Foreword

Higher education, like all other aspects of life, has been dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic, and higher education institutions have had to respond in ways that were unimagined a few years ago. It is a testimony to the resilience and adaptability of our institutions, staff and students that forms of learning and teaching, and other aspects of higher education activity could continue during this time, albeit in very different ways.

However, we should not fool ourselves that it has been plain sailing. The contextual differences in our higher education system, still very much characterized by our historical legacy of unequal development, and by the continuing triple challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment, have been even more sharply brought into focus by the Pandemic.

The experience of staff and students has not been uniform across the system and the ability to engage effectively in remote, online and/or blended forms of learning and teaching has been moderated by access to suitable devices, access to data, connectivity to the internet and by living conditions, including food security and physical spaces in which to work, and by the efficacy of the range of learning and teaching processes that were implemented during this time.

Universities transitioned more or less effectively and efficiently into emergency remote and multimodal learning and teaching modalities, with the more resourced universities, and those which had already started introducing blended learning and teaching being able to transition more speedily. Staff and student experiences of support, and of capacity development for the new modalities of learning and teaching varied. The robustness of university Learning Management Systems was also severely tested, and many institutions were required to invest more resources into beefing up their systems to enable their effective use.

These and other themes come through strongly in the Staff Experience of, and Perspectives on Teaching and Learning and its Future Survey Report (SEP-TLF), which complements an earlier survey on Students' Access to, and Use of Learning Materials (SAULM) that provided student perspectives on their experiences.

Surveys such as the SEP-TLF and the SAULM are very important at this time as they provide one way of capturing the voices of students and staff in the system, and they add to the growing body of knowledge and resources on higher education experiences during the Pandemic. The findings of the surveys also provide valuable insights into learning and teaching futures. The knowledge generated through these surveys will therefore be a very useful contribution to the Reconceptualising Learning and Teaching (RELATE) Project, led by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The RELATE Project recognizes, as its starting point, that learning and teaching has been irrevocably impacted by recent experiences, and that it needs to be responsive to other social dynamics at play, including rapid advances in technology, a swiftly evolving world of work, environmental sustainability, climate change, and the need to contribute more strongly to social justice imperatives. The RELATE Project seeks to understand what the future of learning and teaching is and should be for higher education in South Africa and how can this future be achieved in ways that are equitable and beneficial for the country and its people.

The CHE and Universities South Africa are very proud to have partnered with the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the University of the Free State in undertaking this survey. We would like to thank Professor Francois Strydom, Dr Sonja Loots and their team for the commitment to this project and for the high-quality report that has been produced. We trust that it will enjoy wide readership in the sector, generate much engagement and debate, and help to stimulate further thinking and knowledge generation in this area.
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Executive Summary

Teaching is the one profession that creates all other professions.
- Unknown

This quotation highlights the vital role that academic staff, as teachers, play in society. Acknowledging the experiences and voices of university teachers, leaders, and managers, particularly during one of the most difficult times in global higher education, is an important part of planning a way forward. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the move of the higher education sector to emergency remote teaching and learning, for which very few institutions, staff or students were prepared. This resulted in rapid pedagogical adaptations pertaining to content, outcomes, assessments, and modes of teaching. The sporadic, but short-lived spells of remote teaching, learning and assessments brought on by the #MustFall campaign, did not prepare the system for the scale of changes and adaptations that would be required to navigate responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In recognition of the critical role played by academic staff in response to the pandemic, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), Universities South Africa (USAf) and the University of the Free State (UFS) initiated the study entitled CHE-USAf-UFS Staff Experience of, and Perspectives on Teaching and Learning and its Future (SEP-TLF). The study aims to contribute to the emerging and necessary conversations on staff experiences and determine a way forward to guide policy and practice. The study complements the Students’ Access to and Use of Learning Materials (SAULM) survey,1 which was a collaboration between the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the UFS in 2020 and aimed to learn from the experiences of students and guide the responsiveness of the sector.

Informed by academic staff development perspectives and pragmatically developed in consultation with the sector, the SEP-TLF survey focuses on:

i. **Staff experiences during the pandemic** (including a focus on their wellbeing, the support needed, the training staff are receiving, their resilience and adaptability, their access to resources, and the successes and challenges they are experiencing regarding their own work as well as that of their students);

ii. **The future of teaching and learning** (including reflections on the longer-term impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning practices, as well as quality, and what training and support would need to accompany any changes); and

iii. **To ask academic leaders and/or managers** to reflect on their experiences, their staff’s experiences, and how the institution could best support them as we head towards a ‘new normal.’

Twenty-four public higher education institutions participated in the study. Ultimately, 1,851 academic staff completed the survey, which represents around 3.4% of the sector. Despite the efforts of each individual institution, along with external prompts from USAf, and extending the administration timeframe, participation remained low. This could be attributed to a sense of general fatigue reflected in the participants’ responses. The triangulation of data sources within and beyond the SEP-TLF (e.g. with the SAULM data) does, however, bring with it a rich understanding of the experiences of academic staff which could contribute to the sector’s planning for the future direction of teaching and learning policy and practice.

Remote teaching and learning experiences

The remote teaching and learning experiences of academic staff are characterised by increased workloads, balancing home and work life during the national lockdowns, concerns about students’ ability to participate in their studies, the quality and integrity of learning that is taking place, and at times feeling overwhelmed and unsupported. While it

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seems that most institutions responded by providing a range of guiding and training opportunities, there has been less focus on the wellbeing of staff, and less engagement with such support when made available. On the positive side, many university teachers and leaders/managers pointed out how technology has enabled them to learn new skills and ways of doing things, be more creative in teaching and learning practices, and reflect on what aspects of these they would want to integrate into their teaching and learning practices beyond the emergency remote response. Some of the key findings on the remote teaching and learning experiences of academic staff include:

- National infrastructure challenges contribute significantly to academic staff's ability to access reliable electricity, with half indicating loadshedding as a barrier to reliable access.
- 7% (or 119 respondents) were not provided with desktop computers, laptops, smartphones or tablets to use during remote teaching and learning.
- Three quarters of respondents (76%) indicated that they have reliable access to the Internet when working off-campus.
- 70% of respondents' access to the Internet off-campus is completely self-funded, with 25% sharing financial responsibility with their institutions, and 5% indicating that their institutions are funding their off-campus internet access.
- Less than 60% of respondents are aware of the institutional provision which aims to help them support their students during remote teaching and learning. For those who had access to such support, only 49% made use of these resources.
- Students’ lack of participation and engagement cause great frustration among academic staff, particularly because they are intently aware of their students’ challenges with connectivity, devices, and the cost of data.
- Another key concern is the lack of academic integrity and the quality of learning taking place.
- Comments on the quality of teaching and learning in general during the remote response reflect a range of different perspectives, with many feeling confident that the quality is sufficient or even better, considering the circumstances, while others feel that there has been a significant decline in quality, particularly because of the amount of academic dishonesty that is encountered.
- Lastly, the impact of the pandemic and the remote teaching and learning experience on academic staff's wellbeing has been significant, with more than half indicating that they were experiencing burnout.

The future of teaching and learning

The majority of respondents are in favour of a more blended teaching and learning environment beyond the remote emergency teaching and learning response. Some of the key findings include:

- Almost all respondents agree that devices and data for staff are necessary. Around three quarters (74%) further agree that digital skills training for students and university teachers, as well as laptops for students, are important.
- Around 60% of respondents feel that a data-driven approach, including tracking systems, using institutional data to monitor module success rates, measuring the impact of learning, and monitoring students’ engagement, is very important.
- Almost 90% of respondents believe that students are more likely to skip contact sessions when recorded lectures are available. However, providing students with recordings of lectures or presentations is regarded as one of the most popular forms of technology that teachers will keep after remote teaching and learning as this allows classroom spaces to be used differently.
- 66% of university teachers and 71% of academic leaders/managers indicate that measures to ensure the quality of assessments would be very important, and 61% of respondents feel that an assessment proctoring system is a very important aspect of a successful blended teaching and learning environment. This indicates the need for alternative methods of assuring quality in assessments.
- Some quality measures that respondents consider successful include quality assurance guidelines or policies, and peer review procedures. Only a quarter of respondents feel that it is very important for university teachers to have some form of formal qualification in blended teaching and learning.
• Teaching and learning philosophies might have been challenged by the remote teaching and learning response. For some, this means making significant mind-shifts about what teaching and learning entails and to what extent technology shapes the meaning of these processes, unlearning much of what comes naturally after many years of experience, and reconsidering the role of students in the learning process.
• A persistent concern is assessment, and work needs to be done to reflect on how assessment in more blended contexts could be enhanced.
• Many respondents commented on the irreplaceability of face-to-face learning experiences, while acknowledging the potential of technology to enhance teaching and learning practices.
• Some positive experiences respondents have had during remote teaching and learning might become permanent features in the ‘new normal’, include stronger collaborative relationships, being more considerate of the challenges their students face and the inequalities that further burden many of them, using different blended teaching and learning techniques or resources such as videos, voice-over slides, podcasts, flipped classrooms, and generally moving towards using more soft copies and a wider range of learning materials.
• Training needs or support structures that will assist a more blended teaching and learning environment include helping all staff to understand teaching and learning within blended environments and how technology can be used to enhance these processes, making appropriate digital skills training available to students and staff, providing administrative and instructional design support, training teachers to optimally make use of the data repositories of Learning Management Systems to track participation and progress, providing assessment training and guidance, and enabling the professional development of staff in blended pedagogies.

Academic leaders’ perspectives

Academic leaders and managers report higher levels of remote teaching- and learning-related challenges that affect their own and their staff’s wellbeing. In particular, these challenges include an increased workload, balancing home and work life, and experiencing burnout. Other key findings related to academic leaders and managers include:

• Although leaders and managers mainly rely on data or information they receive from their respective faculties or departments to inform decisions and planning, the SEP-TLF data does not provide a strong sense that data in general plays a big role in guiding decisions or planning.
• Academic leaders and managers also specifically foreground a focus on quality assurance of blended teaching, learning, and assessment, and require policy guidance to ensure quality in such environments.
• The main challenges experienced by leaders or managers include feeling out-of-touch with their staff, experiencing frustrations with staff and the institution, and generally feeling a loss of control.
• Some positive experiences that are likely to become part of future operations include more efficient meetings when online, better records of administrative processes and teaching and learning practices. In addition, new digital skills have been learnt including the use of more technology in daily operational processes, and the move towards more flexible working environments (but this would require training on how to manage the wellbeing of staff in such flexible environments).

Recommendations

The SEP-TLF findings conclude with two broad recommendations for the sector: 1) creating an enabling environment for blended teaching; and learning; and 2) enhancing quality assurance. Both of these have a set of implications for the sector.

Creating an enabling environment for blended learning

1. Recognising the importance of resources and infrastructure. A blended teaching and learning environment cannot be successful if all students and staff do not have access to reliable devices, network, internet connectivity, and adequate data to access resources and participate in educational activities. The importance
of resources and infrastructure was also listed as a key priority area in response to the student-focused SAULM survey.

2. **Reimagining the integration of pedagogy and technology.** Communities of practice are needed to develop a body of knowledge on best practices in blended teaching and learning, as well as the philosophy of teaching and learning in more technology-enabled spaces.

3. **Reconceptualising academic staff development interventions.** Providing staff with relevant training and development opportunities, and finding ways to encourage participation in such activities are important aspects to create a well-functioning blended teaching and learning environment.

4. **Empowering academic leaders.** Providing appropriate support to academic staff, e.g. by instructional designers and other specialty support staff, will also help leaders and managers with their tasks. In addition, leaders and managers, who are willing to adapt to more flexible management styles, also need support to guide them in balancing the requirements of the institution with the needs of the staff they are responsible for.

5. **Fast-tracking sharing on safeguarding academic integrity.** One of the most alarming findings in this study concerns the integrity of academic assessments as a result of cheating and illicit collaborations that have overwhelmed student disciplinary structures at institutions. It is vital to create opportunities and platforms to share solutions for these challenges to ensure the quality of teaching and learning.

6. **The need for national and institutional guidance to ensure quality.** Many of the challenges experienced by respondents could be addressed by a uniformed approach to quality in blended teaching and learning. This should include a collective, conceptual understanding of different forms of technology-enhanced teaching and learning practices, what the best practices are for each of these, which assessment methods work best, and so forth. Such policies or guidelines should also align with discussions within the sector on how teaching and learning could be reimagined in the South African context.

7. **Enabling digital skills and the ethical use of digital resources.** As mentioned in the SAULM survey report that recommended national prioritisation and a collective approach to develop digital skills, the SEP-TLF findings also point to the need for a unified response to the digital skills gaps among staff and students. The ability to ethically engage with digital resources is another prime concern of academic staff, which also corresponds to the SAULM findings; students also indicated the need to know how to ethically engage with learning materials, thus implying that at least some of these behaviours are due to ignorance.

8. **Reconsidering recognition for quality teaching and learning.** The development of a blended teaching and learning environment that will enable institutions and staff to compete as global teaching and learning providers will require scholarship and considerable investment of staff time. By recognising and encouraging staff to publish on teaching and learning innovation academic staff could be able to reclaim some of the research/teaching balance.

9. **Embracing analytics to enable understanding and quality.** A stronger emphasis on nurturing an evidence-based culture and making sure that academic staff have access to relevant, timeous and useful data could be an important contributor to the success of a more blended teaching and learning environment.

There is little doubt that a 'new normal' will include more technology in teaching and learning practices. However, concerns about quality, academic integrity, and the potential of technology to widen existing inequalities are valid and need to be addressed before the 'new normal' can begin. Thus, any considerations that will guide the sector towards a more blended teaching and learning environment will have to start with considering how technology can enhance education for all, not just some. Further, the benefits of technology inclusion, such as making the sector more resilient to disruptions, having a stronger evidence trail to track participation and nudge students towards support structures, and better preparing students for the world of work they will be joining, are nullified if participants in blended teaching and learning cannot fully engage with the educational environment, or when quality assurance measures are absent or lacking.
Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the higher education sector to move to emergency remote teaching and learning, for which very few institutions, staff or students were prepared. This implied rapid pedagogical adaptations pertaining to content, outcomes, assessments, and modes of teaching. In addition to the increased workload to adapt teaching and learning, many staff had to take on different responsibilities at home, while also dealing with the uncertainties and anxieties stemming directly from the pandemic. However, the experiences of staff during remote teaching and learning were overshadowed by ensuring that students were able to access learning materials and continue with their studies. This report aims to share the experiences and voices of staff.

In 2020, the DHET worked with the UFS to explore students' experiences during remote teaching and learning. Almost 50,000 students from 24 public universities completed the SAULM survey. The SAULM survey showed that less than two thirds of students have appropriate devices in the form of laptops to engage with their studies and many have to rely on cellphones or smartphones. The country's lockdown status also resulted in students having to study from home. Many students' home environments are not conducive to studying, and they are in areas with poor network connectivity. Digital inequality mirrors and often exacerbates socioeconomic inequalities. The majority of students also recognised developmental needs in a range of digital skills. That said, there were also many reflections by students on the benefits of learning with technology, including the convenience and flexibility of engaging with studies asynchronously, using a wider range and different modes of learning materials, mastering new skills, and becoming more self-directed learners.

The SAULM survey report concluded with recommendations for a possible 'new normal' of teaching and learning that leverages technology to expand on the benefits that learning with technology brings to teaching and learning, while simultaneously addressing the challenges. Among others, these recommendations include ensuring that all staff and students have access to basic learning infrastructure, prioritising digital skills development, investing in developing technologically enhanced pedagogical practices that are flexible and adaptable to disruptions, and embarking on collaborative initiatives to consider the implications of subsidy, quality assurance and quality enhancement in a 'new normal'. These recommendations will be revisited later in the report to align with the current study's findings.

Returning to academic staff and the current study, in 2021 the CHE, USAf and the UFS initiated the SEP-TLF Staff Experience of, and Perspectives on Teaching and Learning and its Future (SEP-TLF) study to contribute to the emerging and necessary conversations on staff experiences and determining a way forward to guide policy and practice. The study further aims to learn from academic staff experiences to create a supportive, more flexible teaching and learning environment that would be more resilient to change and would benefit all role players.

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Methods, actions and timeframe

This exploratory study was informed by the conceptual assumptions of Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin and Rivard (2016), which point to the need for academic staff to be prepared for the “Age of the Network” and the “Age of Evidence.” These “ages” require that academic staff development has an increased focus on the professional preparation and development of academic staff, which includes a broader scope that aligns with institutional strategic places and links individual development to institutional needs. A post-pandemic networked world will require an academic staff development approach that embraces diverse institutional contexts and evidence-based approaches to create innovative teaching and learning environments that are supportive and resilient. These conceptual assumptions were supplemented by consultation with the sector, where 30 participants from 14 universities, and representatives from the CHE, USAf, and the DHET shared inputs and feedback during a workshop on 30 March 2021. The focus of the survey was developed pragmatically to explore the following main perspectives:

iv. Staff experiences during the pandemic (including a focus on wellbeing, support and training received, resilience and adaptability, access to resources, and successes and challenges experienced regarding their own work, as well as with their students);

v. The future of teaching and learning (including reflections on the longer-term impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning practices, including quality and what training and support would need to accompany any changes); and

vi. To ask academic leaders and/or managers to reflect on their experiences, their staff's experiences, and how the institution could best support them as we head towards a 'new normal.'

The CHE/USAf invited all 26 public higher education institutions’ Vice Chancellors to participate in the study, of which 24 ultimately participated. The UFS Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee granted primary ethical clearance for the survey, after which participating institutions obtained internal gatekeeping permission or additional ethical clearance according to individual institutional requirements. Administration of the survey took place via Questback software, and participating institutions were responsible for distributing the survey link internally to academic staff. Administration was originally planned for a month, but was extended by an additional month in an attempt to gain more responses. 1,947 academic staff responded to the survey (clicked on the link), however, some opted not to participate (n=80). While cleaning the data set, 16 responses were excluded because of duplication. Ultimately, 1,851 academic staff across the sector completed the survey. The CHE reports around 55,000 academic staff at public higher education institutions, indicating that the sample for the SEP-TLF survey represents around 3.4% of the sector. When interpreting the data, we need to keep the low response rate in mind. That said, the inclusion of qualitative responses in the survey brings with it a rich understanding of the experiences of academic staff and leaders. The triangulation of the current study’s data with the SAULM findings also contributes to a more holistic understanding of the sector’s experiences, which will inform the future direction of teaching and learning policy and practice.

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Sample demographics

The number of participants per institution is shown in Figure 1. Over half (54%) of the sample are from six institutions – the Universities of Pretoria, Johannesburg, the Free State, Cape Town, the Witwatersrand, and the University of South Africa.

Almost two-thirds of the sample (62%) are from traditional universities, while 22% are from comprehensive universities, and 16% from universities of technology (Figure 2). Traditional universities represented 13 of the 24 institutions, while comprehensive universities represented five, and universities of technology represented six institutions of the whole sample.
Three quarters of the sample identify as university teachers or lecturers, with 7% representing academic leaders or line managers. A further 20% take up both roles as university teachers and line managers or leaders (Figure 3).

Because institutions differ in faculty differentiation, the survey relied on Classification of Educational Subject Matter (CESM) categories to get an indication of broad disciplinary representation. Figure 4 shows that just over a third of the sample (34%) consists of respondents affiliated with the Humanities and Social Sciences. This category also includes the disciplines of Education and Law. Just under 20% of the sample is represented by academic staff affiliated with Natural and Agricultural Sciences, 17% with Health Sciences, 15% with Economic and Management Sciences, 10% with Engineering and Manufacturing Sciences, and 1% with Tourism and Hospitality. Around 4% of the sample indicated other categories, which mainly include interdisciplinary appointments, staff working in support services, or other disciplines that fall outside the scope of the listed categories.

The majority of the sample are appointed at Lecturer-level (38%), with around a quarter of the sample represented by Professoriate- and Senior Lecturer-level appointments respectively (Figure 5). Junior Lecturers only represent 5% of the sample, with respondents indicating ‘other’ consisting mainly of facilitators, tutors, teaching assistants, or managers employed in support units. The majority of respondents (84%) are appointed in permanent, full-time
positions, with 14% appointed in either full-time or part-time contract positions.

![Level of appointment chart]

As shown in Figure 6, respondents' teaching experience is distributed relatively evenly, with 43% having 10 years' or less experience, and 57% with more than 11 years' experience. Similarly, 58% of the sample are 45 years or older, and 42% are 44 years or younger.

![Total years of teaching at any university chart]

The sample's gender distribution is 60% female and 38% male, with 2% preferring not to answer or identifying with another gender identity. Racially, as shown in Figure 7, the sample consists of 54% respondents identifying as White, 26% African, and 6% identifying as Coloured and Indian respectively. 7% of the sample preferred not to answer, and 1% identify with other racial groups.
Only 4% of respondents did not teach remotely during 2020. This was mainly because of appointments only starting in 2021, respondents being on sabbatical leave during 2020, or some continuing with small face-to-face classes because of the nature of the discipline. Figure 8 shows that the majority of lecturers (66%) that did teach remotely during 2020 were responsible for one to three modules, while 28% were responsible for four to six modules, and 6% were responsible for seven or more modules.

The number of students who respondents were teaching during remote teaching and learning in 2020 was relatively evenly distributed, with 55% responsible for teaching up to 200 students and 45% responsible for teaching more than 200 students (Figure 9). The numbers for teaching remotely in 2021 are almost identical.
In 2021, at the time of administration in June and July, 65% of respondents were only teaching remotely, with 33% indicating that they were teaching some students face-to-face and some remotely, while only 2% were teaching students solely face-to-face (Figure 10).

During 2021, a quarter of respondents are responsible for teaching one first-year module, just over half (51%) are responsible for teaching up to two senior undergraduate modules, and 43% are responsible for teaching up to two postgraduate modules (Figure 11). Respondents who indicated that they are teaching ‘other’ modules mainly refer to short courses, or other forms of training they are involved in.

Reflection on sample

Figures 1-11 provide us with some contextual knowledge about the respondents. Besides a low representation of the sector’s academic staff (3.4%), the majority of respondents are employed in traditional universities, with few voices representing universities of technology in particular. Regarding equity, the sample is not quite representative of the sector in terms of gender and race. While males represent 50% of academics in the sector, only 38% of the current sample are males. Similarly, while Africans represent 45% of the sector’s academic staff, they only represent 26% of the current sample. In contrast, Whites represent 40% of the sector’s academics, and 54% of the SEP-TLF sample. These factors will be revisited when reflecting on the contribution the survey data can make to the sector in the final pages of the report.

\[\text{Comparative data from CHE, 2021.}\]
Remote teaching and learning experiences

To explore the remote teaching and learning experiences of academic staff, the SEP-TLF survey focused on whether staff had adequate access to infrastructure and resources to enable remote teaching and learning, what type of support institutions provided and whether staff made use of available institutional support, the challenges and concerns academic staff experience in relation to remote teaching and learning, how they perceive their students’ experiences during this time, reflections on their own wellbeing, and to what extent they relied on evidence in the form of data to guide their decisions during remote teaching and learning.

Figure 12 shows that while the majority of academic staff had access to devices through their institutions, such as laptops (86%), desktop computers (20%), and to a lesser extent smartphones and tablets, 7% (or 119 respondents) were not provided with any devices listed here. The latter group cuts across institutional types, level of appointment, and disciplines.

National infrastructure challenges contributed significantly to academic staff’s ability to access reliable electricity, with half indicating loadshedding as a barrier to reliable access (Figure 13).
Three quarters of respondents (76%) indicate that they have reliable access to the Internet when working off-campus. For 19% of the sample, reliable access to the Internet off-campus is sporadic, and 5% of respondents do not have access to reliable internet off-campus. Figure 14 shows that respondents mainly rely on personal data from fixed lines (64%) or mobile data bundles (50%) to access the Internet for teaching and learning tasks off-campus, with 25% of respondents indicating that they are assisted by their institutions to access data and 8% rely on public Internet access or other sources.

Figure 14 How academic staff are accessing the Internet

When asked whether respondents experience their home environments as conducive to working from home, 55% feel that their home environments are conducive to working from home, 39% indicated somewhat, and 7% felt that their home environments are not conducive to working from home (Figure 16).
Figure 17 lists a range of support structures. The SEP-TLF survey asked respondents to indicate whether their institutions offer these support services (that they are aware of), and whether they have made use of these services. The main support services made available by institutions include Learning Management Systems training and support (made available in 90% of respondents’ institutions), online assessment training (79%), learning and instructional design support (75%), remote teaching guidelines (74%), and technological support (73%). The least support services made available include support for family responsibilities (20%), work/life balance support (39%), work from home guidelines (40%), and physical health support (43%).

The main support structures that respondents made use of include Learning Management Systems support and training (81% and 76% respectively), perceiving institutional communication as clear (72%), technological support (66%) and remote teaching techniques (65%). The least institutional support used by respondents include support for family responsibilities and physical health (12%), work/life balance support (13%), and work from home guidelines (30%). While almost 70% of respondents were aware of mental health support provided by their institutions, only 17% made use of such support.

Other noteworthy findings include that less than 60% of respondents were aware of institutional support to help them support their students during remote teaching and learning, and for those who had access to such support, only 49% made use of these resources. Similarly, only 57% of respondents were aware of curriculum adjustment support at their institutions, while only 46% engaged with this support when offered by institutions. The findings further show that 79% of respondents were aware of online assessment training support provided by their institutions, however, only 61% attended this training.

Respondents were provided space to indicate other institutional support structures that were made available to them and that they made use of. Responses include support from colleagues, and learning from each other’s experiences, and making use of institutional support structures, such as teaching and learning centres or education innovation teams and education consultants.

Figure 16 Respondents’ reflections on the conduciveness of their home environments to working from home

![Chart showing percentage of respondents' reflections on the conduciveness of their home environments to working from home](chart.png)
Figure 18 shows that the biggest challenges respondents face during remote teaching and learning have to do with students' participation and engagement. The significant challenges students experience with connectivity, devices and data, as illustrated by the SAULM findings, likely contributed to the lack of engagement with their studies. Related challenges are that almost 60% of respondents feel that students are not comfortable with online applications or tools, and half (49%) do not feel confident about the best ways to assess students in this context. Other key concerns relate to respondents' research lagging behind (70%), experiencing difficulties in 'switching off' (62%), and experiencing difficulties with the teaching and learning of practical work (49%).

Less than 30% of respondents found it challenging to manage large classes, provide feedback to students, and deal with a lack of institutional resources, respectively.
The biggest concern respondents have about remote teaching and learning is the lack of students' access to resources or infrastructure that enable them to engage with their studies, followed by different concerns pertaining to quality and academic integrity. As shown in Figure 19, three quarters (73%) of respondents are concerned about academic dishonesty in online assessments and two thirds (67%) are concerned about students' ethical engagement with academic materials. Intertwined with academic integrity are different concerns about quality, such as the quality of relational interactions between students and academic staff, which is a concern for around 70% of respondents, the general quality of teaching and learning, which is a concern for half of the respondents, and diminished learning taking place during remote teaching and learning, which is a concern for 61% of respondents.
Respondents were asked to reflect on the challenges their students face, as well as commenting on some areas where their students might have done well during remote teaching and learning. Figure 20 compares these two reflections. In line with the challenges and concerns academic staff are experiencing, respondents identified students’ connectivity challenges as the main issue students are struggling with, followed by 72% of respondents thinking students struggle with being independent or self-regulated learners, and around 60% of respondents believing that students struggle with developing discipline-specific and generic attributes during remote teaching and learning. Some respondents also noted that other factors affect their students negatively, such as balancing academic work with family responsibilities, staying motivated and managing their time, and dealing with mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety and trauma.

Reflecting on areas where students are doing well, around half (52%) of respondents feel that students are doing well in using technology, including devices and Learning Management Systems (46% and 47% respectively). When asked whether respondents thought students had difficulties communicating with their lecturers or other students (aside from difficulties that may result from connectivity issues), more respondents indicated that students did well in these actions, as opposed to having challenges with getting in touch with lecturers or peers. Respondents further indicated that students struggle to balance their academic time with social time. Respondents noted that students were dealing successfully with specific behaviours, which include being resilient, flexible and adaptable, and supporting each other by helping their peers find solutions to problems.

When asked what data or information respondents rely on to get feedback on their students' and modules’ progress during remote teaching and learning, the majority indicated that they rely on information obtained directly or indirectly from students, such as students’ performance in assessments (77%), written or verbal feedback from students (63%), or module evaluations (47%) (Figure 21). Almost half (47%) of respondents made use of data obtained directly from the Learning Management System. Less than 30% of respondents receive data from their faculties or departments, and around 20% receive data from other institutional sources, such as institutional research offices (17%) or support structures, such as teaching and learning centres (21%). 14% of respondents do not receive any data or information to guide them. Some respondents noted that they rely on their class tutors or facilitators for guiding information.
Turning to the wellbeing of academic staff, the SEP-TLF survey asked respondents to indicate which factors have been influencing their wellbeing during remote teaching and learning. As Figure 22 shows, the main factors impacting on respondents' wellbeing include an increase in workload (75%), balancing work and home life (61%), and experiencing burnout (53%). Just over 40% of respondents feel that the isolation accompanying remote teaching and learning influences their wellbeing, and around a third of respondents indicate that factors related to physical health, experiencing loss or trauma, and experiencing financial strain have influenced their wellbeing.
Reflection on academic staff's remote teaching and learning experiences

Figures 12-22 show a glimpse of the experiences of academic staff during remote teaching and learning. It is not difficult to make the connections between the impact of the significant increase in workload, along with pressures to balance home and work life during the national lockdowns, concerns about students’ ability to participate in their studies and the quality and integrity of learning that is taking place, mainly having to rely on self-funded data, and an inability to ‘switch-off’ and experiencing a sense of burnout. While it seems that most institutions responded by providing a range of guiding and training opportunities, there has been less focus on the wellbeing of staff, and less engagement with such support when made available. These and other experiences are further explored below in the academic staff’s own words.

Qualitative reflections on the experiences of remote teaching and learning

Respondents were asked to reflect qualitatively on their teaching and learning experiences during remote teaching and learning, and how that has influenced their approach to teaching and learning. Furthermore, respondents were asked to comment on the quality of teaching and learning that took place during emergency remote teaching and learning and how, if necessary, such quality might be enhanced in similar circumstances in the future. This section will share experiences of remote teaching and learning by highlighting the challenges respondents are facing, and comments on the quality of teaching and learning as part of the emergency response. Respondents’ reflections on how their approach to teaching and learning has changed, and the positive experiences with technology they had during remote teaching and learning and how that has influenced their perceptions about the future of teaching and learning, are discussed under the Future of Teaching and Learning.

Regarding remote teaching and learning experiences, respondents listed a range of challenges they are facing, which predominantly includes concerns about a lack of academic integrity and the quality of learning taking place, frustrations with a lack of relational engagement with students and many students' inability to participate in their studies, and feeling unsupported and overwhelmed.

One of the main concerns highlighted by respondents is the lack of academic integrity accompanying remote teaching and learning. This mainly includes plagiarism and dishonesty during tests, exams and other forms of assessment. Some examples of respondents’ concerns are listed here:

The blatant cheating with no remorse is incredibly disappointing, devastating in fact. I have learned to develop assessments which make cheating more difficult and now refer cheating for disciplinary. We use Turnitin but students try to cheat that too, recently text from a different student’s assignment was embedded as an image in the assignment so as not to be detected.

Cheating in online assignments was a complete nightmare, and no support was provided by the institution.

I am very, very, very concerned about academic dishonesty in online assessments. I do not have the capacity to police assessments. And even if I find dishonesty, the legal department is overwhelmed and the students run circles around them. Specifically the advantaged, white students who can afford legal advice.

There was also a marked increase in student dishonesty and the student disciplinary bodies were simply overwhelmed by the number of reported incidents - so that students effectively got away with it and this unfortunately results in a marked drop in standards and integrity of the courses we teach.

I have realized that some of the students copy and paste information from the internet.

A primary concern is academic dishonesty in online assessments. While plagiarism tools may pick up some
plagiarism in relation to online sources, the bigger concern is students discussing the answers to questions privately. This makes it impossible to evaluate reliably if students have achieved the necessary learning and understanding of the work.

Related to concerns about the integrity of assessments are concerns about the quality of learning during remote teaching and learning. Examples of these concerns are noted below and include arguments that the compromised integrity of assessments influences learning negatively, and that the adapted curriculum, students’ lack of self-discipline, and major challenges with connectivity all inhibit deeper engagement with academic work. Furthermore, respondents made the case that learning optimally happens in relational-enabling contexts, which is something the sample is struggling with during remote teaching and learning.

As we know, assessment drives learning and I’m not convinced that for my undergraduate students, deep learning took place, mainly because of the challenges in proper, appropriate assessment methods - student dishonesty was a big issue with online testing.

Remote learning is a complete joke. Our students lack the maturity and self-discipline to engage effectively with material provided to them by themselves. The academic impacts of 2020 remote learning are now being felt in our blended learning approach, as students fluffed their way through 2020 and now need to build on knowledge that they didn't learn effectively.

I am deeply concerned about the quality of the education that students have received / are receiving via online teaching. Despite all our best efforts, it is clearly not up to the standard of teaching and learning we would deliver if we were teaching face-to-face.

I miss the interaction with my students. I have in the past before COVID used a blended approach but most of the learning took place in face-2-face contact sessions. The supportive Blackboard module was used as a backup and as a source of more literature and resources. I am worried about the quality of learning and whether REAL understanding of methods employed in research are really well-covered and understood.

It has dumbed down the content because the available assessment opportunities do not allow with the deep engagement that is needed.

I am constantly frustrated by the fact that students have such difficulty with data and access that it severely hampers their learning. They also seem to struggle alone in ways that are unique to this online learning situation where there is no class and no sense of community holding them in a learning programme.

A key contributor to learning, and gauging whether learning is taking place, is through participation. Many respondents commented on frustrations because of students’ non-participation, which in many, if not most cases, could not be helped, as socioeconomic inequalities are mirrored and magnified in some cases by digital inequalities. Respondents are very aware of the challenges students are facing with connectivity, data costs, and inadequate devices for study. Participation, however, also extends to engaging with peers and with the lecturer. Many respondents commented on frustrations stemming from a lack of engagement by students when they do have access to contact sessions. This demotivates teachers, and contributes to the inability to assess whether students’ learning and understanding are up to par. Some examples of these challenges are shared here:

I am also concerned that some of my students have much, much better infrastructure available to them. For instance, two students write the same online test. The case study and questions are made available on [the LMS] for 90 minutes where after they must submit a handwritten PDF on [the LMS] within 20 minutes. The one student prints out the test, writes it in a quiet environment scans it with the office scanner and submits. This student’s parent may even assist with the admin. The other student has to read from a smart phone
screen, in a crowded living space with limited internet access... while writing the internet goes down, this student runs to the nearest internet cafe to try and submit the test... Not fair.

I find it frustrating that the gap between privileged and unprivileged students is growing.

Reaching out to particularly weak or at-risk students has been especially difficult as it is easy for them to simply ‘unplug’ if they become overwhelmed. Students can choose not to check their emails or not attend a live lecture for a number of weeks; dealing with many students makes keeping track of missing names on a screen (as opposed to absent faces in a classroom) quite difficult.

Students often stating they have connectivity issues does not allow for many synchronous teaching methods. Hence, I have tried to use more asynchronous modes of teaching [such as weekly online discussion forums, chat rooms, narrated PowerPoint presentations]. However I am unable to tell whether these methods are effective. Students do not reach out. They do not ask questions. They are silent. It is very difficult to know how my students are doing if they do not speak to me. I get the occasional email but that's it. I worry that we are leaving students further and further behind without even realizing it, until the exam results come in and they have performed poorly. Students also like to leave things for the last minute and reach out the day before or after an assessment for example. This makes it much more difficult for us to assist them if we do not have ample warning and understanding of their challenges.

Very poor attendance by students at online classes - sometimes less than 5%. It is very disheartening and demoralising. Virtually no interaction with students, even in small classes.

For me personally, it has been a terrible experience. In my module we often go on site visits to companies, we have intensive 3-day presentation sessions and interactive debates on current cases in our field, by the end of the semester I know everyone’s names. This year I have not seen a single face nor heard more than 3 voices in a class of over 100. Listening is not the best way to learn or to think, we have to engage, interact, disagree and debate, this is how we shape our minds. None of this is happening in the online environment, regardless of how hard you try to make it happen.

In classes, due to the need to limit data, we have been discouraged from hosting ‘too many’ online classes in favour of pre-recorded asynchronous delivery, which makes it near impossible to determine if students are engaging with the materials and even more difficult to elicit responses.

Online learning is content based and instructive. It is not relational learning, which is deep learning, through experience, personal development and social interaction. On a personal level, I enjoy working with people, not with a screen, so my interest in academia as a career has waned significantly.

I believe that remote teaching and learning, while inescapable, is a poor substitute for face-to-face teaching. There is a lack of any connection with students and most students struggle to attend online classes due to network, data and device constraints. As a result, the only feasible option is to pre-record lectures and make additional support materials available. This severely limits interaction and means that I interact with fewer than 10% of my undergraduate students.

Many respondents reflected on the negative impact the remote teaching and learning experience has had on their own wellbeing. This includes significant increases in workload, experiencing burnout, feeling unsupported and overwhelmed, and struggling to balance different priorities for an extended period of time. Some respondents’ experiences are shared here:

The lecturing staff is overwhelmed by the number of hours needed to prepare for class and the responsibility
to produce professional videos etc. More academic and technical staff is needed to get all the material in place.

I had to be willing to devote substantial time to the design/development of my modules. Even with the assistance of instructional designers, much of the actual design and building of modules in [the LMS] was done by myself. I had to attend training to learn how to use gradebook for continuous assessment. I had to become an online instructional designer and that was time-consuming.

Remote teaching and learning requires a far higher administrative burden than face-to-face teaching and this burden is not once-off but continuous. No additional resources are available (in fact less, as the administrative staff typically do not have the ability to perform their functions from home) so that teaching quality is undermined by academic staff having to perform administrative functions.

Students have also become more demanding in terms of having high expectations regarding support after hours. Both staff and students seem to be suffering from burnout and online fatigue.

I think that university management believes that last year was the pilot project and that this year everything is sailing along smoothly. They could not be more wrong. I, and most of my colleagues, are completely depleted. We have no more capacity to respond to any kind of emergency. Of necessity, to protect ourselves, we are ignoring cries for help from students that we would usually be responding to, making the university an even more alienating and inaccessible place for our students. Students say “the lecturers punish us with more difficult tests because they feel out of control.” First year students, who have never been to the university campus and have never had an opportunity to meet other students on their courses are dangerously isolated. If I have to continue to teach like this next year, with this workload and these demands, I will cut more corners, and reach fewer students. We are a long way from developing a sustainable model for effective, humane and socially just remote teaching and learning.

I felt very isolated, was solely dependent on my own resources to do my job, and found it difficult to grapple with my own challenges and students’ needs and expectations.

I am exhausted, we are working ourselves to death!

I really try to be as supportive as I can to my students, but I also need to sleep ....and cannot answer every single WhatsApp anymore. I answered more than a thousand WhatsApps last year (2020). I also spend much more time assessing work as it is taking about 3 times longer to mark assessments that is submitted online.

The stress on my students impacted my stress levels and working from home whilst having children at home also impacted my ability to work during normal working hours. Sleep deprivation over the long term and increased stress alongside increased workload due to the transition meant an upheaval of my life. Essentially an entire 2020 crisis, which has continued into 2021.

I fully embrace remote teaching and learning. In fact, I have been advocating for it as far back as 2013. There are a multitude of tools and techniques available which could aid online teaching and learning, with new ones emerging quite often. However, lack of experience on the part of both students and the institution is preventing lecturers such as myself to introduce these in my teaching and learning practices. They are simply too far behind in terms of technological and pedagogical development, and continues to fall behind the longer the necessary change to fully blended learning is put off.

Lack of clear Institutional guidelines, administrative support and a lack of understanding of the increased
workload continue to be challenging.

Tone of communications from senior management has been aggressive and threatening, rather than supportive, which exacerbated the stress and anxiety of a very difficult and unexpected year. Offering a ‘manage your own stress’ workshop is not taking responsibility for these systemic issues. There has been a strong focus on developing the technical skills to utilise Moodle during this time but would be good to see more guidance on materials development and curriculation.

Respondents were asked to comment on the quality of teaching and learning in general during the remote response. The reflections listed here represent a range of different experiences and perceptions on the quality of teaching and learning, including general positive experiences, where respondents feel that the quality was sufficient for the circumstances, or even improved in some cases. Others feel that the lack of student participation in their own learning (whether intentional or not) and the amount of academic dishonesty that is taking place negatively impacts quality. Further perspectives include that increased leniency to ‘leave no student behind,’ the efforts of lecturers, institutions’ lack of preparedness for remote teaching and learning, and a lack of practical engagements by students all affect the quality of teaching and learning. Some examples of these reflections are shared here:

I think that during the initial stages of the transition to remote teaching, many students and lecturers were out of their depth, and I did find that it was a challenge for some lecturers to communicate the necessary information to the students. In a face to face situation, the students would probably have asked for clarity by visiting the lecturer in the office or after class.

I think quality probably increased in our instance. We have a flipped-classroom approach, which research has shown to be effective. Before the pandemic, there was always some resistance to change, and now we all had to adapt, which is good. We became comfortable with tools that we thought we would never use. There will always be room for improving quality (just like the case was in traditional, face-to-face teaching). We continuously improved, but I think we did well.

Given that is was emergency, the quality of teaching and learning was exceptional. All parties (students and lecturers) were overwhelmed by the changes and uncertainty and yet the teaching and learning in the modules which I was part of, seemed to match that of the previous years (if not better). The students who do well, did even better as they could go back to videos and recordings. The students who usually struggle, did even worse seeing as they thought they could catch up a few days before assessments by watching only videos. The exceptional quality of teaching came at a price as us as lecturers are feeling the anxiety and burnout now, with little relief from management.

The quality was reduced due to the challenge of assessment and evaluation.

This would be difficult to answer without some kind of data set and thorough analysis. However, if one has to go solely by the sharp increase in the pass rate of 2020, my view is that there was a decline in the quality of teaching and learning. However, I must qualify this by saying that it was not necessarily due to the offering of teaching and learning at my institution, but rather due to the lenient approach, perhaps too lenient, approach towards students. It was an absolute free-for-all with endless assessment and catch-up opportunities offered. This has now resulted in a blatant abuse of the so-called “no student left behind” principle where students are not taking any responsibility for their learning. Instead, the onus is squarely on the lecturer and/or institution to ensure that students pass. I anticipate a further negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the 2021 academic year.

The quality depended largely on the attitude of the lecturer. Some simply went home and loaded the PowerPoints onto the blackboard while other changed over to remote teaching methods. In some instances
students really struggled but when communication channels were open and learning material changed appropriately the students did exceptionally well. It does however come at a cost to the lecturer and having 300 plus students in direct contact with you 24 / 7 is a very draining exercise.

If the lecturers did their best to assure high quality of teaching and learning, the students seemed to struggle to rise to the occasion. Many students complained to me that they paid for face-to-face classes or chose to enrol at a residential university instead of a distance learning institution and would like to see their money’s worth.

Quality of teaching tried to remain the same if not improved. Students learning ability went down with a lack of discipline and disinterest. Students expected to pass with minimum effort and hand-ins.

We did our best, but ultimately the experience was poor, in my opinion, when compared to F2F contact.

Despite the challenges I believe that my colleagues and I in my discipline went above and beyond and delivered courses of good quality in general in 2020. The assessments though were not of reliable quality as class averages were extremely inflated due to pressures to have multiple choice only tests/examinations and to leave tests/examinations open for prolonged periods allowing for collaboration. In 2021 we have learned from our mistakes and the assessments so far are more reliable this year.

The huge disconnect is with assessment, especially summative assessment, which feels disconnected with the goals of teaching and learning. We have to think about assessment in different ways if we are to continue to have remote learning. These punitive, antagonistic, high stakes, high risk assessments were problematic while we were doing face-to-face learning, since students and lecturers focus effort on these few activities. Now that we are remote they are a farce.

There is very little conception of what learning really means and how it is best facilitated at many of our institutions, particularly in large-class contexts. Information is flooding both staff and students in inconsistent formats, and without taking into consideration the additional time required to sift and filter and find what you need. The quality of T&L is the best it can be under the circumstances, but educators need more support AND TIME to really interrogate what ‘facilitating learning’ means in their contexts.

The variability in quality of T&L was far greater than usual: some students thrived and others collapsed, even in the same classes. Significantly more time has been invested in advising individual students individually.

Many hours spent on preparing online lectures, tests and exam made it possible to create material of acceptable standard, but the students received a very theoretical training - watching a video is no replacement for a hands-on laboratory practical. Students are not engaging in the work.

The future of teaching and learning

Flowing from respondents’ experiences with remote teaching and learning, the focus turns to how academic staff envision the future of teaching and learning. SEP-TLF questions focused on staff’s teaching environment preferences, their beliefs about the role of technology in teaching and learning, to what extent they expect certain things to change permanently in teaching and learning environments, what training or development opportunities and resources they would need for such changes, and what measures would need to be in place to ensure the quality of teaching and learning in an environment likely to include more technology.

Three quarters of respondents prefer a blended teaching and learning environment as the ‘new normal’ (Figure 23), with 14% preferring online education, and 11% preferring exclusive face-to-face teaching and learning.
Figure 24 reflects some beliefs respondents hold about teaching with technology. Almost 90% believe that students are more likely to skip contact sessions when recorded lectures are available. In general, around three quarters of respondents recognise the potential of technology in supporting teaching, increasing the accessibility of education, and preparing students for the world of work. Only about 60% of respondents feel that technology helps students learn, and just over 40% believe that technology is an aid to students’ involvement in their studies.

The SEP-TLF asked respondents to reflect on the likelihood of permanent change of behaviours or other factors as a consequence of emergency remote teaching and learning. Figure 25 shows the responses, with particular emphasis on behaviours or other factors that have a high probability for permanent change in the ‘new normal.’ For example,
almost 70% of respondents will continue to provide students with recordings of lectures, make use of more blended teaching and learning in their modules, and use a wider range of Learning Management System tools. Respondents are less convinced of the permanency of using social media in teaching and learning (33%), using data to inform decisions and planning (43%), and using technological tools to enhance active learning (42%).

To what extent do you expect the roles of university teachers to change in the following areas because of the COVID-19 response?

For academic staff to function optimally in a more blended teaching and learning environment, the SEP-TLF enquired about possible training needs respondents would have. Figure 26 shows these training needs by respondents’ level of teaching experience. Respondents with less than five years of teaching experience indicate a higher need (or willingness) for training, particularly in using data to track students’ participation and success (56%), and knowledge about the design of blended curriculums (58%). All groups regard training in quality assurance mechanisms for blended teaching and learning as important.
Figure 27 shows the factors respondents deem ‘very important’ to ensure a successful blended teaching and learning environment. Almost all agree that devices and data for staff are necessary. Around three quarters further agree that digital skills training for students and university teachers, as well as laptops for students, are important. Only around 60% of respondents feel that a data-driven approach, including tracking systems, using institutional data to monitor module success rates, measuring the impact of learning, and monitoring students’ engagement, is very important. In addition, 61% of respondents feel that an assessment proctoring system is a very important aspect of a successful blended teaching and learning environment.
When asked about the importance of certain measures to ensure quality in a blended teaching and learning environment, Figure 28 shows what respondents regarded as very important. Two-thirds of respondents indicate that measures to ensure quality of assessments would be very important, while 60% indicate that there should be quality assurance guidelines or policies in place. Around half of respondents feel that materials and modules should be reviewed by peers and students. Only a quarter of respondents feel that it is very important for university teachers to have some form of formal qualification in blended teaching and learning.

**Figure 27 Factors essential to a successful blended T&L environment**

When asked about the importance of certain measures to ensure quality in a blended teaching and learning environment, Figure 28 shows what respondents regarded as very important. Two-thirds of respondents indicate that measures to ensure quality of assessments would be very important, while 60% indicate that there should be quality assurance guidelines or policies in place. Around half of respondents feel that materials and modules should be reviewed by peers and students. Only a quarter of respondents feel that it is very important for university teachers to have some form of formal qualification in blended teaching and learning.

**Figure 28 Quality assurance of blended teaching and learning**
Reflection on the future of teaching and learning

Figures 23-28 show academic staff’s preferences for a ‘new normal.’ As expected, the majority of respondents are in favour of a more blended teaching and learning environment beyond the remote emergency teaching and learning response. While there is a general sense of positivity towards technology in teaching and learning, some doubts seem to remain among respondents regarding the value of technology to enhance active participation or involvement of students in their academic work. Respondents predict a high likelihood of permanently using more technology in their teaching and learning. However, this technology seemingly focuses on using a wider range of Learning Management System functions and using different formats of learning materials, such as recordings, and not necessarily making use of a wider range of educational technologies or social media. Respondents also do not seem convinced about the value of data or information to inform their decisions and planning on a modular level. Moving towards a more blended teaching and learning environment will also require appropriate digital skills and other relevant capabilities. While most respondents deem it important to engage in training to enhance the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in more blended environments, less experienced teachers are more open to, or more in need of training in a range of other areas, including digital skills. Lastly, most respondents require guidance from institutions or national role players in the form of policies or guidelines on ensuring quality in blended teaching, learning and assessment.

Rethinking teaching and learning: What will stay

The remote teaching and learning experience has led university teachers to take a step back and rethink the purpose and processes of teaching and learning. However, the pace at which institutions and university teachers have had to adapt has resulted in a lack of deep interrogation of these observations. In asking respondents about their reflections on teaching and learning, some commented on having had to make significant mind-shifts about teaching and learning, including having to unlearn much of what comes naturally after many years of experience. Others noted that remote teaching and learning could help us consider the role that students have to play in their own education, arguing that more independent learning should be supported. A persistent concern is assessment, together with reflecting on how assessment in more blended contexts could be enhanced in content or quality and practice. Others commented on the irreplaceability of face-to-face learning experiences, while acknowledging the potential of technology as enhancing teaching and learning practices. Another important aspect to consider is which technologies to use. Some respondents commented on feeling more comfortable in using certain technologies, but feel that they are limited by their institutions to use other technologies only.

I believe the shift to ERT [emergency remote teaching] has shed a harsh light on the digital fluency divide as well as the lack of insight into how learning really happens. Technology cannot solve the problems in our country - and transmission-orientated ‘teaching’ does not facilitate real learning. The ERT experience has seriously challenged staff to begin to think about how they are enabling learning to happen, but I fear that the overwhelming overnight workload has forced a more strategic ‘survival’ approach which has not really benefitted the majority of students, unless they have particularly well-developed, self-regulated learning habits.

I have had to critically assess my teaching style to determine how well the students are able to learn during my modules. From there, I have tried to adapt to the change in the environment in my assessment styles.

I feel this pandemic has allowed us to reflect on our teaching, learning and assessment practices as a matter of urgency when the lockdown no face to face methodology was imperative to continue the academic year in 2021 - and overall I think the experience has been beneficial to revisit what we do, why we do what we do and how we do it - and to some degree hear the voices of the students also in moving forward into our 2nd year of non-face to face teaching and learning.

2020 was a very difficult year because I had to unlearn the way I had taught for 20 years. I am more
comfortable and confident about online teaching and assessment this year.

It has influenced me to look more to instructional design when developing to adapting assessments, lesson content and curriculum. Due to this, my pedagogy is shifting towards more learner-centred and UDL [Universal Design for Learning] principles when I am teaching and adapting the content and resources. There is a lot of reflection on the influence of contexts in the way I teach and the way learners learn. It has become a lot more stressful as more time is needed. Both to learn and implement new ways of doing things and to do so against old institutional ways and structures that slow the process and do not actively provide help or directions.

In general my experience in the online classroom is that it has proven very effective as a central space to upload material, supporting material, feedback and to meet with students. Nothing beats face to face teaching so when things eventually normalise, I will be using the online classroom as well. It baffles me that the university is now being prescriptive about which space to use. MS Teams works for me. It is more user friendly. However it is suddenly now frowned-upon by the university and we are told to use Moodle instead. It's almost the same as telling us which books we must or must not read!

My institution had us register for 3 blackboard courses to get skills to teach online. The courses were enjoyable and skilled me with the ability to build courses online, conduct synchronous classes effectively and engage the students and quality assess the students. I enjoy teaching and learning online, I believe it gives teachers an opportunity to help the students engage with the content better, we can curate content and have the students watch or learn beyond the classes, the students have the opportunity to watch classes that took place to catch up, we can give students quizzes, we can easily identify students at risk via data analytics even if they are a large group. Basically, we have an opportunity to implement student-centred learning and have students take the responsibility of their learning while we guide them. I can truly say this has been an enjoyable time for me and I hope we will not go back to face-to-face teaching and learning.

In terms of my approach to teaching and learning, I have grown significantly in respect of technology. 15 months ago I would never have imagined that I could achieve the things I now do with my laptop. I am of the view that remote teaching and learning has changed the face of education. It definitely does have a place even in non-covid times. Online assessments, however, would need much refinement in order to protect the integrity and credibility of qualifications.

I think students are becoming more self-sufficient and this is a positive development. However, some face-to-face interaction is needed, for reasons of group cohesion, getting to know students and vice-versa, also the overall university experience that transcends the academic aspect of being a student.

I also think that the need for the exhibition of more understanding in assessment questions to counter cheating amongst the students is driving lecturers to consider their assessment more and think deeper about the types of tasks and questions that they set.

Many respondents commented on positive experiences they have had during remote teaching and learning, many of which are likely to become permanent features in the ‘new normal.’ Some examples listed here include stronger collaborative relationships with other teachers, a deeper understanding of the challenges their students face and the inequalities that further burden many of them, using different blended teaching and learning techniques, particularly videos, voice-over slides, podcasts, flipped classrooms, and generally moving towards using more soft-copies and a wider range of learning materials. Some examples of respondents’ experiences are shared here:

Personally, I have found the experience of adapting to online teaching positive. This was primarily because of the willingness of both my colleagues and my students to adapt and innovate, so that we were able to
work together on solutions that responded well to the challenges we faced. The result was that the teaching and learning process actually improved, becoming better than it had been pre-COVID. We have learned lessons that we will be able to take forward with us beyond the pandemic. At the same time, the experience has also meant that we have had to confront the fact that our education system is characterized by deep inequity, with many students not having access to resources required for learning, or conducive home environments. This is not a new issue: the pandemic just highlighted the problem. And now that we have acknowledged this, we cannot just ignore it again.

A positive from 2020 is that I made several podcasts which I will now use in a flipped-classroom approach.

I have adapted and learned and adjusted since we started online to where we are now. I look forward to face to face teaching again. I plan to do theory in narrated PowerPoints for the students to watch online and use the contact time for exercises based on fostering application and analysis skills.

It is not all negative. Being forced to teach online has sparked a lot of creativity amongst all sectors of the university and perhaps the realisation that we should have made much more use of technology previously. I would like to spend time with my colleagues analysing what elements of the online we should retain in the long term...we need research to help us do this responsibly.

I will look forward to going to a mixed mode of teaching but will not be printing any course material in future and will aggregate and present course material as I have been doing for remote teaching.

I will also embrace the continuous assessment method instead of the traditional assessment methods. I learned new skills and approaches to making presentations fresh and new. I had to re-evaluate the content of the module. Due to the amount of time I spent preparing online content, I will stick to blended learning if our current COVID situation ends.

A positive is the short offline videos I made of all my classes. They will be handy for many years to come to supplement in person teaching.

If I am honest, then this was a blessing in disguise. We were asked to move to blended learning for several years, but due to it not being urgent, it stayed on the back burner.

I am not that comfortable with teaching online and I find the students are not interacting as they should. I think it will have a negative impact on their studies. I do however think the fact that lectures are recorded and the student can have a look at them again will be helpful.

One good thing that has come about through the ‘forced’ transition to online learning is learning to actively incorporate alternative resources, which I have never ‘bothered’ about, e.g. YouTube videos, apps (although these only benefitted students with internet access and suitable devices).

To enable a successful blended teaching and learning environment, respondents noted certain training needs or support structures that might assist. These include understanding teaching and learning within blended environments and how technology can be used to enhance the process, making appropriate digital skills training available to students and staff, providing administrative and instructional design support, training teachers to optimally make use of Learning Management Systems’ data repositories to track participation and progress, providing assessment training and guidance, and enabling the professional development of staff in blended pedagogies.

My biggest concern is the lack of knowledge in the large portion of academic staff. Dedicated instructional designers are needed. People do not understand what remote teaching and learning really means nor do
they take their students into consideration. For me it was important to understand my students’ circumstances before I could decide how I would adapt to remote teaching. Most academic staff that I spoke to just took their classes and recorded it online. They did not understand remote teaching and learning, nor did their students.

The introduction of blended learning teaching methods has enhanced the teaching learning programmes. It has facilitated and set the foundation for student-led learning. The remote and online learning has focused academics to shift from didactic methods of teaching. However, without the correct support and infrastructure especially for securing online assessments, these methods can be challenging and concerning. As we expand the use of online methods and include them into mainstream curriculum, lectures and students require further upskilling, institutions need to invest in software programmes, simulation software and proctoring software. As academic we should start engaging in research relating to the effectiveness of online methods especially for the clinical modules.

My University invested a great deal in trying to ensure that access was given to students. Their focus, especially during the first semester of 2020 was navigating student success through increased support. As I was teaching first years much of the responsibility to proof engagement, design continuous assessment, offer additional support, train tutors etc all came on my shoulders and in addition to redesigning content a whole lot of admin was added. I understand the reason for the admin, I just feel that we need to learn what would be the minimum standards for teaching and make this part of the orientation for new lecturers, as well as find a way for the LMS to produce the data we would like from lecturers.

The use of online classrooms also compels people to prepare adequately before class as opposed to lecturers who can just walk into a class to lecture verbally with no supporting materials. The tools for remote teaching and learning reduce the chances of cancelling classes due to other disruptions that do not allow people to gather in one venue. As a lecturer, I have the option of conducting and synchronous or asynchronous lectures so I can never fall behind schedule and I realized that I can cover all the content that I planned for a lesson. I also learned that besides teaching the content of my course I also need to teach the students how to use some of the online tools in order for them to perform tasks such as presentations and virtual practical work activities. I also noticed that the undergraduate students are more proficient with the use of the online tools than the post graduate students.

At this point, one of my biggest frustrations is our LMS (Blackboard). Not because it is unstable, but because we are not utilising all of the resources / capabilities of the system, like Retention Centre fully.

The training and guidelines provided by the university did help, especially the training on student assessment. Since we moved to remote teaching, I started to think about student assessment in a different way. Specifically what other methods of student assessment are available, instead of just semester tests.

At the outset, as I considered myself a technological dinosaur, I was extremely anxious about remote teaching – I lacked confidence. Thus, I grabbed the opportunity when my university offered a six-month course on Facilitating Online – this was amazing and this year I feel both confident and competent, unlike 2020.

Academic leaders’ perspectives

The SEP-TLF aimed to incorporate academic leaders’ or managers’ perspectives, since they are often tasked with playing a mediating role between staff and the institution. This section reports on academic leaders’/managers’ experiences during remote teaching and learning. University teachers who also play a management or leadership role
were also asked to complete this section. Figure 29 shows the extent to which leaders/managers felt supported by their institutions in certain tasks. The responses only show those who indicated that they are receiving adequate support or that they feel very supported. While almost half (44%) indicated that they do receive training opportunities for their leadership or management positions, support in all other management tasks is generally not seen as adequate.

![Figure 29 Institutional support in management tasks](image)

Figure 29 shows the extent to which leaders/managers felt supported by their institutions in certain tasks. The responses only show those who indicated that they are receiving adequate support or that they feel very supported. While almost half (44%) indicated that they do receive training opportunities for their leadership or management positions, support in all other management tasks is generally not seen as adequate.

Figure 30 shows the factors influencing the wellbeing of university teachers, academic leaders or managers, and university teachers' wellbeing from leaders/managers' perspectives. In general, academic leaders and managers report higher levels of all listed factors influencing their wellbeing. In addition, they also have a much higher perception of how these factors are influencing the wellbeing of their staff. The qualitative reflections from leaders/managers shared later in the report might shed some light on this discrepancy. Other factors noted by leaders/managers as affecting their wellbeing include unrealistic expectations from institutions to keep performing as usual while the workload increased drastically, not receiving enough support from their institutions in terms of wellness, or guidelines on remote teaching and learning, and limited ability to plan because of the uncertainty and unpredictability of the situation. For the staff they manage, other factors that affect their wellbeing include uncertainty, constant change and a lack of planning, a lack of interaction with colleagues and being able to have group discussions, and not receiving enough support from management and the institution in general such as with Learning Management Systems or from support services.

![Figure 30 Academic leaders' perception of their own and their staff's wellbeing](image)

The extent to which each of the following is influencing wellbeing during the pandemic

- Experiencing burnout
- Experiencing loss/truma
- Increased workload
- Financial pressure
- Balancing home and worklife
- Feeling isolated
- Physical health
- Other factors

Figure 30 Academic leaders' perception of their own and their staff's wellbeing
Figure 31 only shows responses from respondents identifying as academic leaders or managers to indicate where they receive data or information from to inform the decisions they have to make. Almost two thirds (64%) receive data from their faculties or departments, with between 59% and 63% of respondents relying on direct or indirect feedback from students. Just over half (53%) receive data from other support structures, and only 35% receive data from institutional research offices. Around 12% of respondents do not receive any data to guide their decisions. The majority of ‘other’ responses refer to anecdotal data gathered from interactions with staff.

On what data/information are you relying/did you rely to get feedback on students’ and staff’s progress during remote learning?

- Data provided by my faculty/department: 64%
- Students’ performance on assessments: 63%
- Students’ written/verbal feedback: 59%
- Data provided by other support structures: 53%
- Data obtained directly from the LMS: 49%
- Module evaluations: 49%
- Data provided by institutional research offices: 35%
- I did not get any data to guide me: 12%

Regarding the permanency of some behaviours or other factors beyond the pandemic, Figure 32 shows that academic leaders and managers expect similar permanent changes than university teachers’ responses noted earlier. For management-specific tasks, around 60% indicate that they plan to be more available online for meetings and consultations, and just under 60% expect more flexible working arrangements for staff. Less than half (48%) expect to engage more with data-driven decision-making, and only 41% expect to manage the wellness of their staff.
When asked what training academic leaders or managers would need in a more blended teaching and learning environment, around 60% of respondents feel that they need more guidance on how to lead/manage staff in more flexible environments, how to ensure quality in such environments, and managing the wellness of their staff members (Figure 33). Just under 60% of respondents also noted the need for training to engage more with data to inform decisions and to track students' progress and success.

Figure 32 Perceptions of changing teaching and learning environments

When asked what training academic leaders or managers would need in a more blended teaching and learning environment, around 60% of respondents feel that they need more guidance on how to lead/manage staff in more flexible environments, how to ensure quality in such environments, and managing the wellness of their staff members (Figure 33). Just under 60% of respondents also noted the need for training to engage more with data to inform decisions and to track students' progress and success.

What training would you need to function well in a more blended teaching and learning environment?

Figure 33 Training needs in a more blended teaching and learning environment
Reflection on leaders/managers’ experiences

Academic leaders and managers’ remote teaching and learning experiences reflect higher levels of impact behavioural and other factors are having on their wellbeing than those reported by university teachers, with relatively low levels of support received for management tasks from institutions. Leaders and managers also report inflated effects of factors on the wellbeing of the staff they manage. Although leaders and managers mainly rely on data or information they receive from their respective faculties or departments to inform decisions and planning, the SEP-TLF data do not provide a strong sense that data in general plays a big role in guiding decisions or planning. Some practices that might become more permanent features in the ‘new normal’ include a stronger online presence in terms of availability for consultations and team meetings, as well as moving towards more flexible working environments. In parallel, however, leaders and managers require training in managing and tending to the wellbeing of staff in such flexible environments. Lastly, as with the university teachers’ responses, academic leaders and managers foreground a focus on quality assurance of blended teaching and learning in general, but specifically assessment, and prefer national and/or institutional guidance in the form of policies or guidelines to ensure quality in such environments.

Qualitative reflections on the way remote teaching and learning is influencing academic leadership or management

The SEP-TLF survey asked of academic leaders or managers to indicate in what ways the remote teaching and learning experience has changed the way they lead and manage their staff. Many responses reflected on the challenges they have been experiencing while trying to lead and manage staff, while others noted the changes in how they have had to deal with the consequences of the pandemic. The paragraphs that follow aims to capture these challenges, experiences in general, as well as noting some specific changes that are for the better.

The main challenges experienced by leaders or managers include feeling out of touch with their staff, experiencing frustrations with staff and the institution, and generally feeling a loss of control. The quotes here reflect how leaders and managers experience a sense of being out of touch with their staff. The general consensus is that face-to-face interactions develop a sense of camaraderie, provide you with a sense of reading people, and assist with having difficult conversations with staff.

It is harder to get consensus, even in on-line meetings, I can't always read people's feelings and reactions.
I have found it hard to determine how effective staff are when working at home.

Not seeing people daily the group loses cohesion and camaraderie that develops in a department.
It’s trickier without the in-person element, especially when dealing with conflict. However, WhatsApp and Zoom have really helped, and I’ve also been able to be on campus or at an in-person event on occasion. These in-person contacts do grease the wheels of working together, and really are essential. I do not think an entirely remote campus forever would be feasible at all.

Many frustrations noted by academic leaders or managers relate to a lack of cooperation from staff, and a lack of guidance and support from the institution, as they have to navigate and manage between both groups. The frustrations academic leaders or managers felt with these groups are described here:

A lot of ‘sheparding’ had to be done especially early in the pandemic to get everyone on board.

Staff presented with two very distinct responses, the majority of staff embraced the changes and adapted and became very productive. But some colleagues became less productive, more neurotic and overwhelmed.

Dealing with the stress of no to unclear or contradictory communication from Senior Management and how this affects students and staff in my care has indeed been an issue. Some staff are still quite reluctant to "upskill" themselves and hope they can just "sit it out". We have a fabulous EdTech division, but if staff dig in their heels, they dig in their heels.

I am the teaching and learning coordinator for a large school. It has been very difficult to advise on best practice when people take very different approaches to online teaching.

At present, it is extremely difficult to make any future plans or decisions as management has not made any decisions regarding the use of online teaching and learning or on how much of it must be implemented in our modules.

In Science we are not trained in leadership and management, so one has to wing it as you go along and gauge how you positively or negatively interact with staff.

This was very draining and demanding, as I had to be available to lead and manage staff in addition to my own workload, with very little guidance. This was in most instances crisis management and even when trying to be proactive with planning, this was time-consuming.

Another challenge experienced by leaders and managers is a loss of control. The quotes below reflect this challenge in that leaders and managers find it difficult to know what is going on in terms of teaching and learning progress, or whether their academic and administrative staff are actually working. Some relied on measurable outputs, such as research publications, which, as noted earlier, was an area that university teachers did not have time for during remote teaching and learning.

Because so much is happening online, it is difficult as a manager to get accurate insight into the progress of teaching and learning, and to make necessary adjustments.

I would like to see all staff return to office, because it is very hard to gauge performance when working remotely. This is especially true for Admin staff who have limited measurable outputs (e.g. journal publications, student numbers graduating, etc.).

It’s not easy to know how they use their time/ what are they busy with.

I also need to accept that they will do their work independently and remotely and trust them to do it.
Turning to the general experiences of leaders and managers, the emergency remote teaching and learning response saw them engage with their staff on a deeper level, and more regularly, along with a more relaxed or flexible approach to managing staff.

The examples below show how leaders’ and managers’ approach to management changed by recognising the personal challenges that their staff are going through and how that influences their ability to perform professionally. Some also commented on the additional emotional strain it put on them to support others while not being optimally supported themselves.

It provided opportunity to bring to the fore a more personal and caring approach to leadership. Leading my colleagues was not just work-related but became more about caring for their well-being.

I have felt the need to go out of my way to reach out to colleagues than I did before, and to engage with them beyond their professional life so as to better understand how it is affecting them professionally.

I have had to learn to listen to and accommodate emotional and stressful periods in my staff's lives.

At times I must also say that I felt a bit like the ‘cheerleader’ of having to be positive and motivating at the same time as everyone was dealing the stresses, challenges and uncertainty of emergency remote teaching and learning.

I have become an intentionally empathetic practitioner and actively seek out and give feedback to staff and team members to keep them informed and involved in what is happening in the school and institution.

Leaders and managers generally increased communication with their teams, to keep staff engaged and informed, and to monitor performance and progress.

I've implemented an array of "check-in" sessions (more than ever before) both on a one-on-one and cohort format. Individual engagement is critical to prevent disengagement.

We meet on zoom with more frequency to make up for not seeing each other daily and over tea. The time taken to manage has increased because of a lack of casual "corridor" conversations that come with daily presence.

Building working relationships with colleagues and managing staff performance remotely.

A combination of the factors listed here has also led to a more relaxed managing style for many leaders and managers.

I am far more hands off, and do not expect immediate response any longer. Perhaps my expectations have lowered, but it does seem that everything gets done- even if it is at "strange" times of the night. People have different body clocks, and some of the admin staff work at 11pm or 4am. Does it matter?

I had to be more accommodating in disciplinary measures such as when deadlines were not met.

At first there were many meetings to facilitate the move to online learning. However, I believe that it has forced the staff out of their comfort zones and to be more critical of the way they teach and assess. To this end, the experience has lead me to micro-manage less and allow staff to find their own best rhythm for teaching and learning.
Some positive experiences that are likely to become part of future operations include more efficient meetings when online, better records of administrative processes and teaching and learning practices, new digital skills learnt, and including more technology in daily operational processes. Some examples are shared here:

- All records (departmental or modular records) are now in soft copies and can be readily electronically saved and thus can be accessed at any time instead of requiring the staff to first get to their offices.

- Meetings have more focus. Time is saved by having essential meetings only. More productivity output noted. Output based performance is much better than time based.

- Funnily enough, I can now see what all of them do in lectures: we never had such a resource available previously; now EVERYTHING is recorded!

- The remote working experience has created better documented systems of management, in the sense that discussions are documented as they are either recorded or emailed. This leaves less room for “miscommunication” among staff.

- We are much more structured now and have improved our quality assurance mechanisms. We use a project management software programme to track our processes and meet frequently (virtually).

Recommendations

The SEP-TLF focused on the experiences of university teachers, leaders and managers during remote teaching and learning, and the perceptions of these groups about the future of teaching and learning. It is not surprising that the challenges experienced by university teachers, leaders and managers during remote teaching and learning weigh more heavily than the positive experiences. This was an emergency response that no one was prepared for. The experiences and perceptions of respondents might not be as representative of the sector as we would have preferred, but despite the challenges with regard to the sample of the survey, the triangulation of these findings with the SAULM data provides an opportunity to learn from these respondents’ experiences and to use this opportunity to reflect on the future of teaching and learning for the sector.

The recommendations listed below are proposed to inform the development of teaching and learning in a ‘new normal.’ We have positioned them under two broad headings that summarise where interventions are needed: creating an enabling environment for blended teaching and learning, and enhancing quality assurance. Each of the recommendations under these headings is further mapped out to include suggestions of how they might manifest in national and institutional contexts to stimulate conversation (see Appendix 1).

Creating an enabling environment for blended learning

1. **Recognising the importance of resources and infrastructure.** While the majority of the SEP-TLF survey respondents have devices provided to them by their institutions, they mainly take responsibility for their own data and connectivity to complete their teaching and learning tasks. Respondents are further aware of, and frustrated by, the lack of access to devices, data and connectivity that their students are experiencing, as this limits participation in their studies and widens the inequality gap. A blended teaching and learning environment cannot be successful if not all students and staff have access to reliable devices, network or internet connectivity, and adequate data to access resources and participate in educational activities. The importance of resources and infrastructure was also listed as a key priority area in response to the student-focused SAULM survey.

2. **Reimagining the integration of pedagogy and technology.** In a practical sense, the majority of respondents seem to embrace the idea of introducing more technology into their teaching and learning practices beyond the
emergency response. This particularly relates to using a wider range of Learning Management System functions and using different formats of learning materials and technology-enhanced teaching methods. But reimagining teaching and learning also includes a deeper reflection on whether or in what ways the essence of teaching and learning changes when making use of different platforms for teaching and learning, using different assessment methods, or dealing with different levels of participation and engagement. It further provides academics and students with an opportunity to explore the roles that they need to embrace and to reflect on whether students ought to become self-reliant and independent learners, and what that means in the unequal society in which we find ourselves. The transition to emergency remote teaching and learning did not provide the time or space for such discussions. However, the findings of this and other studies, combined with the lived experiences of academics and students in the sector, provide a useful foundation for such discussions.

3. **Reconceptualise academic staff development interventions.** Based on the SEP-TLF findings, most institutions provided some form of training to staff to assist with the transition from face-to-face to remote teaching and learning. For the most part, this training focused on providing technical support to staff in the form of using the institution’s Learning Management System, conducting online assessments, and so forth. Training efforts, or attendance of available training, however, did not focus as strongly on engaging students in synchronous or asynchronous learning, appropriate curriculum adjustment, and methods to ensure and assess deep learning and enhance quality. Respondents’ reflections show that the aforementioned issues are among the main challenges faced by them, which should be included as an important part of future training efforts. The importance of developing innovative interventions to ensure staff mental health and well-being was strongly underlined by respondents’ lack of awareness as well as their lack of participation in these initiatives.

4. **Enhance academic staff development communication approaches.** The responses by staff indicate that many of them do not make use of existing support measures at their institutions. Although this is a global challenge, it is important to look at ways in which technology, nudging and other intentional strategies could enhance awareness and participation in support and development initiatives.

5. **Empowering academic leaders.** Many university teachers and leaders/managers are feeling overwhelmed by the additional workload which the move to remote teaching and learning brought on, coupled with feelings that they are not appropriately supported by their institutions. The changes in operations, along with external stressors caused by the pandemic, have had a significant impact on the wellbeing of all staff. Looking beyond the emergency remote response, institutions will need to invest in support structures, such as instructional designers and other speciality support staff to assist academic staff with the increased workload accompanying blended teaching and learning environments. Leaders and managers, who are willing to adapt to more flexible management styles, are also asking for appropriate support to guide them in balancing the needs of the institution with the needs of the staff they are responsible for.

**Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning**

6. **Fast tracking sharing on safeguarding academic integrity.** One of the most alarming findings in this study concerns the integrity of academic assessments as a result of cheating and illicit collaborations that have overwhelmed student disciplinary structures at institutions. Creating opportunities and platforms for institutions to share solutions for these challenges are vital to ensuring quality of teaching and learning.

7. **The need for national and institutional guidance to ensure quality.** Many of the challenges experienced by respondents could be addressed by a uniformed approach to quality in blended teaching and learning. This should include a collective, conceptual understanding of different forms of technology-enhanced teaching and learning practices, what best practices look like for each of these practices, which assessment methods work best, and so forth. Such policies or guidelines should also align with discussions within the sector on how teaching and learning could be reimagined in the South African context.
8. **Enabling digital skills and the ethical use of digital resources.** The majority of respondents recognise the importance of digital skills training for students and university teachers. As with the SAULM survey report that recommended national prioritisation and a collective approach to develop digital skills, the SEP-TLF findings also point to the need for a unified response to address digital skill gaps, particularly if technology is going to play a bigger role in teaching and learning. The ability to ethically engage with digital resources is another prime concern of academic staff, with many reflecting on the amount of plagiarism taking place. This too corresponds to the SAULM findings, where students also indicated the need to know how to ethically engage with learning materials, thus implying that at least some of these behaviours are due to ignorance.

9. **Reconsider recognition for quality teaching and learning.** For many respondents, the pressure to publish and produce measurable outputs contributed to the stress of the emergency response, as most of their time is now dedicated to teaching and not research. Therefore, the development of a new blended teaching and learning environment that will enable institutions and staff to compete as global teaching and learning providers will require scholarship and considerable investment of staff’s time. By recognising and encouraging staff to publish on teaching and learning innovation, academic staff would be able to reclaim some of the research/teaching balance.

10. **Embracing analytics to enable understanding and quality.** A concern raised repeatedly by respondents is the inability to use traditional methods, such as ‘reading the room’ to gauge students’ understanding of the work. This arguably contributes to an increase in quizzes or other forms of continuous assessment to determine whether students are keeping up. This is also confirmed in that university teachers rely strongly on direct feedback from students to inform their planning and decisions, with little other data/information sources used. Among academic leaders and managers, while they mostly receive data/information from their respective faculties or departments to guide decisions, they generally do not list data/information to guide decisions as a priority for permanent change, yet they would like to receive more training in using data analytics. Collectively, these findings might point to the fact that academic staff might not have access to, or might not be aware of, different data or information sources that could help them track and manage students’ and staff’s participation in their modules, make changes to teaching, learning or assessment approaches, refer struggling students to appropriate support structures, and inform a range of other strategic and operational decisions. A stronger emphasis on nurturing an evidence-based culture and making sure that academic staff have access to relevant, timeous and useful data could be an important contributor to the success of a more blended teaching and learning environment.

There is little doubt that a ‘new normal’ will include more technology in teaching and learning practices. However, the main concern in the South African context remains the potential of introducing more technology that will widen existing inequalities – a concern also raised by Czerniewicz et al. (2020). Thus, any considerations that will guide the sector towards a more blended teaching and learning environment will have to start at considering how technology can enhance education for all, not just some. Further, the benefits of technology inclusion, such as making the sector more resilient to disruptions, having a stronger evidence-trail to track participation and nudge students towards support structures, and better preparing students for the world of work they will be joining, are nullified if participants in blended teaching and learning cannot fully engage with the educational environment or when quality assurance measures are absent or lacking. Returning to the work of Beach et al. (2016), the future of academic staff development includes a focus on the evolution of technology in pedagogical approaches, an increased focus on student success, and an increased use of student-centred and evidence-based practices in teaching and learning spaces. In the South African context, the emergency remote responses brought on by the pandemic have intensified these and other focus areas, including reflections on the nature of teaching and learning, considering digital inequalities, and the need for the sector and institutions to respond with appropriate support for staff. Thus, this work will contribute to how academic staff and institutions rethink the conditions of knowledge, information delivery, learning, and pedagogy within the changing nature of their work.

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Appendix 1: Recommendation matrix of suggested actions at national and institutional level

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<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>National level</th>
<th>Institutional level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creating an enabling environment for blended learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognising the importance of resources and infrastructure</td>
<td>National approaches to support institutions with securing infrastructure, data and devices. E.g. reconceptualising the use of infrastructure grants.</td>
<td>Institutional prioritisation of access to appropriate devices, data and online institutional platforms to enable seamless transition between on-campus and off-campus teaching and learning for all staff and students (e.g. via Virtual Private Networks).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reimagining the integration of pedagogy and technology</td>
<td>Provide platforms at national level to stimulate discussions and knowledge building that promote context-specific understanding and good practice guidelines in flexible, blended/hybrid teaching and learning.</td>
<td>Institutional-level communities of practice, coordinated for example by faculties or centres for teaching and learning, that share good practices internally and contribute to the national and international knowledge base through research and publications where relevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconceptualising academic staff development interventions</td>
<td>Coordinate and catalyse national-level opportunities through implementation of the National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers.²</td>
<td>Use evidence-based methods to identify training and development needs to inform contextualised interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing academic staff development communication approaches</td>
<td>Facilitate discussions on the alignment of national recognition (e.g. Teaching and Learning awards, Fellowships, etc.) for participation in academic staff development.</td>
<td>Use data analytics to assess the effectiveness of different communication channels to increase awareness and uptake of training and development opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering academic leaders</td>
<td>Promote and enable initiatives such as the Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) programme to support capacity in higher education leadership and management.</td>
<td>Reconceptualise current institutional training for leaders and managers to include a focus on managing staff in blended teaching and learning environments.</td>
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<td><strong>Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fast-tracking sharing on safeguarding academic integrity</td>
<td>Coordinate national conversations on best practices; compile guidelines on quality online assessment and develop policy frameworks that take new policies into account (e.g. POPIA, Cybercrimes act).</td>
<td>Review assessment policies by considering the appropriate mix of face-to-face versus online assessment and adapt processes. Develop or adjust internal training offerings and policies to guide appropriate assessment development, administration, and accountability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need for national and institutional guidance to ensure quality</td>
<td>Compile guidelines on quality blended teaching and learning within the current policy framework to guide the sector.</td>
<td>Compile institutional – level policies/ guidelines that align with national policies and guidelines aimed at guiding staff and students towards quality-blended teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling digital skills and the ethical use of digital resources</td>
<td>A national and coordinated approach to developing different levels of digital skills for all students entering post-school education and training.</td>
<td>Prioritise digital skills development as enablers to engage with academic work, as well as explicitly focusing on digital skills development as a graduate attribute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconsidering recognition of quality teaching and learning</td>
<td>Coordinate and catalyse national recognition (e.g. Teaching and Learning awards, Fellowships, etc.) to enhance the status of teaching and learning experts and promote the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) on a national level.</td>
<td>Support institutional recognition and development of SoTL programmes and other initiatives, such as teaching and learning awards or conferences to share best practices and reward excellence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embracing analytics to enable understanding and quality</td>
<td>Use national platforms to encourage an evidence-based approach in all functions of institutions and as an accountability measure for quality assurance supported by appropriate investment.</td>
<td>Establish processes to track staff training and development, inform leaders/managers with appropriate data to execute evidence-based decisions and planning complemented by student analytics to create highly responsive academic support, including just-in-time training.</td>
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