials: <http://uwcflexiblelearningandteaching.blogspot.com/>
- (xii) Popular booklet / educational poster

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The Freedom Charter of the African National Congress (ANC), the triumphant South African liberation movement, proclaims that 'the doors of learning shall be open' for all. Twenty years since coming to power, the doors of the universities are struggling to stay open for adult student-workers. An action research project into implementation of 'flexible provision' at one historically black university is described in response to these realities. Rich experiences from lives of working librarian student-workers illustrate the complex issues that confront individuals, workplaces and institutions in implementing innovative pedagogies within a university.

Paper 2

Making sense of the transitional maelstroms of part-time students; confronting self, family and work, by Mark Abrahams in International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 3 No. 21, December 2013

Abstract

This paper argues that it is essential to make sense of working students' transition into the university, more so, there needs to be clarity about the dominant understanding of transition when dealing with working students. The University of the Western Cape (UWC) has since its inception in 1960 offered evening classes to working students. This offering is currently under threat and the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) as engaged in an action research process to investigate teaching and learning opportunities that are conceptualised and provided in flexible ways. Located in one of the three pilot sites of the action research, this paper explores, the transition of a sample of Political Studies students as shared in interviews and other data collected. It considers the roles and influence of the contextual domains of work, family and self and examines the implications for mature students, their workplaces and the university. A sense-making approach is used to highlight discontinuities or gaps experienced by the students and the initial analysis reveals that attempts to support students may be constrained by prevailing conceptions of the trajectories of part-time students. Instead of the tradition linear transition into higher education – normally associated with younger students – trajectories for mature students are less linear, more complex and include stop-outs and discontinuities within transitions.

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In particular, we draw on the idea of common knowledge to explain how new understandings of pedagogy are negotiated into the practices by the core team and are then deployed institutionally. We identify and discuss the political nature of organisational innovation and the building of common knowledge, through discussing an illustrative 'moment' from the research project and the participatory research approach that we adopt. The chapter brings together analytic resources of cultural-historical theory, a participatory research approach and, in particular, ideas of relational expertise, common knowledge and relational agency.

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Student Research

M.Ed Thesis:

Catherine Wynscolley *Time for Studies: Critical Temporalities of the Professional Development of Working Students in South Africa* (Revisions being finalized for graduation in September 2015)

Abstract

Working students registered for a professional degree, who are also employed in public service, have some interesting hurdles to overcome with finding time for studies (from attending classes, and completing assignments to writing exams). Central to this study is using theories of Critical Temporalities around working university students and the time they have for studies, at home or in the workplace. Critical Temporalities is a way of understanding and describing the time, timing and time-related issues and concerns that the students have. Critical Temporalities examines an often over-looked aspect of working

students' experience as they undertake their professional development studies. The overarching theoretical orientation for this thesis is the contradictions of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as applied to the professional development and time for studies. There is also an analysis of the temporal dimensions theory from sociology of time in the workplace as it relates to time for professional degree studies. Two major insights result from the research. Firstly, a confirmation that there are multi-faceted levels of personal disadvantage (that is, a mix of social and cultural issues) that affect the time for studies related choices of these selected students. And secondly, the particular kind of feeling or perception of acceleration in the pace of life that these students experience whilst studying is a notable feature of their university based professional development.

Research Reports

The DLL research team produced a 70 page research report and then an abbreviated 12 page one for submissions through the Senate Committees. This has been adopted by Senate.

DLL (2014) *Flexible learning and teaching at UWC: understandings, practices and implications*, Research Report, UWC.

Executive summary

This study set out to answer the question: *How is flexible learning and teaching understood and practised at University of the Western Cape (UWC), in particular in relation to undergraduate programmes and for working students?* The criteria for flexibility guiding the study related to admissions criteria, curriculum design, delivery (pace, place and mode of learning) and student support services. This report reflects but one part of a four- year action research project conducted in partnership with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

Primary data in this qualitative, exploratory study were obtained from interviewing a sample of thirty staff¹ for their perspectives on the research question and on their own practices. Secondary data were obtained from institutional policy documents, reports, faculty calendars and handbooks. Data analysis was conducted thematically, following four broad themes, associated sub-themes and categories related to the research questions, to the literature and to the framing criteria for flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP). Additional categories emerged from detailed analysis of the data.

Key findings are presented in relation to the four overarching themes: understandings of FLTP; FLTP practices; contextual factors impacting on FLTP; and FLTP principles/guidelines.

¹ Deputy deans, teaching and learning specialists, other key academics, administrators and student support services staff.

The study found that there are positive shifts towards FLTP at UWC, which are supported by teaching and learning policies, structures and ‘champions’ of FLTP, but that the ‘full-time’/‘part-time’ provision system limits understandings of flexibility. Consequently, FLTP practices tend to be responsive towards enhancing learning and teaching within this binary system, with relatively little attention given to creating alternative flexible, diverse learning opportunities.

A proposed immediate next step is that a common inclusive understanding of FLTP, which arises from this study, is discussed, amended if necessary, and adopted by UWC. This common understanding could then mediate a coherent institutional response for expanding FLTP that better accommodates working students. The findings suggest that FLTP needs to be promoted and driven persistently by the top institutional leadership in order to bring about the required shifts and organisational change.

Policy Briefs et cetera

- Request from SAQA [Dr Heidi Bolton] for Prof Walters to comment on Community College Draft Green Paper
- Prof Walters reviewed a recent book on request: Allais, Stephanie, 2014, National Qualifications Frameworks and the neglect of knowledge, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, ISBN 978-94-6209-576-2 (paperback), 274 pages, in JOURNAL OF ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION, UK. (Forthcoming)
- Article, *“Many academics are working in innovative ways, working around their institutional policies and practices, in order to serve students effectively”* by Shirley Walters in the Mail and Guardian, 1 March 2013
- Shirley Walters and Samuel Isaacs (2014) National Qualifications Frameworks Governing Knowledge: Insights from South Africa, in Fenwick T., Mangez E., and Ozga J. (Eds) GOVERNING KNOWLEDGE: COMPARISON, KNOWLEDGE-BASED TECHNOLOGIES AND EXPERTISE IN THE REGULATION OF EDUCATION, Routledge, London and NY
- Policy brief for the Minister of HET concerning this project (forthcoming)

SEMINARS, WORKSHOPS AND INTERNATIONAL LINKS

National workshops were held each year, coordinated by SAQA, to ensure that insights from the research were being disseminated and shared ‘as they happened’. These were well attended by colleagues from around the country. Regular seminars and workshops were also held on campus to ensure communication and collaboration amongst colleagues.

Several seminars were run in collaboration with the Directorate of Teaching and Learning and Faculty of Arts. There were four very influential visits by international colleagues who inspired the project and which gave access to colleagues from a number of universities to new and innovative scholarship:

2011 Professor Maria Slowey, Dublin City University, and Assoc Professor George Openjuru, Makerere University, Uganda, participated in the colloquium on Lifelong Learners in Higher Education (see report); they also participated in several planning meetings helping to shape the forthcoming research.

2013 Professors Tara Fenwick and Richard Edwards of Stirling University, Scotland, visited and led intense workshops and gave campus wide seminars. In conversations with Professors Tara Fenwick and Richard Edwards it was suggested that we should rather work towards `principles of Flexible Provision` rather than immediately working towards policy formulation at institutional level. This led to the `mapping research` across campus that has been a very important contribution.

In the same year, a group from UWC attended the Professions and Professional Learning Conference at University of Stirling, Scotland. Two papers were presented and the conference led to stimulating theoretical ideas and contacts.

2014 Professor Anne Edwards visited UWC twice in this year and led seminars which were well attended. In addition, she led seminars at Rhodes University, UCT and at SAQA. Her influential ideas of building common knowledge, relational expertise and agency, can be seen in our writings and conceptualisation of this research. The project researchers were invited to contribute a chapter to Professor Edwards' forthcoming book.

2015 Professor Miriam Zukas, Executive Dean, Birkbeck College, University of London, spent a week meeting pilot sites, the research team and leading a seminar, plus giving the keynote at the *Colloquium: Making time for studies*.

The successful colloquium was held on 07 May 2015 as a key event in concluding the action research project. 50 people attended from across the university, SAQA, other HEIs. The objectives of the colloquium were:

- ✚ To stimulate discussion and debate on securing a more responsive HE system for working students through the presentation of the draft findings of a three year action research project, which can feed into the closing report and to provide the basis for a popular booklet;
- ✚ To locate the discussion within lifelong learning and the NQF
- ✚ To have the sites, and others at UWC who have been part of the research, participate actively in the dissemination and discussion of the findings

- ✚ To influence the leadership of UWC to take the findings forward
- ✚ To have international and national perspectives on LLL within HE, relating particularly to flexible provision for working adults.

Professor Walters presented a synopsis of the key insights from the research; each of the pilot sites presented the lessons learnt from participating in the project; and rapporteurs, the UWC Directors of Teaching and Learning and CIECT, wrapped up with recommendations for the way forward.

FINAL SYNTHESIS PERSPECTIVES

In September 2011, DLL hosted an international colloquium on Lifelong Learners in Higher Education; a popular booklet was produced from this which was distributed nationally. It points to the paradox of access for working students being closed while the policy rhetoric was to increase access to everyone, including workers and adult learners. This paradox forms the basis of the action research project undertaken through the SAQA/UWC partnership. The key contradiction that it confronted is that there is an imperative to open access and increase success within a philosophy and approach to lifelong learning, but opportunities are closing down; therefore, a key question was: is it possible to develop a new paradigm, to move beyond the binaries of part/full time: day/night provision, in order to achieve an inclusive conceptual framework for teaching and learning which includes the diversity of students?

The participatory research approach, which was adopted, included research investigation, education and action. This was a university wide initiative, led by the Division for Lifelong Learning, which is a small unit working across faculties to deepen the philosophy and approach to lifelong learning. The research had to ensure that it would not be an innovation on the fringes of the institution; therefore, a particular strategy and approach were adopted to ensure approval of the project at the highest level with regular reporting through to Senate. The project set out to work collaboratively with cognate units and with the pilot sites. A part-time project manager, Vernon Weitz, helped to orchestrate complex structures which coordinated various aspects of the project. A number of researchers were involved at different times: Mark Abrahams, Freda Daniels, Barbara Jones, with Shirley Walters as project leader.

This report has described the various research deliverables; therefore, here I wish to highlight some of the key emerging themes/insights that illuminate the research problem which has to do with the relationships between working students, the workplaces, home/community and the university:

- (i) Centrality of 'time' as a concept which needs further theorising / problematising – this was most powerfully introduced through Catherine Wynsculley's thesis, *Time for Studies*. The working students she studied feel very stressed with an experience of the 'acceleration of time'. They are dependent on micro-negotiations with colleagues at work, with family at home, with lecturers at university, to navigate a complex journey each day from work to university – having to take time off, to get to class in the day as after-hours classes have terminated. Catherine describes their move from 'issuing desk' in the library to 'classroom desk' on campus. The clock starts ticking as they leave work till they get back and they only have 10 days study leave a year. They are left in the most impossible situation. No wonder, that so many working librarians have dropped their professional studies as it is just too difficult. This is a very serious consequence of the inability of the university to offer opportunities more flexibly.
- (ii) Flexible learning and teaching has been a central idea – a working definition in furtherance of the university's lifelong learning mission was developed: *Flexible learning and teaching provision is an inclusive, student-centred approach that promotes flexibility in admissions criteria, curriculum design, learning and teaching modes and assessment, with appropriate support systems and services, for the purpose of developing graduate attributes throughout the learning process so that all students can make a positive difference in the world.*
- (iii) Students and educators are 'persons in the world': this concept was introduced by Professor Miriam Zukas, University of London, in order to emphasise that all students and educators have complex lives; who do not 'have time on their hands'. It can be stated with a degree of confidence that the vast majority of students at UWC are involved in paid or unpaid work. They have limited financial support; the majority are women and they carry responsibilities for siblings, parents, and partners. *Time is of the essence*, therefore flexible and blended learning options will make successful study more possible.
- (iv) Administrative understanding of students as young, who can attend classes during the day, and *have time on their hands*. While the binaries of day/night; part/full-time students do not hold in reality, it is the dominant notion that shapes university administrative structures. It is the shifting of this dominant conception to one which acknowledges a **diversity of students** who are 'people in the world', which is a major challenge.
- (v) Organisational change strategies : What would need to happen/change to be able to move to a unitary system of flexible learning and teaching, to serve the diversity of students? We have found that Anne Edwards notion of 'common knowledge' alerts us to the importance of building common understandings, which include recognising the underlying historically shaped motives of behaviour, if institutional change is to be successful. In addition, the importance

of 'resourceful leadership' at institution level, at the top, in the middle and at the bottom is needed to encourage innovation and provide support for those who are 'going the extra mile'.

- (vi) A university is a complex system with 4 interrelated sub-systems: teacher, student, delivery, and administrative – these all need to work together if flexible learning and teaching is to be achieved.
- (vii) Flexible learning and teaching needs collaborative relationships amongst academics, administrators and technical staff – there is a need to maximise use of all resources of colleagues through adopting a common vision to support students with a democratic, collegial, inclusive management style and approach. Student support is critical, a sound infrastructure is essential, and disciplinary and other expertise a sine qua non, therefore administrative, academic and technical staff need to work in unison.
- (viii) Universities and workplaces have different logics: There is no 'one size fits all' approach to university/workplace relationships. Different labour markets e.g. bureaucratically controlled, professionally controlled or free market, allow for different possibilities.
- (ix) Ways forward for UWC: The 'big ideas' to assist the university build on the very useful platform will include a plan to implement a whole under-graduate degree using flexible learning and teaching principles. A scoping of the B Admin has been done as it runs day and after-hours classes and plays a critical role in supporting professional development in local government. The political and financial support for the next phase needs to be secured. The framework for flexible teaching and learning provision for all students needs to be adopted and a high level mission initiative, which is integral to the IOP, is required to shift the institution from the binary system to a unitary one, working together with all four institutional sub-systems. Support for the innovative teaching and learning which is happening in faculties needs additional support; there needs to be an analysis of the blockages to flexibility, in all four sub-systems e.g. regulations pertaining to staff conditions which allow for flexi-time; use of venues; rules for assessment etc. Capacity of the DVC Academic Office, with the reporting structures of Directorate of Teaching and Learning, CIECT and DLL, need to be strengthened to ensure a 'strong engine room' to drive the change processes needed.
Professional development of the university leadership is needed at the centre, the faculties and departments to learn about flexible learning and teaching by attending, for example, the five-week CHECET course.
- (x) Ways forward for working students: Interactions at a high level are needed with workplaces to ensure that study leave policies are in place and that they are being implemented properly; labour law must be checked to assess whether the study leave policies are adequate; employers' support for working students is

needed in the form of bursaries, flexi-time facilities, access to and use of computers for studying; recognition of the new knowledge that is being acquired by encouraging working-students to impart what they are learning at work, amongst others.

FINAL COMMENT ON THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME AS A WHOLE

This has been an intense, complex project that has provided the opportunity to study in-depth what it means to try to bring about change within one institution towards a new flexible learning and teaching paradigm. It has been a collaborative support for several colleagues on campus as they have experimented and grown in understandings of the new pedagogies required. While it has been of particular use to UWC, there are a number of insights which will be useful for other institutions as they look to implement the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013). This project speaks directly to the policy directives within the White Paper (2013) and challenges education and training institutions to rethink their approaches to teaching and learning.

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training emphasises principles of:

‘learner centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition of credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learning support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems.’ (RSA 2013:48)

The White Paper advocates higher education (HE) programmes and modes of provision that are responsive to students’ needs and realities and “which take into account their varying life and work contexts, rather than requiring them to attend daily classes at fixed times and central venues” (RSA 2013: 48). It recognises the important role of educational technologies and encourages the expansion of quality ‘online’ and ‘blended’ learning, open and distance learning programmes.

This project has anticipated the White Paper directives and lays very useful tracks for other institutions, not only in higher education, to travel. It speaks directly to the NQF objectives of improving quality, access and redress. SAQA showed far-sightedness in supporting this project and must be congratulated for the opportunities for scholarly work to be done, alongside systems change. The partnership between UWC and SAQA has been very generative by supporting scholarly debate with some of the best international scholars, who have helped to shape institutional, provincial, and national thinking. The project will, it is

hoped, contribute to the longer term ability of the education and training system to support lifelong learning opportunities for everyone, including workers and adult learners.

Professor Emerita Shirley Walters

University of Western Cape

June 2015

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Flexible learning and teaching at UWC: understandings, practices and implications

Abbreviated Research Report

By: Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL)

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This research is part of a broader action research project supported by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) into “Professional learning and innovation and its implications for higher education provision” under the leadership of Professor Shirley Walters

Contents

Acknowledgements ii

Acronyms and abbreviations..... ii

Executive summary..... iii

Background..... 1

Literature review 2

 Definitions and understandings of flexible learning and teaching 2

 The governance and policy environment..... 2

 Understandings in the local and international literature..... 2

 Technology enhanced learning..... 3

 Pedagogical implications for FLTP..... 3

 FLTP implementation and organisational change 4

Research Methodology 4

 Research methods 5

Findings 6

 (i) Understandings of FLTP 6

 (ii) FLTP practices..... 7

 Flexible pedagogies..... 7

 Student support services..... 9

 (iii) Contextual factors impacting on FLTP 10

 Drivers of FLTP 10

 Enablers of FLTP 10

 Obstacles/Challenges to FLTP..... 11

 Promotion of FLTP at UWC..... 11

 (iv) Towards ‘principles’ or guidelines for FLTP development 11

Conclusion 12

Suggested next steps 13

Bibliography..... 13

Appendix A: Drivers of FLTP at programme level 15

Appendix B: : Obstacles/challenges to FLTP..... 16

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CHE	Council for Higher Education
CHS	Community Health Sciences
CIECT	Centre for Innovative Educational and Communication Technologies
CSSS	Centre for Student Support Services
DLL	Division for Lifelong Learning
ECP	Extended Curriculum Programme
EMS	Economics and Management Sciences
FLTP	Flexible learning and teaching provision
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IOP	Institutional Operating Plan
LMS	Learning Management System
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SOPH	School of Public Health
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UWC	University of the Western Cape

Executive summary

This study set out to answer the question: *How is flexible learning and teaching understood and practised at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), in particular in relation to undergraduate programmes and for 'non-traditional'¹ students?* The criteria for flexibility guiding the study related to admissions criteria, curriculum design, delivery (pace, place and mode of learning) and student support services. This report reflects but one part of a four- year action research project conducted in partnership with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

Primary data in this qualitative, exploratory study were obtained from interviewing a sample of thirty staff² for their perspectives on the research question and on their own practices. Secondary data were obtained from institutional policy documents, reports, faculty calendars and handbooks. Data analysis was conducted thematically, following four broad themes, associated sub-themes and categories related to the research questions, to the literature and to the framing criteria for flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP). Additional categories emerged from detailed analysis of the data.

Key findings are presented in relation to the four overarching themes: understandings of FLTP; FLTP practices; contextual factors impacting on FLTP; and FLTP principles/guidelines. The study found that there are positive shifts towards FLTP at UWC, which are supported by teaching and learning policies, structures and 'champions' of FLTP, but that the 'full-time'/'part-time' provision system limits possibilities for flexibility. Consequently, FLTP practices tend to be responsive towards enhancing learning and teaching within this binary system, but with relatively little attention given to creating flexible alternatives to this system.

A proposed immediate next step is that a common inclusive understanding of FLTP, which arises from this study, is discussed, amended if necessary, and adopted by UWC. This common understanding could then mediate a coherent institutional response for expanding FLTP that better accommodates 'non-traditional' students as the norm for UWC. The findings suggest that FLTP needs to be promoted and driven persistently by the top institutional leadership in order to bring about the required shifts and organisational change towards a more flexible model of learning and teaching provision.

¹ As opposed to the 'traditional' conception of students as being young, financially supported by their families and having no responsibilities other than to their studies, 'non-traditional' students can be older, engaged in some form of paid or unpaid work, and have a multitude of responsibilities outside of their studies.

² Deputy deans, teaching and learning specialists, other key academics, administrators and student support services staff.

Background

UWC has an historic and niche advantage of providing access to higher education for working people, but greatly increased numbers of young ‘full-time’ students entering the system in the last few years has put pressure on all levels of the institution, leading to a growing decline in after-hours undergraduate degree provision in some faculties and departments.

This study forms part of a larger cross-faculty action research project undertaken by the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) in partnership with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The project is exploring flexible alternatives for working people to continue to access professional development and lifelong learning opportunities that take into account their working and personal contexts and their learning needs. In support of this, the DLL has been leading discussions at UWC over the years to interrogate descriptors of students as ‘full-time’/‘part-time’, ‘working’/‘not working’, ‘distance’/‘residential’ and to try to find a new way of thinking about flexible provision. This is in line with the goals of UWC’s Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) 2010-2014 and Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning³ to “*develop a more responsive teaching and learning environment which promotes and enhances flexible learning*”.

The action research project was conceived of as part of an organisational change and development strategy and to try out what ‘flexible provision’ can or should mean in particular sites of practice. A key question for the overall project has been ‘*what conditions need to change in order to give working people access to achieve success through higher education?*’

This report focuses on a smaller research study within the overall project that sought to explore some staff understandings of flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP) at UWC; their reported flexible learning and teaching practices; their perspectives on how to promote and grow successful FLTP at UWC; and the possible implications for organisational change of expanding FLTP. In particular, the study sought to identify practices that are more inclusionary of today’s diverse undergraduate student population, with their varied learning needs and multiple responsibilities outside of the academy, and based on the premise that most students are working, whether paid or unpaid. This premise is supported by Schreiber & Moja (2014)⁴, whose research shows that the majority of *all* students at UWC are ‘non-traditional’ in that they work either in the formal or informal sector; care for the old or the young; are parents and/or surrogate parents to siblings; live and learn with disability or chronic illness; and are returning or interrupting students.

Therefore the research question framing the study was: ***How is flexible learning and teaching understood and practised at UWC, in particular in relation to undergraduate programmes and for ‘non-traditional’ students?***

The study assumed that FLTP is conceptualised differently by different professional/disciplinary groupings across the campus. It therefore aimed to continue the process of building common understandings of FLTP, that respect the different purposes and traditions of disciplines, that commenced in the larger action research project. This process occurred in the interviews and in

³ <http://www.uwc.ac.za/TandL/Pages/Graduate-Attributes.aspx#.VBvhH5SSy1U>

⁴ internal report based on South African Surveys of Student Engagement (SASSE)

report-back discussions with research participants and the Senate Teaching and Learning (T&L) Advisory Committee.

Literature review⁵

Definitions and understandings of flexible learning and teaching

The governance and policy environment

UWC teaching and learning policy and strategies commit to supporting flexible learning and teaching that is responsive to global challenges, to student needs and that promotes educational excellence. These are consistent with commitments from the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to high quality education and training balanced with flexibility “to cater for the wide-ranging circumstances that face learners and the wide-ranging options for delivering what constitutes relevant credits and qualifications” (SAQA 2000: 3). The Council for Higher Education (CHE) has proposed a flexible model for reforming the undergraduate curriculum that should enable a diverse body of students to achieve their potential without compromising the quality of the qualification (CHE 2013).

At a national policy level, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training emphasises the principles of “learner centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision...” (RSA 2013:48). It advocates higher education (HE) programmes and modes of provision that are more responsive to learners’ needs and realities, including those of working adults, “which take into account their varying life and work contexts, rather than requiring them to attend daily classes at fixed times and central venues” (RSA 2013: 48). It recognises the important role of educational technologies and encourages the expansion of quality ‘online’ and ‘blended’ learning, including of open and distance learning programmes.

It is these principles and parameters that framed the investigation into FLTP at UWC, within a higher education discourse of lifelong learning.

Understandings in the local and international literature

Most educationists would agree that flexible learning is about offering choices for when, where, how and at what pace learning occurs.

These concepts relate to the *delivery* of learning and can be unpacked as follows:

- Pace - including accelerated and decelerated programmes and degrees, learning part time, arrangements that allow learners to ‘roll on/roll off’ (‘stop in/stop out’), and systems for recognition of prior learning and for credit accumulation and transfer;
- Place – work-based learning with employer engagement, learning at home, on campus, while travelling or in any other place, often aided by technology which can enable the flexibility of learning across geographical boundaries and at convenient times;
- Mode – especially the use of learning technologies to enhance flexibility and enrich the quality of learning experience, in blended or distance learning and in synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning (Tallantyre 2012: 4; Gordon 2014).

⁵ This is an abbreviation of the fuller literature review to be found in the comprehensive research report.

This study adopts the broad parameters of flexibility in learning and teaching practice suggested by the University of Southern Queensland, Australia (2011), as follows:

- *flexible curriculum design*, including flexible forms of assessment which take into account different learning styles of students;
- *flexible admissions criteria*, including mechanisms such as the recognition of prior learning (RPL);
- *flexible delivery*, including distance, online, on campus a mix of these modes as well as accelerated or decelerated options; **but has added**
- *flexible support systems and services* that cater for *all* students, including those with disabilities.

This signals a coherent higher education responsibility for FLTP that can sustain the educational changes needed to support the lived realities of all students, especially ‘non-traditional’ students, for learning success. FLTP, then, is more than simply re-packaging existing materials: “we are not just selling a new course but a new concept in education” (Outram 2009:9). FLTP requires the development of distinctive, more *holistic* forms of *provision*, as well as institutional change.

Principles of FLTP commonly expressed in the literature are: that it is responsive to a diversity of learners - both working and not working - and learning styles; that it is about access and success in HE; that it is founded on good pedagogy that puts the learner at the centre of learning (Alexander 2010, Edwards 2014); that it develops self-regulated learners and well-rounded, knowledgeable and capable graduates who can make a positive difference in the world (Edwards 2014); and that it requires a coordinated, enabling response.

Finally, although flexibility is regarded as good for students as well as for the university (Alexander 2010), Barnett cautions that it is “not an absolute good” (2014:7) as there may be unintended consequences. FLTP, therefore, needs to be monitored and limits to flexibility need to be recognised.

Technology enhanced learning

Technology plays an essential role in education today, not only for graduates to succeed in the local and global economy, but also in providing flexible learning and teaching opportunities. But this must not lead to digital exclusion, especially of those already marginalised (Barnett 2014: 7).

Technology enhanced learning (TEL) can mitigate the attendance requirements of full-time study, enabling students to learn in their own time and place and at their own pace; it enables easy delivery of materials from lecturers to students and vice versa; and it connects learners to people and resources that can support their educational needs online (Lai and Chong 2007). Technology allows universities to extend their traditional campus-based services to distant (off-campus) and online modes, and has formed the basis of distance education for many years. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS) have been touted as the answer to flexibility in education, enabling thousands of learners access to learning in new ways, but there are pedagogical concerns with some of these approaches and course completion rates tend to be low (Gordon 2014).

Pedagogical implications for FLTP

Pedagogy is key to TEL. McLoughlin and Lee (2010; 28) argue that today’s students “want an active learning experience that is social, participatory and supported by rich media”, through the use of

information communication technology (ICT) tools and emerging technologies such as Web2.0 social networking tools. But the interactive aspects of social media enabled learning increasingly shift the position of the learner, rather than the content or the institution, to the centre of learning, demanding a curriculum design process that is learner centred and collaborative (Green, Woldoko, Foskey & Brooks 2013).

The agency of the learner, or 'learner centredness', is a significant aspect not only of effective TEL, but also of any quality education that engages the learner in the learning process. Zimmerman (2008) argues that central to such engagement is developing 'self-regulating learners': "the degree to which students are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning processes", and without which little learning can occur.

The pedagogic challenges of introducing quality FLTP and TEL are therefore considerable (Salmon 2005) and academics cannot do this in isolation. The present study offers examples of where such challenges have been met without neglecting the knowledge that students need to succeed.

FLTP implementation and organisational change

Green *et al* (2013:26) claim that, because higher education is a complex system consisting of "four inter-dependent sub-systems" - teacher, learner, delivery and administrative sub-systems - flexible approaches to learning and teaching require profound shifts in the way that the *entire university* views, engages with and develops knowledge.

Johnston (1997) suggests that (i) higher education change strategies need to be both top down and bottom up; (ii) every person is a change agent and the best organisations learn from the external environment as well as internally, from their own staff. Overall, Johnston advocates for a change process that can shift pockets of enthusiasm for flexible learning towards a coherent, institutionalised outcome.

Research Methodology

To reiterate, the key research question framing the study was:

How is flexible learning and teaching understood and practised at UWC, in particular in relation to undergraduate programmes and for 'non-traditional' students?

Sub-questions arising from this were:

- *How is FLTP understood at UWC and what might be a commonly acceptable understanding?*
- *How is it implemented, for whom and what are the benefits and constraints (for staff and students)?*
- *What are the drivers/purposes of and obstacles to FLTP at UWC?*
- *What are the ways in which existing, pedagogically sound flexible learning and teaching practices can gain traction and greater impetus across faculties?*
- *What principles of flexible learning and teaching can be derived to strengthen this provision at UWC?*

The following criteria were used as indicators of FLTP, drawn largely from the literature, to inform the data collection:

- Flexible *admissions criteria*, including the recognition of prior learning;
- Flexible *curriculum design*, including assessment, to take into account different learning styles, different abilities and different knowledge backgrounds of students;
- Flexible *delivery relating to the pace, place and mode* of teaching and learning;
- Flexible *support systems and services* that cater for working and non-working students and those with disabilities.

This was an exploratory, qualitative study. FLTP understandings and reported practices at UWC were sampled to identify a set of principles for expanding quality learning and teaching provision. This makes the study both descriptive and interpretive in nature, seeking to develop both a picture of what was found and the underlying meaning (Henning, van Rensburg and Smit 2004).

Research methods

Primary data were obtained from 30 interviewees, from all seven faculties, in 28 semi-structured interviews, as follows⁶:

People interviewed	Deans	Deputy Deans	T&L Specialists	Academics	Student Support Services staff	Admin staff
Number	1	6	3	12	6	2

Table 1: Interview sample

‘Champions’ or ‘pioneers’ of FLTP initiatives were identified for interviewing through purposive and snowball sampling and included three academics from extended curriculum development programmes (ECPs). The student support services interviewees included the Directors of the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS), the Centre for Innovative Educational Communications Technology (CIECT), the central library and the Writing Centre. Although the total sample was small, care was taken to ensure it comprised people in key leadership and management positions as well as practitioners and implementers of FLTP.

Discussions at a research report back meeting on 20 November 2013 and at a FLTP seminar (‘Thinkwell’) on 19 June 2014 also provided data for the study.

Secondary data were obtained from the student handbook Part-time Studies in 2014, from faculty calendars and from recent faculty teaching and learning reports to the Senate T&L Committee. The faculty reports provided valuable background information for framing the interviews.

Discussions with the Senate T&L Advisory Committee to the study informed the design of the project and the analysis and interpretation of the data. The analysis of the data followed four broad themes related to the research questions, to the literature and to the framing criteria for FLTP, namely:

(i) understandings of FLTP	(ii) FLTP practices
(iii) contextual factors impacting on FLTP	(iv) FLTP principles / guidelines

Table 2: The four major analytical themes

⁶Deputy Deans were interviewed together with their faculty T&L specialists where possible. Guiding questions which formed the basis for the interview schedules were adapted according to the positions and contexts of the staff interviewed and are attached as Appendix A.

Findings

(i) Understandings of FLTP

A range of understandings and positions regarding FLTP were encountered across faculties and support services. These are summarised in Table 3 following:

Understandings of FLTP	No. of responses	Illustrative quote
1. Part-time /after-hours provision	19	"it means evening classes"
2. TE learning and teaching	26	"it was more than ten years ago that we already embraced some of these flexible learning modes" (CIECT)
3. Flexible delivery	17	"(We) make the prac. sessions entirely flexible. They can do these when they want and don't even have to be on campus" (Science); and "flexible learning ...doesn't necessarily have to be in the university because it is – I see it as a mix between formal and informal." (T&L specialist)
4. Student support	17	"What is important is how much you require of your student and what you give them in terms of support and enable them. I don't think that you can require a lot and then not enable a lot." (Writing Centre)
5. Learner-centred ⁷ Pedagogy:		
Active, reflective learning; knowledge integration	16	"..." it's not content-based... they also have to connect things to the other subjects they're doing; where would this be useful, why would this be useful?... we give reflective creative questions in the exams ...what is the point of a flexible programme if you aren't making people's minds more flexible?" (ECP, Science)
Developing self-regulated learners	7	"It's about shifting the ownership of the process from me to students ...they take ownership of when they're going to learn, what they're going to learn, how. So I provide a set of materials and my task is to make them think about it. Where they do that and how they do that – there's a whole range of possibilities around that. ... They're in charge of their own learning... the technology is available, it's amazing for allowing that to happen" (Arts)

Table 3: Interviewees' understandings of and approaches to FLTP

More than half the interviewees conceptualised FLTP for working students as being after-hours classes in one form or another, which could include blended learning. TEL was commonly associated with FLTP, although interviewees reported that technology tended to be used by lecturers more as an additional educational resource than as an alternative to contact teaching: "It is not totally catering for a part-time student and the students still have to be in class to get the full benefit".

A large number of interviewees associated FLTP with flexible forms of delivery, including assessment, block teaching and open/distance learning. For example: "(the Masters in Public Health) shifted significantly in 2001 from the block release model to more distance learning because...they needed to make it more flexible... we need to keep people in posts... provide learning while they work" (School of Public Health [SOPH]).

⁷ This is taken to mean the induction of students into formal, disciplinary knowledge in the context of their own knowledge backgrounds, while preparing them to be professionals and to become self-regulated, adaptive learners. It includes being sensitive to students' needs but within realistic limits.

The majority of interviewees saw a strong relationship between FLTP and ‘learner-centred’ pedagogies which engage learners, provide for interactive learning, promote the integration of knowledge and develop independent, self-regulated learners. Formalised support for students was seen as essential to all aspects of FLTP, including in ICT use. A comment was that many people do not consider what they do as FLTP. This underscores the importance of raising awareness of FLTP and its potential at UWC for accommodating ‘non-traditional’ students.

None of the interviewees disagreed in principle with the criteria for flexible provision framing this study. However, it was suggested at the FLTP ‘Thinkwell’ seminar that a common understanding of FLTP for UWC should imply a dynamic, rather than a static approach, and that it should be linked to the broader mission of lifelong learning. The following statement was proposed:

The current, common understanding of FLTP at UWC, in furtherance of UWC’s mission to make lifelong “learning opportunities available” is: Flexible learning and teaching provision is an inclusive, learner-centred approach that promotes flexibility in admissions criteria, curriculum design, learning and teaching modes and assessment, with appropriate support systems and services, for the purpose of developing graduate attributes throughout the learning process so that all students can make a positive difference in the world. This is a dynamic understanding which we anticipate will change over time.

This initial common understanding will need to be tested further with staff across UWC.

(ii) FLTP practices

This analytical category includes pedagogical practices and services that do and could support the academic and personal development of ‘non-traditional’ students. UWC follows a ‘full-time’/‘part-time’ provision model so that there is no alternative system for working undergraduate degree students. A feasibility study for running a whole degree, the B Admin, using a FLTP framework to accommodate *all* students, both ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ has recently been undertaken.

Some of the examples of flexible provision described below can and do accommodate all students, but within the parameters of ‘full-time’/‘part-time’ provision at UWC.

Flexible pedagogies

The broad theme of flexible pedagogies includes the sub-themes of curriculum flexibility and flexible delivery. Examples of practices that are specifically aimed at ‘non-traditional’ students, or could be, are noted.

Curriculum flexibility

Curriculum flexibility includes the structure of the degree programme, alternative forms of assessment, design that takes into account different learning styles and abilities, and the recognition and incorporation of different forms of knowledge.

- Mainstream undergraduate degree programmes follow a modular design with flexibility of module choice in most generic degrees, such as the BCom, the BA, the BEd, the BSc and the LLB. However, the undergraduate professional degree programmes in Dentistry and Community Health were said to have less opportunity for curriculum flexibility because of restrictions imposed by the professional boards and the considerable clinical practice requirements.

- There may be less flexibility in more specialised programmes: the BTh (Arts) allows some module choice on the 'full-time' programme but follows a set curriculum with no flexibility in module choice on the 'part-time', after hours programme.
- The first year curricula of the extended curriculum programmes (ECPs) in the Natural Sciences, in the Community Health Sciences (CHS) and in Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) were described by interviewees as having an integrated logic across the different compulsory modules, to maximise chances of student success. Although there is no flexibility of subject choice, these curricula were reportedly designed to be learner-centred and to encourage interactive learning. For example, the ECP Introduction to Science course has no traditional lectures but resembles a tutorial design; students work through worksheets in groups with tutors acting as facilitators. Team work, collaborative learning and the development of graduate attributes are emphasised and self-reflection is an essential aspect of the course. Individual learning portfolios form a major part of the final assessment. This pedagogical approach could be adapted for 'non-traditional' students.
- Voluntary and/or transdisciplinary courses that are outside of the mainstream, such as HIV and Aids for Educators, and Environmental Sustainability Studies (ESS) are able to have a more flexible curriculum and delivery approach which could suit 'non-traditional' students. The HIV and Aids for Educators course was said to be designed around the specific needs of the participants; it is a voluntary module for B.Ed students, and is taken to local communities on request. The curriculum incorporates interactive and authentic learning activities and assessments. The ESS programme consists of a series of transdisciplinary modules with students participating from the CHS, Education, Arts, EMS and Science faculties. It incorporates activities such as role play; Second Life where students develop avatars for engaging with different concepts; and learning portfolios.

Flexible delivery

Flexible delivery refers to flexibility in pace, place and mode of provision, including open and distance learning and TEL, some examples of which are presented here.

Pace

- No examples of accelerated learning provision were encountered in faculty teaching and learning reports or reported in interviews; the only option for variance in pace of learning on undergraduate degree programmes is through part-time provision. This occurs predominantly in the EMS Faculty, in the form of the BCom and the BAdmin, but other access programmes, advanced diplomas, postgraduate diplomas and certificates are also offered after hours for working people in EMS. The Law Faculty no longer offers an LLB part-time and the Arts Faculty has a limited number of after-hours options that are still available for working students, such as the BTh, the BLIS⁸ (only first-year courses are offered after hours) and Psychology (Psych. 11 and 111 are offered after hours every alternate year).
- Because regular attendance at evening classes is difficult for working students, some academics make an extra effort to accommodate them by holding classes or tutorials on Saturdays (reported in Political Studies, Library and Information Science (LIS) and Accounting).

⁸ Bachelor of Library and Information Sciences

- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is conducted through the Division for Lifelong Learning and enables flexible access to undergraduate study at UWC for 40-50 adult learners each year.

Place and mode

These dimensions of FLTP are strongly interlinked, as some of the following examples show.

- Off-campus fieldwork, which may take the form of work-integrated learning as in LIS, or of community-related project work, occurs in some courses.
- The computer labs in the EMS Faculty are being kept open until 9pm during the week and until 5pm on Saturdays to accommodate working students who need access to computers after hours.
- The B.LIS (Arts) and Political Studies (EMS) are pilot sites for the FLTP Action Research project, experimenting with FLTP for working students and assisted by the CIECT instructional design team.
- Emerging technologies are the most commonly used tools in flexible delivery. Simulations are used in the Natural Sciences, in CHS programmes and in Dentistry to orientate students to laboratory work or clinical work. YouTube is used as a learning resource across most of the faculties. Vodcasts are used for assessment, such as in the Department of Social Work. Third Life and digital storytelling (for assessment) are used in the Department of Environmental and Water Science.
- Discussion forums using mobile technologies are reportedly quite widely used to enhance learning and for continuous assessment. When both 'full-time' and 'part-time' students participate in the same discussion forum learning can be greatly enriched, as described by an accounting lecturer.
- Most students have access to mobile technologies, making them useful communication tools as students may not have internet access at home. However, students need to be consulted as to what works best for them: a class of evening accounting students preferred communicating by email, which they could access at work.
- Replacing contact sessions with TEL is reportedly more common in post-graduate programmes, with some modules available online only. The Masters in Public Health (MPH) is registered as a blended learning programme; students are from Africa and beyond, printed and digital learning material is provided, and SOPH staff provide academic support by email and telephonically.

Student support services

The different student support services all play a vital role in strengthening FLTP and are themselves flexible, catering for working and non-working students.

- The Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS) provides diverse, responsive professional services to support holistic student learning and personal development. They have offices for: students with disabilities; student development; academic support; leadership and social development; and therapeutic services. To cater for individual preferences, services can be accessed by 'dropping-in'; by appointment; off campus; online; telephonically; and some are available after hours. "So it is packaged differently to enable people to hook into whatever works for them."
- The central library has late weekday and weekend opening hours. A range of information literacy training sessions are available, both walk-in and self-booked online. Self-help guides are available at the point of need in the library.

- The Writing Centre provides academic writing support to undergraduate students in one-on-one sessions with peer writing tutors and through writing workshops on request. It provides asynchronous feedback for students who are off campus during weekdays.
- The CIECT offers comprehensive training and support services in computer literacy and educational and emerging technologies, from the basics to more complex operations, for all staff (academic and administrative) and students, during the day and after hours for working students. Individual training is offered to staff at their own workstations. CIECT staff advise academic staff on the pedagogical use of different technologies and on how to infuse these in curriculum design.

(iii) Contextual factors impacting on FLTP

These are described below under the themes 'drivers' and 'enablers' of FLTP; 'obstacles/challenges' to FLTP; and promotion of FLTP.

Drivers of FLTP

Institutional drivers

Institutional systems are in place to drive learning and teaching development through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and associated structures. The T&L Directorate works in collaboration with the Deputy Deans T&L and T&L Specialists in each faculty in order to meet the IOP 2010-2014 T&L objectives, among them FLTP. FLTP is also driven and enabled by the CIECT services and ICT training.

Programme level drivers

The drivers of FLTP at individual programme level, mentioned by academics in interviews, were overwhelmingly aimed at enhancing learning and teaching through engaging students more deeply in the learning process. This suggests that these academics are reflecting seriously on their pedagogy. The other main drivers mentioned were pioneers and champions of FLTP who expose staff to FLTP practices and their educational potential. See Appendix A for more detail of these drivers with examples.

Enablers of FLTP

Institutional enablers

Some of the most important institutional enablers of FLTP, which can be viewed as 'top-down', are listed below.

- UWC's IOP 2010-2014 and its associated strategic and implementation plans for T&L;
- Having a T&L Specialist and a Deputy Dean T&L in every faculty;
- The collaboration of staff from the library, the CIECT, the Writing Centre, DLL and the T&L Directorate in learning and teaching support and development;
- Institutional support for the professional development of academic staff, e.g. for staff to attend Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) short courses, and especially on TEL; T&L induction programmes for new academics; and the development of a postgraduate diploma for T&L in HE;
- The encouragement of T&L scholarship, especially around educational and emerging technologies;
- Regular T&L seminars, colloquia and events which showcase FLTP practices and research;
- Teaching awards and grants which incentivise FLTP.

- As a signatory to the Berlin Declaration for Open Access, UWC research is now in the public domain. This is an important commitment to making learning more flexible and open to all.

Individuals as enablers of FLTP

Individual dispositions and agency are important enablers of FLTP from the ‘bottom up’, especially champions of FLTP who influence the discourses and practices in their faculties and more broadly across UWC.

Obstacles/Challenges to FLTP

The key obstacles and challenges to FLTP, perceived by interviewees, can be categorised as follows: challenges associated with resistance to change at organisational and individual levels; administrative and bureaucratic obstacles; resource challenges; and limitations to FLTP because of professional body requirements. A detailed table of responses is attached as Appendix B. In brief, formal and informal systems and/or practices at departmental, faculty and institutional level can frustrate individual efforts to create more flexible learning opportunities for both working and non-working students. This is compounded by people’s resistance to change.

The health-related undergraduate degrees are quite tightly controlled by the Health Professionals Council (HPC) in order to assure consistent standards and quality, and the reality is that the majority of these can be offered only as ‘full-time’ programmes. However, many examples of creative, flexible approaches to teaching, learning and assessment were reported in these programmes.

The perception that many academics are not exploring the potential of the learning management system, Ikamva, for FLTP could be partly explained by tensions between the time it takes to become familiar with different educational technologies and to rethink and redesign a course, and the immediate and often overwhelming priorities of teaching and research. A related concern was that, although mobile technologies and email are easy, convenient tools for students and staff to communicate with each other, especially for working students, these can be intrusive and demanding of lecturers’ time unless firmly managed. Counter arguments were that it was worth the initial investment in time and effort, as not only do these pedagogies make for more rewarding teaching and learning, but also can save time and work in the long term.

Promotion of FLTP at UWC

Interviewees were asked what could be done to increase the uptake of FLTP at UWC. Key responses were:

- Promote FLTP more (from the bottom up) by showcasing successful examples within faculties.
- More grants for T&L innovation can incentivise experimenting with FLTP and should be actively promoted.
- FLTP needs to be embraced and championed by UWC leadership in all spheres of its operations (from the top down), at departmental, faculty and executive levels, to bring about a change in institutional culture from ‘full-time’/‘part-time’ provision to more flexible, inclusive learning and teaching approaches for a diversity of students.

(iv) Towards ‘principles’ or guidelines for FLTP development

The following principles/guidelines that would need to inform institutional policy on FLTP were distilled from the interview data, from a report-back meeting, a ‘Thinkwell’ seminar and from the

literature. Although there is some overlap with UWC's present T&L policies, the challenge is to embed these policies more widely and deeply within the institution. The findings suggest that the following actions are necessary:

- Agreement on a broad and inclusive university-wide understanding of quality FLTP;
- The promotion of FLTP across all faculties, for the entire student body, driven by the institutional leadership;
- Putting the learners at the centre of provision, and within a framework of 'ethics of care', starting with knowing who one's learners are;
- Ensuring pedagogically oriented, quality FLTP which respects the knowledge demands of different disciplines and domains;
- Ensuring a responsive pedagogy that respects and builds on alternative forms of knowledge, including the knowledge embedded in learners' life experiences;
- The nurturing of a desire, and the development of attributes for lifelong learning through FLTP;
- Ensuring an inclusive FLTP, providing a range of opportunities and choices for learning for diverse learning needs, and of the pace, place and mode of delivery, both on and off campus (possibly guided by *universal design for learning* principles);
- Promoting greater use of alternative, flexible approaches to assessment within FLTP;
- Guaranteeing adequate resources underpinned by reliable ICT;
- A coherent and enabling institutional system where the administrative, teaching, learning and delivery sub-systems are aligned and support each other.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems that there are positive moves towards more flexible learning and teaching provision at UWC. The Directorate for T&L is playing a vital role in driving, encouraging and monitoring these changes and in developing the scholarship of FLTP, towards fulfilling the objectives of the IOP 2010-2014. However, the duality of the 'full-time'/'part-time' provision system restricts rather than facilitates these shifts. In addition, the findings indicate⁹ that FLTP efforts come largely from self-motivated individuals, rather than from a coherent, centrally-led vision by top institutional leadership.

One of the biggest challenges seems to be to change the dominant conception of teaching/learning as largely face-to-face and lecture based and for university staff to accept that the 'non-traditional' student is the norm, not the exception. It is vital that undergraduate provision affords appropriate flexible learning opportunities that cater for this norm.

That challenge connects with another; the reportedly high workload of academic and administrative staff, which leaves them little time or energy to explore more flexible ways of responding to a diverse student body. Yet another is perceptions that research outputs are valued above teaching, and this

⁹ Despite the relatively small sample from which the primary data were drawn, it was purposively selected to comprise those in key positions and academics engaged in and pioneering FLTP. Therefore, although the data may be representative of the views of these key people, the findings should be said to be indicative only.

constrains innovation and experimentation in teaching . Any drive to assert the relevance of FLTP to student participation and engagement would need to take all these issues into account.

FLTP strategies appear to be pedagogically informed and academics are trying to explore more flexible learning and teaching modes through TEL. Some FLTP activities are directed at working students in particular, reflecting an awareness of their learning needs, but most are aimed at enhancing and facilitating learning and teaching in general and these could be implemented more widely. There are several forums for showcasing innovation in T&L, to encourage, support and raise awareness of quality FLTP initiatives.

The work of the CIECT team ensures that the ICT capacity of all students and of UWC staff at all levels is continuing to grow and be supported and, most importantly, that TEL is pedagogically informed. The student support services are working hard to respond to the needs of all students, providing a range of different, flexible services.

Finally, there are challenges for the administrative system that will need to be addressed if FLTP is to thrive. Not only do all four sub-systems that make up the complex HE system need to be aligned and support each other, but also, for FLTP to grow and to be sustainable, the entire university needs to shift in the way it views, engages with and develops a common understanding of and commitment to a provision which offers a wider range of opportunities for student participation in its programmes.

What follows are possible next steps to ensure flexible approaches to learning and teaching become the norm at UWC, rather than the exception, to meet the needs of its diverse student body.

Suggested next steps

- Set up a central steering committee for implementing FLTP comprising senior leadership and management and that has university-wide representation.
- Ensure university policies and systems align with the FLTP vision.
- Embark on financial modelling that can sustain the envisioned FLTP goals, looking at the costs of resources needed compared to the long-term success benefits.
- Develop a project plan for staged FLTP implementation.

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Appendix A: Drivers of FLTP at programme level

Drivers of FLTP practices	No. of responses	Examples of FLTP practices
To involve students more actively in the learning process	17	Discussion forums were used by 2 academics interviewed, and reported to be quite widely used in 3 faculties
To address authentic learning /integrated competencies/ graduate attributes	10	Science ECP students develop learning portfolios based on UWC's 6 graduate attributes, decide for themselves what to include and justify how their evidence supports the course outcomes
Champions/being exposed to FLTP practices	10	"I like to try new things and maybe improve our department in terms of technology, make it easier. And because of that a few lecturers and one or two of the other technical officers...they're also trying to use Ikamva and e-teaching and stuff in their labs and lectures" (Science)
TE T&L to accommodate/assist working students & PWDs	8	"...whatever you give has actually to exceed what you would give face to face, also particularly because distance learning carries that stigma of second best in many countries..." (SOPH)
To address challenges of large class sizes	4	"There are..up to 700 and even 1 000 to a class... their voices were drowning in the crowd... how do you get the students' voice out again? I think that is where I engaged with the technology... to give me feedback, or ask questions or pose questions." (Accounting)
Time pressures/ work volume for lecturers	2	Using Mixit/mobile technologies to set up virtual consultations with students at night as there is not enough time to consult during the day
To remedy high failure rates in specific courses	2	'Champions' in the Law Faculty used portfolios, MCQs, podcasts and online tutorials as additional T&L resources for these courses and pass rates have increased significantly.

Appendix B: : Obstacles/challenges to FLTP

Obstacles/Challenges to FLTP	No. of responses	Illustrative quotes
Change related challenges		
Resistance to change by academics and/or administrative staff	14	"...some of the teaching practices... are inscribed by the hierarchy in that department. So you've got these poor, innovative people sitting at the bottom who want to do this, that and the other, but they can't; there's no institutional space for it."; and "people don't want to change or do things differently."
Change needs to be driven continually	8	"In the absence of a T&L specialist to drive these initiatives, people tend to slump back into old ways of doing things because it is easier"
Ikamva used more as a repository for T&L resources than for FLTP	8	"People use Ikamva to post lecture notes, readings etc. ...but unless there is actual 2-way communication taking place, which is not the way most people use it, then it is not a LMS and should really be called a content management system"
Perception that research is valued above T&L	4	"People feel that they put a lot of labour into teaching and it is not acknowledged. So it is the general sort of teaching /research divide and what you get kudos for"
Administrative challenges		
Bureaucratic requirements kill creativity in T&L	4	"they come to you saying, 'this is the policy, and this is what you must do'... that it is when people get to tick box exercises rather than face changing the way they think about who they are and how they teach and who their students are."
The academic timetable and venue allocation limits FLTP	5	"... the timetable does not fit (with what we are trying to do), the examination does not fit, the mode of assessment does not fit, there are never enough venues. It is the institution that creates inflexibility."; and "there are seemingly no venues but there are; they are just inappropriate or empty."; and "We've battled to get our classes in a cluster of venues that are student friendly at night, to have facilities at night"; and "The Dean even said at the beginning of this year that he is prepared to hire a few marquees and fit everyone into a corner somewhere because we had so many problems with the timetable."
Admin. obstacles to transdisciplinary T&L	4	"At an administrative level the institution does not work like that, it works in departments."
Admin. systems do not cater for students at a distance	3	"the university system was never geared for distance learning and there was always that thing of: 'don't call it distance learning; call it mixed mode'..."; and "there were years of fighting with a centralised institution that has no time for distance education. ..It is difficult... if you are a small operation in a predominantly face to face university"
Resource challenges		
Limited resources: tutors, 'clickers', laptops for staff etc.	5	"..."because of the lack of resources. ... we didn't have tutors this year."; and "this year the budget has just been quietly absorbed into the different departments so there is no money for resources..."
Access for undergraduate students to computers/ internet	4	"There is this idea that we don't have enough computers... . I think we have to be creative in looking at what students have themselves and trying to use that. ... for me a basic would be to have wireless access anywhere on this campus. There is not good wireless access."
Professional body requirements		
Health Professionals Council (HPC) requirements limit FLTP	3	"Undergraduate programmes are very traditional... very strait jacketed. One cannot choose which modules to do and they are tightly sequenced. This is due to a combination of professional board restrictions and the practical requirements."

Scoping UWC's B Admin degree:

The feasibility of developing the B Admin as a whole flexible degree

Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL)

24 October 2014

Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
Methodology.....	2
Student survey	2
Interviews.....	3
Undergraduates.....	3
Postgraduates/alumni.....	3
Academic perspectives	4
EMS Administrator perspectives	4
Employer perspectives.....	4
Data analysis	4
Analysis of survey	4
Analysis of interviews	4
Findings.....	5
Description of the UWC B Admin degree	5
Structure	5
B Admin-type degrees offered by other South African Universities	6
Articulation routes with other programmes and courses.....	7
B Admin student profile.....	8
Enrolments and completion rates	8
What is the gender, study and employment status of the B Admin students?	10
Challenges for B Admin students	12
Academic challenges.....	12
Technological challenges	13
Course advice and administrative challenges	14
Most valued learning on the B Admin	14
Student needs	15
Themes that emerged	15
Perceptions of the social and economic value of the B Admin.....	15
Employment aspirations and possibilities.....	17
Experiential learning/internships	18

How feasible is it to offer the B Admin degree more flexibly?	20
Existing flexibility of provision.....	20
Suggestions for possible FLTP responses	21
Challenges to consider	22
Conditions required to extend the implementation of FLTP to students, academics, administrators, managers	24
Conclusion.....	25
References	26

Executive Summary

A three-month scoping study was undertaken by the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) at UWC to ascertain the feasibility of implementing the principles of flexible learning and teaching in the whole B Admin degree to develop a new pedagogical approach that meets the needs of working students, in particular. The B Admin degree is offered by the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS), is located in the School of Government (SoG) and serves both full-time and part-time students.

A survey of undergraduate and postgraduate B Admin students was conducted, followed by focus group interviews with a random sample of undergraduates and postgraduates, and a range of interviews with relevant academics, administrators and employers. In addition, secondary data were obtained from a B Admin programme review and the 2014 University Calendar, among other documentation.

The findings suggest that aspects of the B Admin that could make it a suitable degree for a more flexible pedagogic approach are that:

- It is serving working adults in the public and private sectors as a first degree, whose working commitments constrain them from studying full time.
- The B Admin has a high enrolment of part-time students.
- It is already offering a degree of flexible specialisation for possible career pathing through a basket of electives that can be taken as a second major.
- At the same time the B Admin is quite a structured degree, which could facilitate coherence should it be developed into a more flexible programme.
- It has articulation routes with other courses offered by the SoG, which enhance flexible access to the B Admin and associated postgraduate qualifications.
- Academics, administrators and employers interviewed all supported more flexible approaches to learning and teaching, including blended and experiential learning, although understandings of flexibility differed.
- Technology is being used by many of the teaching staff to enhance learning and teaching. Some are at the forefront of using blended learning in a strongly pedagogically focused and student-centred way.
- Central to enhancing learning and teaching is the engagement of students in flexible modes of learning and assessment that cater for individual learning styles, and developing the B Admin as a more flexible degree may embed these approaches more consistently across the curriculum.
- A more flexible degree programme could reduce some of the more significant challenges faced by working students, such as having to attend regular and frequent lectures.
- It could strengthen the image of the B Admin as a positive career choice and rectify what currently seem to be misperceptions about it.

The main factor that militates against the proposal is that not all the electives offered as second majors may be able to be offered as flexibly as may be desired. This is because, being general modules in the EMS faculty from different departments and schools they are affected by timetable

and other constraints beyond the immediate B Admin sphere. Similarly, very large class sizes in some modules may constrain flexible approaches to learning and teaching, although this can also be a driver of flexible provision.

Finally, a number of key conditions will need to be met if the B Admin degree is to be offered more flexibly. These are:

- Developing a common understanding of what constitutes flexible learning and teaching provision for the university
- Institutional commitment that leverages sufficient resources, both financial and human, is essential for the B Admin to be offered more flexibly, otherwise it cannot succeed.
- Sufficient, well conceptualised support will be needed for the students, through appropriate orientation, training, their peers, and face-to-face learning and advice; for academics; and for administrators
- The undergraduate Public Administration programme needs to be refreshed and curriculated in a more holistic way, that integrates with the other components of the programme, as part of the process of developing a more flexible and coherent B Admin degree.
- Central to the pedagogic approaches chosen is the need to engage students in active learning and develop flexible and reflexive graduates. The curriculum must be pedagogically driven.
- A three- to four-year action plan needs to be developed, with clearly articulated aims, objectives and outcomes. Flexible provision needs to be thought of more as a continual process and buy-in is essential; encouraging communities of practice in flexible learning and teaching will allow differing values to be shared and understood.
- Marketing the B Admin in a more targeted fashion to schools and to public sector employers, authorities and organisations, could raise the profile of the B Admin degree and its graduates, making it a sought-after career option for school leavers and enhancing graduates' employment opportunities. This is essential if the project is to be sustainable in the long term
- Funding: the project will need to be properly funded and a full proposal to this effect will need to be drawn up.

Introduction

This report presents the outcomes of a scoping study which was carried out to explore the feasibility of implementing the principles of flexible learning and teaching at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in the B Admin as a whole degree, as part of the campus-wide action research project into flexible learning and teaching provision.

The Senate Lifelong Learning Committee (SLLC) of 11 November 2013 agreed that the B Admin degree has the potential to provide a space for pedagogical innovation, which can help the university find an alternative model to the parallel 'day-time/ after-hours' system that has been operative for over 50 years, and urged that rapid progress be made to explore this possibility. An Economics and Management Sciences (EMS) Faculty Reference Group representing Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) staff and EMS Dean and Faculty members was formed on 6 February 2014 and took an 'in principle' decision that the B Admin degree, located in the EMS Faculty, was a viable degree to explore within the Flexible Learning and Teaching Provision (FLTP) Project.

The need for short-term, systematic work to be done was identified on who the students are; what the possible procedures, format and priorities would be; and what the costs would be to implement such a project. A three-month scoping exercise was approved to ensure that the project was placed on a firm footing and the outcome was to inform a decision on whether to proceed and to whom funding proposals could be submitted for support. This commenced from 1 April to 30 June 2014.

The main research question driving the study was:

What are the possibilities for the B Admin degree, as an action research site, to galvanise/generate/produce/operationalise principles and practices of FLTP and develop a new pedagogical approach to meet the needs of working students?

This is underpinned by the following questions that were explored in the scoping study:

- What is the structure and purpose of the B Admin degree?
- Who are the students enrolled in the B Admin?
- What are the enrolment patterns and success rates over the last 6 years?
- Where do they go after completion?
- What is the value of the degree from the perspective of the students, EMS staff (leadership, management, academic and administrative) and employers?
- How feasible is the implementation of FLTP in the B Admin degree?
- What conditions are required to extend the implementation of FLTP to students, academics, administrators, managers?

The UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) has published a report (Barnett 2014) that provides a nuanced and critical analysis of flexible learning and teaching and the conditions necessary for it to flourish and benefit higher education. Fifteen conditions of flexibility are proposed as a way of evaluating moves towards flexibility and of safeguarding educational integrity, as well as to encourage thinking and responsiveness around flexible learning and teaching. These are attached as appendix 1. What is important to bear in mind, especially when considering the feasibility of offering the B Admin more flexibly, is the "sometimes complementary, and sometimes competing, drivers and value orientations" (Barnett 2014: 4) of FLTP both within and external to the academy, in addition to the flexibility (or not) of institutional systems and structures. Ultimately, the pedagogical

1 | Scoping UWC's B Admin degree: The feasibility of developing the B Admin as a whole flexible degree

focus of FLTP should be on producing flexible graduates, “who are able to engage with the uncertainties, complexities and demands of a rapidly changing world...from a position of...epistemic flexibility” (ibid).

Methodology

In order to answer these research questions, both secondary and primary data were gathered. Secondary data obtained from the 2008 Programme Review report and the EMS Faculty Calendar provided information on the structure and purpose of the degree and associated certificate and diploma programmes. The Quality Director, EMS Faculty Manager, EMS Faculty Officer and the Public Administration Programme Administrator provided data on student enrolments, demographics and completion rates. In addition, data from prior research into flexible learning and teaching provision at UWC were drawn on where this could add value to the findings of the feasibility study.

Primary data were obtained from student surveys and interviews; and interviews with academics, administrators and employers. In addition, primary data were obtained from discussions around the FLTP action research project at a ‘Thinkwell’ on 19 June, to which were invited academics involved in FLTP in one way or another at the other CHEC universities, from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), from the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), experts in distance education and staff who have been involved in the FLTP research project at UWC.

Student survey

Using Google Drive, online surveys were sent to all part-time and full-time¹, undergraduate and postgraduate B Admin students, to establish a profile of these students and ascertain whether they are in any way distinctive from the rest of the student body, as well as to obtain their perspectives on various aspects of the B Admin degree and of their experiences as B Admin students. A copy of the undergraduate survey is attached as appendix 2. The survey responses informed areas for follow-up discussions in focus group interviews with a sample of second- and third-year B Admin students.

	Numbers of B Admin students registered in 2014	Number of survey responses	Percentage of registered students
Undergraduate	445	100	23%
Postgraduate	156	23	15%

Figure 1: Survey returns from total number of undergraduate and postgraduate student registered in 2014

The return rate from the undergraduate B Admin students was reasonably high but the relatively low number of returns from the postgraduate students means that their data may be regarded as indicative only. However, the survey of postgraduate students did not intend to identify DIFFERENCE between the two groups, but to provide additional data - through asking mostly the same questions that were posed to the undergraduate group - on their experiences as undergraduates. It was also

¹ Although this study is advocating moving away from the binary full-time/part-time provision model, these terms are retained in this report for the purposes of describing the existing model and comparing the two enrolled groups.

hoped that, as more mature students, the postgraduates would be able to provide a more reflective perspective in their qualitative responses to enrich the data.

Interviews

Undergraduates

Emails were sent to all second- and third-year B Admin students registered in 2014, both part-time and full-time, inviting them to participate in focus group interviews for the research study. Twenty students altogether confirmed their attendance but in the end only sixteen arrived. Three focus groups were held: two for third-year students and one for second-year students and were held directly after they had written their Public Administration and Political Studies exams. The purpose was to explore some of the survey responses in more depth, to provide a richer qualitative dimension to the data. The guiding questions for the focus groups are attached as appendix3

Focus group interviews sample

Year	Gender		Study mode		Attendance
	Male	Female	Full-time	Part-time	
Second year	2	6	6	2	8
Third year	2	6	8	-	8
					16

Figure 2: Profile of sample of B Admin undergraduate student focus group interviewees

Postgraduates/alumni

It was not possible to set up focus group interviews with current postgraduate students as they were off campus at the time. Instead, a focus group was organised with four B Admin alumni who are working at UWC in administrative capacities, and all of whom had been postgraduate students. In addition, one alumnus, who is doing her internship as part of the requirements for professional registration as an industrial psychologist, was interviewed separately. Their perspectives as alumni of the B Admin course; as having been mostly part-time, working undergraduate B Admin students; and of the value of the B Admin to their work, was discussed.

B Admin Postgraduate/alumni sample

Highest qualification	Current studies	Gender	Mode of study	Current Occupation	Employer
Masters Industrial Psych	Working on PhD proposal	F	PT ²	Industrial psych. internship (ex EMS Senior Faculty Officer)	UWC HR
B Admin (Hons)	Masters Pol St	F	FT	Administrator	UWC
B Admin (Hons)		F	PT	Administrator	UWC Education Faculty
B Admin (Hons)		F	PT	Administrator	UWC Law Faculty
B Admin	Honours	F	PT	Personal Assistant	UWC HR

Figure 3: Profile of sample of five B Admin postgraduates/alumni interviewed

² PT=part-time; FT=full-time

These interviews were helpful in confirming and enriching some of the survey data and providing more in-depth understanding of the survey responses. The guiding questions are attached as appendix 4.

Academic perspectives

Eight academics were interviewed: four from the School of Government (SoG) who teach on the full-time as well as on the part-time Public Administration programmes, including academics in leadership and management positions; and one each from Business and Finance, Political Studies, Information Systems and Industrial Psychology who teach modules on the B Admin programme. Guiding questions for the interviews are attached as appendix 5

EMS Administrator perspectives

Three administrators who are involved in the B Admin programme were interviewed: the EMS Faculty Manager, a faculty officer and the Undergraduate Programme Administrator for Public Administration. In addition the Finance Manager in the SoG, who is involved in developing continuing education courses and diplomas, was interviewed. Guiding questions for these interviews are attached as appendix 6.

Employer perspectives

Perspectives of public sector employers were sought through questionnaires and followed up by telephone interviews for clarification where necessary. One response has so far been received from the City of Cape Town (CoCT), and more are still expected. A staff development officer at UWC was also interviewed, as an example of a private sector employer. A copy of the questionnaire to public sector employers is attached as appendix 7.

Data analysis

Analysis of survey

The survey data were captured and coded on an EXCEL spreadsheet and uploaded into SPSS. The data were then re-coded for SPSS and analysed to generate tabulated reports, charts of frequencies and trends in the data.

In addition, qualitative responses were coded and analysed to establish emerging themes that could be explored further in the different interviews, both in the focus group interviews and interviews with staff and employers. Important themes that were identified were: perceptions of the B Admin as a lesser degree; the need for experiential learning or internships; the need for more curriculum advice for students; the value of the foundation modules in the first year, especially Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC); the need to market the degree more to the public sector.

Analysis of interviews

The interviews were analysed in terms of the research questions and themes that had emerged from the student surveys. Additional issues emerged in the interviews with postgraduate students/alumni such as their employers' support for their studies. Themes explored in the interviews with UWC academic and administrative staff were the relationship between the B Com and the B Admin in terms of admission, articulation, academic progression, employment and social and economic status. These interviews surfaced additional issues such as high student numbers, high staff

workloads and the tension between wanting to be more flexible and the real constraints. In addition, themes and suggestions from the 'Thinkwell' also formed part of the data for analysis.

Findings

Description of the UWC B Admin degree

Structure

The B Admin degree is offered by the Faculty of Economics and Management Science (EMS) at UWC. The Department of Public Administration, the core of the B Admin, relocated from the EMS Faculty to the post-graduate School of Government (SoG) in 2013.

According to the EMS Programme Review Report of the B Admin Degree Programme 21 – 22 August 2008 (p 8):

The B Admin Programme provides a comprehensive qualification in Public Administration with specialisation options through majors such as Political Studies, Industrial Psychology, Economics, Management and Information Systems. The degree primarily aims to serve the needs of the public sector and the particular challenges South Africa (and the region/continent) face in this sector. The particular goals and objectives of Public Administration and Political Studies are to provide students with a thorough knowledge base to allow them to understand the broader context within which public policy is formulated, implemented and monitored. In addition, students are provided with critical academic skills to continuously update and expand their knowledge base. This is done through research and analysis, and the skills required for applying and executing policy for improved management.

Currently, according to the Director of the SoG, the ratio of undergraduate students on the B Admin course to postgraduates is in the region of 65:35, and that in terms of its positioning as a postgraduate school, the ratio should be about 50:50. This points to the tension of housing a department that serves both undergraduate and postgraduate studies in a post-graduate school, but also the advantages for developing a strong identity and articulation possibilities for Public Administration.

The admission requirements for the B Admin are attached as appendix 8. B Admin is offered full-time over three years and part-time over four years³. Students studying part-time may take up to 90 credits per year over each of the four years, instead of the usual 60, 60, 120, 120. This provides some flexibility and may help avoid timetable clashes should students need to repeat certain second-year modules.

The curriculum takes into account the need to strengthen the foundational knowledge and skills (quantitative and conceptual) of all students in order to successfully engage with the knowledge

³ University of the Western Cape 2014 University Calendar: Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (a) Undergraduate

requirements of the B Admin degree. Therefore, since 2000, all first-year students in the EMS Faculty have been required to study Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC131 / 132) and Quantitative Literacy for Commerce (QLC141/145) OR Quantitative Skills for Commerce (QSC131/132), depending on their mathematical ability and curriculum stream. The ALC is a semester course aimed at developing students' academic literacy and general English language proficiency, but it also "equips students with skills & knowledge needed beyond the first year of university studies, and for the world of work."⁴ More detail of the ALC is provided in appendix 9.

Although the B Admin degree is aimed primarily at the public sector, its specialisation options through the electives broaden the scope to include the private as well as the non-profit sectors. Political Studies is compulsory at the second year level but at the third-year level students can choose to major in Public Administration **and** Political Studies (option 1), or to major in **either** Public Administration **or** Political Studies **and** one other major from nine groups of subjects in the Economics, Industrial Psychology, Information Systems or Management (finance management or entrepreneurship management) fields (option 2). Students who have registered for a B Admin may change to a B Com degree (or vice versa) at the end of the first year level, should they fulfil specific requirements

As can be seen, the B Admin already has some flexibility through its specialisation options while at the same time being a very structured degree, which would enable coherence should it be developed as a more flexible offering. However, because it is constituted of modules from nine different departments and schools⁵, this could at the same time potentially limit any increase in flexibility. These tensions are explored further in the report.

In order to position the B Admin in higher education nationally, the following section looks briefly at degrees offered by other South African universities that also serve the public sector.

B Admin-type degrees offered by other South African Universities

B Admin degrees (termed Public Management in some instances) are offered by the Universities of South Africa, Limpopo, the North West, the Free State, Pretoria, Kwan-Zulu Natal, Walter Sisulu University, Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Nelson Mandela Metropole, Vista University, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and Lyceum College.

The programmes of the three other CHEC universities in the Western Cape⁶ are:

- University of Cape Town's (UCT) B Soc Sc in Economics, Industrial Sociology, International Relations, Politics, Public Policy & Administration and Social Development (full-time only);
- Stellenbosch University's (SUN) B Com (Public & Development Management), which is very similar to a general B Com degree but with Public & Development Management as a major and without Politics;

⁴ <http://www.uwc.ac.za/Faculties/EMS/DAD/Pages/Year-1.aspx>

⁵ Accounting, Academic Development, School of Business and Finance, Economics, Industrial Psychology, Information Systems, Political Studies, Statistics, Public Administration.

⁶ Information drawn from the respective institutional websites

- Cape Peninsula University of Technology's (CPUT) Diploma (part-time on Bellville campus and full-time on Cape Town campus) and B Tech in Public Management (Cape Town campus). The B Tech comprises modules such as Public Management; Strategic Public Management; Public Policy Management; Strategic Public HR Management; Governmental Relations; and Public Accountability.

Articulation routes with other programmes and courses

As explained by academic and administrative personnel in the SoG, there are articulation routes with other programmes and courses in the SoG to allow access for those who do not meet the entry requirements of the degree programmes and through RPL.

1. The Local Economic Development (LED) Programme is a stand-alone course or a component of the Certificate in Economic Development (CED) (level 5) (LED→CED).
2. The CED offers access for those who do not meet the entry requirements of the B Admin (CED → B Admin).
3. CPUT B Tech Public Management → B Admin (Hons)
4. The SoG Executive Training Programme for Councillors → Advanced Diploma in Public Administration (ADPA) (level 6) → B Admin (Hons) → Masters. The Executive Training Programme for Councillors is aimed at councillors in local government who have substantial experience in that role and some of them progress onto the ADPA. The ADPA functions largely as an RPL route for people who have many years of relevant work experience and is aimed at advancing the careers of people working in government, municipalities and development organisations in South Africa and other developing countries, for whom full-time study on the B Admin is not an option.

However, it was pointed out by the Director of the School of Government that the articulation is not unproblematic and that these courses need to be carefully scrutinised to see what the gaps and problems are for advancement.

In addition, an Advanced Diploma in Local Economic Development (ADLED) is also being proposed, certain modules of which will articulate into the third and fourth year of the national B Econ Bachelor of Economic Development (B Econ) qualification. In some cases the modules will be equivalent. Thus a graduate from the B Admin who then does well on the ADLED programme may be able to register for the B Admin (Hons) programme.

These various articulation routes through and beyond the B Admin degree emphasise the value of considering aligning the whole degree with the principles of flexible learning and teaching, for increased access and success, especially for working students. In addition, the SoG has strong relationships with the National School of Government (NSG), the state-run academy whose purpose is to develop and strengthen the capacity of the public sector⁷. The Director of the SoG has signaled his intentions to meet with the new Minister for Public Services and Administration and the Director

⁷ For further information on the NSG see appendix 10

General to discuss future partnerships and an improved and more flexible B Admin degree may strengthen such partnerships and relationships.

Having briefly described the B Admin degree and aspects that heighten the feasibility of offering it more flexibly, the next section of the report profiles the B Admin students: the cohort enrolment patterns, gender distribution, completion rates, and student needs and challenges.

B Admin student profile

Enrolments and completion rates

According to UWC enrolment records, a total of 467 students were enrolled for the B Admin undergraduate degree in 2013 and 453 registered at the beginning of 2014. The distribution of the 2014 registered students according to year of study is shown in Figure 4 below. As can be seen, the numbers of students studying B Admin part-time in the first, second and third years are approximately one third of the full-time enrolments, and although substantially less are not insignificant.

Year level of study	B Admin 2014
Full-time	323
1	154
2	98
3	71
Part-time	130
1	54
2	37
3	28
4	11
Grand Total	453

Figure 4: Numbers of students registered in 2014

The following figure is constituted from actual annual enrolments provided by the EMS Faculty. As can be seen, the total numbers of enrolments per year seem to remain relatively stable, which is desirable if there is to be an investment of human and other resources into making the whole degree more flexible. It does appear, however, that there is a sharp drop off of part-time enrolments in the fourth year, and that there are consistently much higher enrolment numbers in the third year of both full-time and part-time students. It is suggested that these figures be analysed further to establish how many of these are repeat enrolments, why there are sudden increases in numbers in some years, how many students de-register and in which years, and if any of these students re-register at a later date. This would provide a better picture of the pattern of student progress and would allow for better planning of the curriculum and of student support in developing more flexible modes of learning and teaching.

Year of study	First			Second			Third			Fourth	Total number	
	Mode	FT	PT	Sub-total	FT	PT	Sub-total	FT	PT	Sub-Total		PT
2008		88	15	103	98	14	112	115	29	144	0	359
2009		94	27	121	52	3	55	150	34	184	7	367
2010		133	36	169	59	17	76	102	19	121	7	373
2011		145	48	193	59	26	85	100	30	130	2	410
2012 ⁸		125	51	176	94	37	136	158	30	188	13	413
2013		134	59	193	102	32	134	91	30	121	14	462
2014		151	57	208	100	35	135	72	27	99	11	453

Figure 5: Breakdown of numbers of students enrolled on the B Admin from 2008 – 2014

One of the questions the scoping study sought to answer was ‘*What are the enrolment patterns and success rates over the last 6 years*’ of the B Admin students? Knowing these trends is important to ascertaining the sustainability and feasibility of the project. The following completion (graduation) rates for the 2008, 2009 and 2010 B Admin cohorts, for the periods through to 2013, were provided by the Department of Quality Assurance.

Completion rates of B Admin students

Cohort year	Total enrolled	Completed B Admin	Percentage Completed	Completed B Com	Completed other degrees/qualifications	Overall completion
2008	73	21	28.8%	21	2	60.3%
2009	84	25	29.8%	8	8	42.9%
2010	121	33	27.3%	5	2	33.1%

Figure 6: Completion rates of 2008, 2009 and 2010 B Admin cohorts until 2013

As can be seen, the highest **overall** completion rate is for the 2008 cohort, but the time to completion for them has been six years, whereas it has been five years for the 2009 cohort and only four years for the 2010 cohort. Therefore the number of students from the 2009 and 2010 cohorts can be expected to rise by the end of 2014 and further still by 2015. However, the completion rate for the B Admin is still very low across all three cohorts, albeit possibly within the average range for UWC as a whole, and it would seem wise to do an analysis of the B Admin throughput and completion rates compared to the B Com degree and to the university as a whole, before commencing with developing a more flexible B Admin degree so that interventions to improve success rates can be put in place.

What is also interesting is the number of students from all three cohorts who successfully migrated across from the B Admin to the B Com, and the very high number from the 2008 cohort. This is relevant to a discussion later in the report on the perceived value of the B Admin compared to the B Com.

The next section takes a closer look at who the B Admin students are, drawing on enrolment data from the EMS Faculty Manager and data from the student survey.

⁸ There seem to be contradictions in figures for 2012 from different sources so these will need to be verified. In the meantime they can be regarded as approximations

What is the gender, study and employment status of the B Admin students?

The gender distribution of the 2014 B Admin student cohort shows that there is a significantly higher number of female students registered than males, as indicated in figure 7 below. This pattern was found to be consistent across all the 2008-2014 B Admin cohorts, and across UWC as a whole, which indicates that the B Admin cohorts have a similar gender makeup to the rest of the student population.

B Admin Students 2014			
Study Type	Gender	Total	Percentage
Full-time	Male	144	44.5
	Female	179	55.4
Full-time Total		323	100
Part-time	Male	47	36
	Female	83	63
Part-time Total		130	100
Grand Total		453	

Figure 7: Gender distribution in the 2014 B Admin cohort

These gender figures are also similar to those of the random sample of undergraduate students who responded to the survey, so the survey sample can be considered to be representative of the B Admin student body as far as gender is concerned. The ratio of female to male students in the undergraduate sample was 57:43, with relatively more female students in both the full-time and part-time groups. This is illustrated in figure 8 below.

	Study Status		Total
	Full-time undergraduate	Part-time undergraduate	
Gender Male	33	10	43%
Female	41	16	57%
Total	74	26	100

Figure 8: Gender and Study Status 2014 – Survey responses

Of the undergraduate sample, 64% were in the 18-25 year age group, and 18% in the 26-33 year age group. The postgraduate group was different in that the female to male ratio was 10:13, in other words far fewer women students were doing postgraduate studies relative to their male counterparts, and there was a shift towards these students being older, as expected, with the majority being in the 26-33 year age group. However, as an analysis of the postgraduate student population was not within the scope of this study, it is not known how this compares to the overall student population.

One of the central reasons for exploring flexible alternatives to traditional day/after hours' classes is to continue to allow working students equal access to higher education. Comparing their study

status (whether registered as full-time or part-time students) relative to their employment status, 4% of the 74% full-time undergraduates in the sample reported working full-time, 12% were working part-time and another 12% reported that they were seeking employment. Although these numbers are relatively low, it still means that these working students would have had difficulty in attending all their classes which would certainly impact on their success.

Although the number of part-time undergraduate students who participated in the survey is too small to be considered representative of all part-time B Admin students, relatively more students reported being in full-time employment than their full-time student counterparts, as expected.

The overall study status compared to the working status of the undergraduate student sample is represented in figure 9 below.

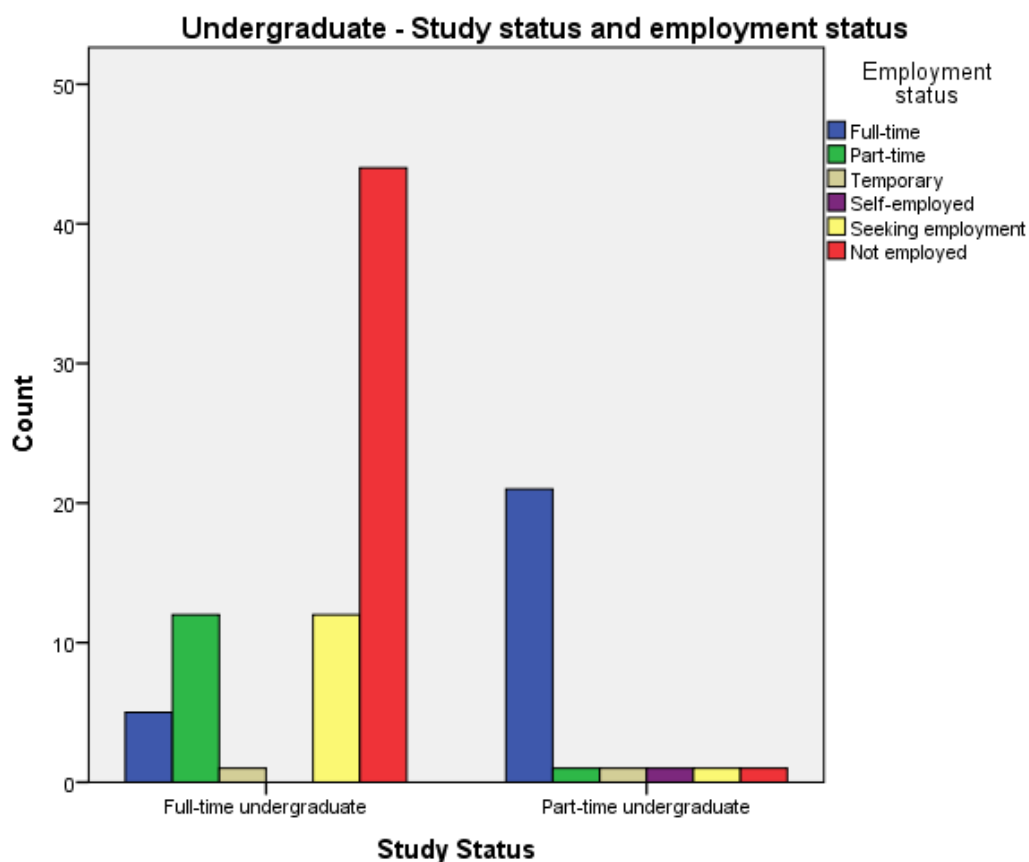


Figure 9: Comparison of study status and employment status of B Admin undergraduate survey sample

Of the postgraduates, 56% (13 out of 23) said they were registered as full-time students, 38% (5) of whom were in full-time employment and an equal number were working part time. Of the full-time postgraduate students, the majority of respondents (61.5%) were doing a B Admin (Hons), (the rest were Masters' students).

One of the research questions was 'Where do B Admin graduates go after completion?' Unfortunately, UWC does not record this information and it was not possible to surmise an answer from the data, so this question was not able to be answered.

Other than demographic data, the survey also sought to establish what challenges the B Admin students experience, what their needs are and their perceptions of the B Admin degree. Their responses are discussed in the following sections.

Challenges for B Admin students

Academic challenges

The greatest number of undergraduate student responses to the survey question *Other than financial issues, what are the three biggest obstacles /challenges that you have experienced during your studies?*, were that they struggled to understand or cope with the work. Had the survey asked for the year level of the respondents, this would have helped contextualise their responses. However, the second and third year students interviewed in focus groups elaborated that the ALC and QLC/QSC (modules in mathematics literacy) had been particularly difficult in their first year, but those who had repeated the modules found this very beneficial. Student interviewees also asserted that they struggled with the volume of work, and the amount of reading in certain subjects, but that by the third year they had learned to cope with it. However, they reported feeling particularly stressed by what they perceived as an excessive assessment load in certain subjects, where even the tutorials were used for tests (“the tutorials should not be tests”), and where lecturers set assignments as well as tests. One group referred to a lecturer who set an assignment covering the whole course, rather than tests, and expressed a wish that other lecturers would do the same as they learnt far more from this mode of assessment. In addition, it was requested that lecturers in the different departments communicate with each other about submission schedules for assignments, so that these dates do not all fall in the same week and in the same week as tests/exams, as this prevents students being able to give of their best. It would seem that this would be one of the areas in which more flexible modes of provision could be explored.

Figure 10 below summarises the key challenges that survey respondents reported.

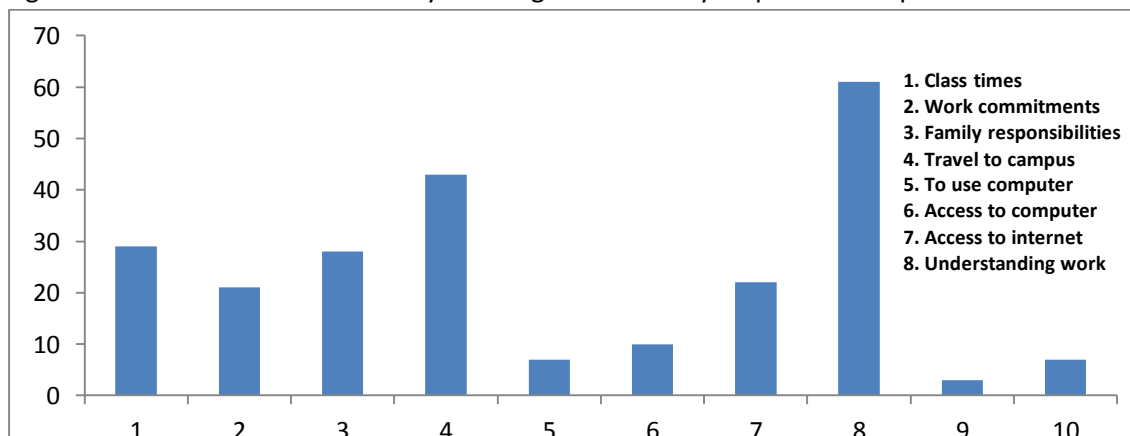


Figure 10: Common challenges for undergraduate students

As figure 10 indicates, travel to campus, class times, family commitments and work commitments also featured high on the list of challenges. When the issues of travel and class times were explored further in the focus group interviews with undergraduate students and alumni, it seemed that these were challenges experienced largely by students attending classes after hours: transport is expensive, infrequent to certain localities, and often dangerous at night; students working off campus may have difficulty getting to evening classes on time, which is exacerbated by rush hour

traffic, and may need to leave early to catch public transport home. Similarly, students attending tests that are held late on a Friday or on a Saturday afternoon may have difficulty getting home safely afterwards. This was confirmed by lecturers who teach the part-time students. For example, it was stated that in the Industrial Psychology honours class, many students are late for the 5pm class, often arriving only at 6pm because of work commitments or being held up in traffic, while others leave early during the 7.20pm – 8.20 pm class so that they can catch public transport, especially if this is their only means of transport home. One student said it cost him R80 to get home after a late test, because of unavailability of public transport at that time.

The challenge of juggling work commitments was discussed with the postgraduates/alumni, as only two undergraduate students in the sample interviewed were working and both in the public sector, whose employers were reasonably accommodating. Getting to class on time was not a problem for those working on campus, but it was for those working further away. It was mentioned by one of the postgraduates working at UWC that it is very difficult to get time off at certain times of the year when faculties are very busy, and this can mean having to miss tests or exams. Several of the postgraduates/alumni interviewed spoke of a lack of both UWC and private sector employer support for their studies. Although this simply made some of them even more determined to succeed, for some employer insistence on meeting work commitments meant they had to take longer to complete their studies than they would have liked. However, it is suspected that where such lack of support existed, it was probably more a feature of individual employer/manager attitudes, or the pressures in individual departments, as other postgraduates felt their needs were sufficiently accommodated by their employers.

Technological challenges

Quite a large number of survey responses indicated that access to the internet was a problem, while far fewer said that they lacked access to computers.

When these issues were probed in the focus group interviews, it appeared that gaining **sufficient** access to the university computers was difficult, even in the student residences, such was the demand. Interestingly, nearly all the students interviewed – and all the part-time students - reported that they had their own laptops, which were essential for them to complete their work. When asked how they could afford this, a student responded that she had used her NSFAS book card to purchase it. However, while on the one hand this may provide a solution for some students, on the other hand this might leave them with insufficient funds to purchase the books they need. One of the students who did not possess her own laptop said her way round this was to write all her assignments by hand, and then come to campus early to type them up, negotiating extra time beyond the one hour allowed with the technician on duty in the lab, when she could. Another student in residence said that closing the residence computer labs at midnight was restrictive and that he would borrow a laptop from a friend when he needed to, swapping from one to another when they needed their laptops back.

Access to the internet at home was an issue for most of the students interviewed, who said they grabbed whatever time they could between lectures to go online and do their research. Wi-fi was said to be very slow in some of the student residences, and not available in others, but this will need to be verified further. The issue is that even having one's own laptop is not enough if there is inadequate internet connectivity. It remains to be seen whether internet connectivity will improve

with the City of Cape Town's plans to roll out wi-fi across the metropole. One of the students claimed that people working in the public sector are provided with laptops fitted with 3G "so that you don't need a modem" and requested that UWC ensure a strong wi-fi signal throughout campus so that students with these devices have reliable internet connectivity 24/7. This would seem to be a prerequisite for flexible learning and teaching to be implemented effectively.

One academic noted that an EMS Faculty study indicates that the majority of students have smart phones. He said that the challenge, however, was how to utilise smart phones for academic work – such as assignments – and that the small screen makes reading difficult. He also pointed out that if students are to use i-phones, laptops or tablets in class then the lecture halls will have to be rewired to allow these devices to be charged.

A third-year student interviewee who had acted as a mentor to first year students confirmed that even though many first years have smart phones, they often don't know even what the internet is or how to use many of the features, and so require a lot of assistance in this regard. This would need to be taken into account in technology- enhanced learning and teaching for first-year students.

Course advice and administrative challenges

Some survey respondents indicated that administrative staff could be more helpful and that they sometimes gave conflicting curriculum information, and that much better curriculum and career advice for B Admin students was needed. These responses were probed further in the focus group interviews with students and it seems that this perceived 'unhelpfulness' relates to insufficient or conflicting advice given about subject choices and course requirements. This was reported to happen at registration if the student advisors/mentors do not have enough knowledge of the career possibilities of the B Admin, but also to inefficiencies and errors by administrative staff during the registration process.

Additional problems reported by some student interviewees were that the prerequisites for certain elective streams were not always clearly communicated, so they might find out too late that they do not meet all the requirements for continuing in their chosen stream. Although these rules are clearly laid out in the EMS Faculty Calendar, it would seem that students do not always study this thoroughly or understand the complexities, probably especially so in first year. Other frustrations were expressed at general administrative errors and miscommunication, especially related to registration and also about marks. For example one student reported being informed that her continuous assessment mark did not qualify her to write the exam – only to discover that not all of her marks had been captured.

Going beyond the challenges students experience, the survey sought to establish what they value about the B Admin and what their particular needs are. These are discussed next.

Most valued learning on the B Admin

Among the qualitative data obtained from the survey was the learning that students valued the most from the B Admin. Interestingly, the undergraduate students seemed to value generic competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, working in a team, and academic reading, writing and research skills the most. Some of the respondents even claimed that they were able to apply these competencies in their personal lives and in their work. These competencies are closely aligned with the stated outcomes for the ALC course and one of the

Academic Development staff in the EMS Faculty confirmed that this broad range of competencies were essential components of the ALC course, which was tailored to the different degrees. These claims were tested and explored in the focus group interviews with the undergraduate students and with the alumni/postgraduate students. The interviewees were unanimous in confirming the value of the ALC course, saying it had assisted them in their academic writing throughout the programme, even in their final and honours years. A lecturer also confirmed the value of the ALC, saying: “(I)t equips them very well for the assignments that they have to do. They don’t get it 100% right, but it really helps with their writing style, it teaches them how to reference. They definitely don’t do it perfectly by second year – but at least it makes them aware of the fact that one should do proper referencing.” It does seem, therefore, that the ALC should remain an integral part of the B Admin programme should it be developed into a more flexible offering.

Student needs

In response to the survey question, *How could UWC could accommodate your needs as a student more?*, many undergraduates said that the curriculum needed to be more flexible, with greater subject choices. This was confirmed in the focus group interviews with students and alumni/postgraduates and related to the fact that the B Admin does not offer the same degree of choice as the B Com, especially in finance-related modules, which the interviewees felt limited their employment and career opportunities. This emerged as one of the themes and is discussed in more detail later in the report.

Several survey responses indicated that the B Admin should offer experiential learning or internships in the public sector, to orientate students to the practical implications of working in this field and to enhance their employment opportunities. This emerged as another major theme.

A summary of undergraduate survey respondents’ needs are summarised in appendix 11, attached. Postgraduate student responses were very similar, with the additional request that course material be made available to them in advance of the block teaching programme.

Themes that emerged

A number of themes emerged from the data that were relevant to the feasibility of implementing a more flexible B Admin degree, typically arising first in the survey data and then being explored further in the interviews.

Perceptions of the social and economic value of the B Admin

Initial conversations with B Admin academics during the planning phase of this research indicated that B Admin students occasionally changed to the B Com, if they were able to fulfil the admission requirements. However, data from the student survey, from interviews with current and post-graduate students and from the B Admin completion rates indicate that a much higher number of students who register for a B Admin have the B Com as a first choice of study than initially thought.

While 47% of undergraduates responded in the survey that the **B Admin** had been their first choice of study, 39% said that a **B Com** had been their first choice, and 22% of the total sample stated that they still intended to change to a B Com. The most common reasons respondents gave for wanting to change were because the B Com offered more employment opportunities, because they were not enjoying the B Admin courses or because it did not meet their expectations. A relatively greater

proportion of the postgraduate sample - 56.5% - responded that the B Admin had been their first choice and only 26% said they had wanted to do a B Com; not surprising for postgraduates. However, most of the post-graduate students/alumni interviewed, four out of five of whom had studied part-time, reported that they had chosen the B Admin by default rather than by intention, because there was a limited choice in academic programmes available part-time, they did not qualify for a B Com and they had wanted a qualification that was relevant to their work in some way. As one interviewee stated: "I feel the degree chose me: I didn't consciously choose it."

The preference for studying a B Com was even more marked in focus group interviews with second and third year undergraduate students. Out of a total of 16 B Admin students interviewed, only four said that they had purposely chosen the degree: two because they were already working in the public sector and wanted to improve themselves; and two because the influence of their political family backgrounds had steered them towards working in the public sector— as one of them said: "My whole family is in politics: it is in my genes".

The reasons interviewees gave for wanting to do a B Com were related to the perceived economic capital of the degree, that it seemed to offer good employment opportunities, and this was confirmed by the survey responses. It appears from the focus group interviews that this perception is reinforced by the lack of public sector representivity at the UWC campus career expos and the lack of demand for a B Admin qualification. Students interviewed reported a predominance of private sector employers at these events, who emphasise B Com qualifications and are seemingly unaware of or uninterested in the B Admin qualification.

The reasons interviewees gave for the B Admin NOT being their first choice was because they had never heard of it, neither at school nor elsewhere. They reported enrolling for the B Admin on the advice of the registration officers, either because they did not meet the criteria for their first choice of study or because their course of choice was already fully subscribed. Academics interviewed claimed that it is not uncommon for B Com students to change over to a B Admin, which one of the undergraduate interviewees had done. He had failed three of his four first-semester modules on the extended curriculum B Com and had been advised to change over to the B Admin.

It was apparent that the seeming lack of employer support for the B Admin degree at the career 'expos', coupled with it being a default option for applicants who are not accepted into the B Com or other programmes, has reinforced the perception among many of the students interviewed that it has less social status and is a lesser degree than the B Com although, as one interviewee protested, "In my opinion we are equal to the B Com students: we have the same amount of work to do". An opinion that drew support from others in the focus group was that:

We are paying the same fees as B Com but we are being treated differently – not just by our fellow students but also by our faculty. ... They start (at registration) by putting (applicants) for all the other programmes, and the rest, including those who do not have enough points for the B Com, they will put for B Admin. They will say 'this is the easy stuff' and 'you will get in'. So it is not being valued by the faculty as a degree that is viable in the market and they are treating it as just another degree which anyone can do. But...it is not...you need brains to be able to do all those different subjects. (Focus group interview with undergraduate B Admin students, 3 June 2014)

It could be argued that this negative perception of the B Admin degree militates against it being a feasible choice for investing resources to develop it as a flexible degree. One academic argued that a more positive image of the degree could be developed by marketing it to schools and this would be a way of attracting high achievers who want to register for the degree as a first choice. This might also improve the completion rates.

Despite this negativity, nearly all the second and third year students interviewed said they were enjoying the programme and felt that it had value for them. As one student put it: “You learn to love it.” This was also seen in the number of students who responded in the survey that they were satisfied with the course, and that no improvements were necessary.

Employment aspirations and possibilities

As already mentioned, the B Admin is primarily aimed at employees in the public sector who need some knowledge of public administration systems and theories. However, through the different elective options, it can also serve employees in the private sector and in not-for-profit organisations.

The 2008 Programme Review Report of the B Admin degree found that former students felt equipped to enter the job market after graduation; public service representatives interviewed thought that the B Admin degree met a definite need, preparing future government officials with competencies in public administration and policy; and external academics argued that the B Admin equips public sector managers with the skills to operate in a unique context (p14-15).

Responding to the survey question of what kind of work they hoped to get with their B Admin degree, by far the majority of undergraduate and postgraduate students said they hoped to be employed in the public sector, which fits with the purpose of the degree. A smaller number of undergraduates specified that they wanted to work in the field of human resources, while other responses were to work in the private sector and in the field of politics.

However, survey responses indicated concerns that they would in fact find employment in the public sector and this perception was re-iterated in interviews with the undergraduate students who had found the public sector was not present at the UWC ‘career expos’ whereas the private sector was well represented. Moreover, private sector representatives tended to be ignorant of what the B Admin was and to show an only interest in B Com students. This has given students the impression that there is no employment available for them in this sector, and has left some of them concerned as to the value of the degree at all.

Responses by some academics to students’ concerns about their employability as B Admin graduates were that in reality the degree was a “building block” to something more, and that there were very few undergraduate degrees that, on their own, were sufficient for employment. Opportunities for specialisation are available through the range of EMS diplomas, continuous professional development courses as well as in postgraduate studies, that can improve their chances of employment in the public or the private sectors. A differing opinion was that:

“(N)o matter what degree you have and where it was obtained from, it depends on what you do with the degree that is important. And I think even someone with a B Admin degree – let’s say he or she has done up to third year Management with

Public Admin, they can do wonders in government units, for example. So it is possible to get quite far.” (interview with EMS lecturer 29/05/14)

Nevertheless, it would seem that continuing conversations are needed with B Admin students, across the three to four years of study, about career options and providing them with career advice.

The City of Cape Town (CoCT) HR respondent had thought initially that the UWC B Admin was a generic administration degree, and his response to questions about the degree were quite negative until it was explained that this was a degree in **Public** Administration. He then confirmed that the CoCT would definitely support an undergraduate degree in Public Administration, such as the B Admin, as a first degree for staff in clerical and support positions, but would not support study towards a B Admin Honours unless this was specifically for career development. This suggests that naming the degree more explicitly as a B Public Admin might elicit more positive responses from public sector employers.

Both the CoCT HR interviewee and the UWC HR Staff Development Officer emphasised that staff development is competency based; education and training that directly enhances staff competencies for their particular areas of work is encouraged and supported. At UWC, strategic competencies for meeting the Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) are especially encouraged. The UWC HR interviewee was not familiar with the B Admin but said that it would be advantageous for staff in general administrative roles to have a general diploma or undergraduate degree, like the B Admin, as an orientation to working in an academic institution and to develop certain general competencies, but that work experience is also very important, particularly work in an academic environment.

Employment prospects for graduates of the B Admin are critical in deciding on whether it is feasible to offer the degree more flexibly. That neither the HR representative at the CoCT nor the UWC Staff Development Officer were aware of what the B Admin degree comprises could be a concern, and confirms the opinion of an administrator and of an academic who were interviewed that the degree could be marketed better and be made more visible, especially to the public sector within which the SoG has many contacts and good relationships.

Experiential learning/internships

The theme of experiential learning and internships arose in the survey responses and this was explored in follow up focus group interviews with undergraduate students, with B Admin academics and administrators and with employers. The responses were unanimously in support of the value of applying learning in the workplace. However, the significant resource and logistical requirements to implement such an initiative were cited as a severe constraint and a dedicated coordinator would be needed.

The two part-time students in the undergraduate focus group interviews, who were working in the public sector, emphasised that the public sector offers very good internships: to matriculants straight from school, to students from CPUT and from other universities. They maintained that the value of these internships in the public sector is that entry level employees generally do not deal with the day-to-day business of government, and so B Admin entry level recruits may not be able to apply what they have learned immediately. Interns also learn how to use the different

administrative systems, which are not taught on the B Admin programme, and employees were frequently recruited from the intern pool.

Various suggestions for how this experiential learning or internships could be implemented were discussed in the focus groups. One suggestion was that experiential learning in the second year would help students to understand the work better, although a counter argument was that if they were offered a job they might give up their studies. Other suggestions were that experiential learning take place in the final year so that students can conduct their research in a real public sector workplace. This could take the form of an apprenticeship model with, say, classes for two days per week and experiential learning on the other three days, or vice versa; or classes in the evenings and experiential learning during the day etc.

Academics interviewed agreed that experiential learning and internships could add indisputable value to B Admin teaching and learning, through practical application of what the students learn, and to graduates' employment prospects. But the programme would need to be properly structured and aligned with the curriculum and would need to be conceptualised differently for working and non-working students; working students could even be 'RPL'd in their places of work, if appropriate.

An academic raised the question of whether internships should form part of the undergraduate or the postgraduate degree, or of both, seeing as honours' students have also asked for internships. A suggestion was that some form of experiential learning could take place at the end of the third year, before commencing honours, and students could write a structured report on what they have learnt. Another academic also suggested the old apprenticeship model, in this case that used by the old Technikons of three months experiential learning which could be held partly during the vacations.

It was suggested that certain areas of the public sector may need to be incentivised to take the interns and provide relevant work. However, as the CoCT HR respondent pointed out, the CoCT has partnered with CPUT for the last 20 years in providing experiential learning for their students in the different faculties. It offers structured internships of up to 12 months that are discipline-related as well as internships for graduates. These latter tend to be for engineering and bursary students, who complete a 24-month internship after graduating and may then be permanently employed. The internships are open to students from all the CHEC partners. Application for internships need to be made through the CoCT website, entered on the database and applicants are called up when a vacancy/need arises.

From these responses, it would seem that not only could experiential learning or internship agreements with the public sector enhance the feasibility of B Admin being developed more flexibly, but also that this could be one parameter of its flexibility. The NSG has a youth graduate public service orientation programme, called 'Breaking Barriers to Entry', which prepares unemployed youth graduates for internship and other employment opportunities within the public service⁹. This programme works in partnership with the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and the NSG could be approached to partner with the SoG to assist with setting up internships for B Admin

⁹ PALAMA Annual Report 2012 / 2013: 21,31

students and for the NYDA to assist in providing incentives to public sector departments to take on these interns, and in providing stipends for the students.

Referring to these findings, as well as drawing on other issues that arose from the data, the next section presents points to consider in offering the B Admin degree more flexibly, acknowledging where it is already operating flexibly.

How feasible is it to offer the B Admin degree more flexibly?

Existing flexibility of provision

The B Admin is already flexible in terms of providing all students with a choice of electives beyond the compulsory Public Administration, which allows them to 'specialise' in Politics, Information Systems, Management, Industrial Psychology or Economics, depending on whether they meet the criteria for these. Although a common theme from B Admin students was that there is not as much choice as in the B Com, the B Admin is a distinctive and different degree and students do have the option of switching to a B Com, but again only if they meet the criteria.

Another dimension of its flexibility is that it is one of the few programmes still offered part-time for working students, although as has been argued we need to move beyond this part-time/full-time and after hours/daytime construct as a proxy for working/non-working students. One of the academic interviewees mused that the distinction between what constitutes full-time and part-time students is blurring to such an extent that maybe the only distinction between them is the time taken to complete the degree.

It is clear that many of the academics teaching on the B Admin degree are finding all sorts of ways to be flexibly responsive, such as teaching on a Saturday, using more flexible modes of assessment and using technology to enhance student learning; some academics are particularly pedagogically focused and student-centred¹⁰ in their use of technology. Central to enhancing learning and teaching is the engagement of students in flexible modes of learning and assessment that cater for individual learning styles, and perhaps this needs to be more consistently embedded across the B Admin degree.

Regarding technology, the SoG is said to have good wi-fi coverage and there are spaces in the building where students can gather informally, for study purposes, discussions and group work, using their own laptops or technology. These environmental factors are significant enablers of FLTP.

Many suggestions were forthcoming from interviewees across the samples as to possible FLTP responses that could be explored in re-developing the B Admin, some of which are presented in the next section.

¹⁰ Student-centred is taken to mean not only catering for different learning styles, or drawing on student experience in the learning process, or ensuring that students are sufficiently at ease with the use of technology in learning and teaching and have access to the necessary resources; but also that the outcome is to enable the development of flexible and reflexive graduates who can hold their own in a rapidly changing world.

Suggestions for possible FLTP responses

- It was argued by several interviewees that maybe UWC should be looking at ways to offer the B Admin more flexibly to the **part-time students**, as a first step. This might be more manageable than attempting to reconfigure the entire degree for all students. The programme would need to encourage student interaction and engagement but reduce the workload for academics.
- It was suggested that a graded approach to flexibility should be followed, with the first year consisting of more face-to-face modes of provision and being much more tightly structured and supportive, to enable the students to find their feet and orientate to an academic environment. From the second year progressively more independent and collaborative modes of learning could be encouraged, and using more technology-enhanced learning.
- The CoCT, as a public provider, stated that the mode of delivery that fitted their context best was a modular approach, outside of working hours, with a blended mode of class interaction or an “e-learning option via a remote work station” (written response to questions received 19/06/14) and access to recordings of lectures and class notes. UWC, as a private sector employer, does not allow employees to register as full-time students, except in the case of certain postgraduate degrees where contact time/classes are after hours. It would seem, then, that contact time for a more flexible B Admin degree will have to be offered after hours as an option for working students.
- Record the proceedings of the daytime classes for the after-hours students, and supplement these with online consultations/discussion groups. It was said that such discussion groups are easier to manage with smaller numbers of students, especially for academics who are still ‘new’ to this mode of engagement, and therefore would be suited to the after-hours classes
- Rather than a full four-year degree for working students, modules could be offered as stand-alone continuous professional development courses as this is what the public sector seems to need for many of its employees. The SoG is already offering a selection of such courses, as is the NSG and other CHEC universities. Where modules are credit-bearing, modules could be combined with core modules, such as Public Administration, towards a degree. It was said that the Masters in Public Health model, in the School of Public Health, is a good example of how this can be done. The mode of delivery of these courses could be negotiated with the employer as block sessions, online teaching and learning etc, and could be a source of revenue to UWC if they are paid for by the employer. This would also guarantee numbers of students for planning purposes.
- When scheduling block sessions, it must be remembered that UWC workers may be particularly busy at certain times of the year, such as during registration and at the beginning or end of term. Block teaching needs to be carefully planned and all the material, including course outlines and assessments/assignments, should be given to the students timeously, before classes start. However, it was emphasised that block teaching is not feasible with very large classes – 45 was said to be a large class – because it is important to recruit students’ working experience into the classroom learning. Block teaching may be problematic at first year level, not only because these

classes are larger but also because these students need to be more slowly inducted into academic and university life and gain self confidence.

- The postgraduate interviewees, who had studied part time, agreed that it would benefit working students to have classes less frequently, perhaps every two to four weeks, and increase the amount of technology-enhanced learning and teaching, as long as this is pedagogically effective and there is sufficient support for the students. Face-to-face learning and teaching was emphasised as critically important, not only by academics but also by the undergraduate and postgraduate students interviewed, and the right balance must be found between independent learning and face-to-face engagement, and provision made for collaborative learning.
- Recruit Masters and PhD students as tutors, who could help with the marking load and mentoring students and could even provide online support to students. The tutors would have to be properly trained and sufficiently knowledgeable to take this on. The Science Faculty has a certification system for their tutors which could be explored. Current budgets are too small to remunerate sufficient post-graduate tutors, but funding could be sought from the teaching grants to implement this tutor system. It was suggested that such an initiative be piloted over three years, and evaluated through a longitudinal study.
- Consider consolidating after- hours B Admin provision in one CHEC university to make it more financially viable. However, ideological differences have proved to be a sticking point in this regard once before.

There are many other examples of flexible responsiveness in the literature, especially in the suite of reports published by the HEA Flexible Pedagogies project (Barnett 2014: 16) that might stimulate thinking around flexibility in the B Admin. But it is also important to consider some of the possible challenges to making the B Admin more flexible, as these impact directly on the feasibility of the undertaking.

Challenges to consider

The following challenges to making the B Admin more flexible emerged as themes and issues in the student surveys as well as in the various interviews held. As Barnett points out, “*systems flexibility and pedagogical flexibility...play out in complex ways, being both complementary to and in tension with each other*” (2014: 8), and this can be seen in many of these challenges. Similarly, Green, Woldoko, Foskey and Brooks (2013) speak of universities as complex systems made up of “four inter-dependent sub-systems”: teaching, learning, delivery and administration (Green *et al* 2013:26) which are in tension with each other, and all four sub-systems need to work together to support change and create an enabling environment for innovations to emerge, to grow and to be sustained.

Support

- It is commonly emphasised in the literature that flexible and technology-enhanced learning must provide sufficient support for the students, through appropriate orientation, training, their peers and face-to-face learning and advice, and this was confirmed in the interviews. However, it was made clear that academics also need such support as do the administrators. For example, one of the administrators pointed out that as a departmental coordinator, her only immediate support

was the students on work study, and that this was not adequate. In some cases insufficient support for administrators may contribute to student experiences of administrative inefficiencies and blockages.

Infrastructural challenges

- Wi-fi coverage seems inadequate to cope with students' needs, but the actual weaknesses would need to be identified. It needs to be more widespread on campus and across the metropole, so that students can access the internet equally well on and off campus, 24 hours a day.
- Size, design and availability of venues across the campus were emphasised as limiting factors in FLTP. It was pointed out that Information Communication Services (ICS) are responsible for most of the computer labs, and that they can be approached to keep the labs open beyond the current hours of opening, in conjunction with campus security. This might help alleviate students' problems with accessibility to computers on campus. A postgraduate student/alumnus maintained that there are not enough computers on campus for first-year students to be able to engage with a large volume of technology-enhanced learning and teaching.
- All timetables are venue-dependent, and the current test and exam schedules which include Friday evening and Saturday afternoon sittings because of venue limitations, can seriously disadvantage working students and those who rely on public transport. Other options suggested were to schedule an additional week in the semester for exams, but which would shorten the teaching time even more; or to add the exam time on to the existing semester, although neither of these alternatives may be acceptable to the academic community. Discussion in the postgraduate student focus group emphasised that more flexible ways of assessment, such as assignments, were preferable to traditional exams. However, the venue booking system would need to accommodate individual differences in assessment practices so that venues not being used remain free for other purposes.

Systemic challenges

- Related to the venue challenges, by its very flexible nature of allowing students to 'specialise' from a range of different electives within the EMS Faculty, this creates logistical difficulties for timetabling. In addition, because some of the courses are electives or service courses for other faculties, such as Political Studies which can be a major for the Arts Faculty, timetable clashes do occur.

Pedagogical challenges

- Technology-enhanced teaching and learning must not exclude students in its attempts to become more inclusive/flexible, and there must be options to cater for their different learning modes and financial circumstances. Currently, different learning platforms are used across the B Admin degree and a more coherent approach may need to be adopted. Moreover, there needs to be a transition phase for moving from hard-copy course texts to more technology-enhanced provision for first-year students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well as lecturers, to enable them to become familiar with this mode of learning and teaching.

- Large class sizes, especially in first year and in the service courses to other faculties, puts added pressure on teaching staff, especially in the smaller departments such as Political Studies. One avenue that Political Studies is exploring is to seek financial recompense from the other faculties for teaching their students, so as to allow additional teaching staff to be contracted. Having sufficient, well-trained tutors was also a challenge with large class sizes. Consulting with individual students face to face is already challenging with large class sizes, and is something the B Admin students seem to want. A concern is that not only may online consultations isolate students who need this contact, but also it may take up much more time for academics.
- Subject clashes for part-time students were reported to occur from time to time in their second and third years should they need to repeat certain modules. Because of the limited timetabling options for after-hours classes, the only alternatives for such students are: to attend the classes on alternate weeks, although they miss a lot of the work this way; to attend some classes during the day if possible; or to prolong their studies.
- Not all the electives offered for the B Admin may be able to be offered flexibly, because they are primarily targeted at the B Com stream with its own timetabling constraints. For example, flexibility of *pace* could be problematic for the IS electives, because of the pace at which knowledge becomes redundant in this field. Currently, credits are not given for IS modules that are more than five years old. Furthermore, the Health Professionals Council of SA (HPCSA) has strict regulations disallowing 'distance learning' modes for courses that are professionally registered with them, so Industrial Psychology has to retain its face-to-face mode of learning and teaching, although some technology-enhanced active learning is currently taking place. These factors may hobble attempts to develop a flexible and integrated curriculum model for the whole B Admin.

Besides addressing the challenges outlined above, and those that have been discussed elsewhere in this report, other conditions were identified by interviewees and by discussions at the 'Thinkwell' on 19 June as needing to be present to allow for effective implementation of FLTP in the B Admin.

Conditions required to extend the implementation of FLTP to students, academics, administrators, managers

- It was acknowledged that teaching awards are a definite incentive to enhance learning and teaching provision. However, it was pointed out that at some CHEC universities, such as CPUT, after-hours teaching was salaried and that this would be a far greater incentive for UWC academics to teach on the after-hours programmes like the B Admin, and to explore FLTP for these students.
- The Director of the SoG emphasised that the undergraduate Public Administration programme needs to be refreshed and re-curriculated in a more holistic way that integrates with the other components of the programme. Having senior and top academics in the department teaching on the undergraduate programme is already impacting on the quality of the course, and this has been assisted by the appointment of two additional senior and experienced academics. Articulation between programmes also needs to be analysed and improved, and the undergraduate programme needs to be conceptualised and structured as a feeder programme

into postgraduate studies, and not regarded in isolation from postgraduate studies. It was suggested by participants in the 'Thinkwell' that a formal programme review be held to inform the reconceptualisation and re-curriculation of the B Admin degree.

- The project would have to have full and public support from the university leadership to implement the principles of flexible learning and teaching in the whole B Admin degree. For any new strategy there must be institutional commitment that addresses resources, both financial and human; for the B Admin to be offered more flexibly, it must be properly resourced otherwise it will fail. For example, appointing a salaried coordinator of the B Admin programme would assist the process greatly, and should experiential learning or internships be considered, a salaried coordinator of this function would be essential. It was recommended by a representative of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) at the 'Thinkwell' that funding for the proposition to develop the B Admin more flexibly may well be obtained as a teaching grant from the DHET as this was an excellent proposal. It was emphasised that FLTP is supported in the White Paper and is a funded mandate.
- At the 'Thinkwell' it was suggested that a three- to four-year action plan be developed, with clearly articulated aims, objectives and outcomes, to ensure that the project does not remain at a theoretical level. Flexible provision needs to be thought of more as a continual process and buy-in is essential. Encouraging communities of practice in FLTP will allow differing values to be shared and understood.
- Funding: the project will need to be properly funded and a full proposal to this effect will need to be drawn up.

Conclusion

This report has presented arguments for the feasibility of offering the B Admin degree more flexibly, following the principles of FLTP, as well as possible challenges to such an undertaking and some of the conditions that would need to be present for this to succeed. Responses from students, academics, administrators and employers all supported the idea of a more flexible B Admin programme, which further lends weight to the proposal, although there were differing notions of how this should be done. However, as mentioned, the tension between the four sub-systems of teaching, learning, delivery and administration need to be understood in operationalising the endeavour, which will need to be carefully planned and adequately resourced before commencement.

One caution that needs to be mentioned here is that the evidence suggests that the B Admin degree is not always fully understood by students or employers, and that there may be misperceptions as to the programme's purpose. Marketing the B Admin in a more targeted fashion to schools and to public sector employers, authorities and organisations could raise the profile of the B Admin degree and its graduates, making it a sought-after career option for school leavers and enhancing graduates' employment opportunities. This is essential if making the B Admin a more flexible option is going to be worthwhile in the long term.

Finally, Barnett asserts that “(f)lexible provision has the potential to enhance student learning, widen opportunities for participation in higher education, and develop graduates who are well-equipped to contribute to a fast-changing world” (Barnett 2014: 10) and the proposal for a more flexible B Admin degree may have the potential to offer such an opportunity. Using Barnett’s set of 15 conditions as measures of flexibility (see appendix 1) may assist in ensuring that the outcomes are realised.

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Flexible Learning and Teaching at University of Western Cape: understandings, practices and implications

Flexible learning and teaching provision has the potential to turn knowledge “from a commodity of scarcity into one of abundance” (Pannekoek 2011:x)

By: Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL)

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
List of acronyms and abbreviations	i
Executive summary.....	ii
Background.....	ii
Methodology	ii
Findings	iii
Understandings of FLTP.....	iii
FLTP practices	iii
Contextual factors impacting on FLTP.....	iv
Principles/guidelines for FLTP development	v
Conclusion	vi
Chapter 1: Background.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature review & conceptual framework.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Definitions and understandings of flexible learning	5
The governance and policy environment.....	5
Understandings in the local and international literature.....	7
Dimensions of flexible learning and teaching provision	8
Technology enhanced learning (TEL)	11
TEL for students with disabilities	14
Critiques of flexible learning.....	15
Pedagogical implications for FLTP	17
FLTP implementation and institutional change.....	20
Chapter 3: Methodology	23
Research design.....	23
Data collection methods	23
Secondary data	23
Primary data	24
Data analysis.....	25
Ethics	26
Limitations of the study	26
Chapter 4: Findings.....	27
Learning needs of students	27

(i) Understandings of FLTP	29
(ii) FLTP practices	31
Flexible pedagogies	31
Promotion of FLTP	40
Flexibility in student support services	40
Flexibility in postgraduate programmes	43
(iii) Contextual factors impacting on FLTP	44
Drivers of FLTP	44
Enablers of FLTP	47
Obstacles/challenges to FLTP	50
(iv) Towards 'principles' or guidelines for FLTP	55
Chapter 5: Conclusion	57
Suggested next steps	58
Bibliography	59
Appendix A: Interview schedule	63

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

CHE	Council for Higher Education
CIECT	Centre for Innovation in Communications Technology
CSSS	Centre for Student Support Services
DLL	Division for Lifelong Learning
ECP	Extended Curriculum Programme
FLI	Further Learning Institute
FLTP	Flexible learning and teaching provision
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IOP	Institutional Operating Plan
LMS	Learning Management Systems
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UWC	University of the Western Cape

Executive summary

Background

This study set out to explore some staff understandings of flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP) at UWC; their reported flexible learning and teaching practices; their perspectives on how to promote and grow successful FLTP at UWC; and the possible implications for organisational change of expanding FLTP.

The motivation for the investigation was largely in response to diminishing opportunities for working people to study at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). In particular, the study sought to look beyond the traditional exclusionary binaries of 'full-time' and 'part-time' provision (and their respective proxies, 'daytime' and 'after hours' provision) for 'non-working' and 'working' students at the university and to identify practices that are more inclusionary of today's diverse undergraduate student population.

The research question framing the study was:

How does flexible learning and teaching manifest at UWC, in particular in relation to undergraduate programmes and for 'non-traditional'¹ students?

Methodology

As an exploratory study, a qualitative approach was taken. Primary data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with 30 key faculty leaders and managers, academics, administrators and student support services staff in order to obtain a diverse range of perspectives on and activities related to FLTP at UWC. In addition, primary data were obtained from discussions at a report back meeting on this study and from an FLTP seminar.

Secondary data were obtained from institutional policy documents, the student handbook Part-time Studies in 2014, from faculty calendars and from recent faculty teaching and learning reports to the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee. The faculty reports provided valuable background information for framing the interviews.

The following criteria were used as indicators of FLTP, drawn largely from the literature, to inform the data collection and analysis:

- Flexible *admissions criteria*, including the recognition of prior learning;
- Flexible *curriculum design*, including assessment, to take into account different learning styles, different abilities and different knowledge backgrounds of students;

¹ As opposed to the 'traditional' conception of students as being straight from school, fully financially supported, able to attend all their classes during the day, and having no responsibilities other than to their studies, 'non-traditional' students can be older, engaged in some form of paid or unpaid work, and have a multitude of responsibilities outside of their studies

- Flexible *delivery relating to the pace, place and mode* of teaching and learning;
- Flexible *support systems and services* that cater for working and non-working students and those with disabilities.

The analysis of the data followed four broad themes:

- understandings of FLTP
- FLTP practices
- contextual factors impacting on FLTP
- FLTP principles / guidelines

Findings

Understandings of FLTP

As expected, a range of understandings of flexible learning and teaching were encountered in the interviews. However, for flexible learning to be implemented sustainably, the meaning of the term needs to be clearly defined and articulated institutionally, or it can lead to division, contestation and the duplication of effort and resources (Kirkpatrick & Jakupec 1997; Johnston 1997). A provisional definition for UWC was suggested at the FLTP seminar as follows:

The current, common understanding of FLTP at UWC, in furtherance of UWC's mission to make 'lifelong learning opportunities available' is: Flexible learning and teaching provision is an inclusive, learner-centred approach that promotes flexibility in admissions criteria, curriculum design, learning and teaching modes and assessment, with appropriate support systems and services, for the purpose of developing graduate attributes throughout the learning process so that all students can make a positive difference in the world. This is a dynamic understanding which we anticipate will change over time.

FLTP practices

Academic provision

After-hours undergraduate programmes and enrolments for these programmes continue to shrink, but there are concerns in certain departments and among certain individuals to find alternative ways to ensure flexible access and success for working people. Many examples of ways in which staff are 'working around' institutional obstacles and resistance to change were identified, such as setting more flexible forms of assessment and allowing flexibility in where and when assessment can take place, specifically to accommodate working students. Other examples were ensuring learning spaces and computer labs were open to students after hours, especially on Saturdays, and holding tutorials on Saturdays outside of the official timetable. However, such responsiveness to student needs was occurring in isolated pockets, and was driven by particular people who cared about their students and their *individual* needs, rather than as coherent faculty or institutional responses.

The use of technology enhanced learning (TEL) in creating more blended forms of learning was quite widely encountered. Innovative uses of TEL were aimed at deepening and improving student learning, but very few instances were reported of where it was being used as an *alternative* to traditional

classroom teaching. In most cases, technology, was being used to enhance or enrich traditional learning and teaching approaches, to improve communication with students or to make learning resources more easily available to students. The benefits of using mobile technology as a learning and teaching resource is that it allows learning to take place anywhere, and at any time, and that nearly all students have access to a cell phone. But interviewees more often reported using mobile technology to facilitate communication with students than to support active learning

Academics involved in teaching outside of the mainstream, such as in extended curriculum programmes and in academic development programmes, seemed to have more opportunities for innovation in learning and teaching, and in taking integrated learning approaches that would maximise these students' chances of success. However, they were still limited in flexibility by institutional systems and infrastructure, in particular by the existing 'full-time'/'part-time' provision system.

Student support services

The Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS) provides many flexible support services for students. Among these, the centre takes particular care of the learning needs of students with disabilities and ensuring that course materials and assessments are easily accessible to these students and in an appropriate format. Students are provided with the assistive technology and training in the use of this technology for their needs and, in addition, the CSSS administers course assessments for students with special requirements.

The library has late weekday and weekend opening hours that can accommodate working students but space is limited and is not conducive for group work. The Writing Centre provides asynchronous feedback for students who cannot make use of their services during weekdays and the Centre for Innovative Educational Communications Technology (CIECT) provides responsive education and training for staff and students not only in the use of different technologies, but also advises staff on the pedagogical use of different technologies and how to design effective learning using ICTs.

Contextual factors impacting on FLTP

Drivers

Drivers of FLTP were categorised as occurring at institutional and programme level. Institutional drivers of FLTP were the institutional systems that drive learning and teaching development through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and associated structures, such as the Teaching and Learning (T&L) Directorate which works in collaboration with the Deputy Deans T&L and T&L Specialists in each faculty and with student support services.

Drivers of FLTP at programme level were individual pioneers and champions of FLTP, many of whom were actively raising awareness of FLTP practices in their faculties and of its educational potential, and who were trying to enhance learning and teaching through engaging students more deeply in the learning process. This suggests that these academics are reflecting seriously on their pedagogy.

Enablers of FLTP

Institutional enablers of FLTP were policies such as the Institutional Operating Policy (IOP) 2010-2014; the appointment of senior teaching and learning staff in every faculty; institutional support for the

professional development of academic staff, for encouraging teaching and learning scholarship and for quality teaching and learning innovation.

Pioneers, champions and practitioners of FLTP were important enablers of FLTP by influencing learning and teaching discourses and practices in their faculties and more broadly across UWC.

Obstacles/challenges to FLTP

The key obstacles and challenges to FLTP were associated with resistance to change at organisational and individual levels; administrative and bureaucratic obstacles; resource challenges; and limitations to FLTP in some of the professional undergraduate degrees, such as the health-related degrees, because of the curriculum requirements of professional bodies.

One of the biggest challenges seems to be to change the dominant conception of teaching/learning as largely face-to-face and lecture based and for university staff to accept that the 'non-traditional' student is the norm, not the exception. So formal and informal systems and/or practices at departmental, faculty and institutional level can frustrate individual efforts to create more flexible learning opportunities for both working and non-working students and this can be compounded by people's resistance to change.

Regarding the use of technology for enabling more flexible learning and teaching, there were tensions between staff workload, associated time constraints and research pressure on the one hand, and the time and energy required to explore and experiment with learning technology on the other.

Expanding/promoting FLTP at UWC

In order to increase the uptake of FLTP at UWC, key responses from interviewees were:

- Promote FLTP more (from the bottom up) by showcasing successful examples within faculties.
- More grants for learning and teaching innovation can incentivise experimenting with FLTP and should be actively promoted.
- FLTP needs to be embraced and championed by UWC leadership in all spheres of its operations (from the top down), at departmental, faculty and executive levels, to bring about a change in institutional culture from 'full-time'/'part-time' provision to more flexible, inclusive learning and teaching approaches for a diversity of students.

Thus, both a 'top-down' and a 'bottom-up' approach are required to bring about a change process that can coalesce pockets of enthusiasm towards a coherent, institutionalised direction.

Principles/guidelines for FLTP development

The principles/guidelines that would need to inform institutional policy on FLTP may overlap to some extent with UWC's present teaching and learning policies, but the challenge is to embed these policies more widely and deeply within the institution. The following actions to develop FLTP as the norm within UWC are necessary:

- Agreement on a broad and inclusive university-wide understanding of quality FLTP;
- The promotion of FLTP for the entire student body, driven by the institutional leadership;

- Finding out who one's learners are and putting them at the centre of provision, and within a framework of 'ethics of care';
- Ensuring pedagogically oriented, quality FLTP which respects the knowledge demands of different disciplines and domains;
- Ensuring a responsive pedagogy that respects and builds on alternative forms of knowledge, including the knowledge embedded in learners' life experiences;
- Establishing FLTP explicitly within a framework of lifelong learning;
- Ensuring inclusivity of FLTP for all students, providing a range of opportunities and choices for learning for diverse learning needs, and of the pace, place and mode of delivery, both on and off campus (possibly guided by *universal design for learning* principles);
- Promoting greater use of alternative, flexible approaches to assessment within FLTP;
- Guaranteeing adequate resources underpinned by reliable ICT;
- A coherent and enabling institutional system where the administrative, teaching, learning and delivery sub-systems are aligned and support each other.

Conclusion

There are positive moves towards more flexible learning and teaching provision at UWC but the duality of the 'full-time'/'part-time' provision system restricts rather than facilitates these shifts. This system is premised on the notion of the 'traditional' student, whereas in reality the 'non-traditional' student is the norm. It is vital that undergraduate provision at UWC affords appropriate flexible learning opportunities that cater for this norm.

For FLTP to grow and to be sustainable, not only do all four institutional sub-systems (teacher, learner, delivery and administrative) need to be aligned and support each other, but also the entire university needs to shift in the way it views, engages with and develops a common understanding of and commitment to a provision which offers a wider range of opportunities for student participation in its programmes. Institutional change needs to be 'top down' and bottom up'.

A proposed immediate next step is that a common inclusive understanding of FLTP, which arises from this study, is discussed, amended if necessary, and adopted by UWC. This common understanding could then mediate a coherent institutional response for expanding FLTP that better accommodates working students. The findings suggest that FLTP needs to be promoted and driven persistently by the top institutional leadership in order to bring about the required shifts and organisational change.

Chapter 1: Background

This report describes and sets out the research findings of a project into exploring flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP) at UWC, within the university's broader framework of its lifelong learning mission. This study is located within a broader SAQA-UWC action research project, led by the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL), which seeks to explore how UWC is responding meaningfully to the real circumstances of working students so as to enhance prospects for their professional development².

Given the costs of studying and the levels of economic hardship that the majority of UWC students face, it seems reasonable to assume that most students will be involved in both paid and unpaid work while studying. This premise is supported by Schreiber & Moja (2014)³, whose research shows that approximately three-quarters of *all* students at UWC are 'non-traditional' in that they work either in the formal or informal sector; care for the old or the young; are parents and/or surrogate parents to siblings; live and learn with disability or chronic illness; and are returning or interrupting students. There is growing evidence in Australia also, which is a far more affluent society, of high levels of employment amongst full-time students. This is shown clearly in a 2010 study into UWC student usage of information communication technologies (ICTs) where, out of a university-wide sample of 812 students, approximately 42% of whom were first years, 83% were studying full time and 14 % part time (Wood, Barnes, Vivian, Scutter and Stokes-Thompson 2010). Of the total sample, 66% reported currently undertaking paid employment and working an average of 17.7 hours per week. This is a significant proportion of students who are working, and Schreiber and Moja's study makes us question whether we should be thinking about 'working' and 'non-working' students at all, and how universities are adapting to the realities of the 'non-traditional' student.

Historically, teaching and learning opportunities for working students have included extramural studies, open universities, part-time study and modular systems. At UWC, over the years, certain undergraduate courses have provided rich part-time study opportunities for adults seeking to enter higher education for the first time. When UWC was established in 1960 a parallel system of delivery of classes became institutionalised – one system operated in the day time (8h20 – 16h00), and one in the evening (16h10 – 21h00). Those who attend in the day are referred to as 'full-time' students and those who attend in the evenings or after office hours are referred to as 'part-time'. This parallel system made sense at the time as UWC's role was to help ensure that the apartheid Coloured Affairs bureaucracy had qualified personnel, and many of the students were working as civil servants for Coloured Affairs in roles as teachers, nurses, social workers, legal clerks etc.

While the parallel system of delivery was established to fulfill an apartheid government need, it did give access to university education to many thousands of people who would not have benefited otherwise. These were, in the main, first generation students whose education had been curtailed for

² See research proposal for mapping flexible learning and teaching provision at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) Appendix A: History of the Flexible Learning and Teaching Provision Action Research Project

³ Internal CSSS report based on South African Surveys of Student Engagement (SASSE)

political, economic or social reasons. Many have gone on since then to be leaders nationally and internationally in many fields.

It was only in the mid-1990s that attention began to be paid to the nature of the 'evening' classes and the students. Up until then, most of the evening classes had mirrored what had happened in the day classes, even though the 'part-time' students had different personal and work experiences and learning histories. With the setting up of the University Mission Initiative on Lifelong Learning (UMILL) in 1997 and the establishment of Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) in December 1999, the adult students within the university system began to be the focus of particular attention. The first study of 'part-time' classes at UWC was done in 1998 and a series of studies has been done and reported on since then through the Senate Lifelong Learning Committee (SLLC).

However, increasing pressures on the capacity and resources of the institution have led to visible 'cracks' appearing in the parallel delivery system, as the different faculties have strained to maintain credible dual options for students. For example, in some faculties certain subjects were offered 'part-time' only in alternate years, making it very difficult for students to complete the courses in reasonable time; the Law Faculty was the first to propose the dropping of the 'part-time classes' altogether; the Arts Faculty was next. The Faculty of Education, being very dependent on government bursary support for its students, has fluctuated dramatically over time. At some times most of their students were 'part-time' and at others, mainly 'full-time'.

The 'cracking' of the dual or parallel system, then, has resulted in a growing trend to reduce the number of after-hours undergraduate classes for working people in some faculties, which is eroding UWC's historic identity and niche advantage of providing access to higher education for marginalised communities and working people. This has occurred despite the increasing urgency for a better educated workforce, particularly with professional qualifications, that can support sustainable economic and social development in South Africa.

This led to the proposal in 2010 by DLL to explore an alternative way of maintaining access for adults, which is manifest in this current research. This research has included having pilot sites explore alternative ways of providing education to working students; and the investigation of flexible provision across all faculties, the focus of this particular research project.

Pannekoek challenges us to consider that: "If humankind is to reach its potential within one or even two decades, there must be change – and that change will be rooted in flexible options" (Pannekoek In E Burge, CC Gibson & T Gibson (eds) 2011:xi) and, increasingly, flexible options are being seen in higher education. At UWC, it is clear that students are finding flexible ways of working and studying within and around inflexible systems at work and in the academy, especially with the reduction in after-hours programmes, and many university staff are responding in various, flexible ways to the needs of their students. However, these forms of provision have not been systematically documented to inform teaching and learning discussions, or to deepen what is meant in the Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) 2010-2014 by the need to "(d)velop a more responsive teaching and learning environment which promotes and enhances flexible learning" (IOP 2010-2014, Goal 2 strategy 3).

In line with the IOP commitment to enhance FLTP, this investigation has sought to establish what flexible or varied learning and teaching opportunities *are* available at UWC for working adults; what

forms these take; staff perspectives on how to promote and grow successful FLTP at UWC; and what *principles* can be derived from these examples for enhancing FLTP and for deepening our understanding of the concept. In particular, the study sought to identify practices that are more inclusionary of today's diverse undergraduate student population, with their varied learning needs and multiple responsibilities outside of the academy and the possible implications for organisational change of expanding FLTP.

The research question framing the study was: ***How is flexible learning and teaching understood and practised at UWC, in particular in relation to undergraduate programmes and for 'non-traditional' students?***

The framing of an alternative view of flexibility from the current, increasingly unsustainable model of parallel day and evening classes, using face-to-face delivery methods, to one of 'flexible provision' which problematises place, pace and modes of learning within the UWC context, is the focus of this investigation. Moreover, the binaries of what has traditionally been known as 'full-time study' and 'part-time study' may no longer be appropriate or relevant in today's global society, where learning often needs to be 'just in time' and convenient in terms of place and time; and where more and more people who enter or aspire to enter university have work, family and other demands on their time that require them to study flexibly.

Professor Anne Edwards emphasises that universities need to envision themselves as "connecting diverse students with powerful knowledge" that can enable them to make a difference in the world. A critical question arising from this that we need to ask is: "what kinds of learners are needed to create the kind of society we would like to have?" (Edwards 2014). This key question highlights the centrality of curriculum and pedagogy in thinking about the present and future society that is needed and wanted. It allows us to conceptualise flexible provision from the standpoint of the graduate attributes of 'scholarship', 'critical citizenship and the social good' and 'lifelong learning' being firmly at the centre of our educational objectives. It also means that flexible provision must address the collective concerns of *all* students, no matter what their working status is, and including those with disabilities, to connect them to useful and 'powerful' knowledge and provide them with sufficient, effective support along their learning journeys.

With these understandings, this investigation has adopted a broad approach to flexible provision that includes

- flexible admissions criteria;
- flexible curriculum design and assessment;
- flexible delivery, such as distance, technology supported, blended and after-hours options where the pace, place and mode of teaching and learning vary from the historical norm particularly, but not exclusively, for undergraduate programmes; and
- flexible student support services.

The study aims to document a range of such flexible learning and teaching activities across the different faculties at UWC: Arts; Community and Health Sciences (CHS); Dentistry; Economics and Management Sciences (EMS); Education; Law; and Natural Sciences. The responsiveness of student

services and administrative systems to the working realities of students is a vital consideration as these can fundamentally hinder or assist the provision of flexible learning and teaching. Therefore, ways in which some UWC staff are able to 'work around' bureaucratic inflexibilities to assist their students, are explored as instances of flexible provision also.

This report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents a review of some of the relevant literature that describes and problematises issues around FLTP, and foregrounds certain concepts, principles and guidelines that can be used in interpreting the data. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology followed, the methods of data collection, the types of data collected and accessed, sampling procedures and sample size, ethical considerations and the thematic data analysis. Chapter 4 deals with the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data and Chapter 5 concludes the report, summarising key points, suggesting possible principles for FLTP as well as possible next steps in taking the research forward.

Chapter 2: Literature review & conceptual framework

Introduction

In the foreword to the publication *Flexible Pedagogy, Flexible Practice* published by Athabasca University, Frits Pannekoek challenges us to reflect on and redefine what we mean by flexible learning:

In 2009 UNESCO estimated that there were 150 million post-secondary learners in the world, with 20 million enrolled in 'open' universities – that ultimate expression of flexible learning. UNESCO further estimated that, in order to reach a reasonable number of learners around the globe, another 150 million places would be required in the next decade, largely in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This will mean a true revolution in the global learning map. It is clear that such a goal will only be achieved through an aggressive implementation of flexible learning. Indeed, such a revolution will need to redefine the term *flexible* which, while radical in its day, is too timid for a future of learning abundance. What advocates of flexible learning are attempting to do is to turn knowledge from a commodity of scarcity into one of abundance. The journey will be difficult, and it will revolutionise the world we know. And, as with any revolution, there will be resistance. (Pannekoek 2011:ix)

(O)pen universities and the flexible learning movement must seize the initiative again to ensure that flexible learning becomes the hallmark of the public movement to remove all barriers to learning – the barriers of time, geography, income and ethnicity. (Pannekoek 2011: x)

This latter sentiment provides food for thought as it echoes strongly UWC's commitment, in the preamble to its Mission Statement, "to nurturing the cultural diversity of South Africa, and to responding in critical and creative ways to the needs of a society in transition" and "in helping build an equitable and dynamic society". These commitments further justify and support the rationale for this SAQA-UWC research study.

Definitions and understandings of flexible learning

The governance and policy environment

One of the things this study investigates is the varying understandings of flexible learning and teaching provision held by staff at UWC, and how these relate to the parameters of flexible learning elaborated

in the action plans for Strategy 7⁴ of the Implementation Plan for UWC's Teaching and Learning Strategy 2010 – 2014, as follows:

- 7.1 *Conduct research on students' learning needs and current capacity for flexible learning at UWC*
- 7.2 *Investigate best practices for flexible learning using educational technology in higher education*
- 7.3 *Plan teaching and learning venues which are conducive to flexible learning at UWC*
- 7.4 *Rework university timetable in order to take into account flexible learning needs of students and educators*

UWC's teaching and learning policy and strategies are consistent with commitments from the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to high quality education and training balanced with flexibility "to cater for the wide-ranging circumstances that face learners and the wide-ranging options for delivering what constitutes relevant credits and qualifications" (SAQA 2000: 3).

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa has proposed a flexible model for reforming the undergraduate curriculum, and thus improve student success. It argues that "curriculum structure exerts a powerful influence on who gains access to higher education, who succeeds in it, and what the outcomes are" (CHE 2013: 92), and that given the inequalities and development needs of the country, the curriculum should be sufficiently flexible to enable a diverse body of students to achieve their potential, without compromising the quality of the qualification

At a national policy level, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training emphasises a number of principles which are central to UWC's lifelong learning mission, and the post-school education and training system as a whole. To illustrate, Chapter 7 on Opening Learning through Diverse Modes of Provision, reiterates the principles of

learner centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition of credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learning support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems. (RSA 2013:48)

It advocates higher education (HE) programmes and modes of provision that are more responsive to learners' needs and realities, including those of working adults, "which take into account their varying life and work contexts, rather than requiring them to attend daily classes at fixed times and central venues" (RSA 2013: 48). It recognises the important role of educational technologies and encourages the expansion of quality 'online' and 'blended' learning, including of open and distance learning programmes.

⁴ Strategy 7: Develop a more responsive teaching and learning environment which promotes and enhances lifelong learning. Directorate of Teaching and Learning UWC, May 2010.

It is these principles and parameters that framed the investigation into FLTP at UWC, within a higher education discourse of lifelong learning.

Understandings in the local and international literature

The investigation considers these understandings within the context of those held more broadly in society. As with Pannekoek, much of the local and international literature talks about ‘flexible learning’. There are increasing numbers of scholars theorising this concept – what it means; why it has such currency; and what the implications are for understanding our changing practices. The notion of flexible learning is informed too by debates about ‘knowledge wars’, which was the topic of Prof Tara Fenwick’s Julius Nyerere Lecture on Lifelong Learning at UWC on 12 October 2010 (Fenwick 2010a). She traced the socio-material (2010b) to discuss and theorise the ‘blurry lines’ between concepts of ‘full-time’ and ‘part-time’ study; ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ students; ‘distance’ and ‘face-to-face teaching’; ‘day time’ or ‘after-hours’ study; what it means to ‘work’ /‘not work’; whose knowledge counts, when, where, and in whose interests; open source versus proprietary approaches to information and knowledge; and ‘flexibility’ and ‘inflexibility’. It includes extramural studies, open universities and modular systems. It is a complex and often disputed term, meaning different things to different stakeholders with different consequences and implications (Kirkpatrick & Jakupec 1997), although there is almost universal acceptance of flexibility as a positive attribute – good for students as well as good for the university (Alexander 2010).

It is important, therefore, to recognise that ‘flexible learning’, or flexible learning and teaching provision, is not referring to one thing: it refers to a range of responses to different situations and to learners’ different needs.

Alexander (2010: 441) concurs that while there has been much discussion on flexible learning in the higher education community in the last 20 years, the focus has been “on the meaning of the term itself, rather than its implementation.” This has resulted in no shared understanding of what it means in practice, and this imprecision has contributed to its status as “a mantra in higher education”. In order for flexible learning to be implemented sustainably, the meaning of the term needs to be clearly defined and articulated institutionally, or it can lead to division, multiple contesting discourses and the duplication of effort and resources, among others (Kirkpatrick & Jakupec 1997; Johnston 1997).

These understandings are reflected in the many discourses around flexibility that prevail. Neoliberal discourses around the ‘flexible citizen’ emphasise flexibility of the individual, rather than any critical engagement with the economic or educational system (Edwards 2013). The knowledge economy is said to be dependent on these multi-skilled, flexible workers, who are “paradigmatic of economically successful organisations” (Burge, Gibson & Gibson in Burge, Gibson & Gibson (eds) 2011: 328).

Discourses around the massification of higher education may view flexibility as a cost-effective means of taking education to scale, whereas those that focus on efficiency aspects of higher education in a context of reduced state funding view flexible learning as a means of reducing costs to the academy. Other discourses emphasise flexible learning as a way of higher education responding to market needs and increasing their competitiveness. Flexibility is also implicit in conversations about the general transformation of higher education in the new technological age (Burge, Gibson & Gibson 2011; Kirkpatrick & Jakupec 1997; Edwards 2013) and is more and more frequently being associated with the use of ICTs in teaching and learning.

Finally, discourses related to lifelong learning and the democratisation of higher education emphasise learner-centredness, enhancing equity and access, and alternative admissions pathways, with second- and even third-chance opportunities for mature learners (Ryan in Burge *et al* (eds) 2011). In this scenario flexible learning takes on multiple forms to accommodate the different challenges that people face at different stages of their lives. It is seen as enabling lifelong learning and increasing and widening participation – both increasing actual numbers as well as diversity of participation - in higher education (Edwards 2013). This discourse resonates most strongly with the perspectives taken by this research study.

However, this study conceptualises flexible learning as being broader than the implied focus of the term on the *learner*, to encompass teaching and the provision of associated services for learning success in higher education – flexible *provision*. From this viewpoint, FLTP refers to flexibility of delivery in terms of time (when), pace (duration), place (where) and mode (how) of learning, as well as to flexible student support services and administrative systems that can sustain the educational changes that are needed to support the lived realities of students, especially working students. It is with the understanding that it is not ‘business as usual’ for the institution on various fronts, neither administratively nor pedagogically, that the research study chooses to use the word ‘provision’.

Dimensions of flexible learning and teaching provision

By using the term *flexible learning and teaching provision* we are signaling a focus on providing flexible or varied opportunities to students for learning. For the purposes of this study, we have found a useful definition of flexible learning from the University of Southern Queensland, Australia (2011):

...the flexible learning agenda aims to establish a sustainable range of learning opportunities that incorporate technology-enhanced learning for all students. Flexibility in learning and teaching practice in a broad sense can include:

- *flexible curriculum design*, including flexible forms of assessment which take into account different learning styles of students;
- *flexible admissions criteria*, including mechanisms such as the recognition of prior learning (RPL);
- *flexible delivery*, including distance, online, on campus, a mix of these modes as well as accelerated or decelerated options.

This definition supports a socio-cultural understanding of learning, where learning is embedded in practices that involve action and work; is material and social; and where meaning is fashioned as one learns. It embraces the use of ICTs but it does not explicitly encompass flexible student services, which is an important omission.

Alexander (2010: 441) avers that:

..the term flexible learning is taken to represent a range of approaches to meet the varied needs of students in contemporary social contexts. The needs of students include independence in terms of time and location of learning, and the availability of some degree of choice in the curriculum (including content, learning strategies and

assessment). The approaches taken to meet these needs include the use of contemporary information and communication technologies to support a range of learning strategies such as learning contracts.

Alexander (2010) usefully elaborates four ways flexible learning has been taken up. In our project all four perspectives co-exist:

1. Flexible learning as flexible delivery:
In many instances flexible learning is referred to as 'flexible delivery' which coincides with the use of ICTs and multi-media capabilities on campus, including the rapid adoption of social media and networking tools like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc.
2. Flexible learning as an educational philosophy and political position about education:
This perspective emphasises the importance of the student experience of learning, rather than the delivery mechanism. "Part of the attraction of flexible learning for many educationists is the belief that it enables students to use desired learning strategies which involve them in constructing meaning, and thereby educationists link the term with student- centred learning, self-directed learning....and the like" (Nunan 1996 cited in Alexander 2010: 444). In this case, philosophical approaches underpin the design of flexible learning strategies, whereas other approaches emphasise providing particular/prescribed learning options for students to choose from.
3. Flexible learning as providing access to and democratisation of learning and teaching processes:
Improving access to higher education for people across social class, gender, age, disability, geographic location and working status leads to an increase in diversity of the student body. There are opportunities for learners to direct and control their own learning, thus shifting teacher-learner power relations.
4. Flexible learning as a set of strategies in response to new challenges in teaching and learning and changing student needs:
Some of these challenges in higher education are: a decrease in traditional sources of funding for universities; evidence that students are undertaking longer hours of paid work to finance their studies; and increased numbers of students wanting to change careers. Many of these students are older, bringing their own knowledge and experience into the learning spaces of universities. Flexible approaches can include individual learning contracts – which afford some choice of both content and assessment - and work-integrated learning.

Billett (2009) reminds us of the value of work-integrated learning in assisting students acquire the conceptual, procedural and dispositional knowledge needed for their smooth transition into professional practice in the workplace: "the very qualities to be an effective student in higher education – a proactive and agentic learner – are those required for effective professional practice" (p838). However, he cautions that this needs to be carefully structured and integrated pedagogically with the curriculum to achieve the intended outcomes.

Collis and Moonen (2001) add that flexible learning needs to emphasise the activities of learners in a 'participation-oriented society' and that learning situations should open up opportunities for learners to contribute to a learning community.

The UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) (Tallantyre 2012; Gordon 2014) emphasises flexible learning and flexible pedagogy as giving students a choice in the pace, place and mode of their learning. They unpack these concepts as follows:

- Pace - including accelerated and decelerated programmes and degrees, learning part time, arrangements that allow learners to 'roll on/roll off' ('stop in/stop out'), and systems for recognition of prior learning and for credit accumulation and transfer;
- Place – work-based learning with employer engagement, learning at home, on campus, while travelling or in any other place, often aided by technology which can enable the flexibility of learning across geographical boundaries and at convenient times;
- Mode – especially the use of learning technologies to enhance flexibility and enrich the quality of learning experience, in blended or distance learning and in synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning (Tallantyre 2012: 4; Gordon 2014).

Tallantyre (2012: 4) continues:

“Each of these three dimensions of flexibility is shaped by the need to ensure that learning is responsive to the requirements and choices of an increasingly diverse and demanding body of learners. Although each dimension may be seen as distinct with its own set of specific drivers, there is also the potential for integration and a unifying thematic coherence. In broad terms, this is about the *transition away from a traditional production led model to a more dynamic and responsive model of learning.*” (emphasis added)

In his review of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) flexible learning provision pilot projects, Outram (2009) confirms that at the heart of flexible learning is a concern to give learners a choice in relation to when, where and how they engage with learning. The HEFCE flexible learning pilots provide useful insights into the implications of implementing such different initiatives. These pilots comprised an accelerated honours course; a blended learning course (half contact and half online); a 'part-time' programme that allowed learners to dip in and dip out over a number of years; short, introductory 'taster' modules for those who had no previous experience of higher education; and work-based modules aimed at continuous professional development. One of the pertinent findings was that accelerated learning may be more suited to certain constituencies of learners than others - in particular for vocational or professional qualifications, where learners are either already working in the sector and would benefit from enhanced job prospects and/or job security; or wish to return to work; or wish to make a career change. In this case, there was a particularly high demand for an accelerated Law degree. The programme consisted of blended and work-based approaches in combination with accelerated learning, with which the learners reportedly engaged well. An observation was made that the learners in these pilots were 'not mobile' and therefore "(i)t is important to make the people in Universities understand that we must take learning to the student

and not vice versa” (Outram 2009: 8). Thus, *where* delivery occurs may be a critical determinant in whether potential learners engage in higher education or not.

In summary, there seems to be some commonality in the literature about what constitutes FLTP: that it is responsive to a diversity of learners - both working and not working - and learning styles; that it is about access and success in higher education; that it is founded on good pedagogy that puts the learner at the centre of learning; that it develops well-rounded, knowledgeable and capable graduates who can make a positive difference in the world; and that it requires a coordinated response, enabling response.

Finally, although flexibility is regarded as good for students as well as for the university (Alexander 2010), Barnett cautions that it is “not an absolute good” (2014:7) as there may be unintended consequences. FLTP, therefore, needs to be monitored and limits to flexibility need to be recognised.

The role of technology in FLTP is discussed in the following section.

Technology enhanced learning (TEL)

As has been mentioned, for some the use of various forms of technology is synonymous with flexibility in education, but this study takes a much broader view of FLTP: that it is more than an ‘e-learning quick fix’.

Technology does play an essential role in education today, providing academics, administrators and students with opportunities to share educational materials, information and processes; to communicate easily and instantaneously; and to collaborate. ‘Elearning’ platforms can integrate instructional material (via audio, video and text), email, live chat sessions, online discussions, forums, quizzes, assignments and the World Wide Web. TEL offers flexibility to students who are constrained by the attendance requirements of full time study, enabling them to learn in their own time and place and at their own pace; it enables easy delivery of materials from lecturers to students and vice versa; and it connects learners to people and resources that can support their educational needs online (Lai and Chong (2007). The use of ICTs and emerging technologies has the potential to allow universities to extend their traditional campus-based service to distant (off-campus) and online (using Internet and other digital technologies 24 hrs, 7 days a week, 365 days a year) modes. Indeed, the use of technology has formed the basis of distance education for many years and has a long history in the UK, Canada, Australia, and in South Africa by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE). Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are increasing rapidly and have been touted as the answer to flexibility in education, enabling thousands of learners access to learning in new ways, but there are pedagogical concerns with some of these approaches and that course completion rates tend to be low (Gordon 2014).

A problem with TEL is that it presupposes students have easy access to the internet, which is not the case for many. Statistics SA 2012⁵ revealed that, on average, less than 10% of South Africans have access to the internet at home, just over 5% have internet access at school/college/university and that most people access the internet at work (just under 20%). Access is greater than the average in the

⁵ <http://mybroadband.co.za/news/internet/85165-south-africas-internet-access-stats-revealed.html>

wealthier provinces, such as Gauteng and the Western Cape where wi-fi coverage is progressing rapidly, but much less in the poorer provinces, and this clearly has implications for online and distance learning.

The umbrella term 'ICT' includes a vast array of computer-based and online tools, such as digital texts, texting, online chat, web browsing, social networking (Twitter, Facebook, Google+, MySpace); video and music download sites (Lea and Jones 2011: 378); the Internet and World Wide Web; email; and learning management systems (LMS) (Macharia and Pelsler 2012: 2-3), and new apps and sites emerge almost daily. These tools can have transformational value if applied properly to effect a paradigm shift from a traditional lecturer-centred to a student-centred learning environment, which in turn can enhance the quality of higher education (Macharia and Pelsler 2012:2-3).

However, Lai and Chong (2007: 85-86) caution that peoples' uptake of these technologies is uneven, ranging between 'explorers' at the one end of the scale to 'laggards' at the other, with 'pioneers' and 'sceptics' in between. This has implications for how both staff and students are trained and supported in their use of technology. In addition, in a review of what constitutes 'enhanced' learning with TEL in higher education, Kirkwood and Price (2014: 10) noted that technology is used in 3 ways in higher education: to replicate existing teaching practices; to supplement existing teaching practices; or to transform teaching and/or learning processes and outcomes.

Bearing this in mind, the question is how best to use new technologies to support education? There are strong proponents for a mixed or blended approach where conventional methods, also referred to as non-technology-based teaching (face-to-face lectures and tutorials, seminars, small-group discussions, question-and-answer session etc.), are complemented by digital methods (Laurillard 2008:143). Alexander explains that blended learning has evolved from early practices of simply combining online activities with face-to-face teaching. It has come to include "both individual and collaborative learning activities, structured and unstructured learning experiences, and blending of both customised and off-the-shelf learning content" (2010: 445). From this perspective, blended learning may be defined as combining aspects of face-to-face learning with various modes of *active* and online learning, in order to engage students optimally in the learning process.

Gordon (2014), in a recent UK HEA report on the role of technology in flexible pedagogies, explains that technology can be used for blended learning (what he calls flexible delivery), for personalised learning, and for 'flexible socialisation'. Flexible socialisation refers to the use of social and mobile computing in the learning process which, Gordon points out, can be very effective for supporting teamwork or group work activities that are impractical for campus-based provision, and especially for 'part-time learning'. He cautions that blended learning is not just about using virtual learning ('e-learning') platforms to create flexible and accessible libraries of course notes, but that a 'flipped classroom' approach – *replacing* traditional lecture-style and other traditional forms of delivery with online content that engages learners, and *transforming* contact sessions into active learning opportunities – allows for more learner-centred and effective learning.

The Flexible Learning Institute (FLI) at Charles Sturt University – an Australian university that specialises in distance learning - has two core principles that guide their curriculum development: learner centredness (engaging, motivating and intellectually stimulating learning experiences focused on the individual and social needs of the learners and that encourage participation and self-

regulation); and equivalence in teaching, assessment, of resources and of support⁶. Whereas blended learning provides all learners with the same set of resources, personalised learning allows for flexibility and adaptability of the content – including of assessment - and its sequencing and pacing, according to learners’ individual desires and needs. One of the ways this can be achieved is through emerging intelligent technologies, such as ‘adaptive technologies’, which mediate individual learning progress. These can be particularly suitable for providing individualised learning for large cohorts of diverse learners, whose needs cannot be met through traditional teaching methods.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an inclusive approach to learning based on the understanding that “learners are highly variable in the ways they learn, and that this variability is the norm, not the exception” (Glass, Meyer and Rose 2013: 99). The challenge is to rethink how we design curricula and learning environments to accommodate this variability, and that “multiple, accessible and flexible pathways may be a promising strategy to address this problem” (ibid). This speaks directly to the focus of our investigation into FLTP practices, underpinned by the assumption that ‘non-traditional’ students are the norm at UWC (Schreiber and Moja 2014) and that a traditional ‘one-size-fits-all’ educational system marginalises large numbers of students.

Furthermore, UDL relates to the notion of personalised learning and is often associated with supporting special needs. UDL learning guidelines provide for:

- Multiple representations of knowledge, for a range of different learning styles and for a variety of different assessment methods, in order to develop resourceful, knowledgeable learners;
- Multiple means of action and expression, including building capacity for managing learning, in order to develop strategic, goal-directed learners; and
- Multiple means of engagement and options for self-regulation, so as to develop purposeful, motivated learners (CAST 2011).

Alexander proposes that “(t)he goal is to use these blends to create flexible learning experiences for students” (Alexander 2010:445). However, the goal should be more than this, and the FLI at Charles Sturt University emphasises that blended and flexible learning approaches need to be applicable to the students’ lives and their educational purposes, following eight supporting principles for effective blended and flexible learning: they must be founded on effective, research-based practice; they must be authentic; collaborative; lifelong; appropriate; innovative; sustainable; and strive for continuous improvement. Edwards takes this further and argues that such learning activities need to help students engage with knowledge that is ‘culturally powerful’ so that they become productive members of society (Edwards 2014). Edwards argues that student engagement is the most critical factor in enabling learning, and from this perspective it is clear that the use of technology for the purposes of FLTP would need to be carefully considered and pedagogically informed in order to promote active engagement in learning.

It is commonly said that higher education graduates are unprepared for the workplace. Bozalek, Gachago, Alexander, Watters, Wood, Ivala and Herrington (2013) maintain that authentic learning, using emerging technologies, can provide complexity in the learning process and prepare learners for

⁶ <https://blendedandflexiblelearning.wikispaces.com/principles> In <http://www.csu.edu.au/division/landt/flexible-learning/bestpractice>

the challenges of professional practice after graduation. Similarly, Lombardi (2007) emphasises that the more students are exposed to authentic learning opportunities in their discipline, the better prepared they will be to deal with ambiguity and to use the kinds of higher order analysis and complex communication needed of them as professionals in situations of complex, ill-defined real-world problems. Technology has the flexibility to provide authentic learning experiences where this is not possible in real life, connecting students to online research communities where they can begin to become enculturated into the discipline and learn the specific ways of seeing and interpreting the world of the discipline, and allowing them to make connections to their own knowledge and experience. However, Lodge (2014) argues counter to this, that “there is little evidence to suggest that virtual engagement with peers and with content matter experts can provide the same benefits as being immersed in the intellectual culture on campus”. Some examples of authentic learning environments using emerging technologies, that can support FLTP, are simulation-based learning, student-created media, inquiry-based learning, peer evaluation, working with research data, and reflecting and documenting achievements such as through e-portfolios.

TEL for students with disabilities

As previously mentioned, UDL is a set of inclusive principles guiding curriculum development and delivery that ensure equal opportunities to learn for all individuals, and is commonly associated with educational provision for people with disabilities or special needs. It embraces flexible approaches that can be adjusted and tailored to individual needs and flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning difference and remove barriers to learning, especially through TEL⁷.

However, this is not unproblematic as the participation of students with disabilities in TEL needs to be considered in terms of ‘digital inclusion’. Digital inclusion is broadly understood as the access to and participation in “the same learning, employment, social and citizenship activities as others, through access to and use of digital technologies and computers” (Seale, Draffan and Wald 2010: 445). Seale *et al*’s (2010) study into the ‘digital inclusion’⁸ of students with disabilities in higher education indicated that digital inclusion is far more complex than merely issues of *accessibility* – access to computers, appropriate software and the internet - and the *inaccessibility* of certain online learning resources and activities, such as virtual learning environments. Their findings suggest that the focus should be more on learner agency and the digital strengths of students with disabilities and to actively support them in pursuing their goals.

One of these strengths was identified as ‘digital agility’ with technology; the wide range of strategies these students used to adapt activities, environments and technologies to suit their own needs as well as their confidence in their own abilities. The decisions and choices they made around the use of digital technologies related to:

- the perceived properties, affordances and simplicity of the technology;
- time concerns - the time taken to become familiar with the software – especially as students with disabilities tend to take longer than those without disabilities to achieve the same

⁷ <http://inclusiveeducationpdresources.com/udl/#sthash.DBJpics3.dpuf> and <http://www.cast.org/udl/>

learning objectives. This meant that these students had to prioritise their activities and generally had little interest in social media; and

- contextual social factors such as feeling stigmatised by their peers when seen to be using specialised assistive technologies - this was found to be so especially for students with learning disorders.

So although a range of assistive technological devices and support may be available, students with disabilities exhibit strong agency, making deliberate decisions about what to access and what not to, based on how quick and easy it is to learn to use and how suitable it is for their needs. This has implications for our assumptions about students' engagement and adeptness with social media technologies, for the way training is offered to students with disabilities and when it is offered, so that it is appropriate and does not waste their time unnecessarily.

So far this review of the literature has touched on different understandings of and approaches to FLTP and of its scope, but there are equally many critiques of FLTP.

Critiques of flexible learning

Coffield, a critic of human capital discourses of flexible learning, writes:

“(t)o our European counterparts it is obvious that both the state and employers throughout Europe are using the rhetoric of lifelong learning first and foremost to make workers more flexible and more employable. In the words of the Tavistock research team within The Learning Society Programme:

This new discourse on flexibility and employability legitimates the already well-advanced shift of the burden of responsibility for education, training and employment on to the *individual*, and implicitly denies any notion of objective structural problems such as lack of jobs, and the increasing proportion of poorly paid, untrained, routine and insecure jobs.” (Darmon *et al* cited in Coffield 1999: 488 [original emphasis]).

This relates to what Edwards (2013) refers to as the ‘dark side of flexibility’, when knowledge is viewed primarily as a commodity for competitive advantage in the labour market, or for commercial advantages. In this discourse, students as higher education ‘consumers’ can drive the demand for certain learning products and processes, such as MOOCs, with the risk that the university can lose its key educational mission and values.

A major critique of flexibility is its ‘alleged flexibility’ (Edwards and Nicoll 2000 in Alexander 2010). This standpoint makes the case that many younger students, straight from school, are not able to cope with the responsibility of pacing their learning and managing their own time, needing more structure and support in managing their learning. Similarly, Marler (2007) warns that ill-advised programme planning in the move to more flexible modes of delivery can result in insufficient time being made available for adequate learner support. He suggests that much of the attention of flexible learning has been on “the quality of learning materials, the range of media used, the provision of practical work at intensive block courses, and the type and frequency of assessments during course design” (2007: 10). He agrees that these are very important quality factors in learning design and delivery processes but has found that a fundamental success factor, one that sustains a student during difficult times, is a

personal relationship with a teacher, mentor or facilitator. He suggests that the students' need for human interaction should be elevated to the same level as the need for quality learning materials. This points to the importance of the affective domain in learning, and that it should be integral in educational design.

There are many critiques of the use of ICTs in education, but it may be helpful to frame these by Lodge's (2014) caution that "(o)nline and on-campus modes of study are not equal and should never be considered so", and that each has its own benefits and drawbacks which need to be carefully considered in education design.

One of the critiques of TEL relate to the common assumptions that young people in particular – sometimes termed the 'net generation' of learners or 'digital natives' – are well-versed and skilled in the use of such technology, including in Web 2.0 applications such as wikis, blogging, social networking, podcasts and 3D gaming. A study carried out on the diversity of student usage of current and emerging ICTs at the University of South Australia, to assess their readiness to use these technologies effectively and ascertain the information literacies they require to participate in Web 2.0 based learning activities, challenges these assumptions (Wood, Barnes, Vivian, Scutter and Stokes-Thompson 2010). The study found that there was greater diversity in students' use of current and emerging ICTs than previously realised. While younger students were engaging with these technologies more than older students, there was considerable variability in the types of technologies they used - their level of engagement and patterns of use could not be attributed simply to age or generational differences. For example, proficiency in English appeared to be a significant factor in usage. Another finding was that students who reported having a disability, as well as those who reported they were studying part-time and working, were engaging with technology less than the rest of the student population sampled. While this may have been because these student have less time to 'play' with technology, the study revealed that students who reported they were studying full-time and working tended to use Facebook and Skype, read blogs and watch YouTube more than part-time working students, who tended to use the web for obtaining information and their mobile phones for email. The study cautions, therefore, that 'net gen' learners may not be as comfortable in the digital environment as previously thought. This has implications for the choice of platforms and technologies that are introduced for learning and teaching and on ICT training for students. Furthermore, the diversity of learners and their exposure to ICTs needs to be taken into account in curriculum design (Wood *et al* 2010).

Similarly, Osborne, McCune and Houston's (2006) review of flexible learning and teaching in the UK alerts us to concerns about the general shift to technology-based approaches to flexibility and the possible risks, questioning the assumption that all young students are 'techno-savvy' and highly adept with technology. The risk here is that while online materials may be developed to support widening participation, it is often the traditional 'good' students who benefit most. These views are supported by Alexander (2010) who argues that many students are not sufficiently ICT literate to access or to benefit from technology-based learning and teaching. Furthermore, poorly designed and inflexible software has the possibility of engendering resistance rather than enabling the adoption of flexible approaches, both at an individual and at an institutional level (Osborne *et al* 2006).

Herrington and Parker (2013) caution that, even though technology training may be offered, many higher educational technology units teach how to use technologies through an instructional, step-by-

step approach (learning *about* the technology), not as cognitive tools to solve problems in an authentic learning environment (learning *with* technologies). For mature students, the ‘cognitive overload’ of academic studies in tandem with the pressure of having to become ICT literate has been suggested as a possible reason for their high attrition rate in the first year, especially for distance learners (Kahu, Stephens, Leach and Zepke 2013).

Holley, Burns, Sinfield and Glass (2011) warn that TEL is being seen as a quick-fix, cost-effective solution for deficit models of learner’s abilities that are emerging among decision makers in higher education. In this efficiency discourse, the emphasis is on the technology rather than on the students. Alexander (2010) concurs, questioning the extent to which technology used in education is innovative, arguing that much of it is not pedagogically driven but simply takes the form of textbooks that have been ‘repurposed’ as websites, and lectures that have been recorded and downloaded onto iTunes or YouTube – what Kirkwood and Price (2014) refer to as replicating existing teaching and learning practices. Similarly, Mostert and Quinn (2009: 73) are concerned that ICTs are being used without a conceptual framework that addresses why and how the technology will contribute to students’ learning. This is supported by other authors, such as Laurillard (2008:139), who caution that if we as educators (lecturers, academics) are always technology-oriented, we will get less than the desired educational results; access to online materials and communication in itself is not sufficient.

Lea and Jones (2011: 378-379), as well as Mostert and Quinn (2009:74), warn against “moral panic” that today’s ‘net gen’ students lack the required academic literacies to engage in meaningful learning. On the contrary, Lea and Jones point to the complex and diverse literacies with which these students engage and that these have “the potential to disrupt conventional academic literacy practices” (2011: 377). They suggest that we need to pay more attention to these textual practices and digital literacies and draw on these in teaching and learning, *using the technology that students are using as a point of engagement for learning*, rather than focusing on students’ academic literacy deficits (Lea and Jones 2011: 379).

Rossi and Luck (2011) argue that it is difficult, using TEL, to engage learners optimally so that they reach their full potential. This situation is exacerbated when educators with little or no experience of TEL are charged with the task of designing and developing authentic, effective educational experiences for a diverse range of students. They advocate for a greater awareness of the social and technological context of learning as well as of the individual characteristics of students. For Subic and Maconachie (2004) this requires a focus on the type of learning that is promoted. They maintain that whatever the mode, quality teaching and learning is achieved by encouraging deep approaches to learning that involve appropriate cognitive processes. Much of what these authors are saying is echoed in Anne Edwards’ writings about pedagogy that engages learners with powerful knowledge: it is not the technology itself that matters, but how flexible learning technologies are used to facilitate learning and teaching interactions and deep approaches to learning.

It is clear that neither is flexibility in itself any guarantee of improved access or success in higher education, and nor is technology, but that there are a number of other factors to consider, pedagogy being central.

Pedagogical implications for FLTP

There have been concerns about the unsatisfactory state of undergraduate education for many years in South Africa and in other parts of the world. As far back as 1987, Chickering & Gamson in the USA came up with seven principles for good undergraduate education practice that they based on 50 years of research into teaching and learning that can be considered as relevant now as they were then:

- Encourage contact between students and faculty
- Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students
- Encourage active learning
- Give prompt feedback
- Emphasise time on task
- Communicate high expectations
- Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

Undergraduate education is intended to prepare students for understanding and functioning effectively in the world, and these underpinning principles encourage the development of such capabilities, especially when working in combination. However, Chickering & Gamson (1987) and Edwards (2014) caution that good education practice is not just the responsibility of the teacher, but that an enabling learning environment and appropriate support need to be created. These principles and conditions apply not only in traditional face-to-face teaching and learning situations, but even more so in TEL where contact with an educator is reduced or absent.

Burge *et al* (2011) point out that traditional frameworks for the development of academic knowledge are out of step with the speed of information sharing today. An article on Ontario's Distance Education and Training Network, Contact North, elaborates that technology is changing the ways we teach and the ways that students learn, leading to the emergence of 'new' pedagogies. Three of these major emerging pedagogical trends are: an opening up of learning beyond the traditional classroom, making it more accessible and flexible; increased power sharing between learners and teachers over the what, how and where of learning; and the increasing use of ICTs in delivery, for support and for assessment. The drivers of these changes are, first, the demands of a knowledge-based society and the need for students to learn how to manage the explosion of knowledge that they are encountering – how to find, analyse, evaluate and apply knowledge as it shifts and grows – and to manage their learning throughout life. The application of knowledge requires critical thinking, independent learning and technological skills and opportunities need to be created in complex learning environments for these abilities to be developed and practiced. Second, there are new student expectations of higher education; learning must be job-related, so students need to be actively engaged and learning must have relevance to the real world. Third, new technologies, especially mobile devices and web 2.0 tools, give learners more control over access to and the creation and sharing of knowledge. It emphasises that educators need to leverage this learner control, through 'new' pedagogies, to create relevance and deep learning (Contact North).

Salmon (2005: 202) observes that technology can be used "to meet *new objectives and purposes* of teaching and learning" (emphasis added). Good TEL therefore requires changes in understandings of teaching and learning, of technology, as well as of behaviour, but many academics do not have a background in curriculum theory and Salmon claims that they have not made these shifts. Similarly, Laurillard (2008) supports the need for shifts in pedagogical approaches in TEL and states that, if we wish to use technology optimally in the learning process, then the educational problem needs to be

fully understood first and the technology purposefully selected and targeted at facilitating an outcome. Laurillard further asserts that a benefit of TEL is that technologies offer a wide variety of forms and combinations of forms that allow the learner to 'personalise' their own learning process.

Green, Woldoko, Foskey & Brooks (2013) concur that a TEL environment requires a completely new educational approach. Social media-enabled learning disrupts the established hierarchical structures and administrative practices of higher education, in particular the established knowledge hierarchies that define higher education, and challenges normative assumptions about curriculum design, development, implementation and assessment. The interactive and collaborative aspects of social media-enabled learning increasingly shifts the position of the learner, rather than the content or the institution, to the centre of learning, demanding a curriculum design process that is learner-centred and collaborative. "Social media involves the creation of digital habitats that will both define, and also be actively defined by, the learners who come to inhabit them. This is a challenge for higher education systems based around hierarchical control" (Green *et al* 2013: 41). They advocate that integrating social media into the learning environments can extend the *scope* and not merely the *reach* of higher education.

It is clear from these assertions that the agency of the learner, or 'learner-centredness', becomes a significant aspect not only of effective TEL, but also of any flexible modes of provision that engage the learner in the learning process. The notion of student engagement is widely accepted as essential for meaningful learning to take place (Dereshiwsky and Moan 2000; Zimmerman 2008; Kahu, Stephens, Leach and Zepke 2013; Edwards 2014, among others) and it can be an important prediction of retention and success in higher education. As Edwards (2014) argues, never take seriously anyone who suggests that teaching is simply a matter of knowing the subject you teach: "Of course subject knowledge and love of the subject are important when teaching; but enabling learning requires far more from the teacher. In brief it involves engaging students as learners, whatever their age, who enjoy working in and on the subject."

Engagement requires both academic and social integration, through student-centred pedagogy and curriculum, and has many facets: being challenged academically, active learning, enriching learning experiences, a supportive learning environment, staff and student interaction, authentic learning and work-integrated learning. Zimmerman (2008: 167) argues that central to such engagement is the development of the self-regulating learner (SRL), which he explains is "the degree to which students are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning processes", and without which little learning can occur. Edwards supports this, contending that developing a SRL is about "positioning students as agentially in control of their own learning", for which an appropriately supportive learning environment is essential.

As previously mentioned, engagement is a complex challenge in TEL and distance learning where learners need to be self-motivated and use their own initiative. Kahu *et al* (2013) point out that work-integrated learning and a supportive environment is especially important for mature learners to become meaningfully engaged, but because of their other responsibilities they tend to have limited social interaction with other students. Therefore more opportunities could be given to mature students to work with their peers on collaborative tasks and to use online communication tools, although at the same time it must be acknowledged this may also present problems for them.

These issues are being researched and theorised, and many models of pedagogical practice have emerged, such as: Dereshiwsky and Moan's (2000) model for keeping students motivated and actively engaged in learning; Graham, Cagiltay, Lim, Craner and Duffy's (2001) similar seven principles for effective online teaching and learning; Salmon's (2002) five step guide to designing educational activities, or 'E-tivities; and most recently, and in the South African context, N'Gambi's five phase pedagogical model (2013).

All these models contain similar key elements. First, they all follow a carefully designed structure and a sequencing of activities to scaffold learning; this emphasises the importance of pedagogic design in TEL, and that it is not a random use of ICTs just because they are there. Second, collaborative learning activities and regular communication with educators and peers are essential, especially where there is diminished contact - to combat isolation, to increase motivation and engagement and for co-constructing knowledge. Third, they all make use of active online tutoring, to provide individual support and feedback for students and to monitor their progress frequently. Finally they all, whether intentionally or not, appear to be aligned with Chickering and Gamson's pedagogical principles.

It is clear that successful flexible learning is more than simply re-packaging existing materials; it requires the development of distinctive, more *holistic* forms of *provision*, as well as institutional change. As Outram asserts (2009:9): "one cannot deliver flexible learning within an inflexible infrastructure" and "we are not just selling a new course but a new concept in education".

Having discussed extensively what FLTP can be, what it should not be, the next section considers the implications of implementing it on the higher education institution and the changes that would need to take place.

FLTP implementation and institutional change

Burge *et al* (2011) caution against an uncritical stance to flexible learning, saying that we need to pre-empt any institutional changes by questioning who is going to benefit most: the students, the academic staff, the academy, or employers? Moreover, the benefits of flexible learning and the 'allure' of emerging technologies in achieving more flexibility must not cause us to lose sight of the impact of such changes and how they will need to be managed.

Johnston (1997) argues that change is complex, slow and difficult for higher education institutions and that instituting flexible provision will cause far-reaching change, including to teaching practices; administrative procedures; curriculum and assessment practices; provision of student support; timetabling and organisational arrangements; library and computer support; technical and infrastructure provision and support; procedures for allocating workload for academic and non-academic staff; and reward structures for academic staff.

Outram, in his review of the HEFCE flexible learning provision pilot projects, noted that:

"one of the most important collective achievements of the projects has been the inculcation of values and practices that make the development of flexible learning possible. This cultural change is fundamental for achieving the sustainability of the early footholds gained by the pilots. Flexible provision needs flexible infrastructures. As these

projects have discovered, this includes staffing practices, estates practices and learner support services as well as the adoption of appropriate learning and teaching models. This flexibility needs to be institution-wide including...the need to introduce appropriate work-force development activities for the professional development of staff.” (Outram 2009: 7)

Examples he gives of the organisational changes that have occurred to enable sustainability of these flexible learning initiatives are:

- Changing working practices for academic and non-academic staff;
- Changing the academic calendar to include summer school and weekend learning provision;
- Engaging with student support services, library and information services, catering services, accommodation services and others to meet the varying needs of the different types of learners on the programmes;
- Provision of academic support, often mediated through TEL; and
- Creating frameworks to support new types of partnerships, especially with workplaces.

Green *et al* (2013:26) argue the point that, because higher education is a complex system consisting of “four inter-dependent sub-systems: the teacher sub-system, learner sub-system, delivery sub-system and administrative sub-system”, flexible approaches to learning and teaching require profound shifts in the way that the *entire university* views, engages with and develops knowledge.

“Shifting engagement with knowledge work in higher education requires the active collaboration, not only of academic staff across disciplinary boundaries, but also instructional designers, educational technologists and students. It also requires those involved in the institutional management and administration to take a risk in creating the opportunities for innovation not only to emerge, but also to be sustained and diffused throughout the sector” (Green *et al* 2013: 23)

How to manage the required changes is crucial. As Senge asserts: “it is not enough to change the strategies, structures and systems unless the thinking that produced those strategies, structures and systems also changes” (Senge *et al* 1995 cited in Burge *et al* 2011: 333-334). Indeed, the institutional culture needs to change in order to implement flexible provision as well as in response to it. This entails not only managing change but also managing staff attitudes to their changing roles and professional identity.

Burge *et al* (2011) advise that the initial challenge is to define flexibility for the context of the individual institution, preferably collaboratively - with students, faculty, administrators and funding agencies - and then to use that definition to frame policies, procedures and costing models that are widely communicated. But flexible learning is not a panacea and adopting new technologies cannot on its own solve problems posed by the existing social, cultural and professional barriers to student and staff participation. It brings serious challenges to academics’ identity as well as to entrenched notions of teaching and learning, and to the culture and expectations of academic practice; it challenges traditional notions of contact time, productivity, allocation of resources and relationships between higher education and the workplace. These beliefs and practices related to teaching, learning and

pedagogy must be re-examined by the institution and individuals, and must be encouraged and supported, as otherwise technology may do no more than reproduce existing approaches. However, Kirkpatrick and Jakupc (1997) maintain that although new practices are important, there should not be an over-emphasis on innovation; previous practices that have been proven to be effective and valuable should not be summarily abandoned for the new.

Burge *et al* (2011) suggest that constraints to instituting flexible provision in higher education are typically institutional inertia; inadequate responses to rapid change; universities that value research and the funding it generates over quality teaching; systemic rigidities; institutional politics and competing agendas; and hierarchies of power that privilege the knowledge of senior management and administration and their 'sceptical attitudes' and perceptions. Academics may be constrained by their academic workload, limited pedagogical knowledge, scepticism, entrenched pedagogical beliefs and practices, cost, and confusion caused by too much choice in emerging technologies. One of the biggest challenges is to shift the "widespread support for the rhetoric of flexibility and accessibility, combined with a deep-seated attachment to the traditional model of students sitting in classrooms listening to lectures" (McKeogh and Fox cited in Burge *et al* 2011: 333) and to create a learning organisation.

Johnston (1997) refers to Fullan's eight 'lessons' or points about educational change, three of which seem particularly pertinent here: (1) the mutually exclusive dualities of either centralised or decentralised change strategies will not work: both top-down and bottom-up change strategies are necessary; (2) connections with the wider environment are essential for success; (3) every person is a change agent and the best organisations learn from the external environment as well as from their own internal staff.

Finally, Johnston cautions that there will be disciplinary differences in the attitudes of academics to change, although there will also be a range of responses; from enthusiasm and interest to apathy and even resistance. Johnston argues that early adopters of flexible approaches (about 10%) will provide much of the impetus to the direction to which changes will take. Support will be needed for both the early adopters and the laggards, but the support they need will be qualitatively and quantitatively different, so care must be taken in making assumptions about the needs and abilities of laggards, who will need more and different support. Overall, a change process will be needed that can shift pockets of enthusiasm towards a coherent, institutionalised direction.

The following chapter briefly outlines the research methodology followed by the study, including the sampling methods, ethical considerations and data analysis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research design

The investigation was essentially explorative in nature, following a qualitative design, informed by the following overarching research question:

How is flexible learning and teaching understood and practised at UWC, in particular in relation to undergraduate programmes and for working students?

Sub-questions arising from this were:

- *How is FLTP understood at UWC and what might be a commonly acceptable understanding?*
- *How is it implemented, for whom and what are the benefits and constraints (for staff and students)?*
- *What are the drivers/purposes of and obstacles to FLTP at UWC?*
- *What are the ways in which existing, pedagogically sound flexible learning and teaching practices can gain traction and greater impetus across faculties?*
- *What principles of flexible learning and teaching can be derived to strengthen this provision at UWC?*

The aim of the investigation was not only to describe the various flexible learning and teaching practices that manifest at UWC, but also to arrive at a set of principles for expanding quality learning and teaching provision. Therefore, the study was both descriptive as well as interpretive in nature, seeking to develop a picture of what was found as well as to explore the meaning that underlies these practices (Henning, van Rensburg and Smit 2004).

Discussions with the Project Advisory Committee, chaired by the Director of Teaching and Learning at UWC, fed into the design of the project and the analysis and interpretation of the data. Professor Denise Wood from South Australia University, who is a recognised leader in the field of flexible learning and teaching, is an active member of the Advisory Committee who has provided valuable input and advice on the project, and Professor Anne Edwards, from the Dept of Education at Oxford University, participated in discussions of the Advisory Committee on 13 February 2014.

Data collection methods

Data was gathered from both secondary and primary sources.

Secondary data

Secondary data were gathered from UWC policy documents in relation to teaching and learning, namely the Institutional Operating Plan (2010 – 2014); the Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning of the University of the Western Cape; the Implementation Plan for UWC Teaching and Learning Strategy 2010 – 2014; and The Development of Graduate Attributes at UWC. These are not presented as data but provided the institutional context in which to locate and interpret the data. In addition, the White

paper for Post-School Education and Training (RSA 2013) was consulted for recent changes in the higher education policy context and informed the background to the study and the conceptual framework.

Secondary data were also obtained from the student handbook Part-time Studies in 2014, from faculty handbooks, and from recent faculty teaching and learning reports to the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee. These faculty reports provided information on progress and innovation in relation to the Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning of the University of the Western Cape as well as to how graduate attributes are being addressed, and provided valuable background information for framing the faculty interviews and for possible follow-up interviews.

Finally, the results of a comparative study into the learning needs of students, that was conducted by the Directorate of Teaching and Learning in 2008 and in 2012 (Bozalek, Shefer and Yu 2012), were studied. The primary data for the exploratory FLTP research study is concerned with the perceptions and practices of UWC staff, whereas Bozalek *et al's* 2012 study is concerned with the perceptions of students about learning and teaching at UWC, and therefore their study has allowed some triangulation with the findings of the exploratory FLTP study.

Bozalek *et al's* comparative study sample sizes were 696 for 2008 and 496 for 2012, and it should be noted that this decrease in the 2012 sample size could have affected the results. The data gathering methods used for both samples were: a survey questionnaire, Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) workshops and additional questions on graduate attributes. Demographic information derived from the 2012 survey questionnaire was that 72% of respondents were female, 28% were 23 years old or more, 45% reported that English was their home language and 98% reported that they were full-time students. Approximately 46% were enrolled either in the CHS or Dentistry Faculties and the remainder were fairly evenly spread among the other faculties except for those in the Law Faculty, who were not included.

Primary data

Primary data were obtained from 30 interviewees, from all seven faculties, in 28 semi-structured interviews, as follows⁹:

People interviewed	Deans	Deputy Deans	T&L Specialists	Academics	Student Support Services staff	Admin staff
Number	1	6	3	12	6	2

Figure 2: Interview sample

First, the Deputy Deans Teaching and Learning and the Teaching and Learning Specialists from all seven faculties were interviewed as a purposive sample. Next, 'champions' or 'pioneers' of FLTP initiatives were identified for interviewing through purposive and snowball sampling and, in some cases, further snowball sampling was conducted from these second-round interviews, to tap into their inside knowledge of people who were engaged in flexible provision initiatives and who might be

⁹Deputy Deans were interviewed together with their faculty T&L specialists where possible. Guiding questions which formed the basis for the interview schedules were adapted according to the positions and contexts of the staff interviewed and are attached as Appendix A.

hidden from the public gaze. In this way, it was expected that a more holistic picture of the range of people involved in flexible provision, including academics, staff in student support services and possibly even administrators, how they work together and the challenges they face, would be obtained.

The academics interviewed included three from extended curriculum development programmes (ECPs). The student support services interviewees included the Directors of the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS), the Centre for Innovative Educational Communications Technology (CIECT), the central library, and the Writing Centre. Although the interview sample was small in relation to UWC's total staff complement, care was taken to ensure it comprised people in key leadership and management positions as well as practitioners and implementers of FLTP, .

In addition, the Masters in Public Health (MPH) offered by the School of Public Health (SOPH) was included as a case study of a site of leading practice of FLTP at UWC. Secondary data for this case study were obtained from annual reports and course documentation and four people from the SOPH were interviewed for the primary data: two administrators, an Emeritus Professor and the teaching and learning specialist. The case study has been written up as a separate report, but relevant data from the case study is drawn on in this report.

Once most of the data had been obtained, an open report-back meeting was held for the interviewees and interested UWC staff on 20 November 2013, and 35 attended. The purpose of this was to report back on some of the interim findings of the study, obtain public feedback and deepen our understandings of the findings; to start conversations around possible principles for flexible provision at UWC and attempt to co-construct some of these principles; and to agree on the most useful ways forward for the research study. In addition, discussions at a FLTP seminar or 'Thinkwell' held on 19 June 2014 also provided primary data for the study.

Data analysis

The unit of analysis of this study is flexible learning and teaching practices as they manifest at UWC, in particular those aimed at working (and other 'non-traditional') students in undergraduate and professional programmes, although any other noteworthy examples of flexible provision mentioned by the interviewees were included in the investigation.

Discussions with the Senate T&L Advisory Committee to the study informed the design of the project and the analysis and interpretation of the data.

As can be seen, the data collection and analysis followed an iterative process, allowing insights to develop in conversation with stakeholders and other interested parties that could be pursued through further, targeted data collection. The initial analysis of the data entailed rough coding of the data and sorting of the primary and secondary data into categories such as

- Different understandings, discourses and discursive communities of FLTP;
- Different forms of FLTP, identified from the framing criteria, and any distinctive practices in the different faculties relating to academic provision and student support;
- Drivers and enablers of FLTP;

- Use of ICTs and emerging technology in FLTP;
- Challenges, obstacles and limitations to FLTP and inherent tensions;
- Examples of flexible learning and teaching strategies that can be shown to improve access to learning for working students and/or their chances of succeeding in their studies;
- Principles of FLTP.

The data were compared and contrasted within these categories as well as across them, until a clearer picture began to emerge. This was then interpreted in relation to themes and concepts from the literature. The final synthesis of the findings followed four broad themes related to the research questions, to the literature and to the framing criteria for FLTP, namely:

(i)	understandings of FLTP	(ii)	FLTP practices
(iii)	contextual factors impacting on FLTP	(iv)	FLTP principles / guidelines

Table 1: Analytical themes

Ethics

All interviewees gave signed permission to be interviewed and to having the interviews recorded. Their anonymity is preserved in this report insofar as attributing any comments or views to a particular individual is concerned

Limitations of the study

The study was constrained by time and the availability of possible suitable interviewees. A limitation is the relatively small sample, comprising 30 interviewees, and although this generated a large volume of data the findings should be considered as indicative only. Nevertheless, it is believed that the sample was sufficiently broadly representative of academics across all faculties; of staff involved in academic development and extended curriculum development programmes; and of student support services personnel (including ICT and library staff), to have provided a diverse range of FLTP activities and perspectives on FLTP at UWC. Only two administrators were interviewed, for this investigation, both from the SOPH, but because of their years of experience in FLTP they were able to provide important insights on the administrative and organisational implications of FLTP.

Although not necessarily a limitation of this study, the more traditional ways of accommodating working students, such as courses that are scheduled after hours, were not investigated in this study as they are well documented in the institution. Similarly, practices around flexible admission of adult learners and recognition of prior learning at UWC have been researched and documented extensively and very recently, and so were not investigated further or presented here.

Chapter 4: Findings

Learning needs of students

Before presenting the findings of the empirical investigation into the FLTP practices at UWC, some observations on the findings of Bozalek *et al's* (2012) comparative study into the learning needs of UWC students are made as this provides some means of triangulating our empirical findings. Only the findings of the 2012 sample are reported on here as these are the most relevant.

Of the 2012 sample, roughly three quarters were female, 28% were 23 years old or more and 98% reported that they were 'full-time' students. Approximately 46% were enrolled either in the CHS or Dentistry Faculties and the remainder were fairly evenly enrolled across the other faculties, with the exception of the Law Faculty, from which no students were sampled. Given that this sample includes so few 'part-time' students, so many young students and does not represent all faculties evenly, caution should be taken in triangulating the findings with those from the empirical study.

The students were asked to report on their experiences of and participation in learning and teaching activities at UWC, as well as on support received from various student support centres and staff at the university.

Students' experiences of UWC registration administrative systems were not encouraging, with 73% saying they had to queue for long periods at registration, 43% claiming the registration processes were inefficient and 30% finding the administrative staff to be unhelpful at registration (although this had improved from 42% in 2008). Comments were that UWC administration was "disorganised".

Regarding teaching activities, 48% of students responded that they found lectures mostly hard to understand and 30% found them uninteresting. A significant 20% claimed that lecturers were mostly unavailable during consultation times and, while slightly fewer said that lecturers were lazy/unprepared/incompetent, it was encouraging that as many as 63% felt that teaching staff cared about their welfare. There was a strong feeling that more trained tutors were needed and that there needed to be more interaction between the tutors and lecturers. More than half the sample said they did not receive constructive feedback from their lecturers; marks and feedback were often slow to be returned; and nearly half believed that course evaluations made no difference to teaching quality. Alarming, more than half had no or only a vague idea of graduate attributes, which indicates that, in general, these are not being explicitly addressed in teaching activities.

As far as learning and teaching venues are concerned, a third complained about overcrowding in classes and the general feeling was that more study spaces and computer laboratories were needed.

Regarding their participation, a very high 96% said they always or fairly regularly attended lectures, but this may be because of the large sample from CHS and Dentistry, which have a full, tightly timetabled programme and high attendance requirements. However, as many as 20% admitted that they read only between 20 and 50% of the required readings, while 60% said they read between 60

and 80%. These low figures could be related to the fact that over 80% found the amount of required reading either quite heavy or too much to cope with.

Regarding ICTs, only just over 1% said they never used technology in course work activities, whereas 12% occasionally used technology, 24% used it quite often, 61% used it very often and 80% had attended an ICT training course. This seems to indicate that TEL is widespread and that most students have received some training in how to use UWC's online learning system and associated technologies.

Only about one in four students reported receiving support for their writing, either from the Writing Centre or from someone in their faculty, despite half the students not having English as a first language, and an equally low number reported availing themselves of the services offered by the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS). However, those who had used these services generally expressed high levels of satisfaction with the support they had received.

Although nearly all the students sampled found university study very different from high school, they were generally happy that they had chosen to study at UWC and a third said that their studies had broadened their understanding of life "*hugely*". This seems to indicate that the pedagogic practices of many academic staff are of a high quality and that they are connecting their students with useful knowledge that can engage them with real-life issues. However, whereas over half the sample felt that UWC catered for every student's needs, as many as one quarter felt that UWC did not care for people like them. This seems to indicate that there is a significant sector of the student population that feels extremely marginalised; a worrying situation.

Constraints in their personal lives that affected their study seemed largely financial, with half the sample receiving financial aid, and half of these finding the funds inadequate for their study needs. As many as 14.5% felt their studies were very badly affected by a lack of personal resources, with an unacceptably high number of these saying that they went hungry because they did not have enough food. The other major constraint was transport, with a third of students finding it difficult to get to campus and stating that transport was costly and time-consuming.

The overall conclusion and recommendations from the comparative study were that

- Epistemological access remains a challenge for students;
- There is a need to identify key areas of learning and teaching that require support, and especially how academic and other literacies are being integrated into the curriculum;
- Future interventions for the professionalisation of teaching for staff and for student learning initiatives need to be considered, in line with the IOP 2010-2014.

Salient issues are that registration processes and administrative staff attitudes could be considerably improved, and that if students already experience difficulties registering with traditionally offered courses, courses following more flexible forms will introduce significantly greater challenges to the administration systems and staff, which will need to be addressed in advance.

In summary, although there were positive responses overall with regard to teaching, indicating that there are significant numbers of committed, caring academic staff, who are engaging students in learning that is really useful in their lives, there are equally some who are not giving sufficient

attention or recognition to their students’ needs, for any number of reasons, and are not engaging students optimally in learning or in a learning community. More and better tutors are needed as are venues and spaces that are conducive to different modes of learning and teaching. The use of technology in learning and teaching seems to be quite widespread, and by far the majority of students are receiving some training in how to use it, although the quality of this provision and of the training was not explored in the comparative study. Personal constraints to effective learning are a concern, and issues around transport could be addressed by more flexible modes of provision.

These findings, as secondary data, are considered in relation to the findings from the empirical investigation into FLTP provision which follow.

(i) Understandings of FLTP

As suggested by the literature, it was expected that there would be diverse and even contradictory views on what constitutes flexible provision among academics, management, administrators and student support services staff, depending on how they saw the purpose of such provision. This was the case and these perspectives are summarised in table 2 following:

Understandings of FLTP	No. of responses	Illustrative quote
1. Part-time/after-hours provision	19	“it means evening classes”
2. TE learning and teaching	26	“it was more than ten years ago that we already embraced some of these flexible learning modes” (CIECT)
3. Flexible delivery	17	“(We) make the prac. sessions entirely flexible. They can do these when they want and don’t even have to be on campus” (Science); and “flexible learning ...doesn’t necessarily have to be in the university because it is – I see it as a mix between formal and informal.” (T&L specialist)
4. Student support	17	“What is important is how much you require of your student and what you give them in terms of support and enable them. I don’t think that you can require a lot and then not enable a lot.” (Writing Centre)
5. Learner-centred ¹⁰ Pedagogy:		
Active, reflective learning; knowledge integration	16	“...” it’s not content-based... they also have to connect things to the other subjects they’re doing; where would this be useful, why would this be useful?... we give reflective creative questions in the exams ...what is the point of a flexible programme if you aren’t making people’s minds more flexible?” (ECP, Science)
Developing self-regulated learners	7	“It’s about shifting the ownership of the process from me to studentsthey take ownership of when they’re going to learn, what they’re going to learn, how. So I provide a set of materials and my task is to make them think about it. Where they do that and how they do that – there’s a whole range of possibilities around that. ... They’re in charge of their own learning... the technology is available, it’s amazing for allowing that to happen” (Arts)

Table 2: Interviewees’ understandings of and approaches to FLTP

¹⁰ This is taken to mean the induction of students into formal, disciplinary knowledge in the context of their own knowledge backgrounds, while preparing them to be professionals and to become self-regulated, adaptive learners. It includes being sensitive to students’ needs but within realistic limits.

More than half the interviewees conceptualised FLTP for working students as after-hours classes in one form or another, which may include blended learning. FLTP was most commonly associated with TEL, although interviewees reported that technology tended to be used more as an additional educational resource than as an alternative to contact teaching: “It is not totally catering for a part-time student and the students still have to be in class to get the full benefit”. In other words, TEL was reportedly being used more to replicate or supplement existing learning and teaching practices than to transform them (see Kirkwood and Price 2014), although there were some innovators experimenting with emerging technologies.

A large number of interviewees associated FLTP with flexible forms of delivery, including assessment, block teaching and open/distance learning. For example: “they shifted significantly in 2001 from the block release model to more distance learning because...they needed to make it more flexible... we need to keep people in posts... provide learning while they work” (School of Public Health [SOPH]).

The majority of interviewees saw a strong relationship between FLTP and ‘learner-centred’ pedagogies which engage learners, provide for interactive learning, promote the integration of knowledge and develop independent, self-regulated learners. This notion of learner agency resonates with much of what the literature says about the characteristics of effective flexible learning and teaching, and the ‘self-regulated learner’, and indicates that these respondents had deeper pedagogical understandings of FLTP. It was expected that particular views on flexible provision might be able to be ascribed to particular academic disciplines, but this was not clear in this study, possibly because samples from each faculty were small.

Student support was seen as essential to all aspects of FLTP, including in ICT training. A comment was that many people do not consider what they do as FLTP. This underscores the importance of raising awareness of FLTP and its potential at UWC for accommodating working students.

None of the interviewees disagreed in principle with the criteria for flexible provision framing this study. Therefore a provisional definition, drawn from these criteria, was tested at a report-back workshop on 20 November 2013, and read as follows:

Flexible learning and teaching provision is an inclusive, student-centred approach that promotes flexibility in admissions criteria, curriculum design, teaching and learning modes and assessment, with appropriate support systems and services.

This definition was supported by workshop participants, but it was felt that the definition needed to emphasise a shift from thinking about how students access what is *delivered* to them, to examining the whole system of provision from the perspective of the student, *engaging* them in deep learning. This can be seen in the ranking of the three most favoured meanings of FLTP by workshop participants:

1. Flexible approaches are ways of increasing student engagement in and deepening learning, and of developing graduate attributes.
2. It is about the ethics of care and caring ways of interacting with each other in the learning and teaching process.
3. It is not only about succeeding at university, but about learning that equips one for life and for becoming a successful lifelong learner.

It was argued that all three of these statements encompass the dimension of learner-centredness, which as a concept on its own needs further elaboration. This suggests that a pre-requisite for effective flexible provision needs to be a real interest in where students are coming from and in assisting their growth and development through use of appropriate pedagogy, engaging them in really useful knowledge. It also emphasises a more agentic role for the learner than simply being the recipient of flexible approaches.

At the FLTP 'Thinkwell' seminar in July 2014, it was proposed that a common understanding of FLTP for UWC should imply a dynamic, rather than the static approach inherent in the provisional definition, and that it should be linked to the broader mission of lifelong learning. The following statement was proposed:

The current, common understanding of FLTP at UWC, in furtherance of UWC's mission to make 'lifelong learning opportunities available' is: Flexible learning and teaching provision is an inclusive, learner-centred approach that promotes flexibility in admissions criteria, curriculum design, learning and teaching modes and assessment, with appropriate support systems and services, for the purpose of developing graduate attributes throughout the learning process so that all students can make a positive difference in the world. This is a dynamic understanding which we anticipate will change over time.

This statement will need to be tested further with staff across UWC as the larger research project progresses.

(ii) FLTP practices

This analytical category includes pedagogical practices and services that do and could support the academic and personal development of working students.

UWC follows a 'full-time'/'part-time' provision model, with no other alternatives for working, undergraduate degree students. A feasibility study for running a whole degree, the B Admin, using a FLTP framework to accommodate both working and non-working students, has recently been undertaken.

Some of the examples of flexible provision described below can and do accommodate both 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' students, but as part of 'full-time'/'part-time' provision.

Flexible pedagogies

The broad theme of flexible pedagogies includes the sub-themes of curriculum flexibility and flexible delivery. Examples of practices that are specifically aimed at working students, or could be, are noted.

Curriculum flexibility

Curriculum flexibility includes the structure of the degree programme, alternative forms of assessment, design that takes into account different learning styles and abilities, and the recognition and incorporation of different forms of knowledge.

Mainstream undergraduate degree programmes follow a modular design with flexibility of module choice in most generic degrees, such as the BCom, the BA, the BEd, the BSc and the LLB. However, the undergraduate professional degree programmes in Dentistry and Community Health were said to have

less opportunity for curriculum flexibility where these are governed by the Health Professionals Council (HPC). For example, the four-year B Nursing follows a curriculum prescribed in terms of choice of subjects, content and sequencing. The considerable clinical practice requirements, such as 4,000 hours for the B Nursing and 1,500 hours for the final year midwifery specialisation, further limits flexibility.

The merger of the UWC Dental Faculty with that of Stellenbosch University has made it the largest dental school in Africa, increasing the number of undergraduate students to approximately 600. As a result, there are insufficient dental chairs at the UWC facility to accommodate all the undergraduate students in their required clinical practicum. However, a way around this problem has been to schedule one resource day per week for each cohort – thus taking one cohort out of the clinical system each day. Thus, flexible opportunities for learning and teaching are possible even within the confines of a set curriculum.

The first-year curricula of the extended curriculum programmes (ECPs) in the Natural Sciences, in the Community Health Sciences (CHS) and in EMS were described by interviewees as having an integrated logic across the different compulsory modules, to maximise chances of student success. Although there is no flexibility of subject choice, these curricula were reportedly designed to be learner-centred and to encourage interactive learning. For example, the ECP Introduction to Science course has no traditional lectures but resembles a tutorial design; students work through worksheets in groups with tutors acting as facilitators. Team work, collaborative learning and the development of graduate attributes are emphasised and self-reflection is an essential aspect of the course. Individual learning portfolios form a major part of the final assessment. This pedagogical approach could be adapted for working and other ‘non-traditional’ students.

The Living and Learning programme run by the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS) is an example of pedagogy that integrates academic knowledge with personal development and real world issues in ECP curricula.

Living and Learning

Living and Learning forms part of the curriculum for the ECPs in the Science, CHS, and EMS Faculties, and for Oral Hygiene students in the Dentistry faculty, with classes once a week. It has been conceptualised as a ‘learning community’ that incorporates active, collaborative learning activities that extend beyond the classroom and that integrates academic, emotional and social development. The programme is designed together with the ECP academic staff in each faculty and aligned with all their other subjects, so that “the content speaks to each other”. It is designed to develop graduate attributes and promote openness to diversity, social tolerance and holistic student development.

Overall, it was reported to enhance student engagement in learning and their motivation to succeed, and hence student retention. Although not a credit-bearing course, attendance is very high where it has been integrated into the curriculum. However, in one faculty where it has been treated as an ‘add on’ to be attended voluntarily, rather than integrated into the curriculum, attendance has been much lower and the course has not been as successful. This could suggest that if students perceive that academics do not value a course, neither will they.

Although there might be more room for flexibility in ECP curricula, interviewees reported still having to be creative in ‘working around’ institutional systems and barriers to achieve their objectives.

Moreover, the three ECP interviewees all mentioned feeling marginalised in some way; because they felt their innovative practices were undervalued by their faculties, or even by the institution, or they felt they were regarded as ‘eccentric or worse’, which meant that they did not get the same support from colleagues and institutional structures as academics in more mainstream teaching provision. Ironically, one of these interviewees commented that his work was better known and more highly regarded outside of UWC than within it.

Voluntary and/or transdisciplinary courses that are outside of the mainstream, such as HIV and Aids for Educators, and Environmental Sustainability Studies (ESS) are able to have a more flexible curriculum and delivery approach which could suit working students. The HIV and Aids for Educators is aimed at trainee teachers in the Education Faculty but is not compulsory, being registered as a continuing education course. Despite being optional, it was reported that there is nearly always 100% attendance, and that students have found it to be of such value that a modified version has been offered off campus and after hours to communities on request for several years. In this case, the community participants create most of the curriculum as the programme progresses, with the facilitator providing occasional guidance to keep it on track. This example of FLTP comprises flexible access for the community; a flexible curriculum that is largely determined by the participants; and flexible delivery - pace, place and mode (audio-visual, case studies, group work, self-reflective ‘homework’ assignments etc). The participants connect the course content to their own experiences, making meaning of it for themselves both individually and collectively, and enabling them to use what they have learned to transform their worlds. However, because these community participants are already self-directed, having extensive life and work experience of HIV and Aids and having chosen to attend the classes for their own self development, it is appropriate that they ‘own’ the course themselves, whereas younger undergraduate students may need more direction and guidance in order to develop self-regulation capabilities.

The ESS programme consists of a series of transdisciplinary modules with students participating from the CHS, Education, Arts, EMS and Science faculties. It incorporates activities such as role play; Second Life where students develop avatars for engaging with different concepts; and learning portfolios.

Flexible delivery

Flexible delivery refers to flexibility in pace, place and mode of provision, including open and distance learning and TEL.

Pace of provision

No examples of accelerated learning provision were encountered in faculty teaching and learning reports or reported in interviews; the only option for variance in pace of learning on undergraduate degree programmes is through ‘part-time’ provision. However, the binary categorisations of ‘full-time’ and ‘part-time’ provision are not aligned with the reality of students’ lives. For example, until fairly recently a student registered for a ‘part-time’ programme was not able to enrol for a subject that was registered as a ‘full-time’ course. Although this rule has changed, it was reported that there are still administrators who do not know about it and do not allow such cross overs between ‘full-time’ and ‘part-time’ studies. Nevertheless, it seems that students are able to work around some of these obstacles, albeit in limited ways - interviewees claimed that it was well known that many students who were registered as studying full time were working during the day and attended classes after hours, where these were offered.

Scenario of how students 'bend the rules' to manage their studies at UWC

Thandi is registered as a 'full-time' student as she needed to obtain a NSFAS bursary for her studies and, coming from the Eastern Cape with no relatives in Cape Town, it was the only way she could obtain a place in residence at UWC. But the bursary was not enough to pay for her books as well as her residence fees and food, so she managed to find a job as a packer at a supermarket some distance away. Because most of her shifts were during the day, and the times were not negotiable, this meant that with travelling time she missed a large proportion of her lectures as well as many tutorials. She had friends who would lend her their notes to copy and two of her courses were also offered in the evening, so she attended these classes when her shifts clashed with her day classes, but it was nevertheless a considerable struggle for her to keep up. At least the library was open until late, and she could access a lot of her course notes and assignments online, but there was always a queue for the computers, even in the residence, and she never really had as much time as she needed.

After-hours teaching and all the associated administrative work adds to the already full workload of academics and, as a result, UWC has closed many of these courses and programmes, especially where enrolments have been comparatively low. Law is one of the undergraduate degree programmes that ran for many years as a 'part-time' offering, but was closed to new enrolments from 2011. The Law Faculty does continue to offer a Higher Certificate programme in Forensic Examinations, which has been running since 2000 and enrolls a maximum of 100 students per year. It is self-funded, and classes are held on campus one night per week for thirty-four weeks over the period of a year. There appear to be several reasons for its continuation: the fact that it is always oversubscribed, that it is financially independent, and that most of the teaching staff are not UWC academic staff but people in private or state practice. It is aimed at a broad range of participants who have at least three years' working experience and a senior certificate, but no university exemption, and focuses on risks regarding white collar crimes in the work-place; fraud, theft, perjury and money laundering. Recruiting participants' experience is integral to the course and it is very practical in nature as the purpose is to advance people's knowledge and skills in the workplace.

The Arts Faculty has a limited number of offerings that are flexible insofar as where and when they are held. Those after-hours offerings that are still available for working students, such as Psychology, are reported to be attracting fewer and fewer applicants. It was suggested that this is probably because there are now very few other after-hours courses to choose from to make up an Arts degree, but also because public perceptions seem to be that UWC has closed down its after-hours degree programmes. In addition, Psychology 1 is offered every year, but Psychology 11 and 111 are offered only every alternate year, which could lengthen the time to degree and be a strong disincentive for potential applicants. The way that the handbook states clearly that the general BA is offered part-time on a very limited basis, and that interested applicants would need to contact the office for further information, could in itself discourage potential applicants.

The Bachelor of Library and Information Sciences (BLIS) offers only its first-year courses after hours, which creates great difficulties for working librarians in their subsequent years of study, as their working hours and limited leave allocations make it impossible for them to attend all their classes during the day. In addition, a limited choice of elective courses offered after hours, and timetable

clashes between compulsory courses and electives offered during the day, was said to be affecting student numbers. As a result, many of the academics in this department go out of their way to accommodate their students and provide additional classes over weekends as well as using some TEL modalities. Because of the small choice in elective courses in the Arts Faculty after hours, it was speculated that this was possibly one of the reasons for so many students dropping out of the programme in recent years, as well as for the reduced enrolments that have been observed.

The Bachelor of Theology degree is offered as either 'part-time' or 'full-time' study options; the 'part-time' option takes place in block sessions and over weekends. The BTh has worked around the constraints of the limited number of evening courses in the Arts Faculty by having their own, closed curriculum, which also allows it to timetable its programme independently of other courses. However this limits flexibility and although there is some choice on the 'full-time' programme, the 'part-time' programme follows a set curriculum with no module choice. Examples of FLTP in theology are the continuing education modules and certain learning modules which are delivered in the community, and these latter can provide an articulation point for entry to the full degree.

The Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) has the largest number of degree programmes – i.e. the BCom and the BAdmin - and other courses offered after hours for working people, such as access programmes, advanced diplomas, postgraduate diplomas and certificates. Some of these provide flexible articulation points; for example, people with a senior certificate and appropriate work experience can enrol on the NQF level five Management Development Programme (MDP) and, should they do well enough, they can continue on to the NQF level seven Advanced Diploma. If not, they can apply to do the Senior MDP, which is an additional year of study part-time, enabling them access to the Advanced Diploma the following year, making it only a three-year study path for these students. From here they can progress to a BCom (Hons) or a Postgraduate Diploma in Management.

Political Studies, which is another degree programme in the EMS Faculty (School of Government), and which offers classes during the day as well as after hours, has low enrolment rates for the after-hours programme, especially from second year. It was suggested that one of the reasons for this could be that, although students from the Law and Arts Faculties can also elect to take Political Studies courses, Law students can only take these courses at the first year level – what are known as 'terminal courses' – and that the numbers drop when they leave. Political Studies has been experimenting with using digital resources to supplement contact sessions and took this further by creating an online learning environment for all undergraduate courses in the first term of 2013. This included hyperlinks directly to learning guides, articles, you-tube video clips, podcasts, and other digital resources. In some cases it included the integration of e-textbooks. Constructing the course sites was reported to have been a labour-intensive process but teaching staff received the necessary training and support from the CIECT.

Other than continuing education and professional development courses, and the adult education Higher Certificate and Higher Diploma programmes run by the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, very little else is offered after hours at UWC. However, it was reported that adults who seek to take up studies towards full qualifications have often been inspired to do so after having attended UWC's continuing education courses, giving substance to UWC's lifelong learning mission.

It was suggested by more than one interviewee that, where courses are not being offered after hours by UWC but where articulation agreements allow them to take the courses they need to complete their degrees with Unisa, some of them are doing so. This also occurs when students fail courses at UWC and cannot afford to re-register, especially as 'full-time' students. If this is the case, and judging by Unisa's student numbers, it would seem that there *is* a demand for alternatives to traditional day time, contact modes of higher education.

The 'full-time'/'part-time' UWC timetable restricts possibilities for more flexible delivery and several interviewees reported having to work around the rules to meet the needs of their working students. For example, an academic who was running tutorials and consultations after hours and on Saturdays for his working students had to timetable them as weekday sessions for administrative purposes or the system would reject this. Many academics also willingly offer flexible arrangements for working students to sit the class tests at other than the prescribed times, although this means additional work in setting different tests and marking schedules. As one interviewee commented: "What am I supposed to do; punish them by giving them zero? What does that say for access, for assessment?" This particular interviewee mentioned that he could identify at least 12 colleagues in his department who were similarly flexible, with the only proviso that the students sit the tests by a certain deadline for curriculum coherence and administrative purposes. UWC has made a commitment in its IOP to "rework (the) university timetable in order to take into account flexible learning needs of students and educators",¹¹ and it seems that this is an area that could be explored creatively.

Place and mode of provision

Place and mode of FLTP are strongly interlinked, as some of the following examples show, so these two parameters are addressed together here.

- Off-campus fieldwork, which may take the form of work-integrated learning as in LIS, or of community-related project work, occurs in some courses.
- Team teaching was mentioned by one of the interviewees as not only enabling teaching staff to collaborate and support each other, but also opened up possibilities for FLTP.
- The computer labs in the EMS Faculty are being kept open until 9pm during the week and until 5pm on Saturdays to accommodate students who cannot access the computers during working hours.
- The B.LIS (Arts) and Political Studies (EMS) are pilot sites for the FLTP Action Research project, experimenting with FLTP for working students and assisted by the CIECT instructional design team.
- Within the constraints of 'full-time' and 'part-time' provision, TEL was found to be the most common form of FLTP.

Technology enhanced learning

Interviewees mostly agreed that, in order to be able to succeed in today's competitive world and become lifelong learners, students need to be ICT literate. In other words, they need to be computer literate; to be adept at using mobile technologies and be able to continually adapt to emerging technologies; and to have a discerning, critical approach to web-based information. Therefore it is vital that they learn to use these technologies at UWC as learning tools and that technology is integrated

¹¹ Strategy 7 of the Implementation Plan for UWC's Teaching and Learning Strategy 2010 – 2014

into learning activities wherever appropriate. This has the added benefit of enabling learning to take place anywhere, at any time and often at a pace that suits the learner, as long as they have access to a suitable device and mobile or internet connectivity. As one academic pointed out, universities have no option but to start using technology in teaching, as: "...actually (i)t's not about teaching, (i)t's living in the 21st century. You know we can all bury our heads in the sand, but if we don't engage with this we're doomed." The CIECT provides a responsive and wide ranging set of training and support services to students and all staff, both academic and administrative, to facilitate these processes, and digital academic literacy (DAL) is built into all the extended curriculum programmes.

The survey conducted by Bozalek *et al* among UWC students in 2012 indicates that technology is quite widely used in learning and teaching: 24% of students reported using ICTs 'quite often' in their course work activities, 61% reported using ICTs 'very often', and 80% had attended an 'eLearning' course. These findings are supported by the interview data which indicate that TEL is becoming increasingly common, with very few teaching staff not using ICTs at all. However, as could be expected, it was reported by interviewees that the uptake of and experimentation with TEL varies across the institution and across and within faculties, although it was not possible to ascribe any definite relationship between faculty culture and TEL practices from the data. The variation in TEL uptake ranges from those leading the way in innovative TEL practices, to transform learning and teaching, to those who are using technology merely to replicate their existing teaching practices (see Kirkwood and Price 2014).

A relatively low number of 'explorers' (Lai and Chang 2007) or 'early adopters' (Johnston 1997) were encountered, who were experimenting with emerging technologies in ways that were pedagogically innovative. These people seemed passionate about wanting to make learning more relevant, more integrated and more accessible for their students, to improve their chances of success, and student participation in co-constructing knowledge was important in this process. A common observation made by these innovators was the need for more flat spaces that could be used in flexible ways for learning and teaching, and that traditional teaching auditoria restricted FLTP.

A larger number of teaching staff were encountered who were cautiously exploring TEL, with support and guidance from the CIECT. For example, some interviewees spoke of approaching technology with trepidation initially, but of slowly gaining in confidence as they tried out more interactive, emerging technologies, and of seeing the benefits for encouraging self-directed and social learning through activities such as online self-assessments and quizzes and online discussion groups. Specifically, one interviewee remarked that she had been open to the idea of TEL, but fearful like many of her colleagues, until attending a Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) professional development course on the use of emerging technologies in learning and teaching¹². This had given her the confidence to experiment with TEL, to the extent that she was even being called upon to showcase her teaching methods to her colleagues, although she admitted still feeling very much a novice in the use of teaching technology.

The value of discussion forums in FLTP

¹² This was reported to be an excellent initiative offered across the four higher education institutions in the region.

One interviewee spoke of how she had started a discussion forum which evolved as she went along: “(it) was amazing. It worked so well.” The students were trained in how to use the technology beforehand, to ensure they all felt comfortable with it.

Initially, she told her students that they had to make five posts on the discussion forum as it was part of the course work. “I didn’t actually care what they did; they just had to make five comments and that counted 5%.” She started the discussion by posting her impressions of student interactions during the first class, with comments like: *I was surprised nobody said anything about this... and I was very interested when someone said something about this and that* After a few tentative responses from students, the conversations and discussions started to roll, with eventually over 800 posts by the end of the semester, and with 50% of the class contributing more than five posts. “It meant they had conversations with one another; it was a bit like ... overhearing a conversation between the students. ...There I am like a fly on the wall, in this cohort of young people having this conversation about something. I was able to draw on that for my lectures. ...I’ve always had interactive lectures – but what I did was, I made at least 20-30 minutes’ interaction built on multiple things that had been said on the discussion forum. So the lectures became, instead of a delivery of information, they became a discussion, a reflection on the reading.”

She had asked the students to read a minimum of five of the ten texts for the semester, write 500 words on each and upload them onto the e-teaching site, and they would be graded according to whether there was evidence that they had read the text; “they could get 5 % for that”. As a result the final assignment for that semester “was way, way better than in previous years.” Also, the students submitted all their assignments online and they were marked online, which saved her a great deal of time.

“Because they were doing the reading during the semester, that impacted on the discussion forum. ... It was amazing, really rewarding. I really enjoyed it, it was the easiest teaching I’ve done because they kind of taught themselves.”

What was so flexible about this mode of delivery was that: “They could do it at midnight; they could do it on the bus going home, or in the taxi, or at weekends. The other thing they were saying was that in traditional lectures, the lecturer’s up there and the students down here, and this didn’t feel like that because we were able to initiate conversations, start discussions and threads and so on. So, in terms of flexible learning it certainly empowered a lot of students when they could do the work, how they chose to do it, whether they were reading a hard copy at home. Some of them said they were reading it on their phones in bed, they could upload it.”

“The students in their evaluations said that they worked harder for this course because they felt that I cared and that came through in the discussion forum; that they didn’t have to make an appointment to see me... they could just send an e-mail or say *hey ..., what do you think about that, or have you seen this?*”

Lastly, one interviewee self-reported his use of TEL only to replicate what he was covering in class, using the learning management system as a repository for course content and for students to access learning resources in their own time, although many of the interviewees claimed that this was commonplace. This practice may signify people's first steps towards more innovative and interactive TEL but, as the literature argues, it has very few learning benefits (Alexander 2010; Laurillard 2008).

Generally, where academics reported successful experiences with TEL, their interest and their creativity had expanded rapidly and they were keen to learn and experiment further. The Ikamva 'eLearning' platform and learning management system adopted in 2014 is interoperable with mobile technology, and it is expected that this will facilitate TEL and encourage staff to engage with it more. It was said that some teaching staff are happy to ask the subject librarians for advice with their TEL activities and courses on Ikamva. The librarians can be a valuable resource in this regard, giving input and feedback, making additional learning resources available, enriching the course content and so on.

Although many examples of TEL were reported in the interviews, only a few selected examples are mentioned here:

- clinical simulations for nursing and dental students, for them to develop competence before interacting directly with patients;
- simulated laboratory set-ups for first-year science students to familiarise themselves with the laboratory environment and with how to conduct the experiments before performing them in practice;
- a completely online, interactive accounting course, which was being developed as an open education resource (OER) for anybody to access, using mobile technology;
- discussion forums that were structured to achieve certain pedagogical goals, such as: an alternative to face-to-face consultations; online interactive tutorials; ensuring students read and engage with prescribed readings.

With the exception of one interviewee, to a greater or lesser extent all the interviewees were supportive of the idea of TEL in enhancing learning and affording more flexible provision. However, their responses were qualified by a range of *caveats*, such as:

- concerns about the differing levels of information and digital literacy among students, and that many first-time students (including adults) had no or very limited experience of computers and computer technology, although it was acknowledged that the number of students who had access to mobile and 'smart' technologies was growing rapidly;
- concerns about the stability of IKAMVA and reliability of the network, based on experience with the earlier systems;
- internet bandwidth and wifi coverage, both on and off campus;
- concerns about whether the amount of time and effort required to re-design a course to follow a more blended learning approach is sustainable in both the short term and the long term;
- concerns about authenticating students' work and security in relation to online assessment;
- concerns about receiving all the support they would need in incorporating TEL and e-pedagogies into their courses, when they need it;

- there must be institutional and administrative support for staff to allow them to be more flexible;
- academics may feel their identities as knowledge workers are being challenged and this needs to be addressed;
- the need for a technology development expert, such as for developing virtual learning environments, who can work directly with academic staff.

Promotion of FLTP

Finally, one of the questions that this study sought to answer was: what are the ways in which FLTP can be promoted at UWC? The most frequent responses to this question, from interviewees and participants in the FLTP ‘Thinkwell’ seminar, were that the best ways of promoting of FLTP at UWC was to showcase innovative learning and teaching approaches and activities even more often and more widely – a bottom-up approach – than was currently the case. It was believed that this would be particularly valuable to do within faculties initially, in order to grow communities of practice where people could share their experiences, support each other, and develop a culture of scholarship around flexible provision. By doing so, it was hoped that this might shift mind-sets not only of academics, but also of administrators and of management to be open to different approaches. As one interviewee argued, on the one hand, “one needs to create enough conversation, enough momentum, change behaviours... to make people see the light in a sense. That is the one approach and that is the approach to where one appeals to insight.”

The main responses are summarised as follows:

- Raise awareness of and share innovative flexible learning and teaching practices, including the use of ICTs and emerging technology. This could entail developing communities of practice within faculties, centred around discussion groups and journal clubs; lunch hour seminars; inviting colleagues to view classes in action; encouraging students to share their views with faculty on the impact of flexible provision on their learning; increasing the scholarship around FLTP and disseminating the research findings among the university community.
- Make management aware of the institutional constraints to flexible provision.
- Create awareness of the changing external environment that necessitates shifts towards more flexible provision, and influence mindsets within one’s own department.
- Engage in and influence policy debates around flexible provision.
- Provide more instructional strategy and curriculum design workshops/courses, especially in how technology can promote deep learning.

These ideas could be considered in discussions around future FLTP implementation plans.

Flexibility in student support services

The different student support services all play a vital role in strengthening FLTP and are themselves flexible and responsive, doing their best to cater for the full, diverse student body. In considering their approaches and practices, we could be asking ‘*What can we learn from them to enhance FLTP in our own contexts?*’

The CSSS

The CSSS has a central focus on inclusivity and accommodating diversity in all of the services it offers to students, providing responsive, professional services to support holistic student learning and personal development. It operates in five areas:

- Student Development, which includes student orientation and career development services;
- Leadership and Social Responsibility which offers various development programmes and workshops;
- Therapeutic Services, including psychotherapy and counselling;
- an Office for Students with Disabilities (OSWD); and
- an Office for Academic Support, which runs peer mentoring programmes for first-year students and the Living and Learning programme, among other things.

A range of support is offered to students, in a variety of flexible modes, with drop-in assistance as well as by appointment. For example, counselling services are provided in individual, hour-long sessions, or in groups with a counsellor. Some support sessions are offered in groups, run by senior students, or individually. Some services are provided in a formal, lecturing style; others are offered as modular courses; others as four-day workshops during the holidays. The CSSS also initiated a chat site, managed by a trained counsellor, for students who might prefer to access their counselling services anonymously. This was reportedly very successful and it drew in a large number of male participants. It has now become an email service, which also works well. "So it is done in different ways. Some of it is on campus, some off campus. Some of it has a special flavour to it... So it is packaged differently to enable people to hook into whatever works for them. Some of it is online. Some of it is done with things that can be downloaded from our website." In addition, they have offices in four different sites on the campus, located in areas where students tend to gather, such as the Student Centre or student residences, rather than in one central building: "People hang out in clusters in different spaces and the more we are in the system, all over, the better."

An after-hours zone provides services for students who attend classes in the evenings; for walk-in assistance, for specific appointments, for workshops and online email chat groups, but it was reported that these services have not been taken up as much as originally hoped. It was speculated that this was probably because working students' lives are just too busy and they do not have the extra time to make use of these facilities. The CSSS also stays open late one day per week to accommodate working students.

The student survey conducted by Bozalek *et al* (2012) indicated that as few as one in four students used the services of the CSSS and this was corroborated by the CSSS staff, although they argued that a quarter of 20 000 students is still a great deal and they are already overloaded with work. They suggested that this situation could be alleviated by extending the academic year rather than having to squeeze everything into what is less than six months' of student contact time, after exams have been accounted for. They emphasised that mainstream academia focuses on academic and cognitive development, but students need time to develop and integrate their psychosocial functions with their cognitive development. "(F)rom my side a short calendar is disastrous. A student needs to attach to the institution; they need to develop new identities, to have new ways of engaging with things."

The OSWD in the CSSS especially caters for students' individual needs. For example, the OSWD administers tests and exams for students with certain disabilities in specially equipped rooms,

according to their needs. This means not only obtaining the exam paper ahead of time and making it accessible for those students using assistive technology, but also so to ensure that students' physical needs are catered for during the exam. For example, a diabetic student may need to take insulin or have a snack and a drink during a four hour exam; a student with rheumatoid arthritis, who is sensitive to extremes in temperature, may need a hot pack or a cold pack to ease muscle cramps in his/her hands; another student may need to be provided with a music stand so that s/he can write the exam standing up, and so on.

Writing Centre

The Writing Centre offers writing assistance to undergraduate students in their assignments and general course work, through writing workshops on request, and through individual sessions with tutors. It also assists students with research skills and advises and encourages students with their personal, creative writing. In addition, it offers advice and support to academic staff in setting assignments and assessments, including in designing rubrics, marking criteria and giving written feedback; in tutor training; and on how to 'teach' academic writing skills in the curriculum.

The Writing Centre was open on Saturdays for a while, but it was reported that there was very little uptake and so this has been discontinued and instead it provides asynchronous, online services for those students who are not on campus on week days. This consists of detailed written comments on any writing the students submit, but not actual corrections to their work. This serves not only the after-hours students, but also others like the CHS students who are either in lectures or doing their clinical work during the day. Synchronous feedback, which has the benefit of being interactive, was attempted with these students but it was found that they were generally unable to make the appointments. The Director said that verbal feedback has the advantage of being able to be much richer and quicker than written feedback, and personal verbal communication is much easier for most students to understand. Therefore they would like to try this, using skype, or podcasted video feedback that takes the student through the assignment line by line, or voice-over applications in Google drive, but this presupposes the students have a fast and reliable internet connection or can download large files.

About 25% of students reportedly seek support for their writing, either from the Writing Centre or from a faculty member, despite around 50% of the student population not having English as a first language. However, it was emphasised that the Writing Centre does not have the resources to cope with more students than this at present.

Library

As mentioned, the central library has late weekday and weekend opening hours. A range of information literacy training sessions are available, both walk-in and self-booked online. Self-help guides are available at the point of need in the library. These services are further described as enablers of FLTP in the section following on contextual factors impacting on FLTP.

CIECT

The CIECT offers comprehensive training and support services in computer literacy and educational and emerging technologies, from the basics to more complex operations, for all staff (academic and administrative) and students, during the day and after hours for working students. Individual training is offered to staff at their own workstations. CIECT staff advise academic staff on the pedagogical use

of different technologies and on how to infuse these in curriculum design. The CIECT services are described in more detail as an enabler of FLTP.

Flexibility in postgraduate programmes

Postgraduate coursework programmes are typically offered after hours as it is assumed these students are employed in one way or another. As with other 'part-time' courses, these classes can take place in the evenings, on Saturdays, or as block teaching modules and often include online components. As mentioned, post-graduate courses did not form a particular focus of this study, however, the MPH in the SOPH was identified as an example of leading practice in flexible learning and teaching delivery at UWC for a number of reasons, some of which are outlined here and could be applicable for undergraduate programmes. In addition, principles of good education practice, such as those upheld by Chickering and Gamson (1987)¹³, can be seen to underpin all aspects of the course delivery and administration.

First, the MPH is registered as a blended learning course, but in reality many of the students are not resident in South Africa or even in Cape Town and cannot attend the block contact sessions, engaging as distance learners instead. The course materials and assignments are specifically designed for distance learning, which allows learners to remain in employment while they are studying, but the block contact sessions are designed, among other things, to encourage contact between students and between staff and students where this is possible. Second, recognising the need for distance learners to remain motivated, to feel connected to the institution and to combat their feelings of isolation, dedicated administrative staff communicate with them regularly to discuss their progress, to mentor them where necessary, and to negotiate alternative dates for submission of their assignments with them when work and family commitments get in the way of their studies. Regular detailed, relevant and prompt email feedback and support is given by the teaching staff on the learners' assignments and drafts as well as telephone support where possible. Third, because UWC's administrative systems do not cater for this model of learning and teaching delivery, the SOPH has set up its own, parallel administrative systems and staff, who are able to deal with students' individual problems and issues.

A fourth reason is that the programme offers a choice of different public health streams and a wide choice of electives, to personalise the course to students' particular needs and contexts as much as possible. Another reason is the use of TEL: online problem-based learning materials are being developed, as well as online guidelines and key words for case studies and a repository of case studies on the Mendeley referencing system, to allow for diverse ways of learning. Interactive discussion sessions are set up using Google Groups, which archives the discussions allowing students to revisit them in their own time. In addition, the SOPH has lodged a number of their blended learning modules as open education resources (OERs) on the UWC Free Courseware site, enabling SOPH students and others to broaden their knowledge or to prepare themselves for studying higher NQF-level modules. This website has received thousands of 'hits', providing positive exposure to the work of the SOPH and to UWC.

¹³ Encourage contact between students and faculty; develop reciprocity and cooperation among students; encourage active learning; give prompt feedback; emphasise time on task; communicate high expectations; respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

Thus, the SOPH is an example of how it is possible to develop flexible administrative systems; flexible forms of delivery – in terms of place, pace and mode; flexible support mechanisms; flexible learning materials; and flexible access to learning materials, among others.

(iii) Contextual factors impacting on FLTP

Contextual factors impacting on FLTP are described below under the analytical themes ‘drivers’ and ‘enablers’ of FLTP; and ‘obstacles/challenges’ to FLTP.

Drivers of FLTP

The drivers of FLTP can be categorised as occurring at either institutional or undergraduate programme levels.

Institutional drivers

Institutional policies, such as the IOP 201-2014, frame and provide strategies and goals for enacting FLTP at UWC. Institutional systems are in place to drive learning and teaching development through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and associated structures; Deputy Deans Teaching and Learning (T&L) and T&L Specialists are appointed in every faculty and the T&L Directorate works in collaboration with them in order to meet the IOP 2010-2014 T&L objectives, among them FLTP.

FLTP is also driven and enabled by the extensive training and support services offered by the CIECT, to students, administrative and academic staff, as well as by the research and development carried out by staff of the CIECT.

Programme level drivers

The drivers of FLTP at individual programme level that were mentioned by academics in interviews, and examples of their responses, are summarised in Table 3 below. It should be noted that all of these drivers are related ultimately to concerns about learning and teaching quality and the need to enhance learning and improve student success. Moreover, it was found that the appropriate use of TEL could contribute to addressing most of these issues in one way or another, although it was emphasised by an interviewee that ICTs are not an educational ‘silver bullet’.

Drivers of FLTP practices	No. of responses	Examples of FLTP practices
To involve students more actively in the learning process	17	Discussion forums were used by 2 academics interviewed, and reported to be quite widely used in 3 faculties
To address authentic learning /integrated competencies/ graduate attributes	10	Science ECP students develop learning portfolios based on UWC’s 6 graduate attributes, decide for themselves what to include and justify how their evidence supports the course outcomes
Champions/being exposed to FLTP practices	10	“I like to try new things and maybe improve our department in terms of technology, make it easier. And because of that a few lecturers and one or two of the other technical officers...they’re also trying to use Ikamva and e-teaching and stuff in their labs and lectures” (Science)
TEL to accommodate/ assist working students & those with disabilities	8	“...whatever you give has actually to exceed what you would give face to face, also particularly because distance learning carries that stigma of second best in many countries...” (SOPH)
To address challenges of large	4	“There are...up to 700 and even 1 000 to a class... their voices

class sizes		were drowning in the crowd... how do you get the students' voice out again? I think that is where I engaged with the technology... to give me feedback, or ask questions or pose questions." (Accounting
Time pressures/ work volume for lecturers	2	Using Mixit/mobile technologies to set up virtual consultations with students at night as there is not enough time to consult during the day
To remedy high failure rates in specific courses	2	'Champions' in the Law Faculty used portfolios, MCQs, podcasts and online tutorials as additional T&L resources for these courses and pass rates have increased significantly.

Table 3: Drivers of FLTP at programme level

Although large class sizes was identified by only four interviewees as a driver of their FLTP practices, large undergraduate classes are a common problem in certain faculties across the higher education sector, so it is worth considering how these interviewees address the problem. It was reported that having up to 350 undergraduate students per class and up to 1,000 per cohort in some programmes, made marking assignments and tutoring difficult enough. But added to this, having to teach in traditional auditoria, with students sitting on the stairs because of insufficient seating, and where there can be very little student participation in the learning process, leaves teaching staff feeling disengaged from their students. One interviewee observed that it was very difficult for students straight out of school, coming from classes of 40 learners or fewer and where "they would have been the bright ones", to adjust and find their voice. Such large classes have motivated some academics to seek more interactive modes of delivery. For example, this particular lecturer decided that he would try getting his students to play money games in groups as a way of learning financial concepts and terminology. He also set tasks and activities based on real world (authentic) financial scenarios for them to work on in their groups. Although he found the auditorium space was far from ideal for this type of interactive activity, with careful planning he was able to make it work and without any additional tutor assistance. He pointed out that it required a lot of preparation beforehand, but that in the end it was easier for the students and for him because he was "not just teaching content or just reading off slides". Although this example is more one of good pedagogy than of flexible provision, it does show that it is possible to engage learners flexibly in what may seem an inflexible teaching space.

Additionally, large class sizes make it logistically very difficult for lecturers to accommodate all students during limited consulting times, and to spare this time in view of their heavy workload, which may have some bearing on what students said about lecturers' non-availability in the survey carried out by Bozalek *et al* (2012). As a result several lecturers mentioned using alternative means of consulting with their students, such as mobile technology and social media.

Consulting with students through mobile technology

John¹⁴ is an academic in one of the biggest faculties at UWC, with very large first year classes, teaching both during the day as well as in the evening. He reported that, although there seemed to be an endless queue of students waiting to see him, these consultations were inaccessible to the evening students and to his day students who were at work. He needed to find a way to be available to all of them but in a different environment, and so he decided to experiment with using mobile

¹⁴ A pseudonym, as are all other names ascribed to participants in this study, for ethical reasons.

technology, as he had established that all of his students either had access to a mobile phone or had their own.

Using Mixit, because of its very low cost and accessibility from any mobile phone, he created a mobile learning environment with consultation periods twice a week between 7pm and 10pm, so that all students could participate. He anticipated that this would be very difficult to manage on his own so he asked the tutors to assist him. Students would come online, ask a few questions and a tutor would answer or he would answer, and then another student would ask a question – “like an online discussion forum that they could access via their mobile phones.”

“The students found it rather strange at first that they should be communicating with their lecturers via Mixit, but there was about a 98% participation rate. Some of them would ask questions, others would just read through the discussion as it was happening.” Initially the questions and conversations were “all over the place”, and so he set up parallel conversation groups around different topics. This allowed students to join whichever group related to the work they were struggling with, or to move between conversation topics. He also archived all the discussions, so that students could access them at any time as a revision aid or should they have missed a session. An unintended, positive consequence of these discussions was that both ‘part-time’ and ‘full-time’ students participated, and this made for a much richer learning environment than would have been the case otherwise.

As time went on he posted snippets of lecture slides on Mixit; self-assessment quizzes for the students to do; short voice-overs of the forthcoming lecture topics and what preparation they should do, and so on. He reported that they seemed to find these messages more meaningful than a text message. “So they could be sitting in a café and go online to find out what next week’s lecture is about and go offline again.”

In this way, what started as a means of alternative communication between teacher and students in response to very large classes, evolved into a form of blended learning and flexible delivery – flexibility of pace, place and mode. This academic reported continuing to explore other forms of blended learning that worked in his particular context and even that he was developing a full online course as an open learning resource. However, large class sizes can also constrain FLTP by making it difficult for teaching staff to find the time to experiment with doing things differently, to familiarise themselves with the range of technology available and to design TEL activities.

Teaching staff on ECPS were very concerned about meeting the needs of their students and reported looking for creative ways of making learning more relevant for them and of integrating knowledge and skills - such as information literacy, academic literacy and digital literacy - through blended and social learning activities. Some of these approaches included flexibility in content, where students could choose their own topics to research, and flexible assessments, such as presentations and portfolios.

It was mentioned that poor student attendance of after-hours classes was a concern and that alternative modes of learning and teaching might be more accessible for them. It was pointed out that missing an occasional class during the day was not too difficult to catch up; however, missing a whole evening’s classes meant many hours of work needed to be made up. Ikamva, UWC’s online learning platform, makes it possible to post course notes and lecture materials for these students to access

digitally, although this cannot be described as FLTP. As previously mentioned, it was reported that some teachers make a special effort to schedule tutorials, workshops and assessments at alternative times to accommodate their working students as much as possible.

Ironically, poor student attendance was also mentioned by one interviewee as precisely the reason why blended learning should *not* be used as, he argued, if students could access the learning material online they would find even less reason to attend classes. He maintained that being present in class was particularly important for students to become enculturated into that particular profession, something they could not learn through online content alone. The idea of a ‘flipped’ classroom¹⁵, was introduced to this interviewee and some others, and it is clear that the flexible learning possibilities of this approach could be made known more extensively.

Finally, one ECP academic argued that the drivers of flexibility and innovation for her were faculty as well as systemic bureaucratic inflexibilities and inefficiencies, and that her flexible responses were to counterbalance this ‘negativity’: “it’s the underside, it’s the dark side of the moon. What you’re doing is because of the lack of support, the lack of resources, and because there’s no understanding of what’s needed for students and for staff; you create sometimes quite innovative stuff in order to counterbalance the negativity.”

Enablers of FLTP

Johnston (1997) argues that widespread institutional changes are required in order to support flexible teaching and learning provision. Furthermore, he suggests that both top-down and bottom-up strategies are needed for effective change to take place. A similar view was proposed by one interviewee because, as she stated, different people respond to different approaches: “as with all behaviours, some behaviours change because of insight, some behaviours change because of a law, some behaviours change because of authority instruction. So I think it can change. It has to come from both directions.”

Institutional enablers

In addition to the institutional drivers of FLTP mentioned above, related to teaching and learning policies, strategies and structures, several others were identified from the data. Perceptions were that the roles of Faculty Deputy Deans T&L and T&L Specialists were important in maintaining a focus on T&L excellence and innovation, but that both posts needed to be filled for them to make the maximum impact and support each other.

The T&L Directorate and the CIECT perform very valuable functions in promoting and supporting excellence and innovation in pedagogical practices across the institution. Annual events provide platforms for showcasing research and innovation in learning and teaching, and for engaging critically with these practices and approaches, and in turn help raise awareness among academics of different possibilities for flexibility in learning and teaching. Furthermore, earmarked teaching grants from the DHET to higher education institutions were said to be a vital resource for incentivising such pedagogical practices. The regular seminars co-hosted by the T&L Directorate and the Faculty of Arts are also an important forum for encouraging pedagogical excellence.

¹⁵ A ‘flipped’ classroom is where students are responsible for reading all the relevant material in preparation for a topic, and class time is used exclusively to deepen understanding of the topic by discussing problems and applications

Additionally, collaboration of staff from the library, the CIECT, the Writing Centre, the DLL and the T&L Directorate in learning and teaching support and development, enables and promotes FLTP.

The UWC library is open until 12pm during the week, 8pm on Fridays and 5pm on Saturdays, for students who cannot access it during the day. Although it is vital that the library accommodates student needs flexibly, an interviewee argued that it should not be the major responsibility of the library to provide study spaces and online access for learning, and that faculties also needed to open their doors to students after hours. The library sees its primary role as providing knowledge and information services and doing so in more flexible ways, especially through its migration to next generation, cloud-based library management services platforms in the near future, which will allow for more client-oriented services. The library makes extensive use of technology in its operations and runs walk-in as well as scheduled library training sessions for staff and students, both during the day and after hours, as well as providing self-help guides to using the library system that patrons can use at the point of need. The library has an 'iPad lab' and, on the ground floor, there is a 'disability hub' equipped with computers and rest facilities for students with disabilities.

The CIECT is a specialist ICT and TEL training and research unit, providing extensive training to students, academic and administrative staff, across a range of programmes and applications, from basic digital academic literacy (including word processing) to more complex multi-media training, materials development and instructional design. Support is provided through scheduled face-to-face training sessions, through individual and walk-in consultations, as well as via telephone and email.

The CIECT staff are TEL specialists and are committed to continuing to build the TEL expertise of UWC academics through its educational programmes, with an emphasis on TEL pedagogy. Interviewees from the CIECT explained that, in addition to generic training on emerging educational technologies and TEL tools, they offer Instructional Design Strategy workshops for academic staff. These focus on aligning the course outcomes, TEL activities and assessments and on developing participants' understanding of alternative TEL tools for achieving their pedagogical objectives. The workshops take each participant step by step through the design process until they have developed a tailor-made, pedagogically appropriate, TEL product for their particular need and context and that suits their particular teaching styles. It was acknowledged that academics may struggle to find the time to attend these modules and workshops, or may lack the confidence, so the CIECT staff also provide personal training and assistance when requested.

In short, the CIECT does not merely train people in how to use the technology, although this is a necessary aspect, but it takes a holistic approach by enabling academics to engage with the technology critically and by foregrounding pedagogy in TEL strategies and design – what Herrington and Parker (2013) term learning *with* ICTs and not just learning *about* them. This approach resonates with and is informed by much of the academic thinking around best practice that is discussed in chapter two of this report. Indeed, it was explained that the CIECT continually researches and critically reflects on its practice, so as to improve both its academic and service dimensions.

Ikamva is a significant enabler of FLTP not only because of its integrated learner information functions but also because of the TEL tools and emerging educational technologies which it hosts and can be accessed by staff and students, and its interoperability with mobile devices.

Institutional support for the professional development of academic staff, such as for Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) short courses on T&L and TEL; T&L induction programmes for new academics; and the development of a postgraduate diploma for T&L in higher education, are all important enablers of FLTP. Two interviewees spoke of how CHEC courses – on tutoring and on the use of emerging technologies in T&L respectively - had enhanced their capacity as educators, had helped them reflect on and theorise their practice more deeply, had improved their practice and had encouraged them to experiment with more flexible approaches to learning and teaching. It was attested that these courses are particularly effective as they encourage collaboration among participants, focus on the application of learning to participants’ individual contexts and practices, and allow participants to gain a better understanding of each other’s contexts. In addition, the modules are facilitated by experts in their respective fields from the four Western Cape universities, providing a rich collegial forum for learning. These initiatives need to continue to be supported as strongly as possible by university leadership.

Finally, UWC has become a signatory to the Berlin Declaration for Open Access to enable all UWC research to be accessed in the public domain; an important commitment to making learning more flexible and open to all.

There therefore appears to be strong institutional commitment to excellence in learning and teaching, out of which is emerging engagement with and discussions about flexible learning and teaching, but other than in the pilot action research sites in the B.LIS and Political Studies, and some individual responses to accommodate working students, these are not attempting to provide an alternative to the current, traditional mode of learning and teaching provision t UWC.

Individuals as enablers of FLTP

Individual dispositions and agency are important enablers of FLTP from the ‘bottom up’, especially champions of FLTP who influence the discourses and practices in their faculties and more broadly across UWC.

Champions and leaders of FLTP were found to be active in the academic, administrative and student support services spheres and to be drivers of innovation. Collegial collaboration was mentioned as an important aspect of this innovation, and it was contended that continued support and incentives for collaborative projects, and for building communities of FLTP practice, could broaden discussions and understandings of FLTP across the academy.

The following are examples of responses by the CSSS to enable FLTP and that are inclusive of people with disabilities, using innovative technological solutions.

The portable ‘classroom’

The Director of the CSSS told described twenty portable ‘classrooms’ that the Centre had purchased with donor funding and that had wide potential for FLTP.

Each of these ‘classrooms’ consists of a mobile, ‘smart’ whiteboard, a data projector, a speaker system and a laptop, that pack into a small suitcase. All notes that are written on the whiteboard are recorded and sent to the laptop, and these can be made available to the students afterwards. This allows students to concentrate on and participate in class discussions rather than on taking notes, and is of particular benefit to students with physical or learning disabilities.

In addition, the Director reported that the CSSS is attempting to make learning spaces more inclusive for people with disabilities by installing audio induction loop systems - which can assist hearing impaired students by transmitting sound directly to a hearing aid - and large-screen televisions in various teaching venues for sight-impaired individuals.

Finally numerous examples of enabling FLTP were encountered, but it is clear these need to be part of a greater, coordinated and focused strategy to reach across the entire institution.

Obstacles/challenges to FLTP

Key, general obstacles/challenges

The key, general obstacles and challenges to FLTP, perceived by interviewees, can be categorised as follows: challenges associated with resistance to change at organisational and individual levels; administrative and bureaucratic obstacles; resource challenges; and limitations to FLTP because of professional body requirements.

A summary table of interviewees' responses as illustrative of the most frequently mentioned obstacles and challenges to FLTP is presented below.

Obstacles/Challenges to FLTP	No. of responses	Illustrative quotes
<i>Change related challenges</i>		
Resistance to change by academics and/or administrative staff	14	"...some of the teaching practices... are inscribed by the hierarchy in that department. So you've got these poor, innovative people sitting at the bottom who want to do this, that and the other, but they can't; there's no institutional space for it."; and "people don't want to change or do things differently."
Change needs to be driven continually	8	"In the absence of a T&L specialist to drive these initiatives, people tend to slump back into old ways of doing things because it is easier"
Ikamva used more as a repository for T&L resources than for FLTP	8	"People use Ikamva to post lecture notes, readings etc. ...but unless there is actual 2-way communication taking place, which is not the way most people use it, then it is not a LMS and should really be called a content management system"
Perception that research is valued above T&L	4	"People feel that they put a lot of labour into teaching and it is not acknowledged. So it is the general sort of teaching/research divide and what you get kudos for"
<i>Administrative challenges</i>		
Bureaucracy can stifle creativity in T&L	4	"they come to you saying, 'this is the policy, and this is what you must do'... that it is when people get to tick box exercises rather than face changing the way they think about who they are and how they teach and who their students are."
The academic timetable and venue allocation limits FLTP	5	"... the timetable does not fit (with what we are trying to do), the examination does not fit, the mode of assessment does not fit, there are never enough venues. It is the institution that creates inflexibility."; and "there are seemingly no venues but there are; they are just inappropriate or empty."; and "We've battled to get our classes in a cluster of venues that are student friendly at night, to have facilities at night"; and "The Dean even said at the beginning of this year that he is prepared to hire a few marquees and fit everyone into a corner somewhere because we had so many problems with the timetable."

Admin. silos frustrates transdisciplinary T&L	4	"At an administrative level the institution does not work like that, it works in departments."
Admin. systems do not cater for distance education	3	"the university system was never geared for distance learning and there was always that thing of: 'don't call it distance learning; call it mixed mode'..."; and "there were years of fighting with a centralised institution that has no time for distance education. ..It is difficult... if you are a small operation in a predominantly face to face university"
Resource challenges		
Limited resources: tutors, 'clickers', laptops for staff etc.	5	..."because of the lack of resources. ... we didn't have tutors this year."; and "this year the budget has just been quietly absorbed into the different departments so there is no money for resources..."
Access for undergraduate students to computers/ internet	4	"There is this idea that we don't have enough computers... . I think we have to be creative in looking at what students have themselves and trying to use that. ... for me a basic would be to have wireless access anywhere on this campus. There is not good wireless access."
Professional body requirements		
Health Professionals Council (HPC) requirements limit FLTP	3	"Undergraduate programmes are very traditional... very strait jacketed. One cannot choose which modules to do and they are tightly sequenced. This is due to a combination of professional board restrictions and the practical requirements."

Table 4: Obstacles and challenges to FLTP

In brief, formal and informal systems and/or practices at departmental, faculty and institutional level can frustrate individual efforts to create more flexible learning opportunities for both working and non-working students, which can be compounded by people's resistance to change. To reiterate Green *et al* (2013), constraints to flexible learning and teaching occur when any of the four interdependent 'sub-systems' of a university are not aligned with each other and therefore these obstacles and challenges need to be addressed for FLTP to flourish. Even more, the institutional culture, infrastructure and administrative systems must support and nurture such work.

Some of these obstacles and challenges are elaborated below.

Change related challenges

FLTP challenges relating to people's reluctance to change from traditional, siloed ways of teaching and learning in certain disciplines, meant that 'explorers' and 'early adopters' of flexible provision working in ECPs could feel isolated from mainstream academia because, as those ECP staff who were interviewed reported, the work of academic development is often perceived as separate from and merely preparation for disciplinary learning – as addressing a deficit in underprepared students. Their approach to learning and teaching on the ECPs was holistic and flexible, trying to ensure the integration of academic and other literacies with disciplinary content. But theirs was perceived to be a separate responsibility from mainstream teaching and they often struggled to get academics to understand what they were doing and to cooperate with them:

Lecturers are resistant to work with me and often they feel that – I don't know whether it is because of their limited understanding of what an academic development course is about - it's like, *that's your work, you should be doing it. We're sending our students to you to develop their language ability so you do it.* They don't see the importance of integration.

The director of CSSS emphasised that psychosocial and emotional maturity is essential for students' cognitive development and therefore that these aspects of their development must be integrated into the curriculum, as part of FLTP. But this is not always recognised by academics and it can be a challenge to get them to cooperate.

Flexible provision as integrated learning

“We need to have conversations around diversity and about gender, and about violence, and about drugs and about what goes on in residences. We need to find a way of how we speak to each other when we sit in groups and have to do group work. That needs to be facilitated...Integrated means we do it in the timetable, we do it in the same venues where academic business happens... We (CSSS) have conversations with academic staff, we're part of academic staff... Integration is how (this) is aligned to the academic content, whichever faculty that might be – there are different alignments. So there is a content alignment, there is a structural integration... of staff and venue and time – those sorts of practical things.”

For example: “it is very rare that we have a person who can critically examine a text, who can hold two valid positions in balance who is not morally on the same level. So a six year old can't see that good and bad can sit next to one another, they would not be able to do that: a ten year old struggles with that. They don't have that kind of psychosocial and personal maturity... Then there is no deep level understanding of human rights, of being critical, or of comparative... Comparing something is a very difficult thing. ... So if you want academic development, intellectual development, the other part must be developed alongside, otherwise your academic development remains a superficial thing.”

It was also mentioned that the way some undergraduate degrees are structured can limit students' choice of subjects and restrict their career paths. This has been the case in some instances in the Faculty of Natural Sciences, but it was said that more flexible alternatives were being investigated.

Administrative obstacles/challenges

Universities' centralised administration systems are governed by particular rules and guidelines that are not always compatible with innovation in learning and teaching. This was well illustrated by responses from some of the interviewees. For example, one interviewee pointed out that, as important as it is to have innovators and pioneers of FLTP, there is often “no institutional space for it”:

So, for instance, it's required that we have consultation times, that we have our bums on our seats in our offices. Well, actually, no student comes to see me in my office – all my students connect with me via e-mail, via Twitter, whatever – they wouldn't dream of coming to see me...(But) people in charge of departments don't know this technology. So there's a mismatch in the institution.

She reported that she knew of teaching staff who had left UWC for other higher education institutions out of frustration with inflexible bureaucratic systems at UWC that blocked their creativity. The SOPH has managed to work around these inflexibilities by setting up their own administrative systems in parallel with the UWC systems, which allow them more flexibility in dealing with the individual needs and circumstances of their distance learning students.

Other administrative constraints that were mentioned by interviewees, were

- the pre-set timetabling system, as well as an academic year that is too short;
- the venue booking system, which can create artificial venue shortages;
- insufficient flat spaces in some faculties for creative, flexible learning and teaching modes.

In relation to venue issues, interviewees complained that the timetable was dictated by venue availability and, in turn, the assessment policies impacted directly on the availability of venues. Several interviewees mentioned how they 'worked around' such venue constraints.

Venue constraints

An ECP academic spoke of her frustrations with the venue booking system and how she managed to work around these obstacles: "When I asked for one venue in this building for two periods a week, early in the morning: no can do. For three years we have squatted every Friday. They will not allocate them to us because they're already booked but nobody's actually using them. So you make friends with the security guys who open up the venues, so you can use them."

Accessing computer laboratories are a particular problem: "You can't get computer venues for that size class on a weekly basis; nobody will give it to you. This year physics finally built their own computer lab, and they gave us 2 periods a week. ... But we can't get anything from the people who run the computer labs... and the library labs are too small. I spent the previous years running around finding little computer labs all over the place at different times, breaking the kids into different groups to get them into the computer labs, it was madness. So they've got to be computer literate but we won't give the resources. ...So it's a huge logistical nightmare to try and offer a flexible programme. This is just one (obstacle), facilities and timetable!"

Another academic, who taught both evening and day classes, expressed his frustration at the limited availability of study spaces over weekends for his working students. He argued that students need to work on the computers, they need online access, but they also need general learning spaces for working on projects collaboratively with other students, and the weekends are usually the only time these working student have. "There is more than enough space (in the building) to cater for the students who want to come. There are security guards...so there is no reason why not. ...(A)ll they want is access over the weekend, on a Saturday and a Sunday. They can't use the community libraries. They need to prepare presentations, work in groups etc. and they can't invite 10 people to their houses. ...It is also the whole student experience; the coffee in the flask, the whole environment which is conducive to learning. ... It is such a simple thing that needs to be done, just turning a key, just using what we've got in a more efficient way. We really don't need more resources, we just don't use them in a flexible way."

He reported that the labs are open in the EMS building until 9pm on week nights, but that because it is not on the timetabling system, students don't know about it. So far he has managed to get the building kept open until 3pm on a Saturday and is pushing for it to be kept open until 7pm.

According to the part-time studies 2013 handbook, UWC has approximately 68 computer laboratories, as training or walk-in facilities, both on and off campus, with a total of over 2 000 computers. The computer labs in the student residences are generally open until midnight, 7 days a week, and the ICS Thintana and Walk-in labs are open until 9pm during the week and 5pm on Saturday, but with the exception of EMS and the library, all other labs are only open during the week until 4.30 or 5pm (Juggling to Learn, 2013). This corroborates academics' complaints about the lack of availability of computer labs, as well as other learning spaces on campus after hours, and especially on weekends for working students. Strategy 7¹⁶ of the Implementation Plan for UWC's Teaching and Learning Strategy 2010 – 2014 commits to "plan teaching and learning venues which are conducive to flexible learning at UWC", and this could be explored more creatively with teaching staff.

Resource challenges

A lack of resources is a problem that permeates higher education, but a particular need was identified at UWC for resources to engage tutors and teaching assistants, and for increased access to online technology and full wi-fi coverage on the campus. An infrastructural constraint to FLTP that was mentioned was a lack of social spaces for students to gather and engage in informal learning activities and discussions, as these are essential in knowledge construction and holistic student development.

Obstacles/challenges for FLTP for people with disabilities

Job insecurity was identified as a challenge for FLTP in the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSWD) in the CSSS: it was reported that out of three staff members, only one is permanent and another, who has been working there for 11 years is still on a one-year contract. This left her feeling very demotivated at times: "It is as if we don't matter. And you can't give your best work if you don't have security of tenure."

An important practical consideration is that not all of the venues at UWC are disability friendly and an audit of all the buildings is being proposed by the CSSS. For example, the top level of the library¹⁷ is inaccessible for people with mobility difficulties, which poses particular problems for postgraduate students. It was claimed that the student residences are also not disability friendly, especially with regard to the design of the bathrooms and toilets.

The concept of universal design for learning was raised by an interviewee, where the learning environment is designed along universal design principles that take *all* people's requirements into account, making it a better and more flexible space for everybody, and that these should be guiding principles at UWC. Students with certain disabilities pose particular challenges for some forms of flexible provision and, although the OSWD at UWC has the resources, assistive technology and support structures to accommodate the learning needs of these students, it was said that academics are not always aware of their needs and can sometimes unthinkingly cause them additional hardship. This makes it imperative that a fully inclusive culture be developed at UWC, and that universal design principles be implemented, so that students with disabilities can be the norm and not have to be treated as 'special cases'.

¹⁶ Strategy 7: Develop a more responsive teaching and learning environment which promotes and enhances lifelong learning. Directorate of Teaching and Learning UWC, May 2010.

¹⁷ The top level of the library is a dedicated space for postgraduate students, but the lift does not go all the way to the top and the ramp is very steep.

The need for an inclusive culture at UWC and the implementation of universal design principles

One interviewee reported: “It is often a hitch where incoming tutors and incoming contract lecturers are not made aware of specific special needs of students. It can cause huge trauma to the student who suddenly has to stand up in class and say; ‘I am...’ or ‘I need...’ and they don’t want to do that.”

On another occasion there was a mix-up with the allocation of students to tutorial groups, and a tutor would not accept a student because her name was not on his list. He insisted she go and sort it out with the faculty first and then come back, but what he had not realised was that because of her disability it had been a huge struggle for her to get up the stairs to the tutorial venue, and it was too much for her to go straight back down again. Fortunately, one of her classmates was able to carry her down the stairs but it was a traumatic experience for her: “ That was really bad because it is an affront to your personal space to have somebody carry you. The student said that she did not like having somebody’s hands on her body. It’s an invasion.”

Staff at the OSWD reported that they do their best to raise awareness of issues around disability on campus and this seems to be borne out by the responses of other interviewees, who agreed that there was no stigmatisation of people with disabilities in the university community. The OSWD staff emphasised that they make a special effort to form good working relationships with teaching staff and inform them of the individual needs of their students with disabilities; in turn, teaching staff are generally very willing to accommodate these needs once they are aware of them.

The OSWD emphasised the value of ICTs and assistive technologies for students with disabilities as these open up opportunities for the students to learn in many flexible ways. However, it was claimed that, before coming to university, most students with disabilities have not been exposed to the types of assistive technology for reading and typing that are widely available – other than Braille, and that very few have ever used a computer or keyboard. This is a significant obstacle for them to overcome: not only do they have to cope with the academic load but they also have to become computer literate and learn how to use the assistive technology - albeit with the dedicated assistance of the OSWD. Add to this that they tend to take longer to complete the same tasks as their peers without disabilities, and it is clear that any obstacles to their academic progress should be removed and that the university environment should be as accommodating of all difference as possible, such as through UDL.

(iv) Towards ‘principles’ or guidelines for FLTP

The following principles/guidelines that would need to inform institutional policy on FLTP were distilled from the interview data, from a report-back meeting and from a ‘Thinkwell’ seminar. Although there is some overlap with UWC’s present T&L policies, the challenge is to embed these policies more widely and deeply within the institution.

- FLTP needs to be informed by UDL principles and approaches, to allow for an inclusive learning environment and provide a range of opportunities and choices for learning for diverse learning

needs, and of the pace, place and mode of delivery, both on and off campus, for 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' students equally;

- There needs to be discussion and agreement on a broad and inclusive, university-wide understanding of quality FLTP;
- Put learners at the centre of FLTP, informed by an understanding of 'who are our students?' and 'what kind of learners do we need for what kind of society?';
- Ensure pedagogically oriented, quality FLTP which respects the knowledge demands of different disciplines and domains, but also builds on alternative forms of knowledge, including the knowledge embedded in learners' life experiences;
- Nurture a desire and the development of attributes for lifelong learning through FLTP;
- Promote greater use of alternative, flexible approaches to assessment within FLTP;
- Guarantee adequate resources, including a funding formula that enables flexible time to degree, underpinned by full wi-fi connectivity on campus;
- Ensure a coherent and enabling institutional system where the administrative, teaching, learning and delivery sub-systems are aligned and support each other.

Chapter 5 following summarises key issues arising from this investigation and concludes by suggesting possible next steps to embed FLTP more broadly across at UWC.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

There seems to be general acceptance that higher education must engage a diverse range of students across the life span, and across a range of abilities, in order to meet the socio-economic needs and aspirations of South Africa and the African continent. There is also growing acceptance at the national level that approaches to teaching and learning must change, and must be responsive to changing conditions and circumstances of all students.

This research study set out to investigate UWC staff understandings of flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP) at UWC; their reported flexible learning and teaching practices; their perspectives on how to promote and grow successful FLTP at UWC; and the possible implications for organisational change of expanding FLTP. Given that the traditional distinction between ‘working’ and ‘non-working’ students has become blurred, and that because many other factors are determining students’ learning trajectories, the ‘non-traditional’ student is now the norm at UWC, the overarching research question was:

How is flexible learning and teaching understood and practised at UWC, in particular in relation to undergraduate programmes and for ‘non-traditional’ students?

There were diverse understandings of FLTP at UWC, but an interim definition was proposed:

The current, common understanding of FLTP at UWC, in furtherance of UWC’s mission to make lifelong “learning opportunities available” is: Flexible learning and teaching provision is an inclusive, learner-centred approach that promotes flexibility in admissions criteria, curriculum design, learning and teaching modes and assessment, with appropriate support systems and services, for the purpose of developing graduate attributes throughout the learning process so that all students can make a positive difference in the world. This is a dynamic understanding which we anticipate will change over time.

This provisional definition will need to be tested further with staff across UWC to reach a common understanding of FLTP, which is essential if FLTP is to be taken seriously as an alternative to traditional modes of learning and teaching provision.

This investigation has provided evidence of positive moves towards more flexible learning and teaching provision at UWC. The Directorate for T&L is playing a vital role in driving, encouraging and monitoring these changes and in developing the scholarship of FLTP, towards fulfilling the objectives of the IOP 2010-2014. However, the duality of the ‘full-time’/‘part-time’ provision system restricts rather than facilitates these shifts which, by and large, are not challenging the system or offering an alternative model. In addition, the findings indicate¹⁸ that FLTP efforts come largely from self-

¹⁸ Despite the relatively small sample from which the primary data were drawn, it was purposively selected to comprise those in key positions and academics engaged in and pioneering FLTP. Therefore, although the data may be representative of the views of these key people, the findings should be said to be indicative only.

motivated individuals or small groups, rather than from a coherent, centrally-led vision by top institutional leadership.

One of the biggest challenges seems to be to change the dominant conception of teaching/learning as largely face-to-face and lecture based and for university staff to accept that the 'non-traditional' student is the norm, not the exception. The student support services do recognise this and are working hard to respond to the needs of all students, providing a range of different, flexible services. It is vital that undergraduate provision affords appropriate flexible learning opportunities that cater for this norm.

That challenge connects with another; the reportedly high workload of academic and administrative staff, which leaves them little time or energy to explore more flexible ways of responding to a diverse student body. Yet another is perceptions that research outputs are valued above teaching, and this constrains innovation and experimentation in teaching. Any drive to assert the relevance of FLTP to student participation and engagement would need to take all these issues into account.

Some FLTP activities are directed at working students in particular, reflecting an awareness of their learning needs, or at integrated learning in ECPs or transdisciplinary courses, and could be offered as flexible learning options for all students equally. There appears to be a growing movement among teaching staff to experiment with ICTs and emerging technology to provide enhanced, flexible learning options which are pedagogically informed. The work of the CIECT team ensures that the ICT capacity of all students and of UWC staff at all levels is continuing to grow and be supported and, most importantly, that TEL is pedagogically led.

There are several forums for showcasing innovation in T&L, to encourage, support and raise awareness of quality FLTP initiatives, but there is a desire to make these initiatives even more widely known and to build communities of good FLTP practice within faculties.

Finally, there are challenges for the administrative system that will need to be addressed if FLTP is to thrive. Not only do all four sub-systems that make up the complex HE system need to be aligned and support each other, but also, for FLTP to grow and to be sustainable, the entire university needs to shift in the way it views, engages with and develops a common understanding of and commitment to a provision which offers a wider range of opportunities for student participation in its programmes.

What follows are possible next steps to ensure flexible approaches to learning and teaching become the norm at UWC, rather than the exception, to meet the needs of its diverse student body. While this may seem a daunting task, UWC seems ready to take this on under the right leadership; many of the respondents in this study would argue that UWC has no alternative if it is to maintain and improve its position in higher education, locally *and* globally

Suggested next steps

- Set up a central steering committee for implementing FLTP comprising senior leadership and management and that has university-wide representation.
- Ensure university policies and systems align with the FLTP vision.

- Embark on financial modelling that can sustain the envisioned FLTP goals, looking at the costs of resources needed compared to the long-term success benefits.
- Develop a project plan for staged FLTP implementation.

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Appendix A: Interview schedule

Mapping flexible learning and teaching provision at UWC

Introduction

DLL is undertaking an action research project into flexible learning and teaching provision at UWC. Our focus is mainly on undergraduate programmes but we are also interested in gaining insight into any flexible learning and teaching practices adopted for post-graduate programmes, so that we can map some of these practices across the university. One of the aims of this research is to develop a set of principles of flexible learning and teaching provision for consideration by the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, and in the long term to develop a culture of flexible provision at UWC. We have already interviewed the Deputy Deans Teaching and Learning (T&L) and the T&L specialists in all the faculties and we are now conducting follow-up interviews with academics that they have recommended as being involved in flexible provision in one way or another.

Interview Questions

- Our research so far shows that there are many different understandings of flexible learning and teaching. What are your understandings?
- Can you give me some examples of how you are applying these understandings in your T&L practice?
- In what ways are these flexible approaches responding to student needs?
- Are any of these initiatives aimed at after hours' provision or working students? If so, how?
- What impact do you think they are having on student learning, if any?
- We are using the following criteria as indicators of flexible learning and teaching in our research project:
 - Flexible admissions criteria, including the recognition of prior learning;
 - Flexible curriculum design, including assessment, to take into account different learning styles, different abilities and different knowledge backgrounds of students;
 - Flexible delivery relating to the pace, place and mode of teaching and learning;
 - Flexible support systems and services that cater for working and non-working students and those with disabilities.

Would you agree with these criteria or not, and would you add anything else?

Are there any initiatives that you are involved in that meet these criteria that you haven't mentioned? If so, what are they?

- What are the challenges with flexible learning and teaching provision in relation to
 - The students

- Yourself / other lecturers
 - Administrative processes?
- Do you share your experiences of flexible learning and teaching provision with your colleagues at all and, if so, would you tell me about this?
- How has implementing some of these practices changed the way
 - you think about teaching and learning?
 - your interactions / relationships with your students?
- What to you are important principles to follow when considering flexible learning and teaching initiatives?
- What is needed to enable and enhance flexible learning and teaching provision at UWC?

Many thanks for your participation in this project.

A realist assessment of the implementation of blended learning in a higher education context: the case of the Library and Information Science Department at the University of the Western Cape.

Mark Abrahams and Sally Witbooi

Abstract

Opportunities for further studies by working adults came under threat as the University of the Western Cape stopped the offering of after-hours classes in most of its Faculties. Unqualified and under-qualified librarians were directly affected by this decision. This paper outlines an assessment of the conceptualisation and implementation of an action research project initiated by the Division for Lifelong learning. Using a realist evaluation approach, the assessment focuses on the implementation of strategies aimed at showing how lifelong learning opportunities, conceptualised and provided in flexible ways, could support innovation in learning and teaching in order to enhance access and success to learning by working people in the context of the Library and Information Science Department.

Introduction

Confronted with the challenge of decreasing opportunities for working adults to study at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) embarked on an action research project to engender flexible learning and teaching provision in three pilot sites at the university. UWC has since its inception in 1960 offered evening classes to working students. The increase of its intake of young full-time students, the ongoing pressure on staff to generate research and the unfolding of a strategic objective to promote post-graduate studies at the university are some of the factors that contributed to the decisions to limit its after-hours offering in some departments as well as to cease offering completely, as was the case in the Arts faculty where the Library Information Science (LIS) department is located.

The myriad of components involved in the overall intervention, alerted to the complex nature of the endeavour. The intervention was also steeped in explicit and implicit theoretical views that informed choices of definitions and the general discourse associated with the intervention. Even the framing of it as an action research process revealed a discursive treatment of the problem based on particular ideological assumptions. A realist assessment was deemed appropriate for this complex intervention where multiple interacting components were present; where components did not act in a linear fashion; where it was reliant on people to carry out the intervention and most importantly, it was highly dependent on the context in which it took place.

The action research project's research question for the various sites on campus and indeed the institutions was: "What conditions need to change in order to give working people access to achieve success at UWC?" The specific evaluative research questions for the application of the intervention at the LIS site were:

- What was the overall nature of the intervention? Context

- What factors/mechanisms hindered/ supported the intervention? Mechanisms
- What were the experiences of students and staff? Outcomes
- How/where/ to what extent did the intervention manifest as blended learning?

The multiple factors alluded to above, the varied project referents and the institution's very diverse student population (February and Koetsier, 2007, Daniels and Roman, 2013) informed the realist evaluation approach, one that is grounded in critical realism and asserts that both the material and social are 'real' and can have real effects. Pawson and Tilley's (1997) articulation of the close and dynamic interplay between a programme's context and mechanisms leading to outcomes, informed the choice of methodological approach for the assessment of the LIS intervention.

Methodological approach

A common sense understanding of the purpose of programme evaluation is to find out what is and is not working in an intervention. Clarke and Dawson (1999) credit Scriven, for introducing the most popular organising conceptual framework for evaluation research in 1967. Scriven used the terms/concepts formative and summative to describe two approaches to programme evaluation and this distinction has characterised evaluation research for decades. Formative evaluation, as articulated by Scriven was employed to provide feedback to people who wanted to improve a programme or an intervention. The emphasis in formative evaluation is on the gathering of information from programme planners, practitioners and participants to assess what changes are needed to improve the programme. Summative evaluation on the other hand focuses on the determination of overall effect of the programme. In contrast to the improvement agenda of formative evaluation, summative evaluation is employed with the intention of making recommendations whether the programme should continue to run or not. Depending of the specific purposes of the evaluation, the context of the programme, and the needs of programme planners and implementers, an evaluator will make a choice for the type of evaluation to employ.

Rossi, Freeman and Lipsey (1999) provide a more detailed definition of programme evaluation; "The use of social research procedures to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs that is adapted to their political and organizational environments and designed to inform social action in way that improve social condition (p. 2)." In this definition, a simple experimental design – the black box design – runs the risk of focusing only on one aspect of this framework, that is, outcome assessment. The results of such a design provide answers to questions related to outcomes but are unable to shed much light on the reasons for the results, be they positive or negative.

Kazi (2003) identifies those evaluation practices focusing solely on outcomes as emanating from an empirical practice paradigm and provides the following categorisation of evaluation practices as they are manifested in research paradigms:

1. Empirical practice
2. Pragmatism or methodological pluralism
3. Interpretivist approaches including critical theory and participatory approaches

4. Post-positivist approaches such as scientific realism. (p.11)

He further states that a crucial limitation of empirical practice is its focus on effects or outcomes almost to the exclusion of the character and nature of the intervention that is being measured. It relies on the application of reliability and validity tests to deal with the limitation of understanding reality. This approach is embedded in a positivist ontological orientation to reality, according to Krauss (2005), where the researcher is regarded as separated from the world s/he is studying. The lack of analysis of the context in this approach makes replication difficult because social interventions involve the interplay of the individual and the social and multiple factors and influences are continuously at work (Kazi, 2001).

The pragmatic or pluralist approach embraces the advantages of empirical practice and attempts to compensate for its limitations through triangulation (Kazi, 2003). This 'anything goes' approach has been critiqued as being anti-intellectual for failing to engage with epistemological debates. On the other hand, the mixed methods movement has managed to highlight the limitations of research methods associated with specific paradigms and put forward convincing arguments that it is acceptable to combine qualitative and quantitative methods to develop a more comprehensive approximation of reality. Ontologically, pragmatists tend to draw the line at relativism, and therefore, at least at the level of ontology, it is not 'anything goes' (Kazi, 2003). Methodological pragmatists consider feasibility as the main criteria and tend to over emphasise the needs of stakeholders or the needs of practice and often fail to capture the effectiveness of a programme.

Interpretivist evaluation approaches include critical theory, social constructivism and feminist evaluation (Kazi, 2003). There is a preference for qualitative methods that enable the researcher to dig deeper and the application of a dialogic approach to help participants achieve greater self-knowledge. According to Kazi (2003), the process of enquiry here is not technical or procedural but embedded in values, ethics, morality and politics. Similar to the pragmatist approach there is a tendency to exclude the consideration of outcomes and the concentration on in-depth processes lead to a lop-sided treatment of the main dimensions of practice.

The post-positivist approach where realist evaluation is embedded entails elements of all three perspectives (empirical, interpretivist and pragmatist approach, Kazi, 2001) however; it differs in respect to how reality is viewed. Positivism concerns a single, concrete reality that can be measured by a disengaged observer and interpretivism concerns multiple realities that are interpreted and re-interpreted by participants (Krauss, 2005) and the realist ontology posits that there are multiple perceptions about a single reality and that reality exists independent of our interpretations of that world (Krauss, 2005, Westhorp, 2011). Realist evaluation draws on the realist philosophical positions of science as espoused by Bhaskar, Harre, Putnam and others where realism is regarded as a post-positivist perspective that steers a path between empiricists and constructivists' accounts of scientific explanation (Pawson, 2006). However, Maxwell (2012) believes that the critical realists' view that there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions accommodates the constructivists' interpretation that the *understanding* is inevitably a construction from perceptions and standpoint – a position he regards as an alternative to both naive realism and radical constructivists' views that deny the existence of any reality apart from our own constructions (p. 5). He claims that critical realism's

rejection of multiple realities is not incompatible with the constructivists' view since critical realism accommodates multiple constructions and perspectives. A substantial amount of qualitative research, according to Maxwell (2012), is implicitly realist in its assumptions and methods (p. 10).

Realism, as a philosophical paradigm therefore has elements of both positivism and constructivism and both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are seen as appropriate for researching the underlying mechanisms that drive actions and events. However, rather than being value-free, as in positivist research, or value-laden as in interpretivist approaches, realism is 'value cognizant'; conscious of the values of human systems and of researchers (Krauss, 2005). Furthermore, critical realism differs from a 'naïve' or 'empirical' conception of realism by distinguishing between the 'real', the 'actual' and the 'empirical' – as a stratified ontology introduced by Bhaskar in 1975 (Olsen, 2010). Empiricism makes reference only to experience (the empirical) and that can be misleading as it relies on conceptual frameworks and conflates this with the real instead of separating them (Bhaskar, 1979). The "real" and the "actual" as part of the critical realist ontology presuppose that not all the structures of the things that we experience may be in fact observable (Sayer, 2000).

Realist evaluation is also regarded as a species of theory-driven evaluation (Cardin and Alkin, 2012; Astbury, 2013) that is of the view that all programmes are theory-laden, and that these theories hold the assumptions about how change is brought about through interventions. Pawson and Tilley (2004) agree with the similarity but assert that within realist evaluation the programme theory is specified in realist terms, that is, with a distinct philosophical orientation.

A realist approach assumes that programs are "theories incarnate". That is, whenever a program is implemented, it is testing a theory about what 'might cause change', even though that theory may not be explicit. One of the tasks of a realist evaluation is therefore to make the theories within a program explicit, by developing clear hypotheses about how, and for whom, programs might 'work'. (Pawson and Tilley, 2004, p.3)

The distinct philosophical orientation to programme theory is encapsulated in what Astbury (2013) refers to as the 'analytic centerpiece' of realist evaluation ; that is the search for underlying mechanisms (M) that in particular contexts (C), generate outcomes (O). Sometimes presented as a simple formula of Context + Mechanism = Outcomes.

Mechanism refers to the way in which resources interact and describe what it is about programmes that bring about change. Pawson and Tilley (2004) maintain that it is not programmes that work but the resources they offer to enable their participants to make them work. Mechanisms are often hidden and should be made visible in the evaluation process. Mechanisms will be active in particular circumstances called the 'context'. These are features of participants, organization, staffing, history, culture etc.

For realism, it is axiomatic that certain contexts will be supportive to the programme theory and some will not. And this gives realist evaluation the crucial task of sorting the one from the other. Context must not be confused with locality. Depending on the nature of the intervention, what is contextually significant may not only relate to place but also to systems of interpersonal

and social relationships, and even to biology, technology, economic conditions and so on.
(Pawson and Tilley, 2004, p. 7)

Outcome patterns generally emerge from programme implementation and they comprise the intended and unintended consequences of programmes. Instead of relying on a single measure of success, realist evaluators strive to understand and explain outcome variations through systematic theory testing and refinement (Astbury, 2013). Kazi (2003) adds that the stratified ontology of realism includes the concept of 'emergence', meaning that the stratification of structures in the open system continually gives rise to new and emerging phenomena. This implies an awareness of the ever-changing contexts where social programmes are implemented. Whatever the outcomes, the realist evaluator will aim to identify how the programme mechanisms interacted to produce the outcomes and how the patterns of interrelationships may be transformed over time.

A brief overview of the action research intervention is provided below followed by an outline of the intervention in the LIS pilot site. An analysis of the context, that is, the conditions needed to trigger mechanisms (Gill and Turbin, 1999), precedes the explicit and emerging mechanisms of the intervention and the resulting outcomes. Some of the latter was obtained through surveys and interviews administered during 2013 and 2014.

The overall action research context

The action research intervention by the Division for lifelong Learning started from what appeared to be a simple problem. Opportunities for study by working students were declining. The study used 'flexible learning and teaching provision' as its focus to signal the provision of flexible or varied opportunities to students for learning. The project embraced a notion of a flexible pedagogy that provided students a choice in the pace, place and mode of their learning. One that was responsive to a diversity of students – both working and not working – and learning styles. Casey and Wilson (2005) assert that introducing flexible learning in this type of context is bound to be an iterative process and action research provides one way of getting information in an effective way to establish feedback loops on the process of change.

The proposed action research had four points of reference: the **student**, the **university**, the **workplace**, and **profession** from which students came. It aimed to show how lifelong learning opportunities, which were conceptualized and provided in flexible ways, could support innovation in learning and teaching in order to enhance successful access and success to learning by working people. At the same time it intended to highlight how innovative flexible provision challenged both the higher education institutions and workplaces to interrogate understandings and approaches to professional development.

Figure 1: Programme components (DLL Strategic planning, 2012)

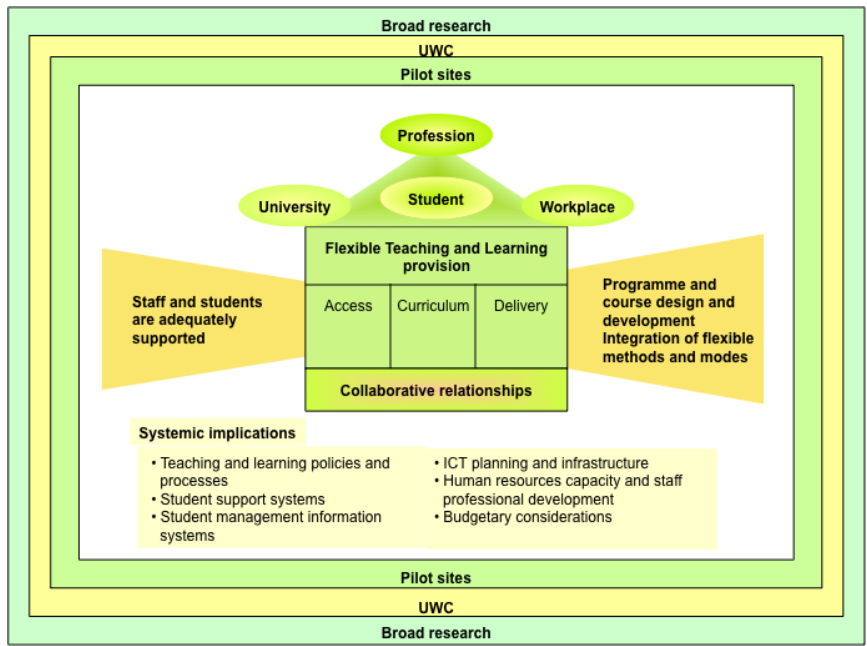


Figure 1 above outlines how DLL staff and site representatives viewed the interrelationships among components within the university. It projected systemic implications for the teaching and learning processes, student support systems and student management and information systems. There was upfront acknowledgement that any move towards introducing or strengthening flexible provisioning would have an impact on the kinds of resources, support, systems and processes needed to provide a stimulating and supportive learning and teaching environment (DLL, 2012). After securing external funding the action research project was endorsed at the highest level of the institution and reporting structures were established to assist with institutionalization.

An enabling management structure was created consisting of a project committee for each pilot site, made up of representatives from the pilot sites and DLL. These committees reported to the DLL coordinating committee that provided overall direction to the project. A Senate Teaching & Learning Advisory Committee (STLC) was established as a sounding board with representation from all faculties of the university as well as an external teaching and learning expert.

LIS Pilot site - the intervention

One of the three pilot sites in the action research project was the Library and Information Science Department located in the Arts Faculty at UWC. The University of the Western Cape is the only university in the Western Cape region in South Africa offering undergraduate Library Science qualifications. The significance of this statement is amplified in the national context where there is a critical shortage of public libraries and an existing policy initiative to establish a library in every school. While the entire degree B.LIS, was the focus of the action research project, this paper reflects on the

assessment of initiatives towards more flexible learning and teaching strategies within the first-year semester course LIS111.

At the start of the project, full time students attended academic activities from 8:30 until 16:10 during weekdays, whereas part-time students typically attended to these activities from 17:00 until 20:20. The part-time students worked at the UWC or CPUT libraries as well as for the City of Cape Town Library Services (CoCT LIS). The latter category of students was allowed (10 days) 80 hours per annum to attend classes normally taking place during the day. They were usually practicing librarians (under-or unqualified) or some of them completed the Lower Diploma in LIS and wanted to improve their qualifications. They were generally more mature students while the full time students were normally straight from school. Because of the lack of availability of 'after-hours' courses, many of them attended courses of their choice during the day time.

The semester course LIS111 was taught with two lectures per week complemented by a weekly tutorial. The course content provided an overview of the development of writing, the alphabet, libraries, different types of information agencies and the link to mass media and publishing. The reading tutorials were introduced in 2008/9 when the faculty became concerned about the critical reading and academic writing skills of students. The tutorial aimed to get students to read widely, and to think critically about current LIS issues. Traditionally, the course material was made available as printed notes that students could purchase from the Arts Faculty Bookshop. LIS111 is also offered as an elective to BA general students who may or may not be interested to pursue librarianship as a profession or career. These students typically exit after the first-year, or possibly doing LIS121, another first year service course offered to Arts Faculty and Education Faculty students.

In 2013 the LIS111 course materials were uploaded onto the Learning Management System (LMS), Ikamva. The printed format was totally abandoned. Students were required to access course notes, tutorial instructions and guidelines online. All announcements about class schedules, assessment dates and formats were posted online as well as on the notice boards located in the Department building. The 'announcement' feature allowed for rapid communication with students regarding course developments and students were notified via email. The 'resources' feature is the space where additional materials such as Power-point presentations and worksheets were deposited for students to access.

The students were required to access their course notes online in preparation for class. During class time, concepts would be clarified and explained using power-point presentations – also available prior to the class. The technology (online environment) allowed for quick searches to relevant and related materials. Students could experience the interactive nature of searching for information to enrich the curriculum. Students would then be referred to additional readings made available online. For the tutorials, the worksheets were made available beforehand and students were required to work through these in the computer laboratories when appropriate.

A blended learning approach was encouraged, founded on pedagogy that puts the student at the centre of learning. The action research project promoted flexible learning and teaching provision that included e-learning but did not equal e-learning. The latter has the opportunity to allow universities to extend

their campus-based service to distant and online modes. Technology then, or e-learning was viewed as a medium, a means to achieve success and not an end in itself (Njenga and Fourie, 2010) and this notion is supported by Crawford and McKenzie (2011) who have studied the impact of local contexts on technology use and outcomes. They found that, instead of democratising the education process, the exclusive use of technology can exacerbate historical social inequalities.

The project was mindful of the context and did not assume that all students had access to the internet. Particularly since Statistics SA (2012) revealed that, on average, less than 10% of South Africans have access to the internet at home, just over 5% have internet access at school/college/university and that most people access the internet at work (just under 20%). Flexible provision was understood as a broad provision of learning and teaching that encompassed a range of sustainable access, curriculum, and delivery variables that provided all students with the best chance of success (DLL, 2012).

Analysis of the Context

The management structure of the action research project included a Senate Committee – reporting to the Vice Chancellor, a Senate Teaching and Learning – Advisory Committee, with faculty representatives – where the DLL Coordinating Committee also reported and the Pilot Project Committees with representatives from the pilot sites. The locus of control for the project was however the DLL Coordinating Committee. The DLL initiated the project, secured the funding for the project, set up the subsequent structures for the management of the project and was responsible for reporting progress to the external funders. The project strategic plan projected the unfolding of the project in four phases. Phase 1 involved the setting up of the project, identifying project partners, entering into agreements with project sites, setting up structures, creating a conceptual understanding and developing a guiding framework. Phase 2 was concerned with mapping and innovating. The prevailing flexible provision and practices were mapped. Intervention strategies were implemented in pilot sites and project website was set up to collate resources and for communication. The 3rd phase concerned the use of feedback from previous phases to improve practices and to implement innovations suggested by lessons of experience from others. The main focus of the 4th phase was the consolidating of lessons and experience and promoting the necessary changes to policy and practice at institutional level (DLL, 2012).

Pilot sites were identified based on the following criteria:

- A willingness of the faculty and departments to participate.
- Pressure of increasing (part-time) student numbers.
- A suitable undergraduate programme.
- Possibilities for impact of the pilot for UWC's understanding and implementation of 'flexible provision'.
- Capacity to deliver an entire undergraduate degree within a flexible provision framework.

Factors that influenced the Library Information Science department to participate include LIS111 being identified as a 'killer course' by the faculty Teaching & Learning Committee and the recommended changes to tutorials during 2010. This means that too many students failed the course and the recommendation was to increase the number of tutorials to one per week, instead of the fortnightly

tutorial at the time. There was also a sharp decrease in the number of part-time students due the closing of part-time offering of OTHER courses in the faculty. Timetable clashes and limited subject choices also affected student numbers. Even full-time students were forced to do an extra year because of timetable clashes. The LIS department also experienced a huge drop-off in student numbers over a three year period; for example in 2010, there were 155 1st year students and in 2013 there were 20 students for the 2nd and 3rd year modules. An incentive to participate in the action research project was the availability of R25 000 per year to be used by the department to support related activities – either through employing additional personnel, buying resources that would enable staff to better implement strategies or paying for training courses that would assist staff to improve their skills levels.

The Learning management system (LMS)

Since 2005, UWC made use of an in-house, open source learning management system (LMS) called e-Teaching, built on the Chisemba platform. This LMS consisted of various teaching-and-learning e-tools (i.e. content, communication and assessment). The uptake among staff was very limited primarily because of the unstable nature of the system. Staff and students complained about the numerous ‘down-times’ experienced. A new LMS (Ikamva), based on the Sakai platform, was introduced in 2012 and piloted in the LIS site. The roll-out occurred towards the end of 2013. This meant that the students participating in the action research intervention were exposed to the new LMS in LIS while still working on the existing e-Teaching LMS in other courses.

The students

All the students, full- and part-time, registered for LIS111 were ‘exposed’ to the intervention. Those surveyed in 2013 all indicated that they were registered as full-time students. Despite this, 2 students indicated that they were working full-time and 5 were working part-time. Their times in employment ranged from 1 to 3 year (3 respondents) and 4 to 6 years (4 respondents). The following job titles were provided: Student assistant UWC; HR Student Development Assistant; Consultant; Trainee and Eskom librarian. The full-time ‘registration’ was an administrative requirement to enable part-time students to attend day-time classes.

Most of the students lived off campus - more than 15 km away from campus while relying on public transport to get to and from class. The majority (80%) indicated that their studies were paid for via a NSFAS loan or a bursary. 98% of the respondents had exclusive access to a cellphone with only 2 % sharing. However, indications of no access to other technologies ranged as follows: 22% desktop computer; 27% laptop; 54% broadband ADSL; 55% WiFi; 60% digital camera; 61% Ipod/MP3; and 77% tablet computer.

Most of them, 75%, indicated that they mainly used their cellphone to access information on the web, with 40% using it several times a day. While 22% indicated that they used the web to access the learning management system (e-Teaching or Ikamva), 20% indicated that they had not used the web to access these systems. On the other hand, some 60% indicated that they used the web regularly to access general information for news and holidays.

A follow up survey was administered in 2014 to the same cohort of students. It should be noted that only one LMS (Ikamva) was available during this period. Here more students indicated that they had exclusive access to a desktop computer – 31% compared to 16%. More students had exclusive access to a laptop computer - 52%, but the no access to WiFi or broadband ADSL remained similar to before. The cellphone remained the most popular means of accessing information. More than 50% indicated that they used the web to access the LMS and 42% were using it several times per day. There was also an increased use of the web for academic reference sources and for general use.

Explicit, strategic and emerging mechanisms

The first integrated mechanism introduced to facilitate the change process, was the availability of the monetary incentive for the department and their cooption onto the pilot project committee. This provided space for a staff member (co-author here) to spend time with the DLL staff to engage with the underlying thinking that informed the overall intervention and for ownership to be shared with the site.

This also resulted in a shift in the dynamics of the department itself. There was an early uptake of technology by one staff member – well before the action research intervention. The rest were very slow to embrace technology and reluctant to try out ‘new’ things. Since becoming a pilot site, there was more willingness to engage and staff members availed themselves for training in how to use the learning management system.

At the pilot project committee meetings, the department HoD and staff member reported on progress within the department, plans for using the ‘incentive’ grant, the challenges and future plans. These regular meetings ensured ongoing focused activity within the department. Besides reporting to the pilot project committee, the department also reported to their Teaching & Learning sub-committee in their faculty and reported on progress in their annual reports to faculty board meetings.

The learning management system Ikamva, was the key mechanism identified to engender flexible provisioning of the LIS111 course content. The LIS department pioneered the new system and made all course materials, including tutorial materials available online. All notes, presentations, worksheets and announcements could be accessed online. There were initial challenges; students having to deal with two different systems and the Ikamva system being off-line periodically during the piloting phase. However, the introduction of the new system was accompanied by the availability of training by the Centre for Innovative Educational and Communication Technologies (CIECT), responsible for the roll-out of the new system.

LIS staff members could also draw on the technological know-how of a colleague who had been experimenting with the online environment for a while. This staff member later became the head of the department and this entrenched the role, purpose and general thrust of the intervention.

During the early stage of the project, the DLL facilitated a meeting between the City of Cape Town (CoCT) Library officials and the LIS department. The meeting was called to discuss the CoCT’s work-study policy that allowed for 80 hours per annum (during working hours) where staff could attend to their studies and access to computers at work. The working librarians used the allotted time to attend class or

prepare for and write an examination. The implementation of the policy had been problematic for a number of students because in order to attend a two hour class, they had to travel four hours to and from campus. When it came to examination time, the students had little or no 'available' time and their managers did not allow them to use the computers at work for study purposes. This meeting and a subsequent meeting with the head of the human resources of the City of Cape Town, resolved that the work-study policy should be implemented as an enabling device, that is, managers should be more accommodating regarding the time used by the students, and students should be able to negotiate the use of available computers during mutually agreed periods. The outcome of this specific intervention was not assessed. However, staff members were asked to communicate the results to students.

The limited number of computers (17) in the dedicated LIS computer laboratory generally used by groups of 20, hampered application exercises and staff were compelled to work after hours and on weekends to accommodate students.

Outcomes

As a result of being part of the action research project and volunteering to pilot the new learning management system (Ikamva), all LIS staff members attended the training provided by the CIECT and were able to use the system to upload resources and communicate with students using the online environment. Staff members shared the following experiences during interviews:

Making materials/ information available online does not mean it will be used. Students still attend class not having read what is freely available online. Students were reluctant to the use discussion forum (DF) - even when marks were assigned. For most students English is their second language and they are/were not used to the discussion forum environment. [Staff interview; 8/9/13]

There is a need to experiment with available elements of the Ikamva system and make it more interactive (dynamic). The announcements work very well but students don't necessarily read their emails. [Staff interview; 2/10/13]

The system needs to allow for flexibility. Uploading marks for example should be less rigid. People/staff need time to develop their courses for FP and provide with time to think and do. Activities should be focused on both students and staff – but accommodate different types of students. [Staff interview; 2/10/13]

All the students had access to the resources made available online and the part-time students in particular benefitted by this arrangement as they felt that they were – for the first time – being treated equally to their full-time counterparts. The following feedback from students was obtained during the first survey in 2013:

The lectures were very informative and relevant to our course reader information, whereas the tutorials were fun and energetic, I enjoyed preparing for the discussion and debates in the tutorials. [Student feedback; 5/6/2013]

It was at times difficult to access the Ikamva site. Network connection should be improved. In some cases we had to submit our work late because we were struggling to get hold of the questions on Ikamva. [Student feedback; 5/6/2013]

It was difficult to access the account at home but after I copied the link I was able to gain access at home. I feel that this system will work fine if the access is more stable because there were times when I could not gain access to the site. [Student feedback; 5/6/2013]

I found downloading the workbook for LIS111 difficult because there wasn't an option to save the notes. I had to copy and paste into word. This was time-consuming and I would prefer if I could download the notes into a PDF. [Student feedback; 5/6/2013]

Some students volunteered to be interviewed about their online experiences and they shared the following:

There must be more visual images like u-tube clips and videos. That will grab my attention. We are still like children, we are stimulated by pictures. Interestingly, that is what they teach us in the course. [Student interviews; 20/7/13]

They must give us laptops so that we can access work easily or to type assignments. Because now we use our cell phones and I have to wait at the computer lab for a turn to do my assignment. [Student interviews; 20/7/13]

The follow-up survey and interviews in 2014 produced mainly positive responses from both staff and students related to their experiences working in the online environment. This was because only one LMS was in operation, it was reliable, and was in use across the institution. A staff member reported the following:

The availability of physical space (classrooms) affected the timetable. The use of technology requires laboratory space, not lecture halls. In the Library department the computer labs are inadequate. There are limited resources, for example 17 computers for 20 in a class. [Staff interview; 3/5/2014]

Extrapolating from the interview responses (2014) with students, three distinct types of students emerged. Those who still prefer hardcopy or textbooks as a means to study and engage with course contents (30%); those who encounter obstacles when attempting to engage with the technology, that is, they rely on access to computers, their notes and resources while on campus (40%); and lastly, those who understand the importance of using technology as a tool to access resources and master course content through technology (30%).

The availability of online resources (course notes etc.) did not replace the face-to-face class schedule or the tutorial offering. In the classroom, the online environment allowed for immediate searches and access to relevant sources pertaining to the concepts being discussed.

Discussion

The intricate nature of the action research project is evident in its conceptualization of the challenges to implement innovative learning and teaching strategies provided in flexible ways that could enhance successful access and success to learning by working people. These attempts were initiated in an environment where institutional decisions about the use of facilities, resources and capacity generally favoured students who were residential and full-time (DLL, 2012). There was recognition that contextual influences could hinder flexible provision and or provide opportunities to aid and support it.

The structural arrangements served to influence the mainstream discourse of teaching and learning at the institution – through engaging all students – while inserting the plight of working adults by involving workplaces as a strategy to interrogate understandings and approaches to professional development.

The monetary incentive to the pilot site LIS facilitated the space and opportunity for one staff member to develop a deeper understanding of project purposes that enabled her to act as a catalyst for innovation within the department. Through their cooption onto a project site committee the LIS staff was required to provide progress reports, future plans and to offer solutions to emerging challenges. These requirements influenced the dynamics and culture of staff meetings, interpersonal relationships, and practices of individual staff members. Initial resistance and reluctance among some staff members changed to compliance and later experimentation.

The unfolding programme theory of the overall action research project was imbued with a conception that all attempts at introducing innovative practices at the level of access, curriculum and delivery would be affected by and would have an impact on the kinds of resources, support and systems needed to provide a stimulating and supportive learning and teaching environment. Theorising at this level is a way, according to Pawson and Tilly (1997) to make evaluations ‘cumulate’. The idea being to build up broad enough knowledge of the processes at work to have a fair chance of predicting what initiatives might have best chance of success in future interventions (Jolly, Crosthwaite and Brown, 2009). The ‘interdependencies’ between the curriculum components; students and staff; learning, teaching and assessment processes; academic and administrative processes and procedures at the departmental and institutional level became obvious in this assessment.

Staff members in LIS, tasked to implement the online strategies initially resisted because they were required to utilize unfamiliar technology that was generally ignored across the institution because of its instability. In addition the intended use of the online environment was not accompanied by a reduction in contact time with students. The structural arrangements, referred to above, facilitated exposure training and a more positive attitude. The frustration experienced during the pilot phase of the new LMS slowed the momentum of the implementation.

The diverse student group was required to engage with two different learning management systems while battling to address and overcome their own limited technological exposure as well as learning styles. The working students were additionally constrained by time-factors, access to computers and institutional administrative arrangements that obliged them to register as full-time students. The limited number of computers available in the LIS computer laboratories also hampered access.

However, the more recent experiences of students, having to deal with only one learning management system, reveal a significant increase in the daily use of various technologies to access online academic resources, general announcements and additional documentation made available. More computer laboratory spaces will certainly enhance access. While the innovation 'mirrored' a blended learning course model, allowing students more flexibility about when, where, and how to access information, students were still required to attend the same number of face-to-face contact hours as stipulated in the institutional curriculum policy framework. As a pilot site, LIS should be allowed to experiment with the notion of contact hours for both classroom sessions and tutorials. This will result in a more creative use of technology, attention to student engagement with the content and innovative and meaningful ways of assessment. A reduction in the obligatory contact time will partially assist staff but will surely benefit working adults who have severe time constraints and a host of other responsibilities to deal with. The 'partial only' assistance for staff refers to the need for creative ways to be available to students in the online environment.

The complex, in some cases oppositional, institutional environment necessitated an integrated response in the form of introducing flexible learning and teaching strategies. The realist approach to this assessment allowed for the articulation of the context(s) in relation to explicit and emerging mechanisms that were used or operational during the intervention. It showed how the outcomes resulted from a dynamic interaction between explicit and emerging mechanisms and specific contexts.

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KEEPING THE DOORS OF LEARNING OPEN FOR ADULT STUDENT-WORKERS WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION¹?

Shirley Walters, Sally Witbooi and Mark Abrahams

Abstract

The Freedom Charter of the African National Congress (ANC), the triumphant South African liberation movement, proclaims that 'the doors of learning shall be open' for all. Twenty years since coming to power, the doors of the universities are struggling to stay open for adult student-workers. An action research project into implementation of 'flexible provision' at one historically black university is described in response to these realities. Rich experiences from lives of working librarian student-workers illustrate the complex issues that confront individuals, workplaces and institutions in implementing innovative pedagogies within a university.

Key words: adult student-worker; flexible learning and teaching provision; higher education; South Africa; institutional change

Introduction

Professional innovation and development are shaped by the abilities of higher education and training institutions (HEIs) and workplaces to adapt to the changing circumstances within which workers live and work. The inability of HEIs to adapt to providing access for professional development in more flexible ways can have major consequences for the professional education of workers. Presently, public HEIs in South Africa are under pressure to increase their intake of young students which can mean that working people are finding their options for lifelong learning limited.

This article is based on institutional research within one university in South Africa, which has a 54 year tradition of providing access to working people. It sketches contradictory contextual factors which can impact professional development profoundly. It describes the situation which has led to an action research project on 'flexible learning and teaching provision' for working people who are studying, whom we refer to as 'adult student-workers'; and it points to the

difficulties for the professional development of librarians who are working, in particular. The action research is part of a process of institutional change.

We are concerned with the inter-relationships between the adult students, their working lives and the university – the primary question is how can the university respond meaningfully to the real circumstances of adult students to enhance prospects for their professional development? In brief our research process set out to explore how the university can develop more appropriate pedagogical approaches to help adult student-workers to succeed. This has entailed understanding the working lives of adult students, engaging their workplaces, and influencing the teaching, learning and administrative environment of the university. This is a work-in-progress.

Setting the national scene

The commitment made in the South African Higher Education Policy document (Department of Education, 1997, p.17), which echoed aspects of the ANC's Freedom Charter, that the education system would 'open its doors, in the spirit of lifelong learning, to workers and professionals' raised expectations in South Africa that provision for the education of adults would be taken seriously. Yet, one finding of the study by Buchler *et al*, (2007) was that adult learners remain poorly served at all levels of higher education institutions. The study set out to investigate whether a higher education system that facilitates access, equity and success for adult learners exists or is being formulated. It asked: what is the place of adult learners in South African higher education policy? The study concluded that adult learners are seemingly not a high priority at a time of scarce resources and competing challenges. However, (Buchler *et al*, 2007, p.152) urge that:

...the education of adults in a society, such as South Africa is a political, moral, historical and economic issue – and it is not merely one of these, but all of them. Adults have a critical role to play in the development of South Africa because of their accumulated knowledge and experience, which can be mediated by educational processes to strengthen it and make it socially useful.

Since then, little seems to have changed and the South African situation is certainly not unique. Within low and middle income countries, the spaces for encouraging and supporting adult learners to embrace higher education opportunities, can easily close down in the face of resource constraints, political pressures from large proportions of youth, and the resilient picture that

holds most higher education systems captive, and which is contradicted by the facts, that it is mainly serving young, full-time, able bodied, middle class, urban youth, who have good health, resources and time to concentrate solely on their studies.

The Higher Education Act of 1997 made provision for a unified and nationally planned system of higher education and created a statutory Council on Higher Education (CHE), which provides advice to the Minister and is responsible for quality assurance and promotion. The Act aimed to transform the previous racialized and unequal system of apartheid to one which embraced redress, equity and quality. Between 2003 and 2005 there was major restructuring of public higher education institutions (HEIs) resulting in 36 HEIs being merged into 23. Between them in 2009 they enrolled 837 779 students in total with 684 419 undergraduate students and 128 747 postgraduate students. The institutions vary greatly in terms of size, scope and history. There is also a growing private higher education sector which occupies niche areas (Council for Higher Education, 2009).

In 2009 a new policy was introduced to build a differentiated post-school system (Council for Higher Education, 2009). The Department of Education was split into the Departments of Higher Education and Training and Basic Education, which oversees schooling for youth. As Cosser (2010) stated, the unbundling of the departments paved the way for redrawing the post-school landscape and forced a re-examination of the entire education and training pathway system. He pointed to the estimated 2.8 million 20 – 24 year olds not being in employment, education or training, who are a major concern for politicians and are creating the lever for certain immediate policy imperatives that have implications for adult learners. 51% of the 48 million people in South Africa are under 25 years.

In 2013 a White Paper on Post-School Education and Training was gazetted and it emphasises the principles of ‘learner centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision...’, (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013, p.48). It advocates higher education programmes and modes of provision that are more responsive to learners’ needs and realities, including those of working adults, ‘which take into account their varying life and work contexts, rather than requiring them to attend daily classes at fixed times and central venues’. It recognises

the important role of educational technologies and encourages the expansion of quality ‘online’ and ‘blended’ learning, including open and distance learning programmes.

The tensions at national level between the contradictory messages of access for adult student-workers, on the one hand, and the imperative to get the unemployed youth off the street into education and training, on the other, is leading potentially to the limiting of lifelong learning opportunities and is being played out within HEIs. The action research project exists in the middle of these tensions and contradictions.

Setting the institutional scene: University of Western Cape (UWC)

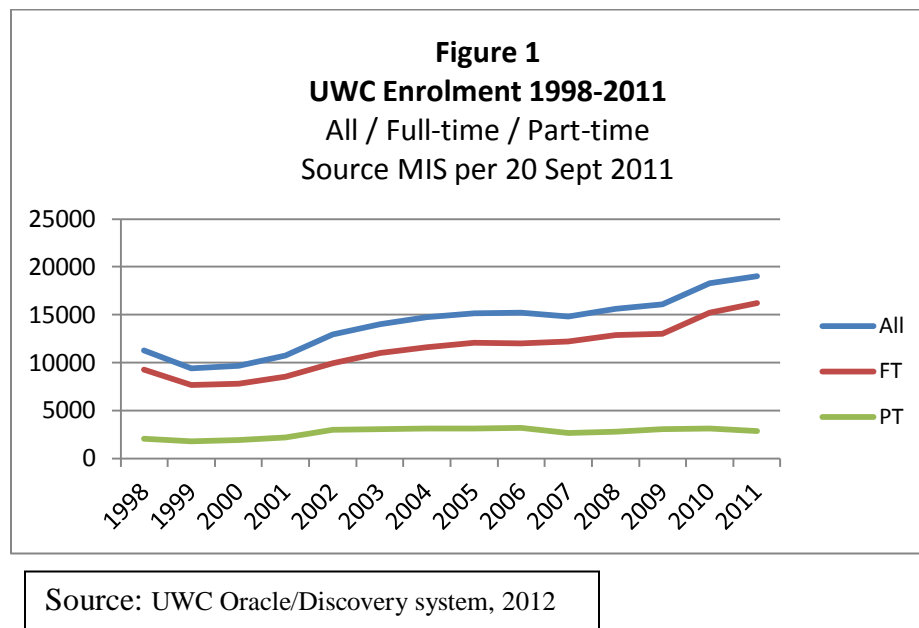
UWC is an historically black university that was founded in 1960 to fulfil the needs for ‘coloured bureaucrats and professionals’ to service the Apartheid political vision of separate development. In 2010 it had about 17, 000 students with a student profile of primarily black, poor and working class students, nearly 60% being women. From the beginning, offering of evening classes to adult student-workers, was part of its mandate.

An analysis of UWC as a lifelong learning institution has been done previously (Walters 2005, 2012), where key lifelong learning characteristics were used (Division for Lifelong Learning, 2001). We do not intend rehearsing the arguments but rather to reflect briefly on specific moves that are afoot to create a new approach to meeting needs of adult student-workers through an action research project on ‘flexible teaching and learning provision’.

A proposal towards this end was first mooted in March 2010 (DLL, 2010) which indicated some fundamental shifts taking place in the institution in response to different pressures. One of these was that the Arts Faculty, for the first time in 50 years, was proposing, and has since decided, to stop delivering courses after-hours except for Library and Information Science and Religion and Theology. The Arts Faculty, as did others, experienced considerable growth in its full-time undergraduate numbers. This resulted in overstretched staff, insufficient tutors, inadequate venues and reliance on inexperienced contract staff. They pointed out that the part-time numbers had decreased dramatically, from 13% to 5% while the full time registrations had almost doubled over the last ten years.

Overall enrolment trends 1998-2011

The graph in Figure 1 below clearly shows that from 2006 onwards the overall growth trends were predominantly driven by increased full-time enrollment. This largely unfunded growth created great pressures for staff (and students). In 2010 alone the first year full-time intake increased by 2200 students. These increases lead to major logistical and teaching and learning challenges.



Since 2002 the proportion of part-time students of the overall student population came down from a high of 23.1% in 2002 to 14.9% in 2011. The part-time numbers for the Arts Faculty went from 231 students in 2010, to 218 in 2011, to 196 in 2012. These figures are not unproblematic, for example, they mask the effects of the faculty's 'alternating offering' provision over the last 7 years. Some BA courses were offered in alternate years. For example, English I and English III would be offered during one year and English 1 and II would be offered, alternately. This affected the patterns of registrations and the trajectories for some adult student-workers. Those failing courses had to wait a year to pick up courses they failed or register for other courses or complete the courses at the University of South Africa (UNISA), a distance-education university.

The Arts Faculty conceded that departments offering professional degrees in Library Information Studies and Religion and Theology accommodate students who were mainly

working and could only study after-hours. However, these departments are located within the Arts Faculty and their degree programmes encompass courses offered by other departments within and across faculties.

The decision by the Arts Faculty to close all after-hours offerings for the BA degree as from 2012 was controversial and was discussed at the Annual General Meeting of the university's Convocation where a resolution was adopted to urge the university management and its governing structures to reconsider. There was also engagement with the Registrar's Office on the terminology of 'part-time and full-time' as used within the formal and informal university structures. It was pointed out that while the organizational practice was to refer to after-hours or 'evening classes' as a proxy for 'part-time', this was not necessarily accurate, as there were 'part-time' students who studied in the day and full-time students who attended after-hours.

In the University Calendar Faculty of Arts, it refers to rules for a 3 year BA (full-time) and a 4 year BA (part-time). Therefore the intention of the Arts Faculty was not to exclude part-time students, but to limit the number of courses which were being offered after-hours. The implications of these clarifications were that it was still possible to do a 'BA part-time', even though the numbers of evening classes offered were reduced from 2012. Students had to be advised of all the options available. Senate endorsed the position that it was *students* who were part or full-time *not courses*. However, the confusion and ambiguity in use of language have continued to cause confusion for both students and staff.

The action research project was to help shift the institution from the parallel provision of 'day time' and 'after hours' classes, to embrace 'flexible learning and teaching provision'. It resonated with the UWC teaching and learning policy which supported flexible learning and teaching. Calls were made to faculties to propose pilot action research sites. This article highlights one of the pilot sites, the Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS) located in Faculty of Arts.

Setting the action research scene

The primary research question was: how can the university respond meaningfully to the real circumstances of working adult students to enhance prospects for their professional development? This has been a three year research partnership between the university and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The action research was endorsed by the Senate and invitations were sent to all departments to participate according to certain criteria. As researchers, we worked within a set of understandings which included the need for: strong support from the leadership of the institution so that the project could be seen as a strategic priority; resource incentives to encourage involvement in innovative teaching; development of principles and processes for involvement which ensured a sense of fairness and equity; use of leading innovators from other departments to support or work with colleagues; development of project teams for each pilot site which related back to the overall coordinating research team; development of a communications strategy to back up and support the pilot sites so that they did not remain isolated pockets of innovation but had the possibilities to influence others; communication of ‘leading practices’ on campus and elsewhere that already existed, to illustrate potential; speed to move quickly while the need for change was obvious and people were willing to innovate; development of a community of scholarship which excited colleagues intellectually and which could lead not only to ‘flexible teaching and learning provision (FLTP)’ but also to publishable research results.

However, while it has been important to keep these criteria in mind, in reality, not all criteria could be met. In particular, the university was very constrained financially so has not been able to contribute additional finances to the research. This highlighted a key conundrum – even though it was not possible to achieve the criteria excavated from leading innovative practices, should we still go ahead? We have, with external funding support. However, it has been far from ideal and has demanded a great deal of additional work and commitment from colleagues who are already over-burdened.

| *Working librarians who are studying and their lecturers*

In 2013, nearly eighty percent of the students in the DLIS were adult students, working in the public library sector. Many of them worked for the City of Cape Town Library and Information Services and they had to leave work during the day to attend classes.

The first professional qualification for librarians is a four year degree. The degree consists of two professional majors as well as credits from other departments or faculties. In terms of delivery, the first year Library Science modules could be attended in the evening, but not all the other facilitating BA subjects. This situation forced the adult student-worker to select from a very small basket of subjects. It also meant attendance during the day to take subjects of their own choice.

From second to fourth years the LIS modules were attended in the mornings only as per the day-time timetable. The morning preference was a request of the employer. The motivation was to have all personnel in the libraries in the afternoon when libraries were at their busiest. The DLIS tried to accommodate these students as far as possible in the mornings, which resulted in rather long sessions of 2-3 hours. This timetable arrangement inevitably resulted in clashes with other subjects or limitations on subject choice and selection.

The adult student-workers experienced the challenge of juggling their work and studies as they were only allowed 10 days (80 hours) per annum for all class and tutorial attendance and 10 days (80 hours) study time for assessment activities per annum. The adult student-worker had to clock out as they left work therefore those who travelled further to the campus were at a disadvantage. Having to leave work during the day could also create tensions in the library as other staff members had to cover for them. On days where there were no staff members available, the adult student-worker could not attend classes.

The researchers met with regional managers of public libraries and with the head of Human Resources at the City of Cape Town, who were the employers of many of the librarians who were studying. The purpose of these meetings was to get greater clarity on the work-study policy and to see whether anything could be done to ease the adult student-worker situation. What emerged was that it was the implementation of the policy rather than the policy itself which was the problem. It was some library managers who misinterpreted policy and who could be heavy

handed. The employers wanted their employees to professionalize and welcomed the university's attempts to work with them to find solutions to the challenges adult students were experiencing.

Lecturers have accommodated affected students by being flexible in offering additional classes to those individuals after hours (i.e. when libraries have closed and the individuals were free to come to campus) or on Saturdays. This was especially the case for practical subjects where the students needed further opportunities for face-to-face clarification and access to resources.

In order to respond to the difficulties experienced by both adult students and staff, the DLIS joined the action research project and as one of the flexible provision strategies, mobilized the use of information communications technology (ICT) in curriculum design, both to facilitate access and assessment. The staff was trained and implemented a first module during 2013. The experience showed that academic literacy levels of students were limited, as were their ICT literacy levels. They also had limited to no access to computers at work to engage their course materials. There were also, at times, university ICT infra-structural problems with irregular access. This caused frustration for staff and students alike. Students struggled with time-management to access course materials and to submit assessments. Both university staff and adult student-workers have had to be exceedingly resilient and creative to 'work around' the various constraints to 'flexible' learning and teaching.

The case of working librarians who are studying has shone light on many structural, organizational and pedagogical issues which are not easy to resolve. Their resolution requires not only concerted commitment from the university but also workplaces, and professional associations, to clear some of the structural barriers to allow the staff and adult student-workers to focus more time and attention on the pedagogical matters, to ensure successful completion of their studies. During the research, it has been clear that both staff and adult student-workers have developed intricate moves to 'work around' institutional and infra-structural barriers. There is still a long way to go to understand and appreciate fully how this has been done, seemingly against great odds. The development of a workable, flexible, pedagogical alternative to ease the burden on both staff and adult student-workers has been one of the objectives of the action research. So what is FLTP?

Flexible Learning and Teaching Provision

A brief dip into the literature on FLTP follows in order to frame what an alternative paradigm might mean. (DLL, 2014)

Most educationists would agree that flexible learning is about offering choices for when, where, how and at what pace learning occurs. These concepts relate to the *delivery* of learning and can be unpacked as follows. Firstly, **`pace`** which includes accelerated and decelerated programmes and degrees, learning part time, arrangements that allow learners to ‘roll on/roll off’ (‘stop in/stop out’), and systems for recognition of prior learning and for credit accumulation and transfer; secondly **`place`** which can relate to work-based learning with employer engagement, learning at home, on campus, while travelling or in any other place, often aided by technology which can enable the flexibility of learning across geographical boundaries and at convenient times; thirdly, **`mode`**, especially the use of learning technologies to enhance flexibility and enrich the quality of learning experience, in blended or distance learning and in synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning (Tallantyne, 2012, p.4; Gordon, 2014).

Our research project adopted the broad parameters of flexibility in learning and teaching provision suggested by the University of Southern Queensland (2011). They highlight *flexible curriculum design*, including flexible forms of assessment which take into account different learning styles of students; *flexible admissions criteria*, including mechanisms such as the recognition of prior learning (RPL); *flexible delivery*, including distance, online, on campus a mix of these modes as well as accelerated or decelerated options. In addition, we added *flexible support systems and services* that cater for working and non-working students and those with disabilities.

These parameters signal a coherent higher education responsibility for FLTP that can sustain the educational changes needed to support the lived realities of all students, especially adult student-workers, for learning success. FLTP, then, is more than simply re-packaging existing materials: ‘we are not just selling a new course but a new concept in education’ (Outram, 2009, p.9). FLTP requires the development of distinctive, more *holistic* forms of *provision*, as well as institutional change.

Principles of FLTP commonly expressed in the literature are: that it is responsive to a diversity of learners - both working and not working - and learning styles; that it is about access and success in higher education; that it is founded on good pedagogy that puts the learner at the centre of learning (Alexander, 2010; Edwards, 2014); that it develops self-regulated learners and well-rounded, knowledgeable and capable graduates who can make a positive difference in the world (Edwards, 2014); and that it requires a coordinated, enabling response.

In addition, although flexibility is regarded as good for students as well as for the university (Alexander, 2010), Barnett cautions that it is 'not an absolute good' (2014, p.7) as there may be unintended consequences. FLTP, therefore, needs to be monitored and limits to flexibility need to be recognised. We turn now to highlighting briefly technology enhanced learning, as it plays a key role in conceptualising FLTP.

Technology plays an essential role in education today, not only for graduates to succeed in the local and global economy, but also in providing flexible learning and teaching opportunities. But this must not lead to digital exclusion, especially of those already marginalised (Barnett, 2014, p. 7). Technology-enhanced learning (TEL) can mitigate the attendance requirements of full-time study, enabling students to learn in their own time and place and at their own pace; it enables easy delivery of materials from lecturers to students and vice versa; and it connects learners to people and resources that can support their educational needs online (Lai and Chong, 2007). Technology allows universities to extend their traditional campus-based service to distant and online modes, and has formed the basis of distance education for many years. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have been touted as the answer to flexibility in education, enabling thousands of learners access to learning in new ways, but there are pedagogical concerns with some of these approaches and course completion rates tend to be low (Gordon, 2014).

Pedagogy is key to TEL. McLoughlin and Lee (2010 p.28) argue that today's students 'want an active learning experience that is social, participatory and supported by rich media', through the use of information communication technology (ICT) tools and emerging technologies such as Web2.0 social networking tools. But the interactive aspects of social media enabled learning increasingly shift the position of learner, rather than content or institution, to the centre of learning, demanding a curriculum design process that is learner-centred and collaborative (Green *et al*, 2013). The agency of the learner is a significant aspect not only of effective TEL, but also

of any quality education that engages the learner in the learning process. Zimmerman (2002) argues that central to such engagement is developing 'self-regulating learners'.

The pedagogic challenges of introducing quality FLTP and TEL are therefore considerable (Salmon, 2005) and academics cannot do this in isolation. There are many examples at UWC and elsewhere, where such challenges have been met without neglecting the disciplinary knowledge that students need to succeed. Implicit within the introduction of FLTP is organisational change and development. Green *et al* (2013, p.26) claim that, because higher education is a complex system consisting of 'four inter-dependent sub-systems' - teacher, learner, delivery and administrative sub-systems - flexible approaches to learning and teaching require profound shifts in the way that the *entire university* views, engages with and develops knowledge.

Johnston (1997) suggests that (i) higher education change strategies need to be both top down and bottom up; (ii) every person is a change agent and the best organisations learn from the external environment as well as internally, from their own staff. Overall, Johnston advocates a change process that can shift pockets of enthusiasm for flexible learning towards a coherent, institutionalised outcome.

Keeping the doors open?

The action research has been surfacing and naming political, organizational and pedagogical challenges and contradictions both nationally and institutionally with regard to access and success for adult student-workers. These can be politically sensitive, uncomfortable issues to confront. The triangular relationship amongst adult student-worker, workplaces and university, is highly complex and needs to be understood more carefully to know where breakthroughs in the interests of adult student-workers may be possible.

At present, the research reveals that it is largely left up to the adult student-workers to navigate their ways through the institutional minefields both at work and at the university. The priority focus of the university continues to be young, full-time students, who paradoxically are, in all likelihood, also working full or part-time, or seeking work, in order to keep afloat economically.

The attempt to shift the pedagogical paradigm for the whole university from face-to-face, day time provision, to a more responsive FLTP orientation, which can benefit adult student-workers, still has a long way to go, will take time, and is a major undertaking that must be driven by senior leadership, who are responsive to staff and student pressures from below. As the realities of the working librarians who are studying suggest, it cannot be an 'e-learning quick fix' and there must be sufficient, effective support for students and for staff. We are clear that there is no 'one size fits all' approach, and that we must understand more fully the life worlds of students, staff and employers to develop appropriate responses. We also need to understand more deeply how adult student-workers and staff are 'working around' the barriers to find solutions to problems they confront. Time, however, is not on the adult students side and they can be expected 'to vote with their feet' if the institution is unable to respond to their real conditions.

While the action research is yet to evaluate its influence, it is safe to say that through various processes, there seems to be an emergence of a common institutional understanding of flexible provision. This is but one step in a long and convoluted process to bring Green's (2013) four sub-systems into alignment. Given the political imperative to 'get the youth off the streets', it is clear that the institutional change that is required both within the university and within the workplaces will take sustained advocacy and activism from dedicated champions, working with other activists across campus and workplaces, over long periods of time, if doors of learning are to be kept open for adult student-workers.

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Flexible provision: Looking beyond the binary of 'full-time' and 'part-time' studies

Barbara Jones and Shirley Walters

Abstract:

Key words: flexible learning and teaching, higher education, adult learners

Introduction

Historically, the University of the Western Cape (UWC) has been the primary university in the Western Cape to offer undergraduate degree programmes to (usually working) people who wish to study part-time; a route particularly favoured by communities marginalised by apartheid and prevented from accessing equitable educational opportunities. These evening classes have run parallel to the daytime classes for 'full-time' (usually non-working) students for over 50 years but, more recently, increasing pressures on the capacity and resources of the institution have led to visible 'cracks' appearing in the parallel delivery system, as the different faculties have strained to sustain this model. A range of programmes and courses have been forced to close and the opportunities for working adults to access higher education continue to shrink, eroding UWC's historic identity and niche advantage in the higher education sector.

This led to a four-year action research project in partnership with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), to explore an alternative way of providing adults with access to the university. In particular, the study sought to look beyond the traditional exclusionary binary of 'full-time' and 'part-time' provision (and their respective proxies, 'daytime' and 'after hours' provision) using face-to-face delivery methods for 'non-working' and 'working' students. It sought to identify flexible practices that are more inclusionary of today's diverse undergraduate student population, with their diverse learning needs and a multiplicity of responsibilities outside of the academy. This fits squarely within (UWC's) Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning to "*develop a more responsive teaching and learning environment which promotes and enhances flexible learning*".

The cross-faculty action research was conceived of as part of an organisational change and development strategy and one to try out what 'flexible learning and teaching provision' (FLTP) can or should mean in particular sites of practice, problematising place, pace and modes of learning within the UWC context. The study has included three action research pilot sites at the university that are exploring alternative ways of providing education to working students; an investigation of staff understandings of FLTP, flexible provision practices and the implications for the academy; and an investigation of the feasibility of a whole degree being offered more flexibly to working and non-working students.

This paper explores whether FLTP can provide a third way which goes beyond the 'full-time'/'part-time' binary and conceptualises one system which could meet the needs of a diversity of students, be they younger or older, working or not.

The paper sets out the problematic; it draws on the literature on FLTP; it highlights the different discursive communities which are 'called' by flexible provision; it describes emerging understandings of FLTP which come from a survey of leading practitioners within the university; and in the light of this, it debates critically whether it may be possible to move beyond the binary through a common understanding of FLTP.

National policy framing FLTP

National education policy is acknowledging the need for the post-school system to cater for a very wide variety of potential student needs, including mature adult learners who have to study and work at the same time, as well as younger people who may have dropped out of the schooling system. Such students require access not only to a diverse range of programmes but also to appropriate modes of provision which take into account their varying life and work demands which may not allow them time to attend lectures at fixed times and venues. The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (RSA 2013) emphasises the need for much greater responsiveness and flexibility from institutions, encouraging them to move from rigid models of either face-to-face or distance models to quality, flexible blended learning and teaching models. Furthermore, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) (2013) proposes a flexible model for reforming the undergraduate curriculum to enable a diverse body of students to achieve their potential without compromising the quality of the qualification.

These provide a policy context for debating and discussing issues of FLTP and, together with UWC's mission and strategic plans around teaching and learning, provided an additional rationale and supportive contextual framework for the action research project.

Who are the university students?

Before considering the best ways of addressing UWC's (working and non-working) students' higher education needs it is imperative that we know who they are and what their needs are. Fifty years ago one could safely assume the need for a residential university with the majority of students coming straight from school and studying full time, and with working students being able to upgrade their qualifications for a professional career by studying after hours. However, it seems increasingly that these assumptions are no longer valid.

Pollard (2012) maintains that the boundaries between full-time and part-time study in Britain are becoming increasingly blurred as more and more full-time students take up part-time work, more students choose accelerated or decelerated forms of study and greater

emphasis is being given to work-related learning, especially at more senior levels of responsibility.

There also appears to be growing evidence in Australia, which is a far more affluent society than South Africa, of high levels of employment amongst full-time students and a 2010 study at the University of South Australia (Wood, Barnes, Vivian, Scutter and Stokes-Thompson 2010) showed that a significant proportion of their students are working. Given the costs of studying and the levels of economic hardship that the majority of UWC students face, it therefore seems reasonable to assume that most of the students will be involved in both paid and unpaid work while studying, although it has been difficult to research this aspect at UWC in the past. This is because of students' reluctance to respond openly as their bursary or their accommodation may depend on them being registered as 'full-time students', on the assumption that they are not working. This raises the question of whether we should be thinking about 'working' and 'non-working' students at all, and how universities are adapting to these realities. One of the ways universities are addressing issues of student diversity is through more flexible learning and teaching provision.

Understandings of flexible learning and teaching provision in the literature

While the literature in this field tends to speak of 'flexible learning' the study embraced a more holistic notion; flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP). It is important to recognise that 'flexible learning', (or FLTP), is not referring to one thing: it refers to a range of responses to different situations and to different needs. There are socio-political-economic arguments that emphasise the importance of all citizens to be sufficiently educated to be able to be productively employed in meaningful, well-paid work. Related social justice arguments advocate the rights of citizens to equitable and lifelong educational opportunities of their choosing that are accessible given the realities of their daily lives. Other arguments are that flexible learning alternatives can produce 'flexible graduates...who are able to engage with the uncertainties, complexities and demands of a rapidly changing world...from a position of...epistemic flexibility' (Barnett 2014: 4). These understandings are reflected in the many discursive communities that associate themselves with FLTP, such as: adult education; lifelong learning; open and distance learning; workplace learning; university teaching and learning; the knowledge economy and human capital development; and others. While the notion of flexible learning does seem to be accepted as a positive attribute – good for students as well as good for the university (Alexander 2010) - Barnett reminds us that flexibility is 'not an absolute good' (2014:7): there may be unintended consequences. Therefore FLTP needs to be carefully monitored, and there also needs to be recognition of the limits to flexibility.

It has been said, therefore, that in order for flexible learning to be implemented sustainably, the meaning of the term needs to be clearly defined and articulated institutionally, or it can

lead to division, multiple contesting discourses and the duplication of effort and resources (Kirkpatrick & Jakupec 1997; Johnston 1997). One of the outcomes of the action research project has been to attempt to develop such shared understandings at the university, and the pilot sites in particular have been acting as areas where the building of what Edwards (2011) terms 'common knowledge' of FLTP has been able to occur.

Despite the array of FLTP discourses, there does seem to be some agreement among educationists that flexible learning is about when, where, how and at what pace learning occurs, providing choices for an increasingly diverse student body (Outram 2011). These concepts relate to the *delivery* of learning and can be unpacked as follows:

- Pace - including accelerated and decelerated programmes and degrees, learning part time, arrangements that allow learners to 'roll on/roll off' ('stop in/stop out'), and systems for recognition of prior learning and for credit accumulation and transfer;
- Place – work-based learning with employer engagement, learning at home, on campus, while travelling or in any other place, often aided by technology which can enable the flexibility of learning across geographical boundaries and at convenient times;
- Mode – especially the use of learning technologies to enhance flexibility and enrich the quality of learning experience, in blended or distance learning and in synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning (Tallantyre 2012: 4; Gordon 2014).

Other commonalities in the literature about what constitutes FLTP are: that it is about access and success in higher education; that it is founded on good pedagogy that puts the learner at the centre of learning (Alexander 2010, Edwards 2014); that it develops well-rounded, knowledgeable and capable graduates who can make a positive difference in the world (Edwards 2014); to develop graduates who are flexible in their thinking and can hold their own in a rapidly changing and uncertain world (Barnett 2014); and that it requires a coordinated response and enabling, institutional changes (Outram 2009; Green, Woldoko, Foskey and Brooks 2013).

Pollard (2012) argues that flexibility allows students to combine higher education studies with their complex lives, and the more flexible study options there are the more likely they are to want to study. In turn, the more flexibility, the less valid is the emphasis on 'part-time' provision. Within the philosophy and approach of lifelong learning, the question can be posed whether in future all university students will in fact be 'part-time'?

FLTP manifests in many different forms that are described in the literature. One example of thinking about FLTP is through Universal Design Principles; another focuses on the use of educational and emerging technologies; but all recognise the need for alternative pedagogies. We illustrate below.

Universal Design Principles

Universal Design Principles, usually associated with people with disabilities, can apply not only to designing physical learning spaces that can accommodate all students, with or without learning disabilities, but also to designing flexible learning activities to accommodate a diversity of students and their equally diverse learning needs. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) allows for personalised learning and the principles encompass

- Multiple representations of knowledge, for a range of different learning styles and for a variety of different assessment methods, in order to develop resourceful, knowledgeable learners;
- Multiple means of action and expression, including building capacity for managing learning, in order to develop strategic, goal-directed learners; and
- Multiple means of engagement and options for self-regulation, so as to develop purposeful, motivated learners (CAST 2011).

The use of educational and emerging technology in learning and teaching

Another dimension of flexible responsiveness to the diverse learning needs and personal realities of today's students is the use of technology. Not only is it imperative that students become adept at using information communication technologies (ICTs) to succeed in the local and global economy, but technology-enhanced learning potentially offers flexibility to students who are constrained by the attendance requirements of traditional face-to-face delivery, enabling them to learn in their own time and place and at their own pace. It is allowing universities to extend their traditional campus-based services to distant (off-campus) and online (using Internet and other digital technologies 24 hrs, 7 days a week, 365 days a year) modes, and has formed the basis of distance education for many years.

Higher education institutions' (HEI) Learner Management Systems (LMS), or virtual learning platforms, such as Ikamva at UWC, play a key role in delivering and managing instructional content as well as for centralising and automating administrative functions. In addition to the LMS, McLoughlin and Lee (2010; 28) argue that today's students "want an active learning experience that is social, participatory and supported by rich media", which is possible through the continual expansion of Web2.0 social networking tools. The use of these tools and technologies can, providing the necessary scaffolding is in place and appropriate strategies are used, promote learner agency and increase students' control over the learning process, and facilitate the development of graduate attributes and flexible graduates (McLoughlin and Lee 2010).

Proponents of how best to use new technologies to support education suggest a mixed or blended approach to technology-enhanced learning, where conventional methods of instruction such as face-to-face lectures and tutorials, seminars and small-group discussions are complemented by digital methods (Laurillard 2008:143). These tools can have transformational value if applied properly to effect a paradigm shift from a traditional lecturer-centred to a student-centred learning environment, which in turn can enhance the quality of higher education (Macharia and Pelsler 2012:2-3). For example, a 'flipped classroom' approach that replaces lecture-style and other traditional forms of delivery with online content that engages learners, transforming contact sessions into active learning opportunities, allows for more learner-centred and effective learning (Gordon 2014).

The Flexible Learning Institute (FLI) at Charles Sturt University¹ distinguishes between blended learning, which provides all learners with the same set of resources, and personalised learning which allows for flexibility and adaptability of the content – including of assessment - and its sequencing and pacing, according to learners' individual desires and needs. Emerging technologies can provide authentic, complex learning scenarios to prepare learners for the challenges of professional practice after graduation (Bozalek, Gachago, Alexander, Watters, Wood, Ivala and Herrington 2013).

However, these opportunities for FLTP are constrained by low access to the internet by the majority of South Africans (Statistics SA 2012²) and by the fact that not all people – neither students nor university staff - are equally skilled or comfortable in their use of ICTs, including mobile technology and Web 2.0 applications. In reality, it is often the traditional 'good' students who benefit most (Osborne, McCune and Houston 2006) and an emphasis on technology-enhanced learning may lead to digital exclusion by those already marginalised (Barnett 2014: 7). This has implications for curriculum design and for how both staff and students are trained and supported in their use of technology.

It can be said, then, that neither is flexibility in itself any guarantee of improved access to or success in higher education, nor is technology, but that there are a number of other factors to consider, pedagogy being central.

Pedagogical implications of FLTP

Edwards (2014) argues that student engagement is the most critical factor in enabling learning and that learning activities need to help students engage with knowledge that is 'culturally powerful', to become productive members of society. It is widely accepted that student engagement is essential for meaningful learning to take place (Dereshiwsky and

¹ <https://blendedandflexiblelearning.wikispaces.com/principles> In <http://www.csu.edu.au/division/landt/flexible-learning/bestpractice>

² <http://mybroadband.co.za/news/internet/85165-south-africas-internet-access-stats-revealed.html>

Moan 2000; Kahu, Stephens, Leach and Zepke 2013, among others) and that it is an important predictor of retention and success in higher education. At the heart of Edwards' approach is the development of the self-regulating learner – “positioning students as agentially in control of their own learning”, for which an appropriately supportive learning environment and the appropriate learning tools are essential.

ICTs and Web 2.0 offer such opportunities but Burge, Gibson & Gibson (2011) point out that traditional frameworks for the development of academic knowledge are out of step with the speed of information sharing today. An online learning and teaching environment requires a completely new educational approach (Green *et al* 2013) and is leading to the emergence of 'new' pedagogies (Contact North). Social media enabled learning disrupts the established hierarchical structures and administrative practices of higher education, in particular the established knowledge hierarchies that define higher education, and challenges normative assumptions about curriculum design, development, implementation and assessment. The interactive and collaborative aspects of social media enabled learning increasingly shift the position of the learner, rather than the content or the institution, to the centre of learning, demanding a curriculum design process that is learner-centred and collaborative (Green *et al* 2013) The agency of the learner, or 'learner-centredness', becomes a significant aspect not only of effective technology enhanced learning, but also of any flexible modes of provision that engage the learner in the learning process.

The use of technologies for the purposes of FLTP therefore needs to be carefully considered and pedagogically informed in order to promote active engagement in learning. However, Salmon (2005) maintains that many academics do not have a background in curriculum theory and they have not made these pedagogical shifts.

FLTP, then, is more than simply re-packaging existing educational materials: “we are not just selling a new course but a new concept in education” (Outram 2009:9). It is not 'business as usual' for the institution on various fronts, neither administratively nor pedagogically. FLTP requires the development of distinctive, more *holistic* forms of *provision*, as well as enabling, institutional change.

Understandings of FLTP at the academy

While UWC's strategic plans and the associated implementation plan for teaching and learning allude to flexible learning, principally with regard to learning spaces and the use of information communication technology (ICTs), the meaning and parameters of flexible learning for the institution are not articulated explicitly. The action research project, therefore, adopted the broad parameters of flexibility in learning and teaching practice suggested by the University of Southern Queensland, Australia (2011) as follows:

- *flexible curriculum design*, including flexible forms of assessment which take into account different learning styles of students;
- *flexible admissions criteria*, including mechanisms such as the recognition of prior learning (RPL);
- *flexible delivery*, including distance, online, on campus a mix of these modes as well as accelerated or decelerated options; **but added**
- *flexible support systems and services* that cater for working and non-working students and those with disabilities.

This signals a broader higher education responsibility for flexible learning and teaching provision that can sustain the educational changes that are needed to support the lived realities of students, especially working students, for learning success.

This understanding was tested in interviews with thirty-one leading academics, support services staff and administrators at UWC as well as in report-back meetings with educational leadership, with research participants and with invited higher education flexible learning experts. But first interviewees were asked for their perspectives on FLTP, and a range of understandings and positions were encountered, across faculties and support services, such as it is:

- part-time provision;
- a 'laissez-faire' approach to learning;
- different ways of approaching and engaging with academic knowledge, such as through more contextual learning activities;
- ensuring 'safe learning spaces' for students to engage with each other, to develop academic confidence and metacognitive abilities;
- integrating psychosocial development into academic learning and teaching;
- technology enhanced learning; and
- blended learning.

Some academics expressed more nuanced and deeper pedagogical understandings of FLTP, such as it is about a shift in power relations between learners and teachers; and that flexible approaches specifically enable learners to take more control over their own learning and to engage in complex problem-solving. These understandings were generally linked to learning and teaching activities that the respondents were involved in or were seeing enacted in their faculties.

The researchers' provisional parameters of FLTP were then tested with participants, who broadly agreed with them. But one suggestion by an invited FLTP expert, suggested a dynamic, rather than a static understanding of FLTP which should be linked to the broader mission of lifelong learning. This was supported by others in that meeting and it was recommended that the statement should read as follows:

The current, common understanding of FLTP at UWC, in furtherance of UWC's mission to make 'lifelong learning opportunities available' is:

Flexible learning and teaching provision is an inclusive, student-centred approach that promotes flexibility in admissions criteria, curriculum design, learning and teaching modes and assessment, with appropriate support systems and services, for the purpose of developing graduate attributes throughout the learning process so that all students can make a positive difference in the world. This is a dynamic understanding which we anticipate will change over time.

Just as the traditional model of higher education no longer caters for the diversity of learning needs, the above statement signals that neither is FLTP a 'one size fits all', but which problematises the pace, place and mode of learning in ways which respond to particular groups of under- or post-graduate students. It is also clear that a common understanding of FLTP will need to be built across UWC as a first step, if FLTP is to be considered as the way forward for addressing the learning needs of working and non-working students.

Similar to understandings of FLTP, research investigations revealed a range of FLTP practices across the institution, some deliberately intended to improve teaching and learning and others consequential on particular circumstances.

FLTP practices

Flexibility of delivery

Other than the traditional 'part-time' provision, which has continued to decline, there are no other options for varying the pace to completion of undergraduate degree programmes at the university. However, regular attendance for working students is difficult and in some cases individual lecturers makes additional efforts to accommodate their students, such as providing classes or tutorials on Saturdays, or allowing individual students' flexibility in when they sit class tests.

Some flexibility in learning pace within modules was reported, such as where students can work through science practical activities at their own pace, on or off campus, using simulations; or through assignments.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) exists as a form of flexible access to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, conducted through a specialist division at the university, and approximately 50 candidates gain access to undergraduate programmes every year.

The dominant mode of delivery for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching is through face-to-face contact sessions on campus, with the professional health sciences and related degrees having additional practicum requirements. Continuing education courses can be offered on campus, in the workplace or in the community where there are agreements to this effect. Fieldwork, which may take the place of work-integrated learning, also occurs in some courses. There were many instances of where staff were being creative in trying to

accommodate the different learning needs of their students, and in flexibly 'working around' institutional obstacles, but these were generally responses by individual caring staff, rather than coordinated institutional responses.

However, in most cases flexibility in place and/or mode of learning and teaching seems to take place through the use of technology in one form or another, creating more blended synchronous and asynchronous forms of learning. Simulations are frequently used in the natural sciences and in health related programmes, such as to orientate students to laboratory or clinical work. Discussion forums, as part of the LMS, seem to be quite widely used across faculties to enhance learning and to evaluate conceptual learning progress for continuous assessment. YouTube is used as a teaching and learning resource across most of the faculties. Vodcasts are used for assessment in one department in the health sciences and Third Life in the one of the natural sciences departments. There is an example of mobile technology being used for conducting consultation sessions after hours in a very structured way, and is reported to be very successful as the majority of working students, and even some 'full-time' students, are able to participate. In their attempts to turn around 'at-risk' courses, lecturers were reported to have used a variety of educational technologies to improve student success rates, such as e-portfolios, podcasts, online multiple choice questions, an online tutorial with model answers, among others.

All-in-all, technology-enhanced learning and teaching appears to be growing rapidly, in all faculties at the university, although it is still being used largely as an adjunct to traditional face-to-face delivery rather than as an alternative, even for after-hours learning and teaching. In other words it has become an additional learning and teaching resource, for enrichment, more than a mode of independent, personalised learning for students or for intentionally developing 'self-regulating' learners. Technology is reportedly used more widely to replace contact sessions in postgraduate programmes, with some modules available purely online. For example a masters' programme in the health sciences has been offered as a blended programme for many years, with voluntary contact sessions during summer and winter schools. One may ask why a model of FLTP such as this, which has shown itself to be very successful, should not be replicated at undergraduate levels? The response of some academics to such a suggestion was that undergraduates need to be oriented to the demands of higher education and to becoming independent learners over time, and that an incremental approach to developing the necessary academic capabilities is needed, whereas postgraduate students generally already have these capabilities and attributes.

As can be expected, the use of technology-enhanced learning and teaching is very uneven across and within faculties, ranging from enthusiasm for the pedagogic potential of these tools at the one end of the continuum to reluctance and suspicion at the other end.

A very real concern for academics, that was widely expressed, was the amount of time that acquainting themselves with the different technologies and incorporating them into their

teaching would take. One FLTP champion confirmed that it was very time consuming to design complex learning activities with technology that engage students, but that the rewards justified the effort and that it saved time and work in the long term. Another concern was that, although mobile technologies and email were easy and convenient ways for students and lecturers to communicate with each other, especially for working students, this could become very intrusive and even more demanding of lecturers' time. Finally, concerns were expressed about assuming that students were sufficiently 'techno-savvy' to engage with these technologies effectively, and that they had access to these technologies and to the internet off campus. A caution was that rather than being inclusive, using technology could actually exclude students from succeeding, a point also made by Barnett (2014).

Other than the pilot action research sites, which had a deliberate focus and plan for FLTP, including the masters' programme mentioned above, flexible approaches to learning and teaching were all responses by individual academics to particular contexts, rather than an organised, coherent institutional or faculty approach to address the needs of a diverse student population.

Flexibility of curriculum

Not many instances of flexibility in curriculum design were encountered in mainstream undergraduate degree programmes. However, extended curriculum programmes (ECPs) and academic development programmes seemed to have more opportunities for flexibility and innovation in curriculum design, and in taking integrated learning approaches to maximise these students' chances of success. Other voluntary and/or transdisciplinary courses that are outside of the mainstream are also able to have a more flexible curriculum and delivery approach.

Undergraduate professional degree programmes, especially those in the health sciences and related fields, were said to have less opportunity for curriculum flexibility because of restrictions imposed by the professional boards and the considerable clinical practice requirements. However, blended learning appeared to be used extensively and innovatively in these faculties to enhance and enrich learning and teaching.

Flexibility of student support services

The different student support services all play a vital role in strengthening FLTP by offering their own flexible services. Their niche roles have made them aware of the diverse realities of today's students and they are responding reflexively to their range of needs.

Flexibility of administrative systems

As with any bureaucracy, university administration requirements can be inflexible and get in the way of innovation. This is especially so if they are rooted in different paradigms; in this case, in the traditional paradigm of 'full-time'/'part-time' face-to-face provision. To enable the smooth running of the previously mentioned blended learning masters' programme in

the health sciences, the division was compelled to set up its own administrative systems to run parallel to the main UWC administrative system. This allows their staff, who are attuned to their students' contexts, to deal with their students' individual problems and issues and provide the necessary support and advice timeously.

Drivers of FLTP

The main institutional driver of FLTP at the academy is the specialised teaching and learning directorate, in association with teaching and learning specialists and deputy deans in each faculty. This is supported by the specialist educational technologies teaching and research unit which provides responsive education and training for all staff (academic and administrative) and students in the use of different and emerging technologies, from basic to more complex operations and software usage. They also particularly advise academic staff on the pedagogical use of different technologies to enhance learning and teaching and on how to infuse these in curriculum design, thus contributing greatly to the effective use of educational technology in FLTP.

In addition, it was clear that possibly the most important individual drivers of FLTP were the champions who were prepared to be creative, to innovate and to take risks in the pursuit of improving teaching and learning and in trying to accommodate the needs of working students.

At individual programme level the most commonly mentioned drivers of FLTP were work overload, frequently as a result of large class sizes, and associated time constraints in meeting their academic and research commitments. However, flexible responses to the needs of working students were reported also, and academics were experimenting with flexible approaches, including learner-centred technology-enhanced learning, to improve the quality of learning and teaching and student success.

Towards a common understanding of FLTP at UWC

The varied understandings and practices of FLTP at UWC, and the administrative systems and processes that are rooted in the binary of 'full-time' and 'part-time' provision, make it difficult to imagine how to move practically beyond these binaries towards a more common understanding of FLTP. In the course of the discussions on the preliminary findings, the idea was mooted to investigate whether a whole degree could be developed as a way of giving greater impetus to systematic and bold FLTP development on campus. This was captured most concretely in support for a feasibility study on possibilities for a whole degree to be offered within the framework of FLTP. The first stage of this is an exploration of the feasibility of developing the 'full-' and 'part-time' aspects of the degree within a FLTP framework. The first stage of this research, if the outcomes are positive, will lead to a detailed proposal to enable the roll-out of the degree in new ways. This is envisaged as

another action research project to reflect on the implementation of FLTP more broadly within the institution, and will be the subject of a future paper.

It was agreed that for FLTP to spread and become embedded in the institutional culture, it would need to be embraced and championed by the institutional leadership in all spheres of the university's UWC's operations. Green *et al* (2013: 26) argue that universities are complex systems made up of "four inter-dependent sub-systems: the teacher sub-system, learner sub-system, delivery sub-system and administrative sub-system", and all four sub-systems need to work together to support change and create an enabling environment for innovations to emerge, to grow and to be sustained. This needs a 'top-down' approach, being led and championed by senior management so that it becomes the norm and encourages those who respond well to authority, as well as a 'bottom-up' approach to change people's mind sets and their behaviours as they see the potential and the benefits of flexible approaches to learning and teaching.

But before this can happen, a common understanding of what FLTP means at UWC needs to be developed and embraced, and the previously mentioned provisional understanding of FLTP constructed during the course of this research could be a way to encourage such conversations. At a theoretical level, one way of reaching a shared understanding of FLTP, and thus developing 'relational agency' to enable a more systematic approach to addressing the complexities of moving beyond the binaries, is through building what Edwards (2011: 34) refers to as 'common knowledge'. Edwards argues that specialist practitioners working with others across work settings to solve complex problems need to negotiate understandings of the problem and ways of engaging with it in order to resolve it. This work, at the boundary of intersecting practices, is a 'discursive meeting of minds' (*ibid*) where the people involved build common knowledge through sharing their knowledge and experiences and acknowledging what matters to each other – their 'motives'.

When practitioners or professionals engage in this way, the collaborative process involves bringing what Edwards terms 'relational expertise' to the problem. This relational expertise allows for 'relational agency' in working with others; recognising each other's specialist expertise and the distributed specialist expertise across the activity system and interacting positively and constructively with these different sources of knowledge 'to strengthen purposeful responses to complex problems'.

Developing 'common knowledge' of FLTP at the academy would mean bringing together the expertise of all four institutional 'sub-systems' into dialogue with each other – of teaching and learning specialists, of academics in the different knowledge fields and disciplines, of champions of FLTP practices, of relevant administrators, of student support services, of ICT experts, of institutional management and of institutional leadership. The process of building common knowledge would need to be dynamic and continuous over time for the purpose of

mediating the necessary relational agency of all the actors to take the negotiated vision of FLTP forward and implement it.

However, we would speculate that obtaining a common, dynamic and working understanding of FLTP would not necessarily move the university beyond the binary of 'day time' (full time) / 'after hours' (part-time), unless it was addressing the central question: What kind of learners do we need for what kind of society? The response to this question would require a general acceptance that higher education must engage a diverse range of students across the life span, and across a range of abilities, in order to meet the socio-economic needs and aspirations of the country and the continent. This would imply that approaches to teaching and learning would need to change, and be responsive to changing conditions and circumstances of all students – accepting the reality of a diversity of students most of whom are working and studying simultaneously, and are in fact 'part-time'.

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MAKING SENSE OF THE TRANSITIONAL MAELSTROMS OF PART-TIME STUDENTS AND THEIR CONCEPTIONS OF LEARNING AS MEDIATED BY CONTEXTUAL DOMAINS OF WORK, FAMILY AND SELF. A CASE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE, PART-TIME, POLITICAL STUDIES STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA.

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Abstract

The traditional trajectory of young students in higher education in South Africa is currently under sharp scrutiny and the general provision is considered to be inadequate in terms of quality, diversity and quantity. There is a proposal to increase the participation rate of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 from 16% (in 2011) to 23% by 2030 (DHET, 2012). Already, the increase in access to young school leavers without the concomitant resource allocation has resulted in the inability of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) to continue to provide access to 'non-traditional' working adults in some of its programmes. The large classes for young undergraduates, the necessary foundation/support programmes to assist under-prepared school leavers, recent demands to increase postgraduate study output and to publish are related pressures influencing the decisions to limit undergraduate part-time studies for adult learners.

To address this 'dilemma' an action research project was launched to introduce lifelong learning opportunities that are conceptualised and provided in flexible ways. The intention is to challenge both the university and workplaces to interrogate understandings and approaches to professional development and to support innovation that will enhance successful access and success for working people. The Political Studies department at UWC is one of the pilot sites for the action research and initial reflections on the challenge to introduce flexible modes of teaching and learning revealed that the attempts may be constrained by prevailing conceptions of the trajectories of part-time students. Instead of the traditional, linear transition into higher education – normally associated with younger learners – trajectories for mature adult learners are less linear, more complex, and include 'stop-outs' and discontinuities within transitions (Stevenson & Clegg, 2012).

This paper describes the national transitional context of higher education in South Africa and the precarious location of working adults studying at UWC within this context. It further explores the transitional maelstroms as shared by a sample of part-time Political Studies students; it considers the roles and influence of the contextual domains of work, family and self; and examines the implications for mature students, their workplaces and the Political Studies department at the university.

Introduction

Education and training provision in South Africa continues to be in a state flux. The post-1994 education policy deliberations set the scene for a de-racialised unitary education system in the form of The National Education Policy Act of 1996 (DoE, 1996). This was followed by a policy for higher education in South Africa that articulated intentions to supply high level skills for the labour market, generate knowledge that would be of social and economic benefit and to develop critical citizens (DoE, 1997). Carrim and Wangenge-Ouma (2012) highlight some of the key pieces of legislation introduced to facilitate to opening of access to learning in higher education.

Reforms and other change initiatives in the HE system have since been informed and guided by three additional key documents: The National Commission on Higher Education report (NCHE, 1996), Education White Paper 3: A programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (DoE, 1997) and the National Plan for Higher Education (MoE, 2001).

These legislative interventions resulted in the historically racially (differentiated) based 36 higher education institutions being reduced to 11 'traditional' universities offering mainly degree programmes with a strong research focus; 6 'comprehensive' universities offering a combination of academic and career-oriented programmes and 6 universities of technology, formally known as technikons that offer certificates, diplomas or degrees in technology, and lead students more directly into a career. These changes involved institutional mergers, restructuring of programme mix and reorientation of academic identities for most institutions. Besides the restructuring of the higher education landscape, the government established a National Skills Authority in March 2000, under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour, designed to increase investment in skills development. This was accompanied a National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS I) entitled 'Skills for productive citizenship for all'. A second National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS II) followed in 2005 entitled 'Skills for sustainable growth, development and equity'. Sector Education and Training Authority (SETAs) were established to implement the NSDS and to take responsibility for the development of appropriate skills in their sectors. Sectors are made up of economic activities that are linked and related, for example the banking sector, the transport sector and the chemical industries sector. For purposes of planning and managing the delivery of training, the economy was divided up into 25 sectors (currently consolidated into 23) each of which had its own SETA. The SETAs cover both public and private sectors. A third National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS III - 2010) was launched by the newly created Ministry of Higher Education and Training – an integration of higher and further education into one department, separated from the department of basic (school) education.

This development is particularly relevant for this paper because it signalled a clear intent to strengthen the relationship between colleges, universities, Sector Education Training Authorities as well as employers. The shift of the skills strategy from the labour ministry to that of higher education also indicated a shift away from workplace learning to institutional learning, particularly in so far as full qualifications were

concerned. The NSDS III gave prominence to public colleges, universities of technology and universities so that quality provision could be made accessible to many more learners, especially those who cannot afford market-linked (private institutions) fees.

Despite these and other initiatives, the Green Paper on Post-School Education (2012) laments that:

The system continues to produce and reproduce gender, class, racial and other inequalities with regard to access to educational opportunities and success. ... Equally important, the post-school system is not meeting the needs of the economy and society as a whole. (DHET, 2012, p. x)

Un- and underemployment levels remain unacceptably high. South Africa spends more on education than most developing countries (estimated at 20% of GNP) but the education system performs worse than comparable countries in maths, science and literacy and, according to a cohort study by Letseka (2009), there is a 50% dropout rate of students entering higher education institutions. Lack of finance, under-preparedness, institutional cultures and personal and family reasons were the primary factors recorded in that study. The prevailing poor performances of the education system indicate a disjuncture between policy aspirations and implementation. However, there is a growing realisation that there is no single education system in South Africa. It is a misnomer to speak of an average South African student because some (75%, majority black) occupy a system that is partly dysfunctional and others (mainly white) occupy a highly functional system and their performances on any given measure would concur, that is, 75% would perform below average and 25% would perform well above average. It is in this highly transitive higher education environment that mature, working adults in this study are attempting 'improve themselves', gain access to 'promotion opportunities' or as preparation to search for 'better economic opportunities' elsewhere. They generally do this with variable success, leading Buchler et al (2007) to argue for a study on the extent to which macro- economic and political factors continue to prescribe the demographics of adult participation and success in higher learning.

The mature, working learners in this study bring with them their adult responsibilities of economic sustainability, family and community commitments. They bring complex life experiences to the learning environments and their time is often very constrained. Most of them left full-time education for other roles such as parenthood, providers, care-givers or workers. The majority in this study are also first-generation university entrants, meaning that their parents never attended institutions of higher education. They speak many languages and English, the language of instruction, is often not their first language.

Working Students' Transition into Higher Education

Working adults' decision to undertake part-time studies is influenced by and informed by numerous factors. They need to ensure that work, family and finances support their decision. These factors will also have differential effects because, as Osman and Castle (2006) maintain, adult learners do not form a homogeneous group. Adult learners can be further distinguished by age, gender, ethnicity, employment status, and past educational experience, among others. Typically (at UWC at least) all part-time undergraduate degree students, post-graduate students, occasional students and adults who participate in non-accredited, short courses are categorised as part-time students. Osman and Castle (2006, p. 511) suggest that this 'blurred' typology is forced upon institutions to accommodate the existing funding formula that rewards 'full-time equivalents' in the main.

The question of who counts as a student becomes a key issue when links between student numbers (typically full-time equivalent students or FTEs, in credit bearing courses) and funding formulas are considered. ... Present formulas suppress the fact that what may be reported and counted as only one full-time student may in actuality be three part-time adult students each of whom has diverse interests and unique needs in relation to institutional support.

They cite Cross (1981) who identified the 'factors' above as barriers or obstacles part-time students face and classified them into three categories;

Situational barriers – arise because of the individual's life situation, and include issues such learners' work commitments, domestic responsibilities, as well as problems of child care, finance and transport. **Institutional barriers** include physical location, entry requirements, timetabling problems, as well as practices and procedures which hinder participation. **Dispositional barriers** are attributed to factors such as self-esteem, past experiences, values, attitudes and beliefs about learning. (Osman and Castle, 2006, p. 511)

These factors affect the transitions of mature learners into higher education and they are navigated differently by individual students depending on unique circumstances at any given time. There is a recognition that pathways to outcomes are non-linear and in most cases unique. Contrary to the generally accepted mantras that 'education leads to employment' and that the higher educated are more likely to enjoy higher wages and better job satisfaction, it is understood that the routes that individuals and social groups navigate through the education system, and the outcomes of those educational experiences are much more complex and multifaceted (Coffey, 2001). Here, there is agreement with Baruch (2006) who suggests that the days of predictable, secure and linear careers are long gone. Instead, the organisational system is now in a mode of all change, all dynamic, total fluidity; making careers unpredictable, vulnerable and multidirectional.

The study of Stevenson and Clegg (2012) on how adult learners orientate themselves to the future is particularly useful as they too question the notion of a 'neo-liberal subject who is able to create an individual trajectory in what are seen to be riskier employment futures requiring a flexible, dynamic, and future focused self.' Their focus on the representations of their participants and the interpretations, using an elaborated and expanded understanding of reflexivity, provides a framework for considering how personal values, beliefs, contexts and histories shape the lives of participants. They explain the different forms of reflexivity (drawing on the work of Archer, 2007) as;

Communicative reflexives – people who remain anchored in the natal social context of their birth families:

Autonomous reflexives – people who adopt strategic stances towards constraints and become socially upwardly mobile:

Meta-reflexives – people who are contextually incongruous: and

Fractured reflexivity – where people are unable to form and act on their central projects or cares. (Stevenson and Clegg, 2012)

They further maintain that debates within higher education privilege autonomous reflexivity and an orientation to the future as being obvious, awaiting and open. In the South African context, access, equity and success for adult learners are predicated by inefficiencies and contradictions. Prevailing inequalities in respect of race and gender enrolments in subject fields continue (DoE, 2001), as do disparities in fees charged by institutions for different courses. Making sense of transitions of adult learners is at the core of this study to enable the workplace(s), the academy and the worker-learners to understand how decisions, actions, policies, regulations, affordances, constraints and other navigational mechanisms contribute to and are connected to eventual outcomes for the learners.

Sense-Making Approach

This study is located within a pilot site of an ongoing Action Research project aimed at exploring flexible provisioning for part-time studies at the University of the Western Cape. The action research draws on Ghaye et al. (2008) who have elaborated the approach into what is called participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR). This approach encourages; (i) the development of appreciative insight, an understanding of the root causes of success and the sustaining of strengths-based discourses ; (ii) collective learning through interconnectedness; (iii) the acceptance of more pluralistic view of ways of knowing and; (iv) the use of a reflective learning framework.

Existing gaps in our own understanding of the transitions of the Political Studies part-time students necessitated a methodological approach that would create an enabling

process, an invitational environment, collaborative space, generate 'appreciative insight' in line with PAAR and facilitative within the context we were working. A sense-making process that viewed participants as 'centred and decentred; ordered and chaotic; cognitive, physical, spiritual, and emotional; and potentially differing in all these dimensions across time and across space' as articulated by Dervin (1999), resonated with what was envisaged. A core assumption of sense-making is that of discontinuity. Discontinuity refers to gaps between entities, time and spaces; and as entities, individuals move through time and space dealing with other people, artefacts, systems, or institutions. It is the strategy that a person employs to bridge the gaps - making sense of – that is the central metaphor of the Sense-Making Approach (Spurgin, 2006). The sense-making approach requires researchers to acknowledge the experiences, theories, hunches, opinions and biases they bring to the research domain. It assumes that participants are experts of their own experiences and have opinions and theories of their own. Researchers must therefore take care to elicit the theories as articulated by the participants and include this in the analysis of findings and in the final report.

Brenda Dervin is credited by Weick, Duffy (1995), and, Ford (2004) as the originator of the sense-making approach. The approach however, draws on a range of theorists involved in sociological enquiry that sought to document everyday life using methods of ethnographic fieldwork and social surveys. Garfinkel (1999) used the term ethnomethodology as far back as 1967 to refer "to the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life." Elsewhere, Garfinkel (1986) distinguished ethno-methodological procedures from what he called 'constructive analytical approaches' to sociological enquiry, by citing ethnomethodology's procedure of 'indifference';

By formal structures we understand everyday activities (a) in that they exhibit upon analysis the properties of uniformity, reproducibility, repetitiveness, standardization, typicality and so on; (b) in that those properties are independent of particular production cohorts; (c) in that particular cohort independence is a phenomenon for members' recognition; and (d) in that the phenomena (a), (b), and (c) are every particular cohort's practical, situated accomplishment. (p. 167)

Scott (2011) reports that 'everyday life' enjoyed an 'absent presence' in sociology in the early twentieth century when the emphasis was on the grand narrative and enabling or disabling schemas. She further points to the post-modern era of mass media and the rise of social movements such as feminism, civil rights and gay pride that brought questions of identity and lifestyle difference to the forefront of political consciousness. These in turn interacted with new developing theoretical perspectives of everyday life, such as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, structural functionalism and cultural studies.

Dervin (1989) similarly critiques the traditional approach to research where people are categorised by demographics, personality indicators, or cognitive style, assuming that people remain static across time and space. Such studies are considered tautological to the extent that, as a perspective, it may constitute an a priori assumption that is not tested within the research (Ford, 2004). In contrast;

Sense-Making focuses on the types of situations and gaps in which people find themselves at particular points in time-space, how people define those situations and gaps for themselves, the behaviors used to bridge gaps and make sense of situations, and the outcomes of bridging gaps and making sense. In this way, Sense-Making moves the analysis to a unit smaller than the person. The unit of interest is instead the situation, gap, or question as identified and described by the individual at a moment in time-space (Ford, 2004).

Dervin (2003) also outlines how a researcher is supposed to go about the sense-making process through the interviewing process. The sense-making interview, according to her, demands 'minimal intrusions and namings of the world by the interviewer. She proposes open-ended questions focused on allowing the respondent to communicate his/her process and that the entire interview should be constrained to the central query with its emphasis on time, space, movement, gap, power, history, constraint, outcome, repetition and change.

For the purposes of this study, the interview process as outlined by Dervin was interpreted as the interviewer respecting the respondents and knowing that the respondents/ participants have different values, beliefs and assumptions and can make sense from their own view points. To this end, the Free Attitude Interview (Meulenbergh-Buskens, 1997) technique was employed to solicit the opinions, thoughts, and feelings in a non-directive manner. The structure for each interview was the same; each open question, e.g. tell me your reasons... what have been your experience ... what do you think...; was posed and thoroughly exhausted through 'feedback summaries', 'stimulating pauses', 'asking for clarification' and 'final summaries'. All the interviews were conducted at the places of work of the participants.

This was not the only 'departure' from the guidance outlined in the literature about the sense-making process. Since this study is located within a broader 'action research' project, as indicated earlier, there was a need to have more than a basic insight into the lives of the participants – Political Studies part-time students. A survey questionnaire was designed to obtain demographic data – most of the latter is available on the university management information system (MIS) – however, additional data such as mode of transport, access to technology, employment status, type of employment, reasons for undertaking studies and more was accessed through this instrument. The questionnaire was administered to all students attending class. This may seem as a contradiction to the critique of 'traditional

approach to research' by Dervin (1989), but the questionnaire provided an opportunity to explain the overall research project to the students present, for them to ask questions and to invite volunteers to participate in interviews and other research initiatives.

Following the Sense-Making Process

All the part-time 'undergraduate' students registered - year I to III - in the Political Studies Department are included in the overall action research study. The staff and researcher are also aware that initiatives aimed at part-time students will invariably affect the full time students because the same staff members and tutors are involved in both full- and part-time courses. The staff members, 5 full-time and 2 contract staff members, plan collaboratively and each lecturer is aware of what is being done/ completed/ assessed in parallel courses, courses prior to theirs and those following on from their courses. In this study the focus was on the first year part-time undergraduate students only. The questionnaire instrument, designed to gather data about the first years, has subsequently been redesigned and modified for use with 2nd and 3rd year part-timers as well as full-time students. However, this study reports on data gathered from the first year, part-time class where (in 2013) 36 students were registered to attend. 27 Students were in attendance on the night the questionnaire was administered 9 were absent. After completing the questionnaire the students were able to ask questions about the specific and general action research studies and 8 volunteered to be interviewed at a later stage.

Findings from the questionnaire:

Of the 27 (100%) who responded, 63% are male and 37% female: 59% (16) indicated that they are single, 33% (9) married and 8% (2) divorced. The age-categories revealed were; age 18-25, 7%; age 26-33, 44%, age 34-41, 33%, and age 42-49, 16%. 85% are in full-time employ, 7% part-time, 1 person is self-employed and another, unemployed seeking work. The mode of transport used to travel to the campus was indicated as 77% using own car, 7% get lifts from others and 13% use public transport. The distances they stay from the campus were indicated as follows; 22% within 10km radius, 18% within 15km, 16% within 20km and 44% more than 20km from the campus. Twelve of them, 44%, indicated that they are paying for their studies, 18% have bursaries and 38% are being funded by their employers.

The following options were given as reasons for undertaking studies. Respondents could select any or as many as they deemed fit. The percentages indicate the 'popular choices'.

To be better skilled at current work responsibilities: 63%

Develop skills for workplace promotion opportunities: 59%

Requirement as part of employment contract: 8%

As preparation to search for better opportunities: 44%

To improve my business: 4%

To improve myself- personal growth: 30%

Other: 0%

Since an aspect of the flexible provisioning involved technology, the questionnaire included items related to access the students have to different types of technology that is, off-campus. Most, 59%, have access to a desktop computer – exclusively for own use; 13% have access but it is shared with others, 11% have limited or inconvenient access and 8% have no access at all. The exclusive use of a laptop computer is enjoyed by 51% of the respondents, 11% share a laptop with others and 38% have no access to a laptop computer. 33% indicated that they have access to broadband or wireless networks but the rest do not have access off-campus.

Most of the participants (89%) are enrolled for the B. Administration degree; the others are doing the B. Commerce degree. They provided the following job descriptions that represent what most of them are currently employed as: Office Administrator, Administration Clerk, Admin Officer, Finance Officer, Executive Personal Assistant, Supervisor, Data Capturer, Debtors Clerk, ICT Officer, and Director (self-employed). They work for the City, the Province, Parliament, the Police, at the Universities, a few private companies, and one has his own business.

Interview process(es) and findings;

When the questionnaire was administered, a desire/need was expressed to interview individuals more in-depth and volunteers were called upon to make themselves available. The entire group – those present – was assured that the sharing would be confidential, they would receive a list of questions before-hand and that the interviews would occur at their places of work at a mutually agreed time. Eight (8) people volunteered and provided their contact details. One student did not respond to repeated requests to set up an appointment, resulting in only seven (4 Males and 3 Females) interviews being conducted. They will be identified as M1 to M4 and F1 to F3 hereon.

The first question, or rather the invitation to share their reasons for embarking on further studies, without asking 'why', allowed respondents to decide where and how to start their narratives.

I have always wanted to be a medical doctor, since I was a little girl growing up in the rural Eastern Cape. In our village the doctor was the highest

qualified person and he was very caring, he helped lots of people. That was what I wanted to be ...[F1]

Well, for personal development, but I am aware that there are better opportunities and better paying jobs here at the university. I want to make use of those opportunities. If I don't get it here but I am qualified, I can go somewhere else. [M1]

I want to empower myself because education wasn't in the foreground for my family when I grew up. My parents didn't finish school and my eldest brother was the first to finish matric. My children must look up to me as an example. [F2]

I was told by my manager that I had to do something about my qualifications. The company wants to develop staff and give them opportunities – I would not have bothered if he had not approached me – and they are paying as well. [M2]

[F1] started her narrative by sharing her dreams and aspirations as a child growing up in a rural village where there was no access to electricity and she and her siblings had to fetch water for daily consumption. She continued her story by linking ongoing study and the improvement of her qualifications to that of putting her in a better position to serve her community – her community being the poor and marginalised. [M1] is more forward looking and aware of available opportunities, be they within his current environment or elsewhere. [F2]'s retrospection spurs her on to correct a past 'wrong' by 'foregrounding' the importance of education for the sake of her children. [M2] on the other hand seems externally motivated and is going along with the unfolding staff development policy at work. More interpretation of the sharing will follow later but at this point it is important to highlight – and this was the case with all the responses – the different starting points the respondents selected. When asked to share challenges they faced as part-time students they shared the following;

Time constraints, man, I struggle to handle the deadlines. I have to steal time from my sleeping time. I cannot be seen to slack off at work to focus on my assignments and it is almost as if the guys at work, all the guys man, are watching me. You see, some of these older guys will never study, they are too old. Now they see this youngster doing his degree at a university. I have to pull my weight at work otherwise they complain. [M3]

Traveling to campus is my biggest problem. The public transport is terrible. I am late for class most of the time. Sometimes I just go straight home, ja, I skip class. [M2]

My job requires me to travel, not often but I end up missing classes then I must catch up and I don't understand the work. I cannot say no to the field

trips, I like the work and the professors appreciate having me on the trips. My one colleague is very jealous because I get complimented about my work all the time. [F3]

All the sharing highlights the disjuncture in work and study lives experienced by the participants. While [M2] raises the issue of transport as a major challenge, it should be added that he has a similar problem with getting to work. He lives very close to the university and travelling to and from his workplace requires changing modes of public transport – a train and bus or taxi. When asked what support, if any they get from/at work;

Support? My supervisor demands 150% from me. She is completely threatened. I am not allowed to talk about studies. She feels it is unfair that the university is paying for my studies. I can't wait for her to retire. [F3]

Our company policy does not allow you to access private emails. All private emails are blocked and all websites visited are monitored centrally. I cannot access the university website from here. I try to get emails on my cellphone but it is difficult. [M2]

We have a formal policy regarding study leave. I come in earlier so that I can leave early to get to class on time and we get 10 days per annum to attend class and another 10 for study and examination purposes. [M4]

I get help with tuition fees, but not books but I discovered you can claim some expenses if you need to buy something for your studies. But sometimes it is very stressful you know. Because you sign that document for the bursary but if you fail you have to pay the money back. So after a few years you decide not to study anymore and then you still earn the same money but now they deduct that 'loan' from your pay and you get less. It's a gamble. But I will succeed. [M1]

By chance (not design), all the volunteers interviewed are being funded by their respective employers. The 'double edge sword' metaphor comes to mind when considering the affordances and constraints raised by the interviewees. The same company that encourages staff development and invests financially in the process has a formal policy that limits the ability of staff to engage with their 'development'. The financial incentive at the beginning of the 'journey' can become a financial burden if the student does not succeed. The interviewees were also asked to reflect on the effects on family life.

My children (two daughters) have busy schedules. I used to be able to assist with lifts and things. Now my husband and others must jump in. I also miss supporting them when they perform in their sports or other school activities. [F2]

I worry when my children are sick. At least, I now have medical aid but I am always stressed when one of them is ill. My brother works shifts, so sometimes he is there to look after them but it is very stressful. [F1]

The two respondents reported 'a loss' at least in desired connection with their children. It is also ironic that [F2] is engaging in further education to be an example to her children but in the process has to disengage from the educational process of her daughters. The male respondents generally indicated that they manage to work around family concerns and the other female is single with family living in a different part of the country.

Making Sense of the Sharing

Each narrative had a different starting point. For some, the historical significance of present endeavours, is 'obvious' and the current activities are aimed at an envisioned 'alternate' future. They do however point to articulated 'gaps' or 'discontinuities' as suggested by Dervin (1989, 1999, 2003) and the pursuit of further studies is an attempt to fill the gap or bridge into a 'better' future. The act of studying on the other hand is creating other discontinuities such as spending less time with family and children, dealing with stress within the work environment and working under pressure to fulfil coursework requirements. The latter can be construed as expected 'sacrifices' in the journey embarked on by part-time students who have to juggle work, family as personal challenges in order to reach their final destination. Those who best manage the challenges will succeed. This 'journey' metaphor however, reinforces the linear pathways created by universities, where it is the sole responsibility of the student to navigate the standard set curricula that will lead to graduates enjoying highly successful lives in an equally accommodating social, economic and political environment. On the contrary, as evidenced by the different starting points in the narratives, the 'transitional maelstroms' of the participants reveal involvement in yet another 'expedition' requiring huge effort, through unfamiliar terrain, getting little support from workplaces – beyond providing the fees-, and engaging with higher education institutions who prefer to deal with young learners straight from school.

There is also an example of an autonomous reflexive, as shared by Stevenson and Clegg (2012), who has analysed the constraints and options available and identified the pursuit of further studies as the most logical action to attain future objectives. Being based at the same university where the studies are offered, supports the decision, minimises the risks and enhances the chances of success. The different modes of reflexivity, communicative, autonomous, meta- and fractured, do not comfortably accommodate the individual who appears to be 'externally motivated' to engage in further studies. The fact that he has made the decision and is engaged in the activity, with a penchant to skip classes if the transport system lets him down, point to a kind of 'deferred/referred- reflexivity' where the locus of control, the agency and accountability are external.

The 'skipping of classes' is also not the habit of one student. The 75% class attendance during the administering of the questionnaire can be considered exceptional as the average attendance for part-time classes ranges between 40% and 50%. Part-time students skip classes generally to balance work/family demands with the academic challenges associated with studies. Those attending, more often than not, arrive late and some have to leave early because of their transport arrangements.

Workplace policies related to individual/group further studies differ and students negotiate the policy affordances and constraints as best they can. One can expect workplace policies to be in line with national strategies and policies. The plethora of skills strategies (NSDS I to III), sector wide initiatives and various general economic policies have failed to galvanise both the public and private sectors toward the desired economic growth. The lack of economic growth has resulted in a slowdown of uptake of the unemployed into the economy and an inability of employers to meet the demands of organised labour. Some analysts believe that it is the lack of consensus that is causing a paralysis in policy implementation, particularly within higher education.

Policy is almost always mediated in the realm of implementation by political (discursive), economic (or structural), and institutional constraints. In South Africa there has never been a strong consensus in the HE community on the content of the new policy framework, with a high degree of discursive tension and competing interpretations that characterized the policy debates since 1990. (Kraak, 2004: 244)

The national skills development strategy (NSDS III, 2010) for example promotes the building of partnerships and improved linkages between universities, colleges, SETAs and employers

This includes promoting training to meet the needs of both public and private sector employers and increased university research collaboration with industry. Partnerships should also be extended to building international links as well as supporting the role of community partnerships in planning and delivering local employment and skills support services. (p.27)

In reality, the part-time student enters the university as an individual in pursuit of personal gain, completely delinked from his/her employment sector. The employers on the other hand can claim that they are in compliance with national policy by making the necessary resources available to students who must apply in their individual capacity. These individual students have to rely on 'hard work and dedication' and 'determination and confidence' (February and Koetsier, 2007) to ensure success in their studies. If past trajectories of part-time students are considered (Watters et al. 2007) then 42% of the current students will fail to complete their studies.

The eventual 'sense' emerging from the sharing is one of a lottery. The lottery spinning balls image represents the maelstrom experienced by part-time students as they attempt to balance the competing demands of work, family, studies and personal lives. As with the lottery, success with studies is possible, it depends on the individual efforts. In this scenario, the lottery system – the set of balls, the numbers, the spinning wheels, the announcers are independent tools and arbiters of good fortune, above reproach and custodians of good and widely acceptable practice. Similarly, the workplaces, the universities and the related policies are the custodians for the part-time students' good futures. The fact that 42% will end up out-of-pocket and worse off than when they started is not calculated in this neo-liberal framing of 'skills development'.

Concluding Sense Making

For purely pragmatic purposes the University of the Western Cape has had to adapt its part-time curriculum delivery to suit both staff and students. The part-time curriculum is considered 'equivalent' to that of the full-time curriculum and subject to the same assessment criteria. However in practice, the same content is delivered using less time. A full-time student has 2 (two) lectures of 45/50 minutes, plus a tutorial session of 50 minutes per week, and a part-time student must attend one two hour session to cover the same content for the week- the tutorial is included. There is simply not enough time during a day to replicate full-time provisioning.

Employers need to be aware that as part-time students, their employees are being accommodated and treated differently to full-time students. There is an expectation that as mature learners they are more responsible, more capable, more motivated and more dedicated than full-time, younger learners. Whatever the veracity of the expectations, in reality, the mature learners must cope with more responsibilities, more demands, more pressure and more contextual concerns than their younger counterparts. They have less access to available support services, are subject to the same psychological, physiological, and sociological challenges but more often also carry the economic burden of other family members.

The affordances offered by both employers and the university relate to the principle of 'access'. The employers provide the funding and the university structures its programme so that the employees can be accommodated. The 'equity/redress' principle is sorely neglected and employees/students are treated as homogenous entities left to deal with unique challenges on their own. This affects the principle of 'success' that becomes a lottery instead of the natural outcome of a thoroughly prepared process. In their own study of access, equity and success for adult learners in higher education, Buchler et al. (2007) suggest that deep transformation is required from the micro teaching/learning relationships, to the meso organisational cultures, to the macro provincial and national environments. Workplace policy can be transformed by an acute awareness of multiple, possible challenges faced by mature students embarking on further studies. The university on the other hand should similarly focus on teaching and learning strategies that will facilitate engagement, enhance the learning process, and enable success for the mature learners. The

adult learners should also be made aware, through a reflective process, of the challenges, their own abilities, of available resources and their limitations. Making sense of the transitions of mature learners is an important step in the problem analysis process for considering flexible provisioning for this group of learners.

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Building Common Knowledge: negotiating new pedagogies in Higher Education in South Africa¹

DRAFT

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Abstract

Discussions in this chapter are located within an action research-based study which aims at supporting the integration of enhanced pedagogies in one university in South Africa. The study recognises that even full-time funded students in Higher Education face economic pressures which mean that student employment alongside full-time study is approaching the norm. It also recognises that this situation has implications for the pedagogies that are used by university departments, whether students are preparing directly for the professions or undertaking more open-ended courses. In this chapter we focus on how one university initiative to create more responsive pedagogies has been negotiated into the practices of three departments in one university with a strong history of engaging first generation university students who are poor.

In particular, we draw on the idea of common knowledge to explain how new understandings of pedagogy are negotiated into the practices by the core team and are then deployed institutionally. We identify and discuss the political nature of organisational innovation and the building of common knowledge, through discussing an illustrative 'moment' from the research project and the participatory research approach that we adopt. The chapter brings together analytic resources of cultural-historical theory, a participatory research approach and, in particular, ideas of relational expertise, common knowledge and relational agency.

SETTING THE SCENE

Presently, public Higher Education Institutions in South Africa are under pressure to increase their intake of young students which can mean that working people or 'non-traditional students' (adults) are finding their options for lifelong learning being limited, including their ability to gain access through recognition of prior learning (RPL). At a time when public policy commitment is to open and widen access to workers and adult learners, the 'doors of learning' paradoxically are closing (RSA 2013; Buchler et al 2007). This chapter describes institutional research within one historically black university in South Africa, which was at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle, and has a 50 year tradition of providing access to working class and first generation students. We sketch contradictory contextual conditions, changing priorities, and institutional contestations, which are impacting opportunities for poor and working students profoundly. We describe the situation which has led to an action research project on 'flexible learning and teaching provision' directed primarily for working people. It describes the overall approach to the action research, including the identification of key conceptual tools of 'common knowledge' and 'relational expertise'.

¹ We wish to acknowledge that the action research that forms the basis of this chapter has been done in partnership with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The ideas expressed, however, are the authors alone.

The research is concerned to assist the university realise a philosophy and approach to lifelong learning under new and changing conditions. While the research focuses on the inter-relationships between the students, their working lives and the university – the primary question is ‘how can the university respond meaningfully to the real circumstances of students to enhance prospects for their professional development?’ In addressing that question the study is also concerned with the process of influencing organisational change through the research. In brief, the study sets out to explore, using an action research orientation, how the university can develop more appropriate pedagogical approaches to help working students to succeed. This aim entails understanding the working lives of students, engaging their workplaces, and influencing the teaching, learning and administrative environment of the university.

Located within more extensive analyses of the national and global contexts (Walters 2012; Barnett 2014), the key contradiction, to which the research responds, is that access is being limited, through the closure of after-hours or evening classes, at a time and in a place where access for working and first generation students is a core part of the university’s historic mission. The issue is politically charged and carries with it certain moral obligations relating to social justice for the black majority who have been severely disadvantaged through the history of colonialism and Apartheid. The university, like many others, finds itself in the cross winds of global capitalism where corporatisation of universities is a widespread phenomenon. As Burawoy (2011: 27) states, ‘These pressures come in two forms – commodification and regulation’. These include international ranking systems; the invasion of market logic in every dimension of the institution; research measurement systems which reduce research to publications in refereed journals, and so on. An added dimension, coming from the Apartheid past, is that in South Africa, the historically black university (HBU) finds itself in fierce competition with the more advantaged historically white universities (HWU).

As illustrative of the political struggle for the ‘heart and soul’ of the university, within the geo-political global and national contexts, is a very public spat which reached the press, between the Chair of UWC Council, who was also president of the Convocation, and the Executive Management (Cape Argus 6, 9 and 13 June 2014). Part-time studies is implicated as referenced by the journalist (Cape Argus, June 8, 2014) when he says,

“.....over the years nearly 50 000 black and working class students, who would in all probability, otherwise not have had access to higher education, were able to pursue their studies part-time under the umbrella of UWC’s lifelong learning programme. Historically, very many of these law students upgraded their qualifications while at the same time earning a living.....but in 2011, a decision was taken by the university’s law faculty.....to shut down its part-time teaching programme.....”

A week later (Cape Argus June 13, 2014 p21), a prominently positioned article by university senior management, entitled, “The doors of part-time learning still open at UWC”, appeared. The authors located the problem as, “Demand for after-hours classes has dropped over the years, while student numbers in full-time study increased rapidly; though without a concomitant increase in the staffing budget.” This argument highlights a central conundrum around prioritisation and allocation of scarce resources and, because the university leaders point to the action research projects, which are the focus of this chapter as “pilot sites for the exploration of modes of mixed or flexible delivery, which

may be extended to other qualifications if they prove successful”, the study provides an opportunity to examine the contradictions that comprise the conundrum.

In brief, ‘part-time studies’ seems to have become a proxy for the deeper political contestation around the priorities and future direction of the university. As a consequence, the action research initiatives have been buffeted by the political and pedagogical winds relating to the university’s broader mission. The core research team, in its primary role of oversight of the action research and monitoring of its success, have been conscious of the project’s political character. Indeed they have engaged in it precisely because of their political concern for equity and redress for black adults who have been denied opportunities through past and present colonialist, Apartheid and neo-liberal policies and practices.

BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND APPROACH OF THE STUDY

In early 2010 a UWC Senate document (DLL 2010) proposed an action research project in flexible provision. It described some fundamental shifts taking place in the institution in response to a range of different pressures. It was, for example, becoming clear that due to resource pressures, including increased numbers of young students, and issues relating to the under-preparedness of students from school, it was no longer possible to envisage parallel delivery systems – one ‘full time’ and the other ‘part time’ in day time and after-hours slots. It was also widely recognized that UWC students, both under-graduate and post-graduate, were financially constrained, which meant they sought employment even while studying full time. This recognition was also reflected in increasing patterns of ‘stop out’ that have been raised in other surveys (Breier et al., 2008). Institutional research (DLL 2010) had already raised serious questions about the ambiguity in the distinction between ‘part time’ and ‘full time’ students, finding that sizable numbers of ‘full time students’ studied in the evening and vice versa; this ambiguity placed a question mark over the usefulness of these student descriptors. In particular, students entering through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) were frequently in employment and not able to attend classes during the day, a matter of some relevance to UWC, which had positioned itself nationally as a leader in promoting alternative access. The university was also, in line with global trends, increasing its E-learning capacities exponentially amongst staff and students; and facilities like the main library were remaining open for longer hours.

With these, and other, contextual conditions in mind, the proposal for an action research-based project was adopted in order to help shift the institution to embrace ‘flexible learning and teaching provision’ through the adoption of pilot action research sites. Three pilot sites i.e. Departments of Library and Information Science, Political Studies and School of Public Health, were agreed. The key research question for the action research pilots was: *what conditions need to change in order to give working people access to achieve success through higher education?* The action research in each site was coordinated by a small research team in the cross-faculty, boundary-spanning (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011) Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL).

The research team was, from the start, very aware of the university-wide implications and was in agreement with Green *et al* (2013:26) who state that, because higher education is a complex system consisting of “four inter-dependent sub-systems” - teacher, learner, delivery and administrative sub-systems – innovative approaches to learning and teaching would require profound shifts in the way that the entire university views, engages with and develops knowledge. This ambitious undertaking

would require organisational change strategies which Johnston (1997) describes as both top down and bottom up.

In line with this understanding, the research project obtained endorsements through a range of committees including Senate. As researchers, we worked within a set of understandings which included the need for: strong support from the leadership of the institution so that the project could be seen as a strategic priority; resource incentives to encourage involvement in innovative teaching in the pilot sites; development of principles and processes for involvement which ensured a sense of fairness and equity; use of leading innovators, as far as possible, from other departments to support or work with colleagues; development of project teams for each pilot site which related back to the overall coordinating research team; development of a communications strategy to back up and support the pilot sites so that they did not remain isolated pockets of innovation but had the possibilities to influence others; communication of 'leading practices' on campus and elsewhere that already existed, to illustrate potential; speed to move quickly while the need for change was obvious and people were willing to innovate; development of a community of scholarship which excited colleagues intellectually and which could lead not only to 'flexible teaching and learning provision' but also to publishable research results.

However, while it has been important to keep these criteria in mind, in reality, not all of them could be met. In particular, the university was financially constrained and unable to contribute additional finances to the research. This lack of university investment signalled the paradox which was indicated at the start of the chapter and which was reflected in a series of contradictions as the pilots proceeded. Despite the lack of university financial support, the initiative went ahead with external funding from the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) for a three year partnership. However, no university investment has meant that the pilots have been positioned as additional work demanding a high degree of commitment from hard-pressed faculty-based colleagues.

We recognised that for institutional change to have a chance, the research needed to be collaborative and 'owned' as widely as possible. Organising structures were set up linking the pilot sites, to the research team, to a reference group which was a sub-committee of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC) and to annual review and strategic planning meetings – all meeting regularly, ensuring close connections and collaborative relationships amongst the research team at the DLL who were expert in innovative pedagogies and the action researchers in departments, whose expertise lay particularly in their specialist knowledge. The project can also lay claim to substantial bureaucratic buy-in as evidenced in the substantial meeting and reporting documentation presented to and discussed in committee and strategic planning meetings. However, given the institutional political environment, competing views on the significance of the project have been apparent. These conflicts were of course expected, given the contradictions we have already alluded to. As Castells explains:

...societies are not communities, sharing values and interests. They are contradictory social structures enacted in conflicts and negotiations among diverse and often opposing social actors. Conflicts never end: they simply pause through temporary agreements and unstable contracts that are transformed into institutions of domination by those social actors who achieve an advantageous position in the power struggle, albeit at the cost of allowing some

degree of institutional representation for the plurality of interests and values that remain subordinated. So, the institutions of the state and, beyond the state, the institutions, organizations, and discourses that frame and regulate social life are never the expressions of 'society'.... They are crystallized power relationships; that is the 'generalized means' that enable actors to exercise power over other social actors in order to have the power to accomplish their goals. (Castells, 2009, p. 14)

If we accept the view that power struggles are inevitable, then we cannot assume that the debates and discussions within university are politically neutral. This understanding in turn places more pressure on the politics of the ideas of 'common knowledge' and 'relational expertise', to which we will return later.

Finally, in setting the scene, it is important to emphasise that funding to support the research was accessed through a partnership with the SAQA, which is a statutory body with oversight for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). SAQA's mandate includes facilitating access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths in order to accelerate redress of past unfair discrimination within the education and training system. There is congruence, therefore, between the aims of the research project and SAQA who are looking to the project to assist with more effective implementation of lifelong learning opportunities within higher education. Thus, the research is looking *inwards* to influence institutional policies and practices 'all the way down' (Edwards & Thompson, 2013), and *outwards* towards influencing the NQF policy environments, *all the way up*. Built into the partnership with SAQA, were regular national seminars to engage people in the emerging research insights and the discourse of lifelong learning.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF ACTION RESEARCH

Action research is known by many names and each name implies different purposes, positionalities, epistemologies, ideological commitments and different research traditions (Herr and Anderson 2005). The line that we took is influenced by the participatory research approach (PRA) as defined in adult education literature (for example, Kassam 1982; Walters 1989, Hall 2001). This approach demands that the research integrates 'investigation, education and action'. PRA is a form of action research, which demands involvement rather than detachment. Coming out of the radical Freirian adult education tradition, it has a particular commitment to the educational value of the research process for all participants. It is this specific commitment, which is tied to the 'investigation and action' components which distinguishes it from some other forms of action research. Collins (2011) makes a very interesting link between PRA and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) – through this he highlights, amongst others, the Marxist influences and the overt political nature of both, including how each tradition can serve to deepen the other.

PRA is different in some respects to much educational action research. As Elliott, cited by Ellis (2011:189) states, "the fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than produce knowledge". Such an understanding of action research as practice implies a focus on action as behaviour without acknowledging the cultural and historical influence on behaviour. From a CHAT perspective knowledge (mind) is embedded in everyday interactions and active engagement with the world; that is, learning and development involves "practical and theoretical, material and mental, political and intellectual, social and individual ..." which rejects the separation between mind and action. Moreover, a CHAT line of reasoning emphasises the social/collective over

individual/subjective analysis which enable us to analyse and interpret complex institutional conditions and factors which either enhance or impede creative responses. In our understanding PRA and CHAT reflect and support one another.

This congruence of PRA and CHAT has meant that we have been able to draw on the three conceptual tools within the CHAT tradition, which are at the core of this collection: common knowledge, relational expertise, and relational agency (See Chapter 1 and Edwards, 2010, 2012). These tools have allowed us, as a research team, to interrogate and analyse the responsive pedagogies within and across the three pilot sites. In doing so we have also been able to consider the extent to which they hold up to the pressures exerted in the highly charged and paradoxical environment we have just described.

BUILDING COMMON KNOWLEDGE, RELATIONAL EXPERTISE AND RELATIONAL AGENCY IN PRACTICE

Given that flexible learning and teaching means so many different things and is challenging the dominant approaches to teaching and learning in much of higher education, one premise of the proposal to Senate mentioned earlier was that a common understanding of what it means institutionally needed to be developed and embraced (DLL 2014). At a theoretical level, we found Edwards' (2011) notion of building 'common knowledge' useful as it speaks to the fact that bringing about change in institutions demands that it is not only the surface behaviours that require transformation, but there should also be a recognition of the historically accumulated motives that have given shape to the practices in which these behaviours occur and that these too need to be considered in relation to institutional adjustment. Accessing and discussing these often tacitly held historical motives requires deep and sustained dialogue. It therefore requires us as the core research team to develop and demonstrate relational expertise. As researchers working within the PRA tradition, we need to learn to take the standpoint of the other and understand how and why they are using the resources of flexible learning and teaching in the way that they are and to be explicit about what matters for us.

As Edwards (2011, p. 34) argues, in the process of exercising relational expertise_a 'discursive meeting of minds that gives rise to *common knowledge*' occurs. In this meeting of minds the motives that shape the practices of the other are surfaced and recognised in order to produce common knowledge, which then consists of these motives, or what matters, for each participant. This knowledge is held in common, is respected by the collaborators and brought into play to work on problems, in this case the development of flexible learning and teaching. In summary, in the study we are discussing here, common knowledge is elicited by the research team who also make what matters for them explicit, it then operates as a resource which mediates collaboration on the development of flexible learning and teaching strategies.

While common knowledge is a resource that is built by the research team using relational expertise, relational agency, is the capacity that is exercised when the action researchers in the three pilot sites work with the research team act together_such as to produce and implement flexible learning and teaching.

However, relational work of the kind we have outlined does not replace core professional knowledge and expertise. This has been one of the strengths arising for the integration of PRA with these three CHAT resources. As we have already indicated, the shifts we were hoping the study

would engender required the ownership of the action researchers in the pilot sites. It was therefore crucial that we did not present ourselves as pedagogic experts who were intent on forcing the implementation of new strategies. Instead, we were able to create meetings of mind in which the specific pedagogic and curriculum requirements of each programme could be addressed in ways which respected what mattered for the programme.

While these conceptual tools have usefully augmented PRA they have also helped us to plan how we move forward from successful action research-based pilots to achieve the institutional shifts that support the new ways of working that are emerging. As we have already indicated, flexible learning and teaching provision is a complex problem involving the four inter-dependent sub-systems of the academy (Green *et al.*, 2013), it will require committed collaboration across all systems and sectors within the institution in order to come to a common understanding of (FLTP) which includes the 'diversity' of students, including working students. Here we come to what Edwards (2012) has described as 'upstream learning', taking knowledge up through hierarchically ordered practices. There she has argued that the mobilisation of knowledge upwards, so that the institutional conditions necessary to support its production can be agreed, also involves the creation and deployment of common knowledge. This time the boundaries are horizontal, dividing different hierarchical layers in an organisation, rather than the vertical boundaries that, for example, separate departments and faculties in a university. Again there is a need for us, as PRA researchers, to be explicit about what matters to us about student access, while at the same time eliciting and working with what matters at the level of university administration. It is here that we have envisaged the contradictions to be most evident and most challenging to us as researchers.

One way of engaging with the motives of university administration and the financial constraints that have impeded their funding of the initiative is to invoke what Edwards and Thompson refer to as 'resourceful leadership' (Edwards & Thompson, 2013). They argue that at a time of austerity, when material resources are stripped away and workforces are drastically reduced, as is the case in many universities, the remaining workforce becomes a vital resource and an overt focus for professional development and ensuring engagement with the long term purposes of the organisation. When these reductions are occurring at a time when fundamental change is required, then leadership must be able to recognise, enhance and give purpose to the capability of colleagues at every level of the systems they lead.

There is a strong link to development of 'common knowledge' on the part of the leader in their argument. The creative leadership that is required must listen, tap into and harvest the knowledge within innovations that are occurring at every level and assist with their movement upstream. We have argued that for flexible learning and teaching to become institutionalised in ways which will include a diversity of working and non-working students, changes need to impact every level of the institution, and the most senior levels therefore need to also have ownership. We concur with Johnston (1997) that both top-down and bottom-up change strategies are necessary; every person is a change agent and the best organisations learn from the external environment as well as from their own internal staff. Resourceful leadership, of the kind outlined here, is required to facilitate this occurrence.

We turn now to describing an illustrative example of how we have mobilised these concepts in practice.

TOWARDS AN INSTITUTIONAL POLICY ON FLEXIBLE LEARNING AND TEACHING

In order to ensure that the pilot sites would not remain separate silos of innovative pedagogy, we undertook a survey of work that could be labelled flexible learning and teaching across all faculties so that we could in some way engage non-participating units with the initiative. Through an international literature review, we honed in on a working definition of flexible learning and teaching. We then tested it in interviews with teaching and learning specialists and academics across all faculties, ensuring some discussion of what it might mean for them in their faculties and the university as a whole. The 31 semi-structured interviews were conducted by the team within a period of 10 days; the emerging results were fed back to a reference group of leading practitioners who formed a sub-committee of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC) and acted as the project advisory group. There was also a workshop, to which all those who had been interviewed were invited, to give and get feedback on the survey and to clarify what a working definition of flexible learning and teaching could be.

In order to ensure that ideas were also fed upstream as well as horizontally, the research team made submissions of working documents to two Senate sub-committees. These documents were in various states of readiness and therefore took different forms.

The nature of the different documents at different stages included:

(i) a preliminary research proposal which was invitational and tentative to solicit feedback on the idea for the research from the reference group i.e. "Proposal for mapping flexible teaching and learning provision at UWC"	18 April 2013
(ii) based on the feedback, this was written up as a substantial academic research project, discussed in the reference group and submitted to the Senate sub-committees i.e. "Research proposal for mapping flexible learning and teaching provision at the University of the Western Cape (UWC)"	13 September 2013
(iii) a 6 page position paper which was more of an advocacy document and place holder, while the substantial research report was being prepared; this was sent out to all the faculties to solicit feedback on the broad ideas and their import for the institution; during this time presentations of this document were also done on invitation to 4 of the 6 faculties. i.e. "'Engaging Diverse Students with really useful knowledge': A draft position paper on flexible learning	16 February 2014

and teaching provision at UWC”	
(iv) a 70 page research report which was submitted to the Senate Lifelong Learning Committee (SLLC) and this was referred to the reference group i.e. “Draft Report. Mapping of flexible learning and teaching at University of the Western Cape [UWC]”.	25 May 2014
(v) a 15 page abbreviated report presented to the reference group; where they asked for it to be reduced to 12 pages with some specific requests, for there to be greater acknowledgement of work already achieved i.e. “Flexible learning and teaching at UWC: understandings, practices and implications [Draft report 2]”	9 June 2014
(vi) a 12 page abbreviated report which was submitted to the reference group and was forwarded to the SLLC and STLC first meetings of 2015 i.e. “Flexible learning and teaching at UWC: understandings, practices and implications. [Abbreviated research report]”	28 November 2014
(vii) a project website and then a blog also was used to ensure that the various mutations of the report and supporting documents were publically available (http://uwcflexiblelearningandteaching.blogspot.com)	February 2013 onwards

In understanding the different mutations of the report, we have found Ellis’ (2013, p202) heuristic device in the form of a quadrant, which highlights the relevance of each type of document, as useful. He, drawing on Burawoy’s work, identifies two types of knowledge which are ‘instrumental knowledge’ and ‘reflexive knowledge’. Instrumental types of knowledge are those that allow certain kinds of work to be accomplished, for example improved professional practice or policy related ends; while reflexive types of knowledge require dialogue about values and purposes underlying the development towards broader social goals (Ellis, p201). The two main audiences are ‘academic’, which are primarily academic scholarly communities concerned with critical knowledge, and ‘extra-academic’ which include politicians, bureaucrats, or the public. Both audiences require documents which speak to both instrumental and reflexive knowledge. We found that the university academics, in different contexts, could be seen to move from being ‘academic’ (i.e. part of a critical community of scholars) to ‘extra-academic’ (concerned to improve functioning) – at one point, reflexive knowledge was required as the document was judged by knowledge associated with critical evaluation of research within a wider intellectual context; and at another, instrumental knowledge where the documents needed to speak to policy and teaching practice. Depending on who was in the room at the time, the motives shifted and the political sensitivities were heightened or more muted. Therefore the mediation of the documents was critical.

In reflecting back on the journey of the documents, we can observe that steps 2 and 4 in the Table reflect the need for critical academic engagement, while steps 3, 5 and 6 address the broader university public and the bureaucratic requirements of committees. In attempting to build common knowledge, steps 2 and 4 are concerned to engage in critical, scholarly conversations with colleagues, while the reports in steps 3, 5, and 6 are popularising the ideas amongst a broader university public.

The core research team, as boundary spanners, has had to be alert to 'what matters' to each of the individuals and to the collective in order to hear and understand whether it was possible to construct common knowledge. An example of this was one meeting of the advisory group, where a host of issues were being raised in relation to the 15 page abbreviated report (document 5 in Table) – at a point one of the researchers then asked of the group, 'what is the one thing that matters to all of us?' This was a significant moment of display of relational expertise which helped the atmosphere change from one of contestation to greater collaboration and collegiality; and helpful suggestions were made as to how the document could be altered in order to make its way successfully through the bureaucratic structures. The antagonisms of 'them' and 'us', shifted to a sense of 'us'. There seemed to be a momentary emergence of collective ownership and relational agency. At a point of considerable pressure, relational expertise aimed at building common knowledge proved robust enough to tackle the contradictions that arise when a new way of working is introduced into an established system.

The PRA has included investigation through collaborative research, education through sharing of findings and invitations to co-construct 'common knowledge' of flexible learning and teaching, through moving documents into the committees in order to influence changes in teaching and learning policy, and through supporting changes in teaching and learning within the pilot sites. The next five year Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) is currently being developed and the documents from the study are feeding into this process. In these ways we are attempting to move the knowledge generated in the pilots both horizontally and upstream.

REFLECTIONS

The study took place in an historical context which is marked by the authoritarian scars of a patriarchal, Apartheid state, within a historically black university which prides itself on its contribution to the struggle for liberation. The university is now caught in the cross winds of competitive globalisation and influenced by competition, regulation and commodification, raising questions about the process of building common knowledge in a system of flux. What are the capabilities required of researchers and leadership to bring about organisational innovation? How does the building of deep democratic practices, which common knowledge implies, sit alongside Castells' view that "Conflicts never end: they simply pause through temporary agreements and unstable contracts that are transformed into institutions of domination by those social actors who achieve an advantageous position in the power struggle....."?

Earlier we outlined the politically charged environment of the study, which has been compounded by impending changes in senior leadership within the university. The short term timeframes of senior management have meant that they have been unable to operate as resourceful leaders and harvest the innovations and creative energies to be found in departments and faculties across the

campus. This lack has meant that the building of common knowledge horizontally between departments and faculties has taken precedence in the study – in this we can claim some success. Moving the knowledge emanating from the action research upstream has been partial and it is still impossible to anticipate or predict success.

The main contradiction that the flexible provision action research is addressing is the 'binary' of day/night provision with full and part-time students in an institution which has a long history of support for poor and working students. The members of the research team, and the unit within which we work, has been a champion over 14 years of the black, working, and older students. The researchers therefore carry a certain moral authority in relation to the social justice mission of the university. This has paradoxically meant that we have been implicated in the social and political conflicts, also referred to as 'antagonisms' by Ellis. We have recognised the opportunity created by the contradiction in order to stimulate what Ellis (2013, p.211) refers to as 'difficult but transformative change'.

We have found that a cultural historical approach has offered tools from a radical interventionist tradition with developmental purposes. As Ellis (2013, p210) states, CHAT does not support 'knowledge transfer' but recognises interventions as contested spaces. This has been our experience as we have built common knowledge through relational expertise, which resonates with that of 'boundary spanners' managing ambiguous positions at the boundary (Ackermann et al 2011, p140). The competence has required careful listening to what really matters to people; a willingness to hear, to reformulate and to resubmit ideas, mediated through micro negotiations amongst individuals, and units; and inserting these ideas into the range of senate committees via both instrumental and reflexive documents, as appropriate. It also calls for what Landa (2008, quoted in Ackermann et al, p140) refers to as 'personal fortitude' and 'boundary skills'. It requires a long term perspective and commitment.

As Ellis reminds us, cultural historical theory supports development of pedagogy and design of learning environments at practical and organisational levels and cultural historical theory demands creative disturbance of existing practices – reconfiguration of practice implies transformation of sense-making through building common knowledge. It is inevitably a political process. In the context of the university, within a heightened political climate where some people may have seen the action research as a proxy for the larger struggle over the future direction of the university; so much more so.

This raises the question for us of the political nature of the building of common knowledge, which is a deeply democratic process. It demands sustained dialogue in order to identify collectively new understandings and new practices. In organisational environments where authoritarian leadership may prevail, building common knowledge may not be possible. Certainly moving knowledge like that generated in the action research pilots upstream will be that much more difficult. But even in democratic organisational cultures, if we accept Castells' view of organisations as "contradictory social structures enacted in conflicts and negotiations among diverse and often opposing social actors" is the building of common knowledge a 'moment' when conflicts "simply pause through temporary agreements and unstable contracts", where particular social actors achieve an advantageous position in the power struggle?

In summary, we have drawn on 'common knowledge' to explain how new understandings of flexible pedagogy can be negotiated into practices within the university through use of 'relational expertise' within a participatory research approach. We have identified the political nature of organisational interventions which require conceptual tools which acknowledge the inevitable political contestations, and have therefore found 'common knowledge', 'relational expertise' and 'relational agency' very useful. In addition, for organisational interventions to succeed we suggest that 'resourceful leadership' is essential to move common knowledge upstream. (Edwards & Thompson, 2013)

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Library and Information Sciences

Review of progress as a flexible learning and teaching (FLT) action research pilot site

Introduction

This report forms the summative review of the site's progress made towards fulfilling the objectives of the research. It should be read in conjunction with the overall 'SAQA/UWC contract for the project *Lifelong Learning and National Qualifications Frameworks, Sub-project 2: Professional learning and innovation and its implications for higher education provision*', as these provide the background, context and rationale for the study.

UWC is the only university in the Western Cape region offering undergraduate Library Science qualifications, while nationally there is a critical shortage of school and public libraries. A policy initiative to establish a library in every school in the country makes the professional training of librarians a necessity, but after-hours programmes and courses at UWC have become very limited, as is the case in the Arts Faculty where the Library and Information Sciences Department is located. This impacts on enrolments and throughputs of people seeking a professional librarianship qualification.

Confronted with the challenge of decreasing opportunities for working adults to study at UWC, the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) embarked on an action research project, the SAQA/UWC Action Research Project into flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP), to engender flexible learning and teaching provision in three pilot sites at the university. The Library and Information Science Department's Bachelor of Library and Information Studies (B LIS) degree has been one of the volunteer pilot research sites of the project which ran from the beginning of 2012 to December 2014. The three pilot sites were identified based on the following criteria:

- A willingness of the faculty and relevant departments to participate
- Pressure of increasing student numbers and/or student profiles which are likely to respond positively to flexible provision
- A suitable undergraduate programme
- Possibilities for impact of the pilot for UWC's understanding and implementation of 'flexible provision'
- Capacity to deliver an entire undergraduate degree within a flexible provision framework.

The action research had four points of reference: the **student**, the **university**, the **workplace**, and the **profession** from where the students came as the focal point for the degree. It aimed to show how lifelong learning opportunities, conceptualised and provided in flexible ways, could support innovation in learning and teaching in order to enhance successful access to and success in learning

by working people. At the same time it intended to highlight how innovative flexible provision challenges both the higher education institution (UWC) and workplaces.

Methodology for reviewing BLIS FLTP progress

The action research project carried out at the pilot sites aimed to implement and deepen FLTP, particularly in the interests of improving the learning experiences of working students. The review of the progress of these pilot sites in implementing FLTP therefore emphasised the implications for staff and for working students of the changed departmental and classroom practices.

The review followed largely a qualitative approach, but some quantitative data, e.g. of student profiles, are also presented.

Documents drawn on for the review comprised those that have been generated through the period of the action research 2012-2014, including project meeting minutes, progress reports from the pilot sites, progress reports to SAQA, course evaluations, interviews with staff and students at different times (including Catherine Wynsculley's Masters research in LIS' case), articles, presentations etc. The Education, Training and Development Policy Framework of the City of Cape Town (September 2012) was also consulted.

Interviews were held with three of the teaching staff, including the present and past chairperson of the department, to deepen understandings of the impact of the action research. The following key questions relating to the last three years of action research, informed the review and the interviews and were intended to focus on FLTP practices at the macro, meso and micro levels.

1. How have your teaching practices changed over the three years – what have been the activities, the actions, the outcomes?
2. How do these align with the principles of FLTP, as identified during the course of the broader investigation into FLTP understandings and practices at UWC?
3. How have your department's practices shifted i.e. the activities, actions, outcomes; are there new advantages/disadvantages – what are these?
4. What have been the implications of this project for your department, your classroom, yourself?
5. What have been the implications of this project for working students?
6. How have the profiles of students changed, if at all, with what implications, over the last three years?
7. What insights does this project have for understanding the workings of the NQF, lifelong learning and the relationship between the two?

In relation to question three above, the FLTP principles identified by the investigation into FLTP understandings and practices at UWC, a sub-project in the overarching SAQA/UWC FLTP research project, were:

- FLTP needs to be informed by Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and approaches, to allow for an inclusive learning environment and provide a range of opportunities and choices for learning for diverse learning needs;

- Develop a common understanding of quality FLTP;
- FLTP needs to be learner-centred, informed by an understanding of ‘who are our students?’ and ‘what kind of learners do we need for what kind of society?’;
- Ensure pedagogically oriented, quality FLTP which respects the knowledge demands of different disciplines and domains, but also builds on alternative forms of knowledge, including the knowledge embedded in learners’ life experiences;
- FLTP needs to nurture the attributes and a desire for lifelong learning;
- Promote greater use of alternative, flexible approaches to assessment within FLTP;
- Guarantee adequate resources, including a funding formula that enables flexible time to degree, underpinned by full wi-fi connectivity on campus;
- Ensure a coherent and enabling institutional system where the administrative, teaching, learning and delivery sub-systems are aligned and support each other.

Background to the B LIS action research site

The B LIS degree and context

The B LIS is a four-year undergraduate degree (previously known as the B Bibl, but which changed to B LIS in 2013) offered in the Arts Faculty at UWC, to both working and non-working students, who may register for the degree as full-time or part-time students. Full-time students attend academic activities from 8:30 until 16:10, whereas part-time students in the first year typically attend from 17:00 until 20:20. The B LIS is accredited with SAQA and recognised by the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), the professional body for librarians.

The Department of Library and Information Science (D LIS) also offers a Post Graduate Diploma (PG Dip) in Library and Information Science for working students with a suitable undergraduate degree. This is presented flexibly after hours and on Saturdays.

The B LIS, being a four-year undergraduate degree, comprises 53% professional course content - with Library Science and Information Science as the two professional majors - and 46% elective courses from the Arts Faculty. However, only the first year B LIS modules are available on the after-hours timetable, with second, third and fourth year courses timetabled during the morning for both full-time and part-time students. This has been done specifically at the request of the City of Cape Town Library and Information Services (CoCT LIS), as mornings are the quietest times for working librarians whereas the late afternoon/evenings and Saturday mornings, when after-hours classes for working students are typically held, are their busiest times.

The LIB111 semester course comprises two classes per week complemented by a weekly tutorial. The course content provides an overview of the development of writing, the alphabet, libraries, different types of information agencies and the link to mass media and publishing. LIB111 is also available as an elective to BA students who may or may not be interested in pursuing librarianship as a profession or career. These students typically exit after the first year, or after doing LIB121, another first-year service course offered to Arts Faculty and Education Faculty students.

A significant limitation of the B LIS for part-time students is the very few courses available after-hours as possible electives or specialist majors. A lecturer explained that most of the after-hours programmes in the Faculty of Arts had closed, despite vehement objections from the D LIS. For example, only courses in Psychology, Political Science, Theology and certain languages were being offered when the action research study commenced and, it seems that pressures on departmental resources are causing even Psychology to withdraw its after-hours programme. This has forced the majority of B LIS working students to enrol as full-time students, so that they can benefit from a wider selection of subjects. However, subject choice was restricted even for full-time B LIS students (for example, History was not an option), which was compounded by timetable clashes, and so requests were made to broaden the choice of electives for B LIS students. These negotiations are ongoing but some requests have been granted and students can now choose a course from the Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) Faculty, such as Political Studies or Information Systems, without having MoUs having to be in place, but they may only do so if they meet the entrance criteria for the course (e.g. mathematics criteria) and subject to timetabling compatibility. It was stated that it is possible for B LIS students to do certain BA courses through UNISA up to the second year, subject to existing MoUs between the two academies, but it seems that this is a complex issue and the B LIS majors must be taken through UWC.

Working students from second year onwards experience a tension between having to attend most of their classes during the day and the amount of study leave allowed by their employer. The CoCT Education, Training and Development Policy Framework (2010: 9-10), which was introduced as policy in 2011 for all public servants, stipulates a maximum of 25 days (paid) leave per financial year, according to their Personal Development Plan, "split on the basis of 10 days for examinations linked to formal study, 10 days for class attendance and training courses and 5 days for continued professional development workshops, conferences and seminars. Any further time required shall come from the employee's accumulated leave". The 5 days for workshops, conferences and seminars may not be used for formal study. Furthermore, CoCT "(e)mloyees who are repeating subjects shall be required to take their own leave for class attendance, examination preparation and writing. Such employees shall also be required to pay for their repeat subjects." On the face of it, it would be impossible for working students to keep within the allocated 10 days or 80 hours per annum if they were to attend all their classes during the day, especially as the 80 hours is counted from the time they clock out, and so travelling time to and from campus can impact heavily on their study leave. Therefore class attendance by CoCT librarians can be significantly affected by this policy, and they may have to dig deeply into their annual leave.

Delivery

All modules are conducted as face-to face lectures complemented with tutorials and practical sessions, according to the Arts Faculty time table. As explained, first-year part-time students can attend classes after hours, including all their electives should these be offered in the evenings. From second year all B LIS courses are held in the mornings, as a two-hour 'lecture' session and one tutorial per week which is tacked onto the lecture session, making it three hours long, to try and accommodate the working students as much as possible. As can be expected, this can lead to timetable clashes with elective courses which are timetabled during the morning, which is an

ongoing problem for all B LIS students, whether part-time or full-time, and which exacerbates attendance of their core courses.

A factor that impacts on time to completion of their degree for students working for the CoCT is that they may not do Library Science and Information Systems courses simultaneously, as their 80 hours study leave is insufficient. If these students could attend all their courses after hours, they could theoretically graduate after six years, but in reality they have to take seven to eight years because of these logistical and timetabling issues.

The D LIS has been trying to meet the needs of their working students in various flexible ways for years prior to embarking on the FLTP action research project in 2012. For example, in the fourth year students complete a capstone project and fieldwork; 80 hours in the UWC library for full-time students and 40 hours for part-time students, either in the UWC or another library. An example of how the DLIS has been involved in FLTP prior to 2012 is that the 40 hours fieldwork may be waived as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for part-time working students who have sufficient broad experience working in all areas of the library. But the RPL assessment is carried out by their line managers, and if the student do not have a good relationship with her/his line manager, this can be problematical.

In addition, before 2012, the mode of delivery in the B LIS included some technology usage, with additional reading material, references and tutorial preparation notes loaded onto the E-Teaching platform. PowerPoint presentations and workbooks were also on E-Teaching. There was no allowance for loading of assignments and access was only possible on campus through the Novell login system.

Lecturers have tried to accommodate working students flexibly for many years by making themselves available outside of timetabled classes, or sometimes even on a Saturday. This has been the case especially in subjects of a practical and hands-on nature, such as cataloguing, where the students needed further opportunities for face-to face clarification and access to resources. However, CoCT and university libraries are open on Saturdays, which makes it difficult for librarians to attend Saturday classes if they are working these shifts.

UWC introduced adopted a new open source learner management system, named Ikamva, which went through an initial set-up and trial phase in 2012/2013, alongside the existing E-Teaching platform. Ikamva is part of the Sakai consortium of developers in South Africa, comprising UNISA, WITS, UCT and North West University, and linked to the global Sakai network. The Ikamva system was rolled out towards the end of 2013, superseding the e-Teaching platform. The Department of Library and Information Science (D LIS), because of its history in trying to be flexible in assisting its working students, and because of the new CoCT 80 hour study leave rule, elected to be one of the pilot sites that migrated to Ikamva early on and to provide more blended learning, especially for working students.

Staffing

All the B LIS staff participated in the FLTP research project, and it was championed at the outset by the current and previous chairpersons of the department, as well as by the LIB111 lecturer. The present chairperson emphasised that the closure of the after-hours programmes in the Faculty of Arts instigated the FLTP action research project, as alternatives needed to be sought to provide flexible learning options for working students. In addition, having only four permanent teaching staff in the department, and because of their after-hours post-graduate teaching load, there was not the staff capacity to provide after-hours classes over the full four-year degree.

Nevertheless, in order to accommodate students whose class attendance is affected by timetable clashes and work or family responsibilities, staff willingly make themselves available during lunch times, after hours and even weekends.

The BLIS students

It was reported that the student body of the DLIS consisted largely of working adults for the B LIS degree. Historically, the B LIS has been a feeder for librarians working for the City of Cape Town Library Services (CoCT LIS), as well as for UWC and CPUT librarians, who have either not held a professional librarian qualification or who have completed the lower diploma and want to improve their qualification by studying part-time, after hours. They are therefore more mature students whereas the full-time students are normally straight from high school.

The following table shows that numbers are consistently high in the first year of the B LIS, reflecting that LIB111 and 121 are 'service' courses for other degrees, as well as possibly because these courses are offered after-hours, and are some of the few after-hours options still available. The high drop off in student numbers after first year, other than those who are not B LIS students, may be ascribed largely to the limited options for studying after hours.

MODULE	2011 Total enrol	% Pass	2012 Total enrol	% Pass	2013 Total enrol	Pass%
INF211	18	78	11	91	19	(16)* 84#
INF212	18	83	11	91	20	(17) 85
INF221	18	83	9	67	18	(18) 100
INF222	19	63	11	73	18	(16) 89
INF311	6	100	9	78	15	(11) 73
INF312	5	100	9	89	14	(12) 86
INF321	7	86	10	90	12	(11) 92
INF322	6	67	13	85	12	(10) 83
INF411	10	90	7	100	10	(10) 100
INF412	10	90	7	100	10	(9) 90
INF421	9	100	5	100	10	(10) 100
INF422	9	100	5	100	10	(10) 100
LIB111	132	59	132	68	155	(97) 63

LIB121	267	52	223	52	247	(133) 54
LIB211	21	95	17	94	16	(14) 88
LIB212	22	86	19	89	17	(17) 100
LIB221	20	75	21	86	15	(12) 80
LIB222	18	67	17	82	13	(11) 85
LIB311	15	80	15	87	18	(17) 94
LIB312	15	93	14	93	17	(15) 88
LIB321	13	69	18	56	22	(19) 86
LIB322	14	64	18	94	16	(13) 81
LIB411	9	89	12	100	8	(7) 88
LIB412	10	80	13	85	9	(7) 78
LIB422	8	100	12	100	7	(7) 100
LIB425	9	100	12	100	8	(7) 88

*= actual number passed; # = percentage (%) pass

Table 1: B LIS student enrolment per module 2011 - 2013 and percentage pass.

[Note: at the time of submitting this review report, the verified B LIS enrolment totals and pass rates for 2014 were not yet available. These will be contained in the D LIS Annual Report when this is released]

The enrolments are not disaggregated into 'full-time' and 'part-time' registrations because all classes are held during the day from second year, although this administrative distinction still obtains.

It can be seen that the pass rates for LIB111 and LIB121 are comparatively low. LIB111 was considered an 'at risk' course in 2010 as students were failing and not meeting the national benchmarks. The main reason given for this was that tutorials were held only every second week, and as soon as this was increased to one tutorial per week, the pass rate for LIB111 increased substantially. Other reasons for these low pass rates were ascribed to the following factors, which apparently have still not been able to be resolved:

- Students deregistering informally, i.e. without informing the appropriate authorities;
- Late registrations, which result in students missing the first test and which in turn affects their overall mark;
- Timetable clashes, resulting in irregular class attendance.

A lecturer and student adviser asserted in an interview in early 2015 that fewer full-time librarians were enrolling on the B LIS because of the difficulties experienced with the closing of the after-hours programmes, and with the CoCT study leave policy that has been in force since 2012. Some students have elected to forego full-time employment and work fewer hours on contract with the CoCT LIS, and fit in their work flexibly around their study timetable; some of them work their time in on Saturdays; some of them work afternoon/evening shifts; some are still working but not for the CoCT LIS; and some work at call centres, especially if they are trying to earn enough to pay off an outstanding fee debt. Being mature students, many of them have family responsibilities and this puts additional demands on their time. She also spoke of how the attitudes of managers created either affordances for study, by being lenient around time off for study leave and being open to

negotiating ways for working students to work time in; or who impeded workers' studies by adhering strictly to policy and requiring signed attendance slips for each class. The attendance in class of working librarians was often dependent on the availability of other staff to take on their duties while they were away from work, and in CoCT libraries there is no lunch break to allow time off to be worked in. Added obstacles for some working students are that they are not allowed to use the work computers or the internet for their personal use, or during their working hours, or that they cannot copy any material from their work computer onto a memory stick.

A Masters degree study conducted during the period of the action research project investigated the 'critical temporalities' of a sample of working B LIS students, to ascertain in more detail what some of these demands on their time, and other challenges, are. Leave constraints imposed by the CoCT 10 day study leave policy meant that one student had to forego attending her BA course lectures and rely on her friends to keep her up to date with what was covered in class. Another used up all her annual leave in addition to her study leave in order to succeed in her studies, which meant she had no time off during the period she was studying. Students who were working at the UWC library had much less difficulty attending classes and also did not have the stresses associated with travel and transport to attend classes. When the working students attended classes in the morning, they had to negotiate with colleagues to cover for them but felt constant guilt at having to ask favours and depend on others' good will. They did find ways of working some of their time in, but this meant less time for other necessary activities, and the women in particular experienced time as 'accelerated' in terms of trying to fit in all their duties. They would utilise time from early in the mornings – one as early as 2am to do her studies before attending to household duties and preparing for the day ahead – or late at night and weekends in order to try and keep up.

The FLTP Action Research

A proposal for BLIS as a pilot site was endorsed by the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee in June 2012. The deliverables for the project are set out below.

2012	2013	2014
Develop strategies for best ways for FLTP in BLIS, detailed operational plan,	<p>Evaluate use of Ikamva by Lib111 students in the 1st semester of 2013</p> <p>Provide description of the LIS pilot site in terms of key elements of FLTP to identify what is happening; what is inhibiting, or assisting successful flexible provision.</p> <p>Contribute to the debates on workplace engagements and where necessary, assist in drafting guidelines on this matter.</p> <p>Contribute to amendments in the Faculty of Arts Yearbook for 2014 to enable the LIS students to select from other BA subjects not currently listed as facilitating subjects for BLIS</p>	<p>To qualitatively strengthen LIS courses: increase interactivity and student motivation through TEL. LIB221; LIB222; INF221 and INF222 to be on Ikamva in the 2nd semester of 2014</p>
Redevelop LIB111 using appropriate ICTs in consultation		To enrol a LIS lecturer for the Digital Curation Masters course at UWC, so as to introduce this at UWC in 2016

with CIECT		
		To enrol 2 LIS lecturers for RDA training in the new cataloguing rules

2012 activities

Staff preparations commenced for running LIB111 in 2013 as a blended learning course. Courses were uploaded onto the Ikamva site by the end of 2012. The instability of the site was a concern and this related to the IT infrastructure in general.

The initial research focus of the B LIS was to identify the most appropriate educational and information communication technologies (ICTs) that would allow for more flexible learning provision when the LIB 111 course commenced in 2013. To assist the D LIS identify the most appropriate technologies, staff from the Centre for Innovation and Educational Technologies (CIECT) conducted a workshop for the D LIS staff on 11 September 2012. A follow-up planning session on 17 October 2012 explored the detailed steps to locate the 2013 course programme on Ikamva.

2013 activities

Students enrolled for LIB111 and the pilot commenced from March to June 2013.

Instead of course notes being available only in print, for purchase from the Arts Faculty bookshop, all course material, notices, PowerPoint presentations of lectures and other resources were loaded onto Ikamva for LIB 111 & 121.

Ikamva can be accessed from off campus and all communication with students started to take place via 'Announcements' from Ikamva, linked to their student emails, which notifies them instantly of course developments rather than relying on them to log in to their Novell accounts for fortnightly notifications as previously .

The students were required to access their course notes, tutorial instructions and guidelines online, and use these to prepare for class. During class time, concepts would be clarified and explained using power-point presentations, also available prior to the class. The online environment was set up to allow for quick searches to relevant and related materials, and students would be referred to additional reading made available on Ikamva. In this way, students could experience the interactive nature of searching for information to enrich the curriculum. For the tutorials, the worksheets were made available beforehand and students were required to work through these in the computer laboratories when appropriate.

However, there were initial problems with accessing Ikamva during classes when the system was offline. It was also not ideal to have the e-Teaching platform and Ikamva running as parallel systems, with different functions having to be accessed from the two systems, at least in the early stages. By the end of 2013 Ikamva was ready to be rolled out across the campus as the sole LMS and the e-Teaching platform was discontinued.

It was reported that some staff in the D LIS were reluctant to engage with Ikamva at first, but gradually migrated across to the new LMS once they had undergone training.

A survey was undertaken with B LIS students at the end of 2013, and again at the end of 2014, to ascertain their experiences of using Ikamva and technology for learning and teaching. The results of these surveys are discussed in the section following this one: Reflections on progress in FLTP practice.

2014 activities

From 2014 there were no more printed notes for any of the B LIS courses, as the department aimed to become 'paperless'. The INF courses were all uploaded onto Ikamva. These courses involve the use of technology and students are required to develop various forms of online media. They keep journals as a form of assessment, are involved in group-learning exercises and use technology to catalogue, search and categorise.

Since training started with Ikamva Oct 2012, a blended learning approach was experimented with. Face-to-face lectures and tutorials were held complemented by online course resources available on Ikamva; lesson plan/pages, separate folders for tutorials were created, power point presentations and worksheets were developed, 'announcements' was used and no printed notes were issued. However, for those students who wished to print out their notes, the cost of 45c per page was an issue.

A lecturer, who had been in the forefront of piloting the FLT action research in her courses, completed the Digital Curation Masters course at the University of Cape Town (UCT), so as to introduce this to the B LIS students in 2016. In addition, two lecturers enrolled for training in the new cataloguing rules.

Reflections on progress in FLT practice

Student experiences

The survey carried out among B LIS first-year students in 2013 and again in 2014 elicited some interesting information on their experiences with blended learning using Ikamva and their access to ICTs. Out of a total of 45 who responded in 2013, all indicated they were studying full time, two indicated they were working full time and five were working part time – the rest of the respondents did not answer this question. The follow up questionnaire was administered to the same cohort of students in 2014, but minus the BA/B Ed students, and of the 19 students who responded, two said they were working part time; not one indicated working full time.

Access to technology is an important consideration in FLTP, as by far the majority of all UWC students live off campus, as was the case with the survey respondents. Comparing the levels of access to technology of the 2013 and 2014 respondents, over 80% of both samples had exclusive access to a cell phone, and over 70% of them used it to access information on the web. A much greater proportion of the 2014 sample, compared to the 2013 sample, indicated exclusive access to a desktop computer (31% vs. 16%) but there was only a slight increase in the percentage who had exclusive access to a laptop. There was also a significant increase in the proportion of students who had wi-fi access, while those with no access to broadband ADSL remained more or less the same at just over 50%. These data point to the importance of considering cell phones as a possible ICT tool

for communicating with students and for various modes of blended learning, as not only are they commonly available but also cheap to use with a wi-fi connection.

Having to navigate and use two different learning management systems in 2013 was problematic for a number of students. The piloting of Ikamva did not go smoothly in the beginning and students struggled with connectivity, especially via their cell phones. They were also more familiar with the e-Teaching platform. However, those who managed to gain access to Ikamva and use the available options agreed that the navigation tools and additional tools were 'better' than those on the e-Teaching platform. Ikamva was also linked to the students' emails and this made announcements easier as students were notified via email that items were posted on the Ikamva platform – although, as one lecturer pointed out, not all students read their emails.

Three types of students were identified from the survey responses:

- Those who prefer printed notes or textbooks as a means to study and engage with the course contents;
- Those who encounter obstacles when attempting to engage with emerging technology, so prefer to use the computers on campus; and
- Those who understand the importance of using technology as a tool to access resources and are able to master course content through technology.

Manifestations of flexibility

The underlying assumption within the FLTP action research project was that online provision can be used to meet the needs of particularly working and mature students, leading to more open access to higher education and flexibility in learning and teaching provision. In the B LIS pilot site, as with the other two action research pilot sites, a blended learning and teaching approach was taken, using Ikamva and the different applications and possibilities that this afforded in additions to the timetabled face-to-face class schedules and tutorials.

The intention was that students could access materials and resources at any time, and depending on connectivity, from any place. So the 'flexibility' was manifested in the widening of choice and options for students to access appropriate resources at convenient times and to engage with these resources at a pace that was suitable to their own learning styles. This meant that all students received all materials and resources at the same time via the same medium. It was said that part-time students in particular benefited from this arrangement and that they felt they were being treated 'equally' to their full time counterparts.

In the classroom, the online environment potentially allowed immediate searches and access to sources relevant to the concepts being discussed, where there was good wifi connectivity.

However, it seems that there are still challenges with developing an interactive technology enhanced learning (TEL) environment for the B LIS. For example, it was stated that students were reluctant to use discussion forums, even when marks were assigned. The explanation was that, firstly, English is a second language for most students and they are not comfortable in using it as a language of communication, especially in first year. Secondly, the purpose of the discussion forum is to enhance social learning/ collaboration, but this is not in the culture of undergraduate students

who are new to the university environment. It does seem, however, that perseverance in this regard is necessary, to make the unfamiliar familiar, especially as it was mentioned that discussion forums work well at post-graduate levels.

Staff experiences

The challenges staff experienced with technology enhanced learning and teaching, using Ikamva, were initially logistical; such as problems with student registrations, especially late registrations, and problems with connectivity to and stability of Ikamva. However, these 'teething problems' had all been resolved by the end of the project; Ikamva is stable, it can be accessed off campus and it was reported that all the D LIS design requests had been met.

Another challenge had been that the digital academic literacy (DAL) programme had been timetabled in the second semester, so that the ICT skills of many of the students were not on par from the beginning of the year even though the policy was that students must submit all work electronically in the first semester. However, DAL has since been moved to the first semester, and all students are required to take the course or take the standardised DAL test for RPL exemption. Those students who had their own computers tended to be much more comfortable using the technology, whereas those who did not – often those from more rural areas, and who registered late –lacked confidence. The lecturer explained that this latter group of students would come and ask for advice on buying a second hand computer, search the notice boards, save up and then bring it to the senior computer laboratory manager to fix and load the software.

Lecturers had all been trained in the use of Ikamva and the chairperson of the department insisted that all staff use synchronised digital diaries, as a way of facilitating their working together as a team and of achieving a paperless working environment. Lecturers reported being happy with the features Ikamva offered and were all loading their coursework onto the online learning environment. Whereas many students had preferred printed course readers at the beginning of the project, now they were all demanding digital material on Ikamva. This indicates that the challenges students experienced in 2013 and early 2014 in terms of connectivity and digital literacy have been overcome, and that they are able to use the system much more confidently and easily.

One of the lecturers told of how he was developing 'a couple' of online courses that the students could access from Ikamva to do in their own time and off campus. This will allow the contact time to be reduced, although there will still need to be some face-to-face engagement with the material. He confirmed that some of this engagement could take place through discussion groups or chat rooms and that he would try experimenting with these modes: "It is about seeing how students learn and aligning teaching with how they learn."

One of the interviewees explained that a benefit of the FLTP action research project was that it had helped D LIS teaching staff work more closely together, and they now discuss and share what they are doing much more readily. However, they still need to give each other access to their online courses, so that each can see what the other is doing. But should one of them need to fill in for another, they can be given instant access to all the material they need. Another benefit is that the folders for all previous courses are also on Ikamva, and these can provide the basis for the next

course and be used as additional resources. It is also very quick and easy to update resources, add new material, add reading lists and so on.

It was mentioned by a lecturer that an unexpected benefit of using an online learning environment was that overall contact with students improved, especially with part-time students, who had access to all the same resources as the full-time students. A better rapport had also developed between the two groups, who could now see that they were being treated the same.

The lecturer who completed the Digital Curation Course reflected that an unexpected benefit of this training was how it had shifted her understanding of learning and teaching with technology. In her changed role as a learner, she had gained new insights into her teaching and what her students must experience with Ikamva, and this has sensitised her to their needs and challenges. It has made her realise how essential it is that they receive the correct and sufficient training beforehand if they are to interact with the technology meaningfully, and made her think about how to involve students in learning in different ways:

Technology can offer things but also cripple. It made me think about what and why I am doing things, and in the classroom I have to put something extra that technology cannot provide. I became acutely aware that technology can be an aide, but cannot replace, and the two need to complement each other.

Implications for FLTP

Implementing a blended learning and teaching approach, although it does have the potential for flexibility and in making learning much more accessible to a diverse group of people, including working and mature students, is nevertheless a complex and time-consuming process, requiring comprehensive training of staff and students alike.

In the beginning, some staff were more reluctant than others to avail themselves of the necessary training by the CIECT, but their confidence has grown with time and practice. As one said: "I have overcome my fear of technology" - they are all now using the new Ikamva LMS for learning and teaching. The leadership and motivation of the chairperson of the department towards developing a 'paperless' environment has played a significant role in driving the use of technology, as has the other 'champion' of FLTP in the department who has been at the forefront of embedding the new technologies in her courses. However, it was mentioned that there was still progress to be made in developing a deeper pedagogical awareness of how emerging technologies can enhance learning and teaching.

The project has shown that making flexible learning and teaching provision work requires collaboration and teamwork, and that it has strengthened collaboration among the B LIS staff. A key outcome is reported to have been that it has shifted the way teaching staff have been thinking about teaching and learning and has made them more aware of their practice and of how to accommodate working and mature students. But finding enough time is an ongoing challenge as staff commitment

to the profession, to their students, their heavy teaching load and the pressure to publish leave little room for collaboration in course development.

Another challenge is that making learning materials and resources available online does not mean all students will use it, as some students still attend class not having read what is freely available online. However, it must be recognised that students may not have access to a computer at work, and may have limited access at home because of the cost of internet connectivity. It was argued that the static content on Ikamva could be extended to include more interactive learning materials and self-learning exercises, and that this might incentivise students to use the online resources more. A related problem was that the computer labs allocated to B LIS only seated 17 students, which made it impossible for larger classes to take place in these venues. Subsequently, however, larger venues have been made available and are now being used.

Flexible provision is more than the design and implementation of a blended learning course, and staff of the D LIS have been trying to accommodate the students flexibly in a myriad of different ways. For undergraduate classes, staff must work within the institutional policy framework that stipulates the number of contact hours per course for classroom and tutorial use. These contact hours are linked to the timetable and venue allocation on campus. Any changes must be motivated and justified on pedagogical grounds and must satisfy policy guidelines pertaining to credit accumulation for these courses. However, as discussed, because of the numerous constraints to learning experienced by working and mature students, such as certain employment policies, family responsibilities and timetable clashes, their attendance at these classes may be irregular. A lecturer explained that, taking a typical morning's teaching, where there are two consecutive classes followed by a tutorial for that subject, some students may miss the first period because of a timetable clash and only attend the second period, or may come for the first period and leave for the second. She then uses the third period to consult with students who missed either of the other periods. Also, if exercises or practical work have been set for the third period, many of the working students will leave to go back to work and complete the exercises in their own time. The drawback of this is that these students may miss out on discussions and opportunities for interactive learning with their peers, but it was suggested that carefully constructed online discussion groups may be able to compensate for this. This lecturer also showed how she had made additional time slots available to accommodate students from all her courses, including fourth year, who have attendance problems. So for both lecturer and students, this is a complex 'dance' around all the obstacles and restraints to accomplish their goals.

It was mentioned that this scenario has been made even more complicated for working students by the UWC rule for advanced registration, which is being strictly enforced for the B LIS. This disallows a student from, say, taking a second year subject unless they have full second-year status, which means they have to pass **all** their second majors before they can take any of these majors at third year or fourth year level. It will need to be confirmed whether this rule applies to BA subjects as well as the core B LIS subjects, as it could create logistical nightmares as well as further prolong working students' time to completion. An added concern is the five year ruling which is due to be implemented in 2016, in which certain courses will be considered out of date after five years, which may affect part-time B LIS students who take six years or more to complete. The D LIS may need to

make application on a case-by-case basis for individual students who are affected by this ruling, and it will certainly affect students who take time out of their studies to work or attend to family responsibilities and then return to complete their studies.

A key 'push' factor for continuing to offer the B LIS flexibly, other than ongoing motivation and encouragement from the DLL, is that all professional librarians need to be members of LIASA, and LIASA wants all librarians to be professionally qualified, with a SAQA-accredited degree. However, unless more flexible ways of offering the degree are found, this may become impossible for working librarians, so the D LIS needs to showcase the benefits of FLTP and to continue to develop and strengthen innovative approaches to flexible provision. A suggestion has been that if CoCT librarians find it difficult to study the B LIS at UWC, maybe the B LIS should go to them. This could require delivery of the B LIS at a central CoCT venue that is more quickly and easily accessed, saving working students travelling time and therefore meaning less time away from work. But it would need all the infrastructure required for the programme, significant incentives would need to be offered to the teaching staff and it would need to be financially viable.

An important question to consider is how blended and flexible is the B LIS programme, taking into account the other courses that students need to pass to make up the full degree? If it is to be considered a truly blended learning programme, FLTP will need to extend beyond the D LIS more widely into the Arts Faculty and even the EMS Faculty, so that B LIS students can have more realistic choices about what, when and how they study; to reduce conflicts with work policies and other demands; and to mitigate timetable clashes. However, it was pointed out that it was difficult enough to implement the FLTP changes in the D LIS through the action research project; implementing it in a whole faculty would be a considerably greater challenge.

The implication is that the NQF is not working as it was intended to, because of obstacles to progression and articulation that exist in the bureaucratic policies of universities and workplaces that prevent flexibility and exclude difference – i.e. largely working and mature students who are not able to study full time.

Conclusion

It was clear that tensions between the university timetable and workplace policies – and other life responsibilities - and is the biggest obstacle to flexible learning and teaching provision for working and mature students who want to study for a B LIS. A comment by one of the lecturers was that, without the action research project, the D LIS would have lost the battle of offering any sort of after-hours undergraduate programme for working librarians and mature students. The argument was made that neither UWC nor the CoCT is doing enough for working and mature students to succeed in their studies.

As the teaching staff have demonstrated, although the timetable may specify that a venue is booked for three consecutive periods for a class, it does not mean that the venue is needed for that time, although it is useful to have a space for students to continue working on their own or in groups. Staff should be allowed the discretion to experiment with the notion of contact hours for both classroom sessions and tutorials, for example setting a practical project, or conducting a field trip, or

an assessment. Some teaching staff have become more creative in their development of interactive, blended learning courses that do not require as much contact time, but need to consider ways and means of ensuring students' engagement with the content, innovative ways of assessing this engagement and meaningful ways to assess success. Such initiatives could bring about more flexibility for the staff, students and the institution and this is where working and mature students could especially benefit.

Political Studies

Review of progress as a flexible learning and teaching (FLT) action research pilot site

Introduction

This report forms the summative review of the site's progress made towards fulfilling the objectives of the research. It should be read in conjunction with the overall 'SAQA/UWC contract for the project *Lifelong Learning and National Qualifications Frameworks*, Sub-project 2: *Professional learning and innovation and its implications for higher education provision*', as these provide the background, context and rationale for the study.

Confronted with the challenge of decreasing opportunities for working adults to study at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) embarked on an action research project, the SAQA/UWC Action Research Project into flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP), to engender flexible learning and teaching provision in three pilot sites at the university. The Political Studies Department's undergraduate degree has been one of the volunteer pilot research sites of the project which has run from April 2012 to December 2014.

The selection of the three pilot sites was based on the following criteria:

- A willingness of the faculty and relevant departments to participate;
- Pressure of increasing student numbers and/or student profiles which are likely to respond positively to flexible provision;
- A suitable undergraduate programme;
- Possibilities for impact of the pilot for UWC's understanding and implementation of 'flexible provision';
- Capacity for possibly being able to deliver an entire undergraduate degree within a flexible provision framework.

The action research had four points of reference: the **student**, the **university**, the **workplace**, and the **profession** from where the students came or the focal point for the degree. It aimed to show how lifelong learning opportunities, conceptualised and provided in flexible ways, could support innovation in learning and teaching in order to enhance successful access and success to learning by working people. At the same time it intended to highlight how innovative flexible provision challenges both the higher education institution (UWC) and workplaces.

The Dept of Political Studies appeared to offer a spectrum of challenges and opportunities for flexible learning and teaching in the main areas of provision: access, curriculum, and delivery. Research in this pilot site aimed to investigate how affordances and hindrances to flexible provision could best be understood in a micro environment, where there were possibilities for interaction with students, lecturers and workplace management.

Methodology for reviewing Political Studies FLTP progress

The action research project carried out at the pilot sites aimed to implement and deepen FLTP, particularly in the interests of improving the learning experiences of working students. The review of the progress of these pilot sites in implementing FLTP therefore emphasised the implications for staff and for working students of the changed departmental and classroom practices.

The review followed largely a qualitative approach, but some quantitative data, e.g. of student profiles, are also presented.

Documents drawn on for the review comprised those that have been generated through the period of the action research 2012-2014, including project meeting minutes, progress reports from the pilot sites, progress reports to SAQA, course evaluations, interviews with staff and students at different times, presentations etc. In addition an interview was conducted with the Head of the Political Sciences Department to deepen understandings of the impact of the action research.

Background to the Political Studies action research site

Context and Political Studies courses

The Political Studies Dept is located in the Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences (EMS) and most EMS degrees allow for students to continue taking Political Studies courses into second and third year. For the most part, Political Studies serves students studying for the B Admin degree offered by the Public Administration Dept in EMS; Political Studies first and second year courses are compulsory for B Admin students and they can take it as a major in their third year. However, it is no longer possible for B Admin students to take Political Studies as a dual major with Public Administration, because Gov 132 has become a semester course merging both Political Studies and Public Admin components into a single credit unit. The Political Studies Dept is contesting this reduction of flexible opportunities for career pathing and is exploring ways to reinstate the dual major option.

Political Studies courses are also 'service' courses to other faculties such as Arts and Law. Arts students may major in Political Studies but Law students are only allowed to take first year courses (known as 'terminal courses' for these students). The department runs a full undergraduate and postgraduate programme, and students may register full time or part time for the undergraduate programme.

Following an institutional review in 2011, the department moved from term-based courses in second and third year to semester-based courses. The Political Studies programme is conceptualised into four sub-disciplines: political philosophy/ theory; international relations and international political economy; South African politics; and comparative politics and area studies. There is also a strong focus on research methodology. The following courses are now offered in the undergraduate programme:

POL 131 Introduction to Political Studies and International Relations
GOV 132 South African Politics and Government
POL 231 South Africa in Comparative Context
POL 232 International Political Dynamics

POL 331 Political Theory
POL 332 Research Methodology

A selection of courses across all three years participated in the action research project.

Delivery

Classes for full-time students are held during the day time from 8h00 to 17h00. These comprise three one-hour classes and one compulsory tutorial per week in the first year. Part-time students attend one two and a half hour evening session per week, from 17h00 to 19h30, which includes tutorial time, or weekend sessions if this is an option.

Student-centred teaching and learning and the use of ICTs in teaching was introduced in 2010 and 2011, which provided fertile ground for implementing the action research project. The department's purpose was, on the one hand, to develop students' ICT skills, improve competency levels and student retention and throughput and, on the other hand, to provide for effective articulation between the learning outcomes and graduate attributes. When this action research commenced in 2012, some of the teaching staff were utilising the then e-Teaching platform as a resource for loading additional learning material, including PowerPoint presentations. In addition, communication with students was taking place through their GroupWise email accounts, which they needed to check at least twice a week through the UWC website. A drawback of this was that students missed notices if they did not log in to their email accounts regularly.

At this time, the form of delivery for both full-time and part-time students was face-to-face teaching, supplemented with digital material available on the e-Teaching platform, and one tutorial a week comprising exercises, assignments and for ongoing assessment. The delivery format therefore appeared to follow conventional norms of lectures and tutorials which are held at fixed times, with limited opportunities for alternative modes of access to learning for students. However, the head of the department (HoD) emphasised that the Political Studies Department has always had a philosophy of interactive teaching practice, and of providing contemporary and real world examples to illustrate conceptual issues, to encourage maximum student engagement in learning. Their student-centred approach to learning and teaching involves regular exposure to real life debates, engagement with politicians and critical engagement with current political issues, such as Marikana, that are relevant to students' lives.

The initial technical challenges experienced by both staff and students included access to suitable venues with functional equipment, reliable access to online services and the capacity building of staff and students. These challenges were all overcome during the action research project and venues big enough to accommodate increasingly large classes were found.

Staffing

In 2012, the Department only had three full-time staff members and all other staff were on contract. This left the Department in a very vulnerable position as contract staffing was dependant on annual budget negotiations and allocations. By 2014, the permanent posts and staff had grown to six, with an additional two administrative staff.

The Political Studies students

There are high numbers of first year enrolments, which is in the nature of a service course. But there was a concern that Political Studies had become a 'soft option' for B Admin students who did not meet the minimum maths requirements for other, more quantitative course options, putting additional pressure on numbers in first year. In addition, lecturers reported a lack of interest from these students, and that they may regard it as a mere filler course. A strategic change, in 2013, was to cap the first year full-time enrolments at 350, so as to make the numbers more manageable. Nevertheless, despite this move, the enrolment rate for 2013 and 2014 remains above 350 as can be seen in tables 1 and 2 below. As the HoD explained, this is an administrative challenge:

The enrolment rate is a problem because Law students registered early pushing the numbers up. We then had to accommodate B Admin students for whom the course is compulsory. ... Apparently they can't block online registration by programme, otherwise everyone is blocWe are looking at ways to deal with this. (Per. comm. 06/03/2015)

The HoD reported that the number of Law students in first year is supposed to be restricted to 30, but that in 2015 80 Law students have enrolled. As a result, a significant number of Arts students have had to be turned away who may have wished to major in Political Studies.

The numbers of second and third year students are uncapped.

Table 1: Student enrolment per module 2011 - 2013; study status and percentage pass.
Data drawn from class lists.

MODULE	2011	FT*	PT*	Pass(%)	2012	FT	PT	Pass (%)	2013	FT	PT	Pass (%)
POL 131	420	392	28	68%	421	385	36	86%	403	393	10	89%
POL/GOV132	465	407	58	84%	525	469	56	88%	358	323	35	85%
POL 211	119	109	10	91%	181	164	17	93%	198	178	20	95%
POL 213	149	136	13	71%	190	175	15	69%	220	196	24	84%
POL 221	144	128	16	90%	180	162	18	87%	189	170	19	99%
POL 224	138	123	15	90%	178	160	18	95%	170	151	19	95%
POL 311	57	54	3	91%	62	59	3	91%	75	67	8	100%
POL 312	52	51	1	100%	74	72	2	96%	80	74	6	88%
POL 321	56	54	2	90%	66	64	2	98%	76	69	7	100%
POL 322	59	57	2	94%	61	60	1	89%	78	71	7	100%

(*FT = Full-time; PT = Part-time.)

Table 2: 2014 Student enrolment per module, reflecting semesterisation of all courses.

MODULE	2014	FT	PT	Total nos. qualified to sit exam	Pass (%)
POL 131	485	427	58	401	96%
GOV 132	332	298	34	328	70%
POL 231	214	192	22	191	90%
POL 232	210	186	24	166	69%
POL 331	108	96	12	100	98%
POL 332	117	107	10	116	100%

This report will not comment on the pass rates as these were not interrogated for the review, except to say that the 2014 pass rates for GOV 132 and POL 232 are uncharacteristically low and it may be of benefit to investigate the possible reasons, especially as significant numbers of students also failed to qualify to even sit these final exams.

What is of interest is the low numbers of students registered as 'part-time' across the four-year period, especially in second and third year, although these numbers are encouragingly higher for 2014. It would be worth tracking future enrolments to see if these increased numbers are sustained in 2015 and beyond, as an indication of more people needing an alternative to the largely day-time, face-to-face model of delivery that prevails.

Despite the comparatively low numbers of after-hours students in second and third year, it was emphasised that the reality is that several full-time (day) students also attend the after-hours classes, as many full-time students are working. It was suggested that many working students may register as full-time students so that they can graduate sooner, but attend classes after hours where they can. This boosts the numbers of students attending after-hours classes, although these numbers are still small and are a departmental concern. The exact numbers of full-time students attending after hours is not known as class attendance is not compulsory and so no registers are kept; attendance of tutorials is compulsory for full-time students.

The full-time students generally come straight from high school into the university and the part-time students tend to be older, working adults. The part-time (after-hours) students were said to be more motivated, with most working or having worked in government structures and, having this contextual knowledge, they were able to engage more deeply with the course content and current issues. It also meant they could cover the material more efficiently in the short class time available, compared to the much longer class time for full-time students. They were said to participate more than their full-time counterparts but were less reliable handing in assignments and assessment tasks. As explained by a lecturer, this could be due to struggling to balance their studies with their other responsibilities, leading to poor attendance, especially of tutorials, and difficulties in getting their assignments and assessments completed on time.

The FLT Action Research

The EMS Teaching and Learning (T&L) Committee approved the proposal for Political Studies as a pilot site for the FLT action research project in 2012. The contractual agreement between the DLL and Political Studies set out the deliverables for the project as follows:

2012	2013	2014
Develop strategies to define the best approaches for FLTP at first, second and third-year levels	Continuation of 2012	Review 2014 Pol St modules, focusing on the transition to semesterisation of courses and the transition to Ikamva
Facilitate interactions and discussions with the Public Admin Department, which co-teaches certain courses		Monitor and evaluate course interventions/developments
Monitor and evaluate course interventions/development		

The process of working towards these deliverables is briefly addressed in the paragraphs following, and thereafter the implications of the for the workplace, staff, students and the university are

2012 Activities

The Department of Political Studies was one of the first to move from the e-Teaching platform to the new learner management system (LMS) Ikamva. The migration was, facilitated by a team from the Centre for Innovation and Educational Communication Technologies (CIECT) who worked closely with Political Studies lecturers.

Between July and November 2012, Political Studies curricula and courses 131, 231 and 311 were uploaded onto Ikamva, and an online environment was created for these courses. Plans for more blended learning curricula, modes of delivery and assessment, and programme monitoring plans, were developed. The HoD explained that it had always been her goal to have an interactive online learning and teaching environment, and that Ikamva was a powerful platform through which to achieve this, moving beyond simple one-way communication.

One of the reasons given for moving to Ikamva was to enable large classes to be managed more efficiently on the new LMS, to improve the quality of the programme and to provide ways for students to access and engage with course material so that they were not “left behind”. In addition, the goal was to provide support particularly for the after-hours students. The efficiencies offered by Ikamva make it possible to communicate with large numbers of students quickly and easily and to streamline administrative processes; such as automatically uploading students onto a course once they have registered, and connecting them to the online learning environment, which helps with more effective management of classes. Ultimately, this was said to make for a better learning experience for the student.

2013 Activities

At the beginning of 2013 staff and tutors were trained in setting up and navigating Ikamva course sites. Also, the students were trained in how to use Ikamva in February, at the beginning of the academic year. Initially, there were problems with the stability of Ikamva and with the IT infrastructure, but all of these ‘teething problems’ had been sorted out by the end of the project; the Information and Communication Services (ICS) department was praised for incorporating all the suggestions made by Political Studies’ staff.

An online course environment was created for all undergraduate courses and course material was updated regularly; announcements alerted students when new material was uploaded. Readings and introductory material were made available online and included hyperlinks directly to learning guides, articles, you-tube video clips, podcasts, and other e-resources. The course sites were reportedly easy to navigate and information was easy to find. Students accessed the sites regularly and user activities were reported to be high. Students were required to submit assignments via the site and this helped to resolve problems around the submission of hard copies.

The Political Studies Department had used a blended learning approach for some time prior to the action research project through the e-Teaching platform, where course material and audio recordings of lectures were uploaded. However, the head of the Political Studies Department reported that Ikamva allowed for more creativity in creating a blended learning environment. A good relationship had been developed with the subject librarian, who had been invited to contribute to the development of the courses and could see all the uploaded files and announcements. She had played a crucial role in uploading relevant resources onto the course sites and assisting students with additional materials and sources. An online MCQ assessment was set up for second year students and this is reported to have worked quite well. At the third year level, all lectures were video recorded and were made available to both part-time and full-time students on DVD.

The HoD reported that there had been no resistance from staff in migrating to Ikamva, but it required hard work and they were constrained by time, so that there was unevenness in their use of Ikamva at this stage. Reworking the courses for Ikamva was easier for some staff members who have been busy with the technology over a long period and were more adept with it than others who had to still attend the relevant training. Another layer of complexity was that the semesterisation of all term-based courses, following the 2011 review process, required the courses to be extensively reconceptualised into coherent themes, restructured and creatively merged. Overall, these processes were felt to have significantly improved the process of teaching and learning, despite the challenges faced.

Regarding student experiences of these changes, it was reported that the first year students were introduced to the Ikamva site and its use during a normal lecture period, not in a computer laboratory, which was not ideal because they could not follow the processes online. Most first year EMS students go through the foundation phase and this offers a compulsory digital academic literacy (DAL) course. It had been agreed that the Ikamva training for students would be part of the DAL course, but miscommunication and limited venues, meant that only about 50% of the students were exposed to the training. The smaller classes in second and third years allowed for training to be conducted by the lecturers. Initially, some students reported problems concerning access to Ikamva, and this resulted in the online content supplementing rather than being the core sources for engagement.

2014 Activities

Strategies for technology-enhanced learning (TEL) were further consolidated in 2014. It was emphasised that there was a trusting relationship between the HOD and staff of the department and that a collective spirit and practice of work were experienced at operational level. The focus for 2014 was outlined as follows:

- The optimal use of Ikamva;
- Using Turnitin to deal with plagiarism;
- Continuing a student-centred approach;
- Embedding graduate attributes;
- Tutorial management, including introducing peer mentoring;
- Appointing an after-hours tutor for first years;
- A smooth transition to semester-based courses;
- Continuing to build capacity of teaching staff.

Many of these goals were achieved but some, like setting up online tutorial groups, are still to be realised. Reflections on the project overall are discussed in the next section of the review.

Reflections on progress in FLT practice

It was asserted that, despite the considerable gains made, the changes to more flexible modes of learning and teaching provision had not been as extensive as originally hoped within the time frame. Challenges in implementing their goals were perceived not to come from limitations in Ikamva, but because of time constraints and the labour-intensive nature of providing an optimal TEL environment for their students, which needs to be reviewed continuously. As the HoD pointed out, a three-month lead-in time is needed to think through and set up a quality, interactive blended learning programme, which is not possible with current staff capacity. Political Studies is a small department which has experienced significant undergraduate and postgraduate growth over a very short period of time, aggravating capacity limitations. Although at the beginning of 2015 their staffing had increased from three to six permanent staff, capacity of teaching staff was reported to remain a challenge. Once two of these staff returned from maternity leave, it was envisaged that matters should improve.

The Political Studies staff were reportedly generally happy with what Ikamva had to offer, once the early problems had been resolved. Ikamva provides a platform for a powerful interactive online environment and allows lecturers and students to engage in new and meaningful ways. However, implementation of TEL and teaching modes has been uneven, despite staff and tutor training, and there is still much progress to be made in creating a more interactive TEL environment. Features not fully utilised include discussion forums and synchronised calendars.

In particular, the department had as yet been unable to achieve its goal of integrating the tutorial system into the online changes implemented, especially for second and third-year students. It was envisaged that tutorial groups would each have their own workgroup on the course site and that tutors would be able to digitally manage their tutorial groups and communicate interactively with their students through the use of discussion forums. Tutors only have 25 students out of a first-year course of 350, and so can get to know individuals much more easily than the lecturers can and therefore should be the primary source of support when students have a problem. In addition to facilitating communication, tutors could upload materials onto their tutorial group site and use a range of tools available to make tutorials interactive. There is also the facility for students to sign up for the tutorial of their choice. However, the difficulty is slotting in training for the tutors and students at the right time, and because of tutor turnover this has to be done every year. Tutors were

trained at the beginning of 2013, but early problems with Ikamva meant that the online tutorials did not become functional. The department attempted this again in 2014, but this time with other complications, but they are determined to continue to pursue this flexible learning option.

The HoD asserted that their intentions were not to replace contact time with students, but to use Ikamva as an adjunct to learning, to help students who were struggling with English and for clarifying and revising concepts. There is a printed course reader, but not all students can afford to buy this so the digital material helps them to some extent, especially where there is overlap of material. Students are expected to prepare for class by reading up the relevant material beforehand, which is usually emailed to them by the lecturer ahead of time. The after-hours students can access all the same material as the day-time students, which helps them keep up should they miss a session or part of a session. It was explained that first and second year after-hours classes are fairly big, so these follow a more instructional format. Third year after-hours classes, on the other hand, are very small and are structured more like seminars, where the material and issues are discussed around a table, with time for some tutorial exercises.

The HoD expressed the concern that although the department's staff have always done everything they can to assist the after-hours students, even recording all the full-time classes, these students may not be gaining the same depth of understanding as the full-time students. This is because of the shorter class time, because they are tired after a day's work, and because they are not exposed to the same subject experts with their specialist knowledge – these staff already teach on both day-time undergraduate programmes and after-hours postgraduate programmes, as well as have research pressures, and are stretched to capacity. However, this shortfall is partly compensated for by these students' tendency to engage in more active learning and at a higher level than the full-time students. After-hours students have limited time to meet with lecturers to discuss issues and for them to fully reap the benefits of the online course environments, the course sites need to be fully populated and up-to-date, which requires increased staff capacity.

Key insights that Political Studies staff have gained from the action research project are, first, that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach; there need to be better feed-back loops that assess the learning process in a variety of ways, to assist students who learn in different ways. Second, FLTP requires a flexible curriculum to allow for student-centred interventions that focus on the development of graduate attributes. Third, more support – academic, ICT and personal - is needed for after-hours students in their first year, to help them adapt to the demands of study. Fourth, a team ethic, of being able to work together on a common design for the learning process and align the different courses has been very important; it has helped link teaching, assessment and support components for successful learning and teaching. Post-graduate students performed a vital teaching and support role and this could be further explored. They could be drawn more into "a community of practice – where extra working and learning occur – with support structures." (See Political Studies Department: Description of flexible provision research site, February 2014, by M Abrahams.)

Being a pilot site for DLL's project on flexible learning, as well as being a research site for the Writing Centre, has enabled the department to think deeply about their teaching and learning practices. It was emphasised that at various points, such as when they jointly evaluated their module outlines and examination papers, as well as during staff meetings and strategic planning workshops, they have grappled not only with the content to be covered but also the ways in which innovation in

teaching and assessment could offer their students the best chance of success. It was mentioned that, in particular, being able to articulate their thinking to the DLL research team and to the Writing Centre around the choices they were making helped them focus beyond operational issues.

The major benefit of the action research project was claimed to have been the way it has shifted the thinking of staff in the Political Studies Department and enabled the development of a culture of teaching and learning. The HoD emphasised that for her it has been less a substantive or qualitative shift and more a reflexive shift, making her cognisant of what she does and allowing her to reflect on her practice much more deeply than previously. It has provided the department with the opportunity to explore ideas about being student centred, and about enhancing the quality of the learning experience for students, at a more profound level than before. The staff now collaborate in developing course outlines and assessments at the beginning of each year. This is facilitated by the shared sense of values and of purpose in the department, so that there is no tension or conflicting expectations between the HoD and the teaching staff. These observations suggest that the staff share what Anne Edwards (2011) refers to as the same 'motives' that drive their practice, and that they have developed similar understandings or 'common knowledge' of what is meant by FLTP through the action research project, which has enabled them to work towards the same goals.

Implications for FLTP

At the beginning of this review it was noted that there were four points of reference for the FLTP action research project: the student, the university, the workplace and the profession.

The role of the workplace in FLTP has not been systematically researched for this pilot site because of difficulties the project encountered in engaging with the public sector, where many of the working students who are trying to gain a professional qualification are employed. However, given that a substantial number of students doing the B Admin are working in local government, there is the potential for much greater engagement with these employers.

Nevertheless, interviews with a small group of first-year after-hours students that were carried out in 2013 revealed that students may experience tensions between their places of work and their studies that can be extremely stressful. For example, on the one hand students' studies may be funded by their employers but, on the other hand, a lack of support in the workplace may present significant obstacles to their success. The ever-present worry for these students is that should they not succeed in their studies, the funds would have to be repaid - and they would still not have a qualification. The obstacles they encounter, which they have to work around, could be inherent in workplace policies, such as not allowing staff personal use of the internet or of email, which for some is the only reliable ICT access they have for downloading course material, messages about the course and so on; or policies that stipulate very limited study leave. These workplace policies can be transformed by a genuine awareness of the extensive challenges faced by mature students embarking on further studies. Other obstacles could be deliberately created in the workplace, such as by a manager who is jealous of the study opportunity being afforded a worker.

These working students do not attend classes during the day, but after hours, even if they are registered as full-time students. In addition, other students may be engaged in temporary or contract shift employment, attending the after-hours classes when their shifts are scheduled during

the day. It is worth noting that students who are formally employed, as well as those working informally and 'non-traditional' students, all experience a multitude of competing demands and responsibilities, as well as practical challenges relating to transport, access to resources for learning and so on, that impact on their ability to access and succeed in higher education. These students need flexible alternatives for learning and teaching provision that take these factors into account.

Mark Abrahams a member of the FLTP action research team, describes the complex transitions experienced by part-time students into higher education, and the various barriers they experienced. These were situational barriers, arising out of the individual's life situation, and included issues such as learners' work commitments, domestic responsibilities, as well as problems of child care, finance and transport; and contextual barriers which included institutional and workplace practices and procedures which hindered participation. It is clear that access and success of working students is dependent on a complex web of relationships, policies and contingencies He notes:

There is an expectation that as mature learners they are more responsible, more capable, more motivated and more dedicated than full-time, younger learners. Whatever the veracity of the expectations, in reality, the mature learners must cope with more responsibilities, more demands, more pressure and more contextual concerns than their younger counterparts. They have less access to available support services, are subject to the same psychological, physiological, and sociological challenges but more often also carry the economic burden of other family members. (Abrahams 2013: 208-209)

The small numbers of students studying after hours in third year should be a concern to the public sector, as there may be many more employees who are not able to access a professional qualification, for any number of personal, work or financial reasons, and are therefore not able to add this value to their work. It was also reported that short continuing professional development courses and diploma qualifications are favoured over undergraduate degrees by public sector employers, as this means less time away from work as well as for financial reasons. More flexible forms of undergraduate learning and teaching provision could make it viable for many more working people to consider obtaining a professional degree. Finally, if flexible learning and teaching alternatives to the current systems and structures at UWC are to be addressed seriously, then staff capacity needs to be increased and staff need to be allocated sufficient time to explore and develop sound alternatives, which in turn needs sufficient resourcing and support.

One of the selection criteria for the FLT action research pilot sites was their possible capacity to undertake the flexible delivery of an entire undergraduate degree, which would be able to serve 'working' and 'non-working' students equally, with no distinction. The Department of Political Studies has shown its willingness to embark on a journey of flexible provision of its courses to serve its working students as best it can, but support and commitment would be needed from the other relevant departments and structures in the EMS faculty to work towards the goal of the flexible delivery of an undergraduate degree. Discussions have been held with EMS faculty and department heads and they have indicated interest in the possibility of offering the B Admin degree flexibly, but much work still needs to be done in this regard. Suggestions to promote this possibility have been to bring on board strategic and innovative players in the EMS Faculty, to create exemplars of FLTP that could 'go viral' and create a leading practice of blended learning.

Conclusion

The SAQA-UWC FLTP action research project, as implemented in the Department of Political Studies at UWC, has shown that a coherent departmental approach to flexible learning and teaching that addresses the needs of all its undergraduate students is possible, given an enabling context. In this case, the political will and leadership in the department, together with a collective working culture and shared values, were critical in driving the process forward. Equally important were sufficient capacity and resources, as well as ongoing support and affirmation from colleagues with complementary expertise in the university. Here, the support and shared expertise from colleagues in the DLL, the Writing Centre and the CIECT assisted Political Studies to not only venture into different, more flexible learning and teaching practices, but also stimulated a deep reflexive engagement with their practice, which has become a normalised activity.

Challenges experienced by the staff were limited capacity and insufficient time to dedicate to developing as many interactive and flexible TEL components to their courses as they would like. However, given their achievements so far, staff in the department appear strongly motivated to continue exploring and implementing flexible approaches that benefit their students, so it would seem that the action research project will leave a positive legacy.

The overarching challenges remain, first, how to broaden employers' understanding of the challenges workers face in pursuing their professional studies, which in many cases may be to the employers' advantage, and how to facilitate these students' success. The second main challenge is to shift the university's understanding of flexible learning and teaching provision beyond an artificial 'full-time'/'part-time' dichotomy, that is based on assumptions of linear pathways for learning, whereas students are not a homogenous group and the learning pathways for the majority are tortuous and often interrupted. These understandings and assumptions limit and restrict flexibility, and need to shift to open up expansive and inclusive possibilities for flexible study that allow all students – working, not working and mature students – equity of access and quality opportunities for success. Hand in hand with these shifts would need to be resources, from the workplace and the university, to support these changes and student access to these learning opportunities.

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CASE STUDY OF FLEXIBLE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROVISION IN THE MASTERS IN PUBLIC HEALTH (MPH), SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, UWC

FOREWORD

This case study report forms part of a larger SAQA-UWC research study on flexible teaching and learning provision at UWC which seeks to explore how UWC is responding meaningfully to the real circumstances of working students to enhance prospects for their professional development.

The SAQA-UWC action research project adopts a broad approach to flexible learning and teaching, that has been derived from the literature, and the indicators arising from this that have framed the data collection include:

- Flexible admissions criteria, including the recognition of prior learning;
- Flexible curriculum design, including assessment, to take into account different learning styles, different abilities and different knowledge backgrounds of students;
- Flexible delivery relating to the time, pace, place and mode of teaching and learning;
- Flexible support systems and services that cater for working and non-working students and those with disabilities.

The project is clear that flexible provision must address the collective concerns of students and workers and conceptualises flexible learning as being broader than the implied focus of the term on the *learner*; it encompasses teaching and the provision of associated services for learning success in higher education. From this viewpoint, flexible provision refers to more flexible student services and administrative systems that need to adapt to sustain educational changes that support the working realities of students. It is with the understanding that flexible learning and teaching provision inevitably challenges universities' traditional *modus operandi*, and that it is not 'business as usual' for the institution on various fronts, neither administratively nor pedagogically.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH (SOPH)

The Public Health Programme was established at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in 1993, for the purpose of strengthening education and research in public health and primary health care and to build capacity in the health services.

Public health education in South Africa at that time was concentrated in university medical faculties, as four-year post-graduate programmes for MBChB graduates who wanted to specialise in community health, and work as community health researchers or in policy development, and this is still the focus of these programmes today; they did not cater for the broad range of allied health professionals working in public health services. However, changes that were starting rapidly in the health system, where management was going to be decentralised down to what are now 52 districts,

meant that people who had been in the service for a long time, such as professional nurses, would suddenly have to manage a district or a programme like HIV, TB, or nutrition programmes, but without the necessary skills. Not only were there insufficient numbers and an inequitable distribution of competent public health personnel to address these health challenges, but also it was felt that public health should be more connected to community needs, and that separate schools for the training of such personnel should cater for this.

Discussions around these issues led to a colloquium being held at UWC in 1992 on the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to the teaching of public health in Africa, especially for personnel working as middle managers in the sector, and that this initiative should be housed at an historically black university. There were two major outcomes from the colloquium. One was the establishment in July 1992 of the first winter school for teaching short professional development courses in the field of public health. This was initiated by Dr Olive Shisana who had been seconded part-time from the MRC where she was working at the time. This was followed by a summer school at the beginning of 1993, and these block teaching courses, which initially were held under the auspices of the Western Cape Committee on Public Health Education (COPHE), have continued to run since then. The other was a strong motivation, under the leadership of Jakes Gerwel, to establish a regional school of public health in the Western Cape, based at UWC. Dr David Sanders was involved in all these initiatives, and shortly afterwards, in April 1993, he was appointed as Professor and Director of what was then called the Public Health Programme (PHP) at UWC (interview with Prof Sanders 9/10/2013).

COPHE took the lead in driving the establishment of a regional school of public health, under the chairmanship of Prof Wieland Gewers who was a deputy vice chancellor at UCT at the time and very supportive of the idea. COPHE had representation from all the higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Western Cape and the idea was that the individual institutions would retain their community and public health units, but that academics from each one of these different institutions would also have part-time, joint appointments at the regional school which was to have its headquarters at UWC. There was a lot of support for the idea of a regional school of public health, but in certain quarters there was also significant opposition to it being located at UWC as this challenged the status quo of public health education, which had been located at the historically 'white' universities in the Western Cape. So, despite having refined the proposal for over four years, and having it ratified by the senate committees of all the higher education institutions as well as the MRC, the proposal was ultimately blocked by its detractors and the regional school never materialised. Prof Sanders reflected that, had it come to pass, the regional school would have been a substantial, collaborative academic hub on the African continent, with significant depth of knowledge and expertise, unlike the smaller, separate units that exist at the Western Cape HEIs today (interview with Prof Sanders 9/10/2013).

Nevertheless, through, UWC undertook to provide an academic environment for relevant education and training, research and service-oriented courses in the field of public health and established the

Public Health Programme within the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences¹. It aimed to provide field training that is community-based and fosters community partnerships; to create a centre for innovative ideas in public health education and research that attracts international health scholars; to provide a forum for discussion and debate about ethical issues in public health, and empower communities to participate in these debates; and to cooperate with future schools of public health in South Africa, the African continent and internationally.

The Public Health Programme subsequently became the School of Public Health (SOPH) at UWC in 2000, as a result of a strong, formal motivation to the Senate Academic Planning Committee by Prof Sanders. Since then, it has collaborated increasingly with other African institutions, to address the significant challenges health practitioners experience across the continent, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

The need for such education and training has been fuelled by major shifts in post-apartheid South African health policy, from a predominantly curative-focused, hospital service system to a primary health care approach delivered through the district health system (SOPH 2011: 10). In order to develop this into a high quality, equitable and comprehensive community-based health system, health practitioners have needed to take on new roles and develop new skills at a middle management level. On the health side these encompass primary health care and public health policy and strategies in epidemiology, in health promotion and in key health programmes such as nutrition and HIV and AIDS. But public health practitioners also act in vital management roles, such as information management and managing human, financial and operational resources, for which they need the relevant skills. The SOPH contributes to such capacity development through a range of education and training programmes which are elaborated below.

In summary, the vision of the SOPH “is the optimal health of populations in developing countries, particularly in Africa” (SOPH 2011: i) and is firmly rooted in a human rights ethic. The purpose of the School is “to strengthen education and research in public health and primary health care and to build the capacity” of public health practitioners in the health services, both in South Africa and across the African continent. This is to be attained through developing knowledgeable and skilled public health policy makers and practitioners, “whose practice is based on research, (and) influenced by informed and active communities”.

2. CONTEXT OF THE MASTERS IN PUBLIC HEALTH (MPH)

2.1 The MPH course context

The SOPH has established itself, from the beginning, as a “significant and pioneering initiative in public health with a national and, increasingly, continental influence” (SOPH 2011: i), being the first

¹ Other departments located in the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences (CHS) are Human Ecology and Dietetics; Natural Medicine; Nursing; Occupational Therapy; Physiotherapy; Psychology; Sports, Recreation and Exercise Science; and Social Work.

to offer multi-disciplinary, multi-professional, multi-level postgraduate public health education and training and the first MPH degree in South Africa. Today, six South African higher education institutions are offering MPH qualifications. The SOPH views the MPH as its flagship programme and its holistic, multi-pronged approach to addressing the educational needs in public health marks it as an example of leading practice in flexible teaching and learning provision at UWC. As such, it has formed a case study for the SAQA-UWC DLL flexible learning and teaching research project.

The MPH was preceded by the MPhil, which is elaborated in 3.1 following. The short professional development courses, which continue to be held annually during winter and summer schools, have been very popular among health professionals from across the African continent and have acted as the face-to-face block teaching modules for both the MPhil and the MPH. However, the summer school sessions are now only offered to the MPH students and not as continuing education courses, to alleviate excessive administrative pressures on the staff during the summer holiday season. The SOPH also offers in-service training of practitioners in the field through commissioned continuing education courses and participatory research and service development. These continuing education courses have motivated many participants to progress further in their studies, and particularly on to the MPH. A key strength of the SOPH is the professional involvement of academic staff in a range of service-related projects in the field, ensuring that the learning programmes address priority needs in public health (SOPH 2011:10). One of these programmes, the Health Informations Systems Programme (HISP), has even become a global public health programme (interview with Prof Sanders 9/10/2013).

The teaching and learning specialist² spoke about the role of the continuing education courses, and how, when she joined the SOPH:

There was a real drive and passion to achieve what had been set out in 1994 with Olive Shisana, to turn this into a District Health-led System. We were going to turn around the apartheid centralised health system into a district health system where nurses would be managers, where people would be upgraded to a point where they could actually lead the field, where they could recognise that they had a health promotive, preventive role rather than just a curative, rehabilitative role. So it was a mindshift that we were trying to infuse into the (health) services as well as into the students who registered, and it also became the reservoir of people who wanted to do the (MPH) course.

Among the SOPH'S achievements is being designated a World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Human Resources for Health Development in 2004, which status was renewed for another four years in 2008. In 2008 it received a WHO grant for developing a MPH focusing on Health Workforce Development, in collaboration with the Eduardo Mondlane University of Mozambique, the University of Rwanda and Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. The aim of the programme was to build a "critical mass of leaders to advance sustained development of the public health workforce capacity in (the) three African countries" (SOPH 2011: 18). The programme developed a curriculum and study materials in English, French and Portuguese and used teaching methods that facilitated distance learning, such as the involvement of mentors

² Her official SOPH job title is Education Specialist, but for terminological consistency in the overarching SAQA-UWC Flexible Provision Action Research Project she is referred to here as a teaching and learning specialist.

and practice-based, distance teaching. Fifteen students from the three partner universities were selected to commence the programme in 2009 and a further WHO scholarship grant awarded in 2010 enabled three additional students, who were junior academic staff from the partner universities, to enrol on the programme so that they could develop an MPH programme in their own universities. Most of the WHO-sponsored students have since graduated from the programme and it is expected that they will all play an important role in the integration and sustainability of the project in their countries in the future.

The large numbers of applicants to the programme from other African countries over the last decade and more attests to the fact that the MPH programme is addressing the deeply felt need to deal with the huge human resource challenges in public health being experienced across the continent. The MPH degree is highly regarded not only on the African continent, but also has attracted students from India, Canada, Australia and Europe.

2.2 The students

2.2.1 Enrolment and throughput

The enrolment numbers have grown over the years, with some fluctuations, but recently these have been stabilised.

The very first intake of students on to the MPhil in 1994 was a mere 7, and from 1994 – 2000 there was a throughput of only 69 students in total. However, from 2005 to 2008 the intake of students onto the MPH programme was incrementally increased in response to student demand; from 43 in 2005 to 64 in 2007 to 87 in 2008 – a doubling of the numbers in four years. The programme was realigned with the National Qualifications Framework during this period, which resulted in the students completing the course work more quickly. However, students typically take longer than the recommended time to complete their theses and this is exacerbated when they are working and distance learning students. Thus a significant bottleneck of MPH students occurred in the system in 2009 and 2010, with 150 mini-thesis students in 2009 and 142 in 2010. Supervising this number of students was found to be unsustainable for the small number of SOPH academic staff and so the annual intake has since been cut to a more manageable number, although there is still a backlog of students completing their theses - 124 students still in the system at the end of 2012 (SOPH Programme Handbook 2013: 3). So, there were only 28 new admissions in 2010 and 24 in 2011, but this has settled at 40 for the MPH in 2012 and 41 in 2013 (interview with senior programme officer 1/08/2013).

Rigorous completion targets, on-going motivation of and support for students and a careful monitoring system have contributed to extremely high pass rates (between 88 and 95% for the coursework, depending on the module) and low attrition rates (less than 5%). The minimum completion time for the MPH is three years although some students take five or even six years, but the average completion rate with a mini-thesis is four years; 42 MPH students graduated in 2011, three *cum laude*. An analysis of the completion rates of the course work compared to of the mini-thesis has not yet been done, but there is a very low dropout rate from the mini-thesis component.

2.2.2 Age and gender

The MPH students are mature adults with family and career responsibilities. Student applications in 2010 for 2011 show that the age group of participants ranges from late twenties to late forties, with the median falling in the early to mid-thirties. Female applicants are slightly younger than male applicants. The majority of students applying and being accepted for the MPH course are women (more than 65% female compared to less than 35% male).

2.2.3 Nationality

Initially, applicants for the MPhil and continuing education courses were only from South Africa. However, students from other countries on the African continent have increased over the past years and on the MPH now greatly exceed (comprising more than 65%) the number of South African students. In 2011, 180 students from more than 20 different African countries were registered in the programme. These countries include Botswana, Cameroon, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Senegal, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

2.2.4 Educational background

The majority of accepted students are of a high academic calibre, having achieved good to excellent academic results in their previous academic studies which include BSc Hons Physiology, BSc HIV (4 years) with a Nursing Diploma, Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health, and MBChB (interview with senior programme officer 01/08/2013).

Many participants have completed additional courses after their first degree at their own initiative, for continuous and ongoing further training. These include continuing education courses, distance education courses and open education resources courses, with students aiming to broaden and deepen their practice, as well as to improve their management, public relations or office-related skills.

2.2.5 Employment status

Initial enrolments onto the MPhil comprised mainly nurses, but included environmental health officers, social workers, and a few others. Today, doctors make up a large proportion of the current MPH participants, along with nurses. The students' work environments are strongly focused on community medicine; prevention, treatment and education in the fields of HIV and AIDS; TB; and cancer and leprosy targeted at poor and underprivileged communities in Africa, and for a few, in India.

Some have won important awards in their work while others are holding posts at a senior management or senior practice level in their institutions of work (e.g. chief/principal medical officer, supervisors etc).

Most applicants have their employer's permission to study and are able to take some time off for their studies, although in reality this is seldom sufficient.

2.2.6 Students' motivations for studying the MPH

The motivation letters that students submit with their applications show a high level of commitment to improve their practice and to relieve suffering in the underprivileged communities where they are currently employed. Many have a good understanding of current shortcomings in institutional and policy-related issues where they intend to make a meaningful difference. Most of them want to move to the fields of Public Health Practice or Public Health Management to increase their understanding of and effectiveness in programme planning and implementation, monitoring and evaluation and policy, or operational research. Their aim is to increase their professional competence and to advance in their careers to senior management positions.

2.2.7 How students hear about the MPH

Students mention in their application forms that they have learned about the programme through internet research, through attending previous SOPH professional development courses or through colleagues. The programme is marketed on the SOPH website, in brochures, and through the SOPH's annual reports. SOPH staff also promote the MPH programme at conferences and workshops across the African continent and internationally.

2.3 The staff

When the Public Health Programme (PHP) was initiated in 1993, only three staff were appointed; the Director and two other academic staff. Additional staff, according to their areas of expertise, were brought in from the other Western Cape HEIs to teach collaboratively. After a few years, once the programme had become better established, the PHP had managed to raise enough external funding to employ some additional contract staff and were able to expand a little. But it was not until the late '90s that they started to generate significant project funds, mainly research funding, which allowed them to quite rapidly increase their staff complement. The tension was, and still is, to ensure that the people employed against research grants perform in terms of their obligations to the donor as well as teach on the academic programmes.

Today, the SOPH has a broad academic staff component in the arenas of public and community health, primary health care, social science and physiotherapy as well as a strong administrative staff. In addition, an adult and distance teaching and learning specialist joined the SOPH in 2002 and is responsible for developing high quality course material for all the courses. However, because of the SOPH's relatively low number of 'Full-time Equivalents' (FTEs, the indicator used in university funding formulae), it has been very difficult for them to obtain the permanent staff that they need, and as a result many of these are contract posts, funded by research or donor money. The teaching and learning specialist told how she even approached other post-graduate schools and departments, "to try and create some kind of groundswell around reconsidering FTE's differently for

postgraduates”, but to no avail (interview with teaching and learning specialist 14/10/2013). In this way, having to fundraise to employ the majority of their staff, the PHP and the SOPH have been very different from the other departments in the CHS faculty, and from the rest of the university.

3. THE MPH COURSE

3.1 Changes in the postgraduate programme and MPH

For the first few years after its establishment in 1993, the Public Health Programme (later, the SOPH) offered a taught MPhil in Public Health to all levels of health and welfare workers, as well as to those in other associated fields. The MPhil already existed as a generic degree in South Africa, which meant that there was no necessity to go through the degree registration process again but, as with all masters degrees, it could only admit applicants with relevant honours degrees, resulting in low intakes. The continuing education courses offered as three weeks of block learning during the summer and winter schools became the core of what are now the course modules, and were full semester courses. Certain additional contact sessions were held on the campus as well as in other centres, closer to where the students were working, and the students would complete their assignments during the semester. Prof Sanders recalls that, if there were some students in the Eastern Cape, a lecturer would travel to Mthatha or East London and, over a weekend, would go through the material related to that particular course. As there were only three academic staff in the Public Health Programme at UWC, most of the teaching staff for the MPhil were from the Medical Research Council, UCT and the other Western Cape HEIs (interview with Prof Sanders 9/10/2013).

By the late '90s there was a very well established MPhil and short course programme. However, students struggled with completing the mini-thesis, especially because there was such a small supervisory staff complement, and so, on the basis of review, and in order to boost enrolment and throughput rates, a multi-level postgraduate programme in public health, offered through contact and distance learning, was implemented in 2000. This programme consisted of a postgraduate certificate in public health at the first level, followed by a postgraduate diploma, and the MPhil was transformed into the Masters in Public Health (MPH). The generic MPhil was not specific to public health, whereas the MPH is a well known public health degree in the USA and is also awarded by several European universities. So the SOPH applied to have the MPH registered as a new degree in South Africa, and succeeded and, as already mentioned, UWC became the first university to offer it. The restructured and renamed MPH had a core curriculum covering a wide range of public health topics relevant to the role changes demanded by the developing district health system and it continues to be responsive to the needs of the profession and of the learners – a defining characteristic of flexible teaching and learning provision.

Candidates with bachelor's degrees – many of whom were nurses – entered at the postgraduate certificate level, which provided the professional development they needed for the demands of their new management roles. They could progress through the system to the postgraduate diploma, which provided some specialisation in different public health streams, according to their professional needs, and then on to the MPH. The Senate agreed that registered MPH students who were having difficulty in completing their mini-theses, could exit the system with a postgraduate

diploma, should they have completed the course work satisfactorily, although this was “illegal” at the time (interview with Prof Sanders 9/10/2013). In addition, the distance learning combined with the mandatory three-week block contact sessions of the MPhil were replaced with the (mostly) optional attendance of summer and winter school contact sessions, to make it more flexible, less time consuming and less costly for the health professionals. A key shift in these more flexible delivery arrangements was to develop customised text-based modules as the “lead medium for learning” (Alexander *et al* 2009: 4).

The postgraduate programme was reconfigured again in 2008, to realign with the National Qualifications Framework, resulting in the postgraduate certificate being phased out and the postgraduate diploma becoming a stand-alone degree, distinct from the MPH. The postgraduate programmes today comprise a Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health, as well as a Masters and a PhD programme. The revised MPH programme was launched in 2009 with the assistance of the WHO specifically to address the challenges of the acute human resource constraints faced by the HIV and AIDS sector of public health in sub-Saharan Africa.

The most recent change to the MPH is that it has been re-curriculated to cover a wider scope of content, and to provide more support to students in their research activities. This programme has been offered for the first time in 2013 in parallel with the previous configuration of the MPH, allowing students registered prior to 2013 to complete their programme under the previous rules (SOPH Handbook 2013).

At the faculty level, the SOPH has made a great effort to innovate in response to student needs by designing a “connective-curriculum which not only shapes learner purpose but is shaped by them” (Young 1998 in Alexander *et al* 2009: 4). This orientation has been important in the programme's impact and has been sustained by a series of ongoing internal monitoring and evaluation processes. The text-based distance learning material has become increasingly supported and supplemented by e-learning activities, to enrich and provide greater flexibility in the learning process.

3.2 The current MPH programme

3.2.1 Course structure

The MPH is offered as a blended learning programme, with distance learning supplemented by contact sessions during summer and winter School³, to accommodate the individual professional and personal circumstances of its students. The SOPH Programme Handbook (2013) explains that the programme is structured according to a coursework modular system with six compulsory, 15 credit, core modules; two 15 credit electives, which can be streamed or free-standing; and a 60 credit mini-thesis. The credit points are depicted in Table 1 below.

MODULE TYPE	MODULES	CREDITS
Core	1. Population Health and Development: A Primary Health Care Approach II	15
	2. Measuring Health & Disease - Intermediate Epidemiology	15
	3. Management Strategies for the Public Health Services II	15
	4. Health Promotion for Public Health II	15
	5a. Qualitative Research Methods, OR 5b. Quantitative Research Methods	15
	6. Health Systems Research II	15
Mini-thesis	7. Mini-thesis of 7 500 - 20 000 words	60
Electives	8. Elective 1	15
	9. Elective 2	15
Total credits		180

Table 1: Composition of the MPH curriculum and credit points for each component.

To afford students a degree of specialisation, they may take two 15-credit elective modules selected from one of SOPH's six streams⁴, or from the wide range of other electives available from SOPH. With permission from SOPH, students may take up to 30 credits at NQF Level 9 from other departments at UWC, provided these are deemed directly relevant to public health. As can be seen in Table 2 below, these electives provide a wide choice for participants in the programme and they will be expanded even further in 2014. Attendance at summer or winter school contact sessions is compulsory for a few of the elective modules, but for the most part attendance at such sessions is voluntary, although it is encouraged to allow for collaborative and deeper learning.

³ This combination of distance learning and contact sessions is essentially what is termed 'blended learning', but because many of the MPH students never attend the optional contact sessions, it is conceptualised primarily as a distance learning programme.

⁴ The streams are Health Promotion; Health Research; Health Information Systems; Health Management; Human Resources Development; and Nutrition Management.

SOPH STREAM	MODULE CHOICES	CREDITS
Health Promotion	Health Promoting Schools	15
	Alcohol Problems: A Health Promotion Approach	15
	Health Promoting Settings	15
Health Research	Monitoring and Evaluation in Health and Development Programmes	15
	Survey Methods: Designing Questionnaires	15
	Using Information for Effective Management I	15
	Qualitative Research Methods	15
	Quantitative Research Methods	15
Health Information Systems	Using Information For Effective Management I	15
	Survey Methods: Designing Questionnaires	15
	Quantitative Research Methods	15
Health Management	Using Information for Effective Management I	15
	Managing and Supporting Health Workers	15
	Using Information For Effective Management I	15
Human Resources Development	Introduction to Health Workforce Development	15
	Managing and Supporting Health Workers	15
Nutrition	Public Health Nutrition: Policy and Programming	15
	Micronutrient Malnutrition	15
	Epidemiology of Non-Communicable Diseases	15
other electives	Health and Social Change	15
	Understanding and Analysing Health Policy	15
	Epidemiology and Control of HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in the Era of Anti-retrovirals	15
	Evidence-based Human Resource Planning	15

Table 2. Alternative choices for the two elective modules in the MPH programme.

Even more options are available to students resident in Cape Town, who may select modules offered at the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at the University of Cape Town, but these are offered only through weekly contact classes.

Should students choose to specialise in one of the streams, the research for their mini-thesis would need to be located in the same area. The MPH therefore provides a very broad, flexible choice to students in constructing their own learning to suit their professional needs.

3.2.2 Content / curriculum

The use of experts in their knowledge fields as facilitators at summer and winter schools, as well as for course and materials development, has been central to producing good quality blended learning courses. Although the MPH programme content is theoretically specialised, its aim is to strengthen the practice of public health training, to enable students to apply theoretical knowledge in practice in their local situations. The curriculum is specifically set up to accommodate a multi-disciplinary group of professionals working in the health, welfare and education sectors. In line with international trends in public health training, the programme is conceptually oriented to the

contexts of lower and middle income countries and health sector reforms. It follows a primary health care approach to help students plan and implement programmes which promote health and prevent disease by learning to identify, quantify, analyse and prioritise the health problems and needs of communities for health system development. An essential element of the programme is to learn effective management skills for use at facility, district or higher levels of the health system, in the six areas of specialisation outlined above.

3.2.3 Learning and teaching delivery: pace, place, mode

While most students are employed full-time and effectively study part-time, there is the flexibility for some to choose full-time study. SOPH explains the academic demands of the programme and the time that needs to be allocated for study to students, and discourages working students from registering for more than three – or a maximum of four modules - per annum. The great majority (around 90%) tend to take on a part-time study load. There is also a full thesis MPH option for those who prefer research, rather than course work.

The SOPH model of blended education has been designed to support minimal demands for face-to-face attendance and to enable staff to reach increasing numbers of health workers at lower costs – both to students and to the university. At the same time, students can remain in their career posts, earning a living and using their own workplace contexts as the practical arena in which to implement the theoretical concepts they are learning. As one of the interviewees said: “we need to keep people in posts and not deplete the health services when we provide learning while they work. That to me is the underlying rationale for everything” (interview with teaching and learning specialist 14/10/2013). The programme is supported by pedagogical processes to enhance learning and build student confidence through expanding their skills and capacity. Extensive student support is provided on their written assignments via feedback through email, skype sessions and face to face during the mini-thesis week. More recently, students have been receiving additional support via electronic discussion groups with Google Groups and Google docs.

The modules offered at the SOPH Winter and Summer School programmes provide rich learning experiences and opportunities for the MPH students to interact with their lecturers and their peers face-to-face. As mentioned, attendance is compulsory for some of the MPH elective modules, and students who cannot attend these then have to select other modules where attendance is not a requirement. Travelling and accommodation costs and leave implications mean that very few MPH students can afford to attend both summer and winter school sessions, with the exception of local and WHO-funded students. Most prefer to come to the summer school where they can collect all their course materials and sort out any registration issues at the same time.

The teaching and learning specialist related that:

The courses were always trialed in the Winter/Summer School for a few years, so the lecturer had a fairly good - even if they were not educators - they had a fairly good pedagogical path through it. ... (there is) a tendency to popular education and a recognition that group work and role play is helpful.

And,

The other thing about the Winter/Summer School was that you were exposing yourself to the (health) services and quite high level people came to those courses, and I think that that pushed presenters to present at another level.

Nevertheless, she is passionate about ensuring that the opportunities SOPH offers for learning at a distance are as good as they can be and are not 'second best': "whatever you give has actually to exceed what you would give face to face, also particularly because distance learning carries that stigma of second best in many countries where the kids who don't perform well get pushed into distance education." For example, "in trying to reach those who can't come to winter school and summer school, some of us were putting up the daily offerings on a website so that the others could access it. It was extremely hard work" (interview with teaching and learning specialist 14/10/2013).

During 2011, a total of 317 participants attended the 17 winter school continuing education courses. However, most of them were health workers seeking short professional development courses. SOPH lecturers facilitated between one and three weeks of teaching on the courses and were assisted by guest lecturers while site visits were also fitted into the programme. The primary delivery mode for this programme remains text based.

Up until recently, the SOPH has been restrained in the use of e-learning technology and digital media innovations because many of the MPH students, especially those working in rural areas, have not had prolonged, reliable, high-quality internet access. However this is no longer the case in other African countries and the South African students tend to experience more difficulties than the others in this regard.

Two elective options were tested for web-based discussion (Google Groups), in 2008 and 2009, but were not as successful as hoped because of ICT infrastructure problems. However, this learning mode continues to be experimented with and the outcomes of using such discussions in an orientation module for postgraduate diploma students in 2010 were much more positive. Some of the benefits for this 2010 group of distance learners were reported as follows:

It was valuable in ...allowing us to get to know a little about each other through sharing photos and profiles and therefore being able to take advantage of some of the interesting experience amongst our students. It allowed students to be eased into distance mode with more support than is usual, and with a ready way to ask for help from the lecturers and peers. It created a space for the lecturer to present herself in a less formal way than through email communications and assignment comments which made asking for help easier for students. The much discussed benefits of actively learning together in groups were more than confirmed. One of the students noted that the group '...helped to create a classroom environment where we could share ideas and information' while another said the groups '...fostered a spirit of teamwork which is good in public health'. (SOPH 2011: 23)

One of the big benefits of using Google Groups was that it does not require access to the current limited bandwidth platform at UWC, and therefore increases ease of connectivity. It also allows for

“quick collective interaction”, archiving previous communications for reference and the potential to share learning resources easily. There were challenges with this pilot, such as getting all the students to learn how to use Google Groups and the increased demands on lecturers during the interactions. However, the both lecturers and students indicated that the learning benefits outweighed the difficulties (SOPH 2011: 23).

Up until fairly recently, the PHP and the SOPH that followed it were housed in prefabricated buildings adjacent to the School of Government. Teaching spaces for the winter and summer schools were negotiated with the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences and, when there were insufficient venues there, teaching took place in the prefabs. However, funding from the Atlantic Philanthropies enabled the SOPH to build a new School, which was completed in May 2009.

3.2.4 Course materials

In the late 1990s the SOPH obtained a grant from AusAid to work together with Flinders University in South Australia to develop a distance education programme in public health. This allowed some of the SOPH teaching staff to draw on the expertise of the experienced educators at Flinders which, because of the vast distances in Australia, already had a distance learning programme in public health, and to develop the six core modules for the MPH over a three-year period. It was suggested that this experience must have been quite inspiring for the SOPH teaching staff, and very important in inducting them into the pedagogy of distance and blended education.

A specialist in the development of learning materials for adult and distance education was employed in 2002 to finish writing the course materials for the MPH, working with a strong group of subject experts and the large amount of semi-worked material from the collaboration with Flinders University. Since then, she has continued to work at the SOPH to professionalise and improve the learning materials for SOPH programmes, as well as working as academic coordinator when required: “My role shifts with the needs of the school” (Interview with teaching and learning specialist 14/10/2013).

As mentioned, the MPH modules are all text-based, with the exception of one CD-based module and one e-learning module. However the SOPH continues to expand the range of learning material available on CD to support and supplement the learning texts and to create variety in learning process. This includes voice-over Powerpoint presentations, podcasts, videos and presentations from contact sessions.

There has been pressure in some quarters to make all the course material available on-line, or to send it via email for the students to print when they need it, rather than printing out thick readers and course guides for each student, which inevitably results in the SOPH overspending on its paper budget. However, research that the SOPH has conducted into the needs of their students indicates that, as very busy professional people, it is convenient for them to be able to carry the manuals around with them. Moreover, although internet connectivity is good enough for communication via email, it is generally not good enough to be able to download large files; the students do not have printers at home; and even if they could download the documents and print them at work, they

would need to do this after hours – which is often not safe, especially for women - and it could be considered an abuse of office property. It was emphasised that, as a blended learning course, the students need comprehensive texts but the budget does not take this into account. Despite their overspend on the budget allocated for paper every year, it was argued that this was insignificant in terms of the total SOPH annual budget.

The teaching and learning specialist consults with the lecturers on their particular modules and works with the content and resources that they provide to put together pedagogically sound and ‘professional-looking’ learner guides and readers. Her expertise has been vital to the success of the blended learning MPH model because, in the words of the senior programme officer at the SOPH, “to be able to write materials is very different from a teacher standing in front of a class and getting it across to students” (interview with the senior programme officer, 01/08/2013). The guides contain an introduction to the module, “interactive” tasks and activities, mini-assignments, the assessments and associated assessment criteria, guidelines for the readings and so on, and are written in a very accessible manner. This is described as a “guided didactic conversation written in the voice of a peer as much as possible” (Alexander *et al* 2009:4). It provides a path through the learning material, pointing the learner to a dvd, a resource reading, or an internet reading, and it contains a glossary at the back. “It is written like a learning session, like a tutorial. Holmberg’s tutorial in print is what we’re doing. It’s the voice of the teacher taking you through a tutorial” (interview with teaching and learning specialist 14/10/2013).

The learning material for each module is set up as study sessions containing “integrated topical and academic questions (and) problem-solving tasks and activities” which are supported by and cross-referenced to the relevant literature contained in the reading compilations, requiring the students to read extensively. This pedagogical model, where students are required “to integrate and apply new concepts, models, strategies and approaches to common practical problems frequently encountered by managers and practitioners in the health services”, facilitates the application of these theoretical concepts and models to the students’ immediate work situations and their deeper understanding of health issues (Alexander *et al* 2009:4).

The course files are reviewed annually, and core modules are regularly revised. Readings are updated on the basis of review and assignments are changed or ‘refreshed’ every year. All twenty modules and their course materials are moderated every second year.

With a view to becoming more innovative in the use of different learning and teaching media and to sharing quality learning materials with other institutions, the SOPH is increasingly participating in the Open Education Resources (OER) movement, in line with UWC’s Open Courseware policy. For example, it has collaborated with the University of Michigan’s Medical School to develop a number of case studies for the MPH learning materials. Staff are also developing online problem-based learning materials, as well as online guidelines and key words for case studies, and a repository of case studies on the Mendeley referencing system to enhance learning in public health. In addition, the SOPH has lodged a number of their blended learning modules as OERs on the UWC Free Courseware site, enabling SOPH students to access other modules than those for which they have registered, to broaden their knowledge or to prepare themselves for studying higher NQF-level

modules. This website has received thousands of 'hits', providing positive exposure to the work of the SOPH and to UWC.

3.2.5 Assessment

None of the coursework for the MPH is assessed through formal examinations. Instead, students submit formative and summative assignments by email to a specific, designated email address. The senior programme officer explained that she needs to be flexible in her dealings with the students and take their personal circumstances and commitments into account, so that should students have difficulty in meeting the deadlines for submitting assignments, for instance, she would assist them in drawing up a work plan for completing the work and even negotiate alternative submission dates with them, so that they can meet the course requirements.

3.3 Academic and institutional support

3.3.1 Support for the programme

In order to enhance flexible learning and teaching provision at UWC, Prof Sanders responded that:

It (the university) needs to be a lot more supportive. It's taken the university a long time to recognise this as innovative. You know we had fingers wagged at us for a number of years, including from the faculty, because we weren't doing the traditional thing. They couldn't understand. ... (We have) this great building and we have students producing research, but we've had to develop a unique model to survive, but also to expand.

Other than a few key posts being institutionally funded, the PHP and subsequently the SOPH have had to rely a great deal on external research funding, donor support and funding partnerships in order to expand their programmes.

One of the other major obstacles has been the institutional administrative systems which do not support programmes that are not mainstream in their delivery. So, although the MPH is essentially a distance education course, it cannot be offered as a distance learning course; firstly because UWC is not a distance learning institution, but secondly because the state subsidy for distance education is different. Therefore it has had to be registered as a blended learning course (interview with Prof Sanders 9/10/2013). Moreover, because UWC is not familiar with the needs and the rhythms of distance education, the PHP/SOPH has had to set up their own, parallel administrative systems. This meant raising funds to employ the staff to run them, at least initially, as a few of these administrative staff are now on the university payroll. This is elaborated in 4.2 below.

3.3.2 Support for the students

Administrative support

An extensive effort is made by the SOPH to provide for the needs of their distant, part-time students. Information, guidance and counselling services are available to them before and during the MPH

programme at SOPH, largely by the administration staff. The senior programme officer, in particular, plays a critically important role in this regard, setting very high standards for student support and following them up constantly to ensure they submit their assignments or just to keep in touch.

SOPH provides a detailed information letter on application that clearly outlines the details of the programme and includes the following: purpose of the programme; accreditation details; admission requirements; duration of the programme; composition of the curriculum; and promotion procedures. The application form also discourages working students from registering for more than three to four modules per annum, to ensure a good pass rate and reduce attrition.

Academic support

To compensate for the lack of contact time in the distance learning model, greater emphasis is given to integrating academic support in the texts and assignments through incorporating contextually relevant problem-solving tasks. Regular detailed, relevant and prompt email feedback and support is given by the lecturers on the students' assignments and drafts as well as telephone support where possible. Turnaround time for giving feedback on draft assignments is set at two weeks for up to thirty assignments, but for more than this another lecturer is assigned. This is necessary because of the extremely detailed written feedback that is given, as part of the learning support.

The summer school contact sessions at the beginning of each year allow students to interact with their lecturers and each other on the introductory and some core modules. As the senior programme officer explained:

We prefer them to come, because then they'd meet and they would get orientated. They meet other students because otherwise they feel so distant from one another, whereas if they come together for summer school and it's the first time they're around, they at least meet the other students and they feel a connection with the university as well. ...They learn from each other because if they don't know...it's not always that the lecturers are going to make them understand, so they try and help each other. (Interview conducted 01/01/2013)

In recognition of the different nature of the academic qualifications of the multi-disciplinary MPH cohorts, a substantial academic skills development component is built into the learning materials, further academic development sessions are held at both summer and winter schools and the student handbook assists students in developing the capabilities for planning their studies, in time management and in academic reading and discourse abilities (Alexander *et al* 2009: 5).

An annual mini-thesis week provides additional active support to students in the writing of their theses. During 2011 a total of 24 students attended this session. Individual support and research supervision is considerable, with every student receiving substantial written and skype feedback on their thesis drafts from their supervisors before completion. In addition, writing coaches are available for students working on their mini-theses through the UWC Postgraduate Enrolment and Throughput (PET) Programme, which is said to be effective even for those distance learners (Alexander *et al* 2009: 5).

Teaching methods are continuously reviewed for improvement, taking into account the feedback received from students on their learning needs. Academic support media include Google Docs and Google discussion groups, Open Education Resources (OER), the use of case studies via the Mendeley referencing system, podcasts and voice-over PowerPoint presentations which are integrated into the course. These voice-overs, leading the learner through the slides, is considered very important for blended learning as slides on their own are “difficult to internalise”. The teaching and learning specialist emphasised the importance of thorough, advanced planning when setting up Google Group discussion sessions, as part of the structured academic support for students, for them to be of benefit:

I probably got it right in Introducing Public Health – to map it all out in advance. Three intensive eight to ten day interactions and support in between, so that the student knows it's limited, the lecturer knows it's limited. The lecturer can plan that they're there and the student can plan that they are connected. If you don't do that in our situation, it's fuzzy. The lecturer feels guilty all the time, and then starts to put it at a distance from them. In distance learning, the biggest problem is that you don't see the people in front of you and you can disconnect. The most urgent thing, which is probably admin or some more nitty gritty thing that you can feel you've achieved, will come to the fore and your marking or your support gets left on the back burner.

3.3.3 Staff capacity and enhancement

A vital component in the creation and sustainability of the MPH programme has been the champion of public health at UWC, (now Emeritus) Professor David Sanders, who continues to champion public health with a strong, holistic, community development focus, and has drawn like-minded staff around him to further develop the programme. “There was strong leadership around education, around the purpose of the project, around the values of the project, and that was strongly held by a whole lot of senior leadership” (at the SOPH), and: “David is an educator, and it is critical that your leadership has the capacity to hold a vision, project that vision” (interview with teaching and learning specialist 14/10/2013).

The SOPH has engaged in a number of strategies and events to strengthen the skills and capacity of its teaching staff, specifically towards enhanced e-learning. However, lecturers have been slow in experimenting with e-learning modalities as a way of providing additional support for their students, although difficulties with using the present UWC e-learning platform was cited as an aggravating factor in this. A key innovation was the appointment of the teaching and learning specialist who has provided the impetus for the way learning materials are developed for the MPH programme. She provides ongoing training to SOPH lecturers in teaching pedagogies and she continues to guide staff with their materials development. When Prof Sanders retired as Director in 2009 he was succeeded by Professor Helen Schneider, who has a long history of involvement in the education of health personnel, signalling the emphasis that is given to educational expertise in the SOPH.

Curriculum review meetings are held across the year, and staff regularly attend national and international conferences and workshops related to their curricula. Staff have attended workshops on how to give quality written feedback on assignments and on academic writing, and are actively

involved in writing for publication. Lecturers also attend the interdisciplinary 'Health Research Ethics in the Curriculum' workshops, and a completely new module of this course was developed and taught at the Winter School in 2010/11.

4. ADMINISTRATION

4.1 Admissions criteria and RPL

As per university policy, admission to the MPH degree course stipulates a relevant four- year degree plus three or more years of experience in a relevant field. However, the small number of places available on the programme necessitates very strict selection and competition is high, with people re-applying in subsequent years should they not be accepted.

Part of the current selection procedure, to limit the numbers of participants to a manageable number, requires the students to analyse two pieces of selected text from academic papers dealing with current topics in the field of public health, with a focus on community approaches. Their answers are assessed according to a set of criteria determined by the SOPH and students are selected based on their scores, their letters of motivation and the number of places available on the course.

UWC Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policies allow eligible students to apply for their relevant academic and work experience to be recognised as equivalent to an Honours qualification in terms of the skills, knowledge and competence they have acquired over a period of time. Application is directly through an application form, which requires an officially certified set of documents to provide proof of previous, successful academic achievement, including conference attendance and academic publications. A check list is provided on the application form to help students compile the correct set of documents. In addition, prospective students are required to provide a letter of motivation stating their current roles as well as their future goals after completing the MPH. Students have to send proof of their payment of a nominal fee of US\$ 20 which covers registration and to have their applications assessed for RPL entry to the course. However, the approval process can be extremely lengthy and, in reality, the restricted number of places available on the programme means that RPL applicants are competing against students who are academically well qualified for selection. Nevertheless, at least five students have gained access to the MPH via RPL over the years and, despite generally taking longer to complete than the other students, one of these is graduating in 2014.

4.2 Registration

As mentioned, the administrative systems of a university structured around contact and residential education do not align with the structures and requirements of blended learning programmes , and therefore the SOPH has, from the inception of the PHP, set up its own, parallel systems and structures and appointed its own administrative staff. One fulltime staff member deals with mediating registration issues and obtaining clearance certificates for non-South African students⁵

⁵ Despite being distance learners, these clearance certificates are still required

whereas another is more involved with administering the courses itself; communicating regularly with students, ensuring they submit their assignments, providing personal support and negotiating flexible arrangements for students to submit their assignments when 'life gets in the way' of their intentions.

To facilitate a common purpose for the SOPH, ensuring problems are rapidly addressed and mutual solutions found, the administration offices are situated in close proximity to the teaching and research units. Regular strategic and review meetings are held with both administrative and research/teaching staff to create common ground for proposed solutions.

However, the students still need to be registered on the main university system which presents obstacles every year. In particular, the late notification of what the course fees will be and the slow pace of registration processes by UWC's central student administration has been a persistent problem for the MPH students, especially for those from other African countries. This means that MPH students are often not yet registered by the time the summer school starts. Without a student number they are denied access to certain campus facilities, such as the library and computer laboratory, and need to obtain special permission to do so. SOPH administrators have been seeking ways to rectify this situation since 2007 but, despite some cooperation by individuals and some improvements in the system, a systemic solution has not yet been achieved.

4.3 Financial challenges

4.3.1 Tuition fees

The blended learning model has greatly enhanced affordability for students and the MPH is currently one of the most affordable Masters courses in its field, with the benefit for participants with African citizenship that they pay the same low fees as South African students. However, students have to pay the full fee upfront at the beginning of each year which is problematical for many of them. Moreover, most of them are paying their own way, without bursary or employer/state assistance, and it is difficult for them to plan financially when UWC only makes course fees known at the end of the year for the following year.

Should students not complete the MPH within the required time period of three years, they incur additional penalties for re-registration. Other course expenses are the purchase of selected publications; their own communication and information technology expenses; and the often very high travel, insurance and accommodation costs for attending summer or winter school contact sessions, although these sessions are offered at no extra fees to MPH students. Those students who attend the summer school sessions receive all their course materials and texts for the year, whereas those who are unable to attend incur substantial costs for courier delivery of these course materials - as much as R1 800 to Nigeria. It is essential to use courier services as the national postal systems in many parts of Africa are unreliable or restricted to urban areas, and in this way at least the students receive the material and in time. So, despite the low fees, these additional expenses coupled with currency exchange rate fluctuations can mean that the total financial cost of study to students from countries such as Malawi and Zimbabwe can exclude them.

4.3.2 Financial assistance and bursaries

The application forms provide four funding categories which include: 100% self funded; 100% employer funded; 100% bursary funded; or 50/50 self and employer. However, there are very few bursary options available and limited financial support from employers in the public health sector, so that the vast majority of students are funded by themselves or their families. This is exacerbated in many cases by limited opportunities to leave the workplace for study purposes.

The exception to this has been the 15 students, who were funded through a joint programme with the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the countries of Ethiopia, Rwanda and Mozambique whose universities formed part of a research programme consortium (National University of Rwanda, Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique and Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia).

4.3.3 Financial policies

At present, while some national education and UWC policies are conducive to and promote flexible adult learning principles, a policy challenge is the emphasis on 'full-time study' by most funding bodies for students to qualify for financial assistance.

As already mentioned, the PHP/SOPH has raised a substantial amount of money over the years, through external sources, to cover the major proportion of its own teaching and operating costs.

5. CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF THE SOPH BLENDED LEARNING MODEL

5.1 Factors that facilitate or constrain learning and delivery

It was reported that the mindset that distance learning is 'second best' has been a challenge, both in the institution more broadly as well as among some of the 'newer' people in the SOPH who have not been imbued in the ethos of the school. However, everything is done by the staff at the SOPH to ensure that what the distant learning students receive "exceeds" what students would experience in face-to-face teaching.

The summer and winter school courses provide an orientation to the modules and are not simply the taught version of the text-based materials:

When they teach the summer school courses they're picking out a skeleton for the student. You're not taking them to a point where they start modules; you are giving them the key framework for it and you are also trying to pick on anything that might be difficult and you are trying to anticipate what they have to do with all of this (interview with teaching and learning specialist 14/10/2013).

In this way these sessions facilitate and enrich learning, but students who cannot attend can still engage with the learning materials successfully.

An advantage of the blended learning model has been to facilitate the integration of new conceptual knowledge with practice, through assignments and projects in which students apply new approaches to familiar problems. The care with which the course materials are developed for blended learning, the learner-centred pedagogy and the level of support for the learners are all deliberately aimed at facilitating their learning. Additional technology is used to support learning and the text-based course materials where possible, but this is done taking the circumstances of the learners into account and their and SOPH's access to reliable technology. The SOPH did have a site that worked very effectively for them: "but they've (UWC) just retracted that. They did it through SAKAI, on the Ikamva site, but it is too expensive so they've pulled it back in". Therefore the wish was expressed that they have access to an e-learning platform off campus, out of the bandwidth of UWC, but they would need to fund this themselves.

Student testimonies have confirmed that much of the curriculum holds relevance in their day-to-day working environments. A significant feature in these testimonies is the feeling of personal empowerment. For example, a provincial health programme manager in South Africa spoke of how his increased knowledge has empowered him: "... public health gives you that confidence ... I was a shy person, I couldn't face a crowd. It's because of the knowledge I (have now, that I) think I am a better person ..." (Alexander *et al* 2009: 5).

The use of English as the language of learning has not been without its problems as, for most students, this is not their first language. In particular, for programme participants from Mozambique, language and other academic barriers have made it difficult for them to become fully engaged with the programme and to derive the greatest benefit from it. This is said to be in large part due to the underdevelopment of Mozambique, with its particular historical context of colonialism followed by a protracted and highly destructive civil war. Not much is known of the language experiences of the students from Rwanda and Ethiopia, whose countries were likewise engaged in complicated and violent, post-colonial, civil disruptions. For the South African students, learning in English and previous educational disadvantage may also hinder their learning. However, staff at the SOPH are very sensitive to these issues and use student feedback to address the developmental role that the programme can play in the careers of health professionals.

5.2 Challenges regarding students

Academic dishonesty in writing assignments is a concern, as with any blended education or residential programme. Without getting to know students and their capabilities well, there is the possibility that students may be fraudulently aided in their assignments by a third party. Therefore systems need to be closely monitored and strengthened if necessary to prevent this from occurring

As mentioned, although academic support is available through summer and winter school programmes, the cost of attending these sessions – transport, accommodation and having to take leave from work – is beyond the means of many of the students, especially for those from outside of South Africa. Where students have had to choose between attending a summer or a winter school, they have tended to prefer attending the summer school sessions. However, the senior programme

officer asserted that not attending these sessions did not seem to impact negatively on their success, although this has yet to be properly researched.

The senior programme officer who has dealt extensively with the MPH students for many years said that the programme was not an easy choice for them, and that they needed to have the right mindset to be able to cope with blended learning. Being mature students, being motivated and determined is part of that essential mindset: "These are people who are working for years; they have a goal in mind; they have a family to see to; they have a job to do; and they need that MPH in order to help their communities and get ahead."

5.3 Challenges for staff

The SOPH has had to battle many institutional barriers. As the teaching and learning specialist said:

(I)n distance terms, we were always the exception, wanting to do something different and therefore we were quite isolated;

and

(Y)ou have a problem if you are a small operation in a predominantly face to face university - you're a 'cottage industry', is the term that was used - and you're fighting a whole lot of other processes that have nothing to do with you (interview with teaching and learning specialist 14/10/2013).

As a result, and despite their own administrative systems that have been set up to cater for their students' needs, UWC's administrative systems still present obstacles for the SOPH programmes, which ultimately affect the students. This has led to even the registrar being approached to try and facilitate processes matters.

Just as the right mindset is important for the students to succeed, so, according to the senior programme officer, the administrative staff needed to have the right attitudes and be supportive of their students:

I think it's also very important on this side, as admin people, our mindsets must be right. Our attitudes must be right, because if we're going to get, as a university, involved with this kind of learning, the attitudes need to be different. You know, 'don't email me, I'm busy now'; not that kind of attitude. ... You have to be more patient and you have to have a good attitude.

Limited staff capacity at the SOPH prevents them from expanding beyond their current MPH intake. As they have experienced to their cost, large student loads are not sustainable, especially with regards to thesis supervision, and student numbers for the MPH programme have been reduced to a more manageable intake. While the increase in student numbers, especially from outside South Africa, has been a major strength of the programme, it has also placed significant strain on the existing administrative capacity and student support systems, including tutor-markers who need more coordination, training and moderation of their work. In particular, the workload involved in supervising mini-theses has increased considerably over the years, as supervising research via

blended learning demands more intensive input from supervisors. This arises almost innately from the challenge of separation between the student and supervisor in blended education, making feedback more time-consuming.

The development of the course materials is an enormous challenge, so these are only completely reworked every five to seven years, or as curricula demand. The teaching and learning specialist explained that, as she is not a subject expert in the field of public health, she relies on the input of academics who need to have read widely and be experts in their fields, but that this is not always the case with the newer staff. A major logistical challenge is getting all the course materials completed and printed by 31 January every year for the summer school students and to ensure they reach the non-attendees on time. However, most of the contributors only start to give her material in early December, once their other commitments are over. This is largely because materials development is not recognised as part of teaching at UWC, and therefore time is not specifically allocated for this, despite an observation at a recent education conference, that 80% of a lecturers' work should be seen as materials development. This can put overwhelming pressure on her and her assistants. If all the course material are not all ready on time – for courses in the second semester – they have to be sent later. However, not only is this said to be disruptive for the students, but also if these are emailed they will need to print them themselves or, if they are couriered, they need to pay these costs for a second time. Another issue is that because “everything is written down” for blended learning, it is very exposed: “you can see the problems”. This tends to lead to “overkill” in developing the materials and in providing the readings (interview with teaching and learning specialist 14/10/2013).

5.4 Collaboration and partnerships

The SOPH has explored a number of strategies to meet some of its challenges, such as strengthening partnerships with more public health training and research institutions to increase the pool of teaching, supervising and mentoring assistance for students. Such partnerships could provide access platforms for internet connectivity; settings for assessments and assignments; and providing bursaries or scholarships. Further interaction with employer bodies could be undertaken to engage their financial support, at least for the adjunct expenses to their staff of studying at a distance, and for further exploration of the e-learning medium as access to the relevant technology improves.

The SOPH collaborates in a multi-dimensional fashion with a large number of players in the public health field, broadening and deepening its approach to flexible teaching and learning provision. It has established a wide range of links and partnerships across the African continent as well as with international research institutions, universities and funding bodies. Within South Africa, the SOPH has established an extensive range of partnerships and collaborations with other universities (eg. the Universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch and the Cape Peninsula university of Technology), with faculties, departments and units on UWC campus, with national and provincial health departments, with NGOs, and with local funding bodies such as the South African Medical Research Council and the National Research Foundation.

UWC's Open Courseware policy has enabled the sharing of courseware between universities and for the SOPH to load up modules of its own courses onto the Free Courseware platform for others to access.

6. FLEXIBLE LEARNING AND TEACHING PROVISION IN THE SOPH

The SOPH can be said to be a site of leading practice in flexible learning and teaching provision for a number of reasons, which have been extensively described. Its ethos of providing the best opportunities for flexible learning that it can are embedded in its vision and its mission, and its major achievements in this regard have been its multi-disciplinary approach to strengthening education and research into public health and its multi-level post-graduate blended learning programmes. The rationale for being a blended learning programme has been to accommodate working professionals in the field of public health, and the fact that many MPH students succeed in their studies without ever setting foot on the UWC campus is an indication of how effective the blended learning model is - although it must be said that it might be less appropriate for undergraduate students.

Other indicators of flexible provision are, firstly, that it is strongly student-centred, offering both academic and personal support. Because of the challenges for students of learning in isolation, the programme has been designed to be scaffolded and supported with case studies and formative assessments, and students are carefully guided through the exercises and texts with professionally designed course materials that are user friendly. The material is also contextually rich and community based, with a strong emphasis on solving familiar problems using different approaches and tools. The use of technology is being used more and more to support the text-based material, and online discussion fora provide valuable contact and opportunities for co-learning among students and between lecturers and students.

Secondly, the curriculum offers a wide choice of elective modules, allowing some degree of specialisation or a broader approach to the topic of public health. The pace of the qualification is geared towards working professionals; they may study at an accelerated pace should their circumstances permit or extend their time to completion. In this way the pace of the programme is very flexible, with some students reported as still being in the system after five and even six years, although fee penalties apply after the third year of registration.

Thirdly, there is a certain degree of flexibility in the submission of assignments, with administrative staff supporting the students and negotiating realistic time frames with them, according to their circumstances, where possible.

A fourth important indicator of flexibility is the opportunity for registered MPH students to attend contact sessions, where these are offered, at summer or winter school programmes. However, although these are offered free to MPH students, the cost of travel and accommodation is beyond the means of many of them, especially for those from other African countries.

An important reason, that relates to UWC's enabling Open Courseware Policy, is that the SOPH collaborates widely with other universities, both nationally and internationally, in the development

of open education resources and has placed many of these on the Free Courseware platform with the intention of making learning as freely and flexibly available as possible. Prof Sanders reported that a policy decision was taken in 2008 “to allow other public institutions in the global south, to use our stuff free of charge.”

We’ve assisted the University of Namibia, and Makerere in Uganda, to set up distance learning in public health, and now through the WHO grant we are helping Eduardo Mondlane in Mozambique, the National University of Rwanda and Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia to set up distance learning programmes. Eduardo Mondlane in Mozambique is using our materials as they are, they’re just translating them into Portuguese. The others are using some of our materials. I’m helping a new school of public health in Nepal using our materials - we’re working with two institutions in India using our materials. So we are spreading. The university doesn’t get any money from this; we think it enhances the stature of the university. (interview with Prof Sanders 9/10/2013)

There are many more instances of flexible provision in the MPH, but these are the most prominent and relate to flexibility in delivery of the course - pace, place and mode of delivery; flexibility in curriculum design and assessment; and flexible support systems and services. Flexible admissions criteria are reported on earlier in the report and will not be repeated here.

7. CONCLUSION

The MPH as a blended learning programme is addressing the keenly felt need for an accessible higher education course for working public health professionals. It is addressing the needs of health service practitioners and managers through a teaching mode that matches their personal, economic and academic needs, and this responsiveness is an essential element for the success of public health education programmes. In the context of the crisis of human resources for health in Africa, training programmes for public health professionals must not disrupt the provision of health services. Blended approaches that enable distance learning, such as those offered at the SOPH, are able to do this.

The demands of the distance learner are unique, as is the learning environment required. While blended learning provides greater flexibility for working health professionals, sound blended learning pedagogies need to be embedded in the learning materials, which need to be contextually relevant to the learners, and academic and personal support for the learners is essential, all of which are being provided by the SOPH.

However, there are major organisational challenges for the delivery of a blended learning programme in a university structured around contact and residential training and so alternative administrative systems and structures have had to be developed in the school to try and alleviate some of these problems. Certain challenges are ongoing, chief among them being institutional attitudes and mindsets, and financial constraints for SOPH and the MPH students.

All pioneering initiatives are driven by a champion, and the SOPH is no exception with Prof David Sanders being the instigator and driving force behind where it is today. Many barriers and obstacles have had to be overcome along the way and many more will continue to arise, but the outcome is that the SOPH is providing much-needed quality, flexible education and capacity building to professionals in the field of public health across the African continent, and can be considered to be a site of leading practice in flexible learning and teaching provision at UWC.

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Appendix A

Interviews

Interviewee	Date
MPH Senior Programme Officer	1 August 2013
Prof David Sanders, retired Director of the SOPH	9 October 2013
SOPH Teaching and learning specialist	14 October 2013