Quality Enhancement Project

Institutional Submissions: Phase 1

Due Date: 1 September 2014

Name of Institution	University of South Africa
Contact Person	Prof MC Mare
Date of Submission	1 September 2014

The aim of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) is to improve student success, both at individual higher education institutions (HEIs) and in the higher education sector as a whole. Student success is defined as enhanced student learning with a view to increasing the number of graduates, with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable.

Institutional submissions form the starting point for each phase of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP). They are intended to be for information rather than for evaluative purposes, although it is expected that institutions will recognise the value and importance of serious engagement in producing the submissions. Institutional submissions serve a purpose for both the institutions and the CHE. For institutions, the submissions provide an opportunity to reflect, at an institutional level, on what they are currently doing or planning to do and where there are unaddressed needs related to the focus areas. For the CHE, the institutional submissions enable the CHE to elicit information related to student success from all universities. This information is needed for two reasons:

1. It serves as a baseline, providing a snapshot of current thinking, practices and priorities in each institution related to the focus areas, in particular and student success, in general.

2. It provides a starting point for identifying common approaches and problems as well as unique approaches that are particularly effective and problems that are of particular concern to sub-sectors of the university community. This will allow more focussed discussions to take place later on in the QEP.

The institutional submissions should be concise and focused. The CHE may request universities to provide more information, if required. Submissions should include an indication of where further information can be accessed from the university's website, if applicable.

Institutions are requested to be frank and clear in their responses. Otherwise it will be difficult for the higher education sector to engage meaningfully with enablers of and obstacles to student success. While there are indisputable differences in institutional contexts, most challenges are common to several, if not many, institutions. Clear and honest statements of the challenges will facilitate the development of strategies to address them. On the other hand, successful approaches developed in one institutional context could be adapted to help students in another context.

1. INTRODUCTION (2-5 pages)

1.1 Briefly describe the features of your institutional context that are most salient to the success of your students.

Unisa provides open distance education that is mindful of the context of South Africa and it makes full use of a wide spectrum of pedagogical and technological innovations in order to support students to succeed in their studies. The experienced, knowledgeable and competent staff at Unisa (both academic and administrative support) contributes greatly to the success of the students and the implementation of the Open Distance Learning (ODL) model. Over the years the institution has migrated from pure correspondence to ODL.

The following contextualised aspects of ODL are geared towards supporting and enabling students to achieve success in their studies:

1.1.1 Qualification design

The qualifications are designed to meet the needs of industry in the South African context through relevant and academically sound content that enables students:

- to work independently
- to be interactive
- to pace themselves
- to critically engage in the learning process

To this end, the Curriculum Policy requires all study material to be developed by teams of specialists in various fields. The procedures for the function of teams are contained in the Senate approved "Framework for the implementation of a Team Approach to Curriculum and Learning Development" (FTA). Curriculum development projects are managed by education consultants (ECs) from the Directorate of Curriculum and Learning Development (DCLD). The ECs are qualified and experienced instructional technologists or learning developers and their role is to guide the development teams in using appropriate pedagogical strategies, assessment strategies and general design to create Rich Environments for Active Learning (REAL), including the appropriate use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Instructional technologists and/or learning developers are supplemented by ICT technicians, who develop tools and artefacts for use in teaching and learning for e-Learning purposes.

Each development process begins with a rigorous review of existing modules or programmes by the Department of Strategy, Planning and Quality Assurance (DSPQA). The DSPQA has developed a mathematical model, called UQUES, to obtain feedback from various stakeholders (students, professional and support departments, employers, professional bodies) on particular modules or learning programmes and to develop turnaround strategies where areas of weakness are identified. The UQUES measures performance against agreed upon quality standards. As much as the mathematical model is useful, it is limited in terms of rigour. The UQUES data is supplemented, where applicable, by other sources of information such as annual student reviews of modules and tutors, the annual student satisfaction survey results and college and departmental initiatives (such as the College of Human Sciences (CHS) internal programme reviews and the Department of Tuition and Facilitation of Learning (DTFL) Best Reflective Practices (BRP) programme).

The study material writing teams are composed of Unisa employed teaching staff, who are

subject specialists, supported by co-developers from other universities and/or critical readers, who are also specialists in the particular discipline. The learning materials are edited by qualified editors from the Directorate of Language Services and prepared for printing or online learning by a number of specialists (graphic designers, layout specialists) in the Department of Study Materials, Print and Despatch (SMPD).

1.1.2   Student support

The student is placed at the centre of all initiatives of the university and the support thus includes administrative, cognitive and emotional support. The range of student support activities and programmes available and the rationale for particular student support initiatives are documented in a Senate approved "Conceptual Framework for Student Support" document.

1.1.2.1 Administrative student support

Unisa produces a range of publications (including digital resources) with information on its learning programmes, student support initiatives and student funding to enable students to make informed choices. Students are provided with administrative support mainly through the provision of services at the regional learning centres spread across all provinces of South Africa and one regional office located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Academic departments make use of text messaging, announcements via the myUnisa learning management system (LMS) and e-mails to provide both additional academic and administrative support to students.

1.1.2.2 Cognitive student support

Orientation programmes are provided to students at all Unisa learning centres to ensure that students are aware of the demands of ODL. Students are provided with digital literacy training to enable them to participate effectively in teaching and learning within an ODL institution that makes extensive use of ICTs.

Academic literacy programmes, as well as programmes aimed at improving the study skills of students, are also available for students.

The Integrated Tutor Model (ITM), approved by the Senate in 2012, provides for the appointment of e-tutors for students registered for undergraduate modules. The model is in the implementation phase and, currently, e-tutors are appointed for NQF 5 modules and some approved NQF 6 modules. The model further provides for the appointment of face-to-face tutors in selected modules with high enrolment and low success rates ("modules at risk"). The concept of "modules at risk", as defined above, is used to provide targeted support to students enrolled for these modules, such as face-to-face discussion classes with lecturers. Taking into consideration the comprehensive nature of courses offered at the institution, academic support is provided by the teaching staff in various forms, including practical training and synchronous and asynchronous lecturer-led presentations through myUnisa. Student engagement is facilitated through student activities such as mandatory assignments, practical laboratory activities, workshops and seminars and assessments that provide extensive, detailed and timeous feedback to students. Students are invited to participate in discussion forums, where they can interact with one another and pose questions to their peers and the lecturers, enhancing the sense of community among Unisa students. Additional mentoring

and tutoring are provided for students who have only one or two modules left to complete a qualification.

1.1.2.3 Emotional student support

The Directorate for Counselling and Career Development (DCCD) is a referral structure within the institution that is able to identify the emotional and psychological challenges students are faced with in an ODL and higher education environment and where appropriate interventions are provided to students to assist them to overcome and deal with these challenges. The DCCD works in collaboration with other units such as the Directorate: Information and Analysis, the Directorate: Institutional Research and the Advocacy and Resource Centre for Students with Disabilities (ARCSWID) to provide the required support to students where they encounter difficulties arising from studying at an ODL institution.

1.1.3   Appropriate learning programmes

Unisa offers a comprehensive Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) including vocational, professional and general formative qualifications. Students, who only qualify for enrolment in a higher certificate, can access Unisa and the university offers opportunities for students to progress up to a doctoral degree. At entry level, extended learning programmes are available in many colleges and DHET funded foundation programmes are available in SET and Business Management. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme provides a systematic process for assessing experienced and mature individuals' competencies for entry into particular learning programmes.

1.1.4   Student profiling

Student profiling enables the university to provide appropriate interventions at each stage of the student's walk through the system. Student progress is now tracked and those identified as at risk of academic exclusion are notified timeously and referred for help.

The Student Success Forum (SSF) is a sub-committee of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC) tasked to analyse student data and develop interventions that will enhance student success. The SSF has facilitated the tracking of students through cohort analyses, examination pass trends, dropout analyses and developed interventions such as helping students develop appropriate behaviours for success in their particular learning programmes and reducing student drop out rates.

1.2. Indicate how the submission was prepared, including the names and designations of the people involved with producing various sections of the submission.

The QEP is coordinated institutionally by the Vice Principal Academic: Teaching and Learning, supported by the Executive Director: Tuition and Facilitation of Learning and the Executive Dean: College of Science, Engineering and Technology.

The institution hosted two dedicated seminars in March and April to specifically engage critically with the Unisa community on the QEP. A progress report was considered by the Senate in June 2014 and, at the Senate meeting in August, the document was submitted for approval. The Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, as well as the Student Success Forum, considered all the input and feedback received from the internal structures. A lead

writer was appointed for each focus area, supported by a number of writers from professional and support departments and colleges.

Focus Area number	Writers	Designation
1	Ms Alice Goodwin-Davey (lead writer)	Professional Development specialist, CPD
	Dr B Zawada	Deputy Executive Dean: CHS
	Prof AG Oosthuizen	Tuition Manager (CEMS)
	Dr WA Louw	Head: CPD
	Ms E Kovacs	Acting Director (Organisation Development)
2	Dr MJ Mashiapata (lead writer)	Acting Director (DCCD)
	Prof M Temane	Deputy Registrar
	Mrs Y Chetty	Director (Institutional Research)
3	Prof MC Matoane (lead writer)	Director (DISS)
	Dr E Johannes	Deputy Director (Quality Assurance and Promotion)
	Dr B Mbambo-Thata	Executive Director (Library)
	Dr K Jacobs	Acting Director (Regional Services)
	Dr L Steyn	Head (Academy of Applied Technologies in Teaching and eLearning) (AATTeL)
	Mr T Yeni	Director (Academic Systems)
	Mr M Willemse	Deputy Director (Property Management)
4	Prof PH Havenga (lead writer)	Executive Director (Academic Planning)
	Prof M Linington	Executive Director (College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences) (CAES)
	Ms L Griesel	Executive Director (DSPQA)
	Mr G Barnes	Director Institutional Analyses (DIA)

2.   FOCUS AREA 1: ENHANCING ACADEMICS AS TEACHERS (3-6 pages)

(Including professional development, reward and recognition, workload, conditions of service and performance appraisal)

2.1 Which aspects of your institution's strategic plan relate to this focus area? (Please be specific by quoting from the strategic plan)

The Unisa Strategic Plan, "Unisa 2013–2015: Towards a high performance university" directly relates to enhancing academics as teachers.

The emphasis on quality teaching and, thus, quality teachers, is a primary concern, as indicated in the mission statement and value statement:

> ### Our mission:
>
> The University of South Africa is a Comprehensive, Open Distance Learning institution that produces excellent scholarship and research, provides quality tuition and fosters active community engagement. We are guided by the principles of lifelong learning, student-centredness, innovation and creativity. Our efforts contribute to the knowledge and information society, advance development, nurture a critical citizenry and ensure global sustainability (page 7).
>
> ### From the value proposition:
>
> The rich learning experiences of our students at Unisa ensure that, with corresponding effort on their part, their chances of success are enhanced considerably. This means not only that they graduate with a breadth of knowledge and skills necessary for the workplace and for critical citizenship, but also with the self-knowledge, confidence and realisation of potential necessary for lifelong learning, creativity and a fulfilling life (page 8).

Specifically, the first goal of the strategic plan calls for the enhancement of academics, in their roles as teachers, specifically within an ODL approach. This also involves curriculum and course design, integrating student support, assessment and more.

Goal 1:   Improve academic performance in teaching and learning, research and innovation as well as community engagement to enhance institutional impact and student success.

Related strategies to achieve this goal include:

> 1.2 Develop/re-develop relevant curricula to align with new policies, the market and innovations
>
> 1.3 Develop an integrated student support model (including academic, tutor and financial support)
>
> 1.4 Revise assessment processes and practices to ensure relevance and efficiency
>
> 1.9 Maximise the appointment of appropriately qualified staff to ensure required levels of support

Goal 3: Promote service efficiency and effectiveness in the institution towards being a recognised student-centred organisation

Related strategies to achieve this goal include:

3.1: Inform, educate and train staff proactively in the use and adoption of new technologies and relevant communication strategies

2.2 What activities do you currently have in place related to this focus area that are successful? What evidence do you use to conclude that they are successful? (Do not provide detailed evidence, just a description of the type of evidence you collect and a short summary of the results.)

In an institution the size of Unisa, there are multiple initiatives and stakeholders involved when dealing with professional development and building capacity of staff. In gathering evidence for this QEP report, a multi-sector task team met to collect various types of evidence of successful projects and activities. These can briefly be described in terms of the following:

2.2.1 Institution-wide initiatives to enhance academics as teachers

- The Centre for Professional Development (CPD) facilitates
  - the induction of new academic staff in collaboration with DCLD
  - assessor and moderator training for academics
  - the "Learning in a digital age: my facilitator's role" programme (Training for the development of e-tutors and teaching assistants, as part of the Integrated Tutor Model)
  - virtual learning environment training
  - multiple-choice questions training
- The Directorate: Curriculum and Learning Development (DCLD) coordinates
  - the Excellence in Tuition Awards
  - myUnisa forums and myUnisa training
  - Podcast creation training
- Academics are offered the Master's degree in Education (ODL) – a collaborative qualification for University of Maryland University College and Unisa (60 academics are currently enrolled)
- Quality assurance initiatives implemented by DSPQA: UQUES
- Information and Communications Technology (ICT) support includes:
  - Turn-it In software
  - On Screen Marking (OSM) training
  - jRouter for assessment training

2.2.2 Human Resources Development initiatives

As part of the support for staff at Unisa, the Human Resource Development (HRD) directorate runs successful workshops and training sessions in support of academic staff. The institutional Training Fund is available to provide funding for staff to attend conferences, workshops and other training initiatives requested by individuals or departments, in part, to support academics and administrative staff to achieve the interventions stated in their IPMS Personal Development Plans, .

In addition, HRD provides several initiatives, specifically in support of academics in their teaching careers. This includes:

- the talent management and retention strategy that they have in place

- the Young Academics Programme

- Chair of Department training

- the Wellness Survey

- the Integrated Performance Management System (IPMS) training

- the APEX Award – Accelerated professional excellence award

2.2.3 College initiatives

In addition to the initiatives from Unisa's dedicated structures (such CPD and DCLD) and HRD, there are academic support initiatives in every college to support their academics as teachers. These include:

- College quality assurance initiatives

- Workload Models in the respective colleges

- College-based training and mentoring, for example:
    - the CHS Scholars Development Programme, 2nd Tier Leadership and others
    - the CEMS on-boarding programme for new academic staff
    - CLAW established a young Researchers Committee to provide for various initiatives to capacitate emerging researchers

- Student feedback from the DIA student evaluation

- Mentoring through secondary lecturers and subject managers

2.3 What activities, related to this focus area, have you initiated during the past three or four years that have not been as successful as you had hoped? In what ways were they unsuccessful? What do you think might be the reasons for the lack of success?

In order to gather evidence about these initiatives over the past few years, this task team has determined that a survey should be distributed to the various structures within each college to ascertain the success or failure of these programmes.

There are several areas where we must acknowledge certain issues and areas of concern, these are:

- A need for professionalisation of ODL academics, as teachers. In other words, while hiring practices focus on subject matter expertise and research, there may be little or no emphasis on teaching skills or educational leadership. This lacks needs to be addressed immediately within the context of ODL.

- Once-off training does not work. Therefore, there is a great need for the integrated professional development of new academic staff that takes cognisance of their workplace needs. In other words, a contextualised programme of professional development, which will support academics throughout the process of becoming acclimatised into the Unisa ODL environment.

- There is a constant need for skills updating of academics within the complex and constantly-changing environment of ODL. In other words, from pedagogies to technologies, we are constantly transforming.

2.4 What activities have you recently implemented or are you planning to implement in the next 12 to 18 months related to this focus area? Why have you chosen these particular activities? What is the need or problem they are intended to address?

In order to address these needs, the university has put in place the CPD to foreground the needs mentioned. The CPD has proposed the following menu of services:

- Short Learning Programmes

    – Threshold competence in ODL (Induction of new academic staff) in collaboration with DCLD

    – Assessor and moderator training for academics

    – The design and development of ODL environments

    – A scholarly approach to teaching practices in ODL

    – Towards pedagogical leadership

    – Learning in a digital age: my facilitator's role (for development of e-tutors and teaching assistants, as part of the Integrated Tutor model)

    – Informal initiatives to address institutional and ongoing needs

- HRD

    – A Talent Management Strategy is being implemented

    – Excellence in Tuition Award

    – College Excellence Awards

2.5 What are the challenges or problems related to this focus area that still need to be addressed in your institution?

- Teaching and learning should be foregrounded.

- The ODL nature of the institution should be foregrounded.

- The relationship between teaching and learning and the other performance areas for academics, namely research and innovation and community engagement, should be reconsidered, especially with regard to the IPMS.

- The relationship between *student success* and *quality teaching* should be clarified.

- Quality teaching should be measured against clear criteria.

- Language proficiency of academics in an ODL institution should be measured and researched.

- Multilingualism in teaching and learning should be introduced and evaluated.

- The role of ICTs and ODL in quality teaching should be clarified.

- A truly reflexive attitude should be fostered.

- Rewards in teaching and learning should be considered, as well as the effectiveness of these rewards.

- The Academic Human Resource Allocation Model (AHRAM) should be reconsidered to provide for good teaching.

- The IPMS should support good teaching practices.

3. FOCUS AREA 2: ENHANCING STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT (3-6 pages)

(Including career and curriculum advising, life and academic skills development, counselling, student performance monitoring and referral)

3.1 Which aspects of your institution's strategic plan relate to this focus area? (Please quote from the strategic plan)

Goal 1 of the 2013–2015 strategic plan reads: "Improve academic performance in teaching and learning … to enhance institutional impact and student success."

With regard to this focus area, the following strategies are used to accomplish Goal 1:

- Strategy 1.3: Develop an integrated student support model (including academic, tutor and financial support). Institutional actions in this regards include:

    – Incremental implementation of the Integrated Tutor Model

    – Finalisation of an optimum regional framework

    – Developing a model for course and career counselling for both online and face-to-face student counselling

    – Implementing Senate approved foundation programmes in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) and Business Management

    – Implementing the student tracking system

    – Refinement of the Framework for Student Support at Unisa

3.2 What activities do you currently have in place related to this focus area that are successful? What evidence do you use to conclude that they are successful? (Do not provide detailed evidence, just a description of the type of evidence you collect.)

3.2.1 Academic advising

- Student advisors are appointed at all offices and are supported by numerous hardcopy and electronic brochures
- Student advisors are specialists per college in the main offices, but generalists in small offices
- Multiple exam opportunities and differing types of assessments for students who have only one or two modules outstanding, in order to complete their qualification.
- E-tutors are specifically linked to students who have only one or two modules outstanding in order to complete their qualification.
- Technology enhanced teaching projects like YouTube channels and podcasts
- Open educational resource (OER) initiatives

3.2.2 Career advising

- Professional counsellors and assistant student counsellors are appointed at all main offices to provide career counselling
- Students in small offices are linked to advisors in the main centres through ICTs (video conferencing)
- Survey results at points of service indicate the satisfaction of students about the received advice, which is, however, contradicted by the Student Satisfaction Survey (methodology issues). This will need to be investigated further.

3.2.3 Life and academic skills and literacy

- Regional offices provide orientation sessions for new students every year.
- Academic literacy interventions (academic writing, numeracy skills) occur at regional offices. An online course was developed for academic literacy in December 2013, which is supported by face-to-face interactions at the regional offices.
- An online tool (Shadowmatch) was procured by the university to assist students to gain an understanding of and to improve habits and behaviours in order to improve their prospects of success in their chosen fields of study. The positive benefit of this tool is that students are able to undertake this independently as an intervention after which they receive an automated report and personal development plan. However, a referral process is in place should they require expert guidance. A pilot study was undertaken in 2012/2013 and the majority of students supported the continuation of this initiative, given the benefits experienced. This initiative is being implemented university-wide from the end of July 2014 and is supported by the colleges and support departments such as DCCD.

3.2.4 Counselling

- Annually a group of Assistant Student Counsellors (ASCs) or "interns" are recruited and provided with training space to counsel students identified in carefully selected areas.
- ASCs follow protocols of referral to Student Counsellors, both at the main campuses and at regional offices.
- During 2013 online counselling projects were initiated centrally and piloted in the Midlands region.
- In some small regional offices, space constraints impact on privacy during counselling sessions.

DCCD provides counselling and career counselling support across the various phases of the Student Walk as follows:

PHASE	INTERVENTIONS
Pre-application phase	• Career guidance for Grade 12 focused on career choice and decisions on post-school field of study • Information and guidance on distance learning
Pre-registration phase	• Career guidance and information on career paths and the relationship between a field of study and the potential career paths
Registration phase	• Career information and guidance on choice of subjects and prospects related to specific curricula
Teaching and learning phase	• Personal and emotional counselling; study skills workshops on topics such as concentration, dealing with anxiety, time management, exam preparation, study strategies, etc.

	- Academic Literacy programmes, including reading and writing and quantitative literacy support have been rolled out in the regions - Peer Collaborative Learning - Science Foundation Programme support in selected programmes and modules - Support for the development of online courses and signature courses
University exit phase and beyond	- Career development programmes that include graduate employability skills, student-employer linkages and on-campus career fairs - Training to enhance graduate attributes in students

3.2.5 Performance monitoring

- Department of Institutional Analyses cohort studies
- Student Success Forum/Senate Teaching and Learning Committee reports on examinations, target setting and graduation rates

3.3 What activities related to this focus area have you initiated over the past three or four years that have not been as successful as you had hoped? In what ways were they unsuccessful? What do you think might be the reasons for the lack of success?

3.3.1 Academic preparedness of students

The pilot programme for the development of the assessment tool experienced problems with the technology relating to bandwidth and capacity and it could not go fully online for roll out to all the students.

3.3.2 Tracking system

Although there are disparate programmes to perform some aspects of a student tracking system, obtaining management information to make decisions quickly is underdeveloped. Some of the available technologies used for this purpose are archaic and labour intensive. The development of a tracking system that will be valuable to academic colleges is thus essential.

3.4 What activities have you recently implemented or are you planning to implement in the next 12 to 18 months related to this focus area? Why have you chosen these particular activities? What is the need or problem they are intended to address?

3.4.1 Student relationship management

The institution has developed a framework for handling student enquiries and referrals within the various operational centres. The development of an ICT platform for implementing the framework is currently under development. Companies skilled to develop the system to meet the needs of Unisa have been identified through a tender system and the process is on track.

3.4.2 Student Success Unit

After the approval of the Conceptual Framework for Student Success by Senate, the Student Success Forum (SSF) was formed to perform the following functions:

- oversee the implementation of the student success and support frameworks and monitor its impact;
- ensure the cross-functional, institution-wide integration and coordination of all initiatives to enhance student success at under-graduate and post-graduate levels;
- provide a working forum for in-depth engagement with reports, analyses and tracking system information and alerts as well as the sharing of information and best practices across the institution;
- monitor the dissemination of student and institutional intelligence to all relevant student support role-players.

Most of the interventions and tracking requirements coming out of the activities of the SSF required individuals within the institution to follow-up on them and take them to their logical conclusion. Consequently, a new unit, the Student Success Unit, is being created within the DCCD to perform such tasks.

3.5 What are the challenges or problems related to this focus area that still need to be addressed in your institution?

- Adequate ICT systems – there were problems with the capacity of ICT to handle, for example, the implementation of an online assessment tool for academic readiness
- The support provided to students, where non-academic and personal circumstances hinder their chances of success
- Students' participation in the e-tutor system

4. FOCUS AREA 3: ENHANCING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT (3-6 pages)

(Including teaching and learning spaces, ICT infrastructure and access, technology-enabled tools and resources, library facilities)

4.1 Which aspects of your institution's strategic plan relate to this focus area? (Please quote from the strategic plan).

The new Unisa Strategic Plan, the "Unisa 2015: An Agenda for Transformation" (2005), which came into effect in 2014, outlined key strategic goals and targets, which specifically relate to enhancing the learning environment. In particular, strategic goal 6.5 states that,

How people learn, different learning styles and when and where people learn, impact on how we mediate learning. We must give attention to all of these in order to create a flexible and supportive environment, to foster student access and success.

At the time, a number of strategies were identified to support the attainment of the goal. Five years into the implementation of its strategy, Unisa has paused to reflect on progress, to reprioritise and reformulate aspects of its strategic plan in the light of the changing institutional and higher education context (Unisa 2015 Revisited). The latter is implemented through the "2013–2015: Towards a High Performance University Strategic Plan".

The 2014 IOP identified the following strategies related to the learning environment:

- Strategy 1.3: Develop an integrated student support model (including academic, tutor and financial support)

- Strategy 1.4: Revise assessment processes and practices to ensure relevance and efficiency

- Strategy 1.8: Promote the appropriate adoption and use of cutting edge technology in teaching, learning, research and community engagement

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(Goal 1: Improve academic performance in teaching and learning … to enhance … student success.)

- Strategy 2.1: Develop an organisational architecture framework that ensures the sustainability of Unisa by charting synergies between technology, human capacities, systems, processes and organisational culture

- Strategy 2.3: Implement an effective ICT disaster recovery plan

(Goal 2: Establish Unisa as a leader in sound corporate governance and the promoting of sustainability)

- Strategy 3.2: Actively promote the revision, appropriate adoption, utilisation and maintenance of systems, processes and technologies across the institution in pursuit of increased efficiencies and service

- Strategy 3.3: Design and implement an ICT governance model to ensure appropriate reporting practices and compliance with national policy and benchmarked industry norms

(Goal 3: Promote service efficiency and effectiveness in the institution towards being a recognised student-centred organisation)

- Strategy 4.1: Create an enabling environment for people with disabilities through dedicated infrastructure, academic and technological support staff

- Strategy 4.2: Design and implement a student/staff communication model to ensure adherence to the service charter

- Strategy 4.3: Draft and implement a conducive institutional culture plan in line with the Charter on Transformation and Service Charter

- Strategy 4.4: Develop a staff work ethics/expectations model in line with the

governance norms

- Strategy 4.5: Develop a student satisfaction monitoring tool

(Goal 4: Establish a people-centred university by enhancing capabilities and capacities and advancing cultural transformation)

- Strategy 5.1: Embed Unisa's reputation as a leading ODL institution on the African continent and internationally

(Goal 5: Cultivate external stakeholders and stakeholder relationship)

4.2 What activities or facilities do you currently have in place related to this focus area that are successful? What evidence do you use to conclude that they are successful? (Do not provide detailed evidence, just a description of the type of evidence you collect.)

4.2.1 Teaching and learning spaces

Unisa has regional learning centres across all provinces in the country, which provide teaching and learning spaces such as computer laboratories, library commons, photocopying facilities for students and mobile libraries. In addition, the learning centres enter into partnerships with institutions in their vicinity to cater specifically for tutorial classes.

A science campus in Florida makes provision for students studying in the science fields to be exposed to an appropriate and effecting teaching and learning environment through state of the art science facilities.

4.2.2 ICT infrastructure and access

- The regional learning centres have well-resourced computer laboratories to enable students to download and upload their study material as well as engage in other teaching and learning activities.

- The institution has an initiative wherein it identifies centres with functioning computers (Telecentres), particularly in areas where the regional learning centres are not within easy reach for our students, to facilitate student access to computers.

- The institution has video conferencing facilities at the Muckleneuk and Florida campuses and across all regional learning centres to enhance the learning experiences of students.

- An ICT broadband project was introduced in the institution to provide wireless connections across all campuses and regional learning centres as well as an initiative to provide students with discounted 3G contracts.

4.2.3 Technology enabled tools and resources

- The institution's learning management system, myUnisa, is functioning effectively in enhancing students' learning experiences. Students are able to access study material via myUnisa and they can upload assignments. In addition, myUnisa is a platform that

enables students to participate in discussion forums for optimum learning.

- Interaction between academics and students is facilitated via myLife student e-mails as well teleconferencing. Urgent notices are communicated to students by sending them SMSs.

- Unisa has an active ARCSWID office, which ensures that students with disabilities are able to access all teaching and learning material (ARCSWID office). In addition, the ARCSWID office has formed collaborations with the regions to establish centres of excellence for students with disabilities.

- Unisa has introduced online modules and Signature modules, which affords students the opportunity for peer and collaborative learning as well as the autonomy to decide on what to learn.

4.2.4 Library facilities

The library continues to support research, teaching and learning with dedicated professional staff allocated to serve colleges.

4.2.4.1 Research Commons

The dedicated Research Space in the Muckleneuk Library has been upgraded to offer fully-fledged research services and is now a Research Commons.

4.2.4.2 Branch and mobile library services

The branch library services have received a funding allocation of R15 555 400. The intended upgrades include dedicated learning commons facilities, increased book collections, expanded RFID equipment, review of space allocations; improved infrastructure with regard to power and network wiring, carpeting and refurbishment; installation of appropriately-designed counters and furniture and computer training facilities for Information Literacy training purposes.

The library has the following branches: Akaki (Ethiopia), Cape Town, Durban, East London, Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Nelspruit, Polokwane, Rustenburg, Sunnyside.

4.2.4.3 Mobile libraries in Limpopo (Polokwane) and the Western Cape (Cape Town)

As a pilot project two mobile libraries were introduced to the Cape Town and Polokwane regional library services, respectively. The use of these mobile libraries has increased and the collections have been expanded (see item on growth of library collections). A project is underway to expand the services to five other regions, namely the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, the Midlands and Mpumalanga regions.

4.2.4.4 Self-help services utilising Radio Frequency Identification (RFID)

Since the implementation of the self-help services in the Library (using Radio Frequency Identification Technology, RFID), the usage of the self-help issue desks in all libraries has improved significantly. It now indicates a larger use of self-help services than desk issues. The implementation of additional RFID-enabled circulation equipment at existing and new branch libraries, for example Rustenburg, Nelspruit and East London, was finalised in 2013. The Library can therefore focus on client services and support for clients with time saved on manual issues.

4.2.4.5 Library collections

In response to our clients' needs, the Unisa Library collections were expanded and the library

remains one of the most valuable assets of the university.

4.2.4.6 Unisa Institutional Repository (UnisaIR)

The value of an institutional repository lies inter alia in the fact that it is a type of digital library that captures the original research output and other academic intellectual property generated by the academia and researchers of the university. It gradually becomes an integral part of the future of research libraries, allowing researchers to perform self-archiving and, by so doing, self-management of the publishing of their research output.

The institutional repository extends the library's capability to participate in the scholarly communication system, especially in the growing world of digital resources. The content forms an integral part of the library's collections and provides a service to and a platform for the academic users and the community at large.

The UnisaIR remains an important tool in support of the research strategy at Unisa. It plays a critical role in the electronic preservation, management and dissemination of Unisa's intellectual output. It creates a coherent view of Unisa's research output with global reach and is based on Open Access principles.

4.3 What activities or facilities related to this focus area have you undertaken or put in place during the past three or four years that have not been as successful as you had hoped? In what ways were they unsuccessful? What do you think might be the reasons for the lack of success?

4.3.1 Teaching and learning spaces

- While partnerships with external institutions allows for expansion in teaching and learning spaces, sometimes these result in poor attendance of tutorial classes.

- The satellite technology did not sufficiently enhance teaching and learning and, eventually, had to be closed down.

- The unreliable ICT connectivity hampers the provision of e-learning infrastructure as a critical component of ODL.

4.3.2 ICT infrastructure and access

- As a way of increasing students' access to technology, Unisa created an opportunity for students to buy laptops at reduced rates, however, most students still found these laptops unaffordable.

- The Unisa ICT environment is currently unable to cope with the increasing online demands brought about by the adoption of a blended mode of teaching.

4.3.3 Technology enabled tools and resources

- The introduction of the power courses (in 2007) was discontinued when they did not achieve the intended purpose.

- The Unisa call centre was closed down in 2012.

- The satellite broadcast services were closed down in 2012.

- The use of e-learning toasters at the regional centres, for the purpose of accessing

study material, was discontinued.

4.3.4   Library facilities

Library Renovation Project

The "Unisa 2015 Revisited" informed the updated planning and requirements for the renovations of the Muckleneuk and Florida Libraries. The Library engaged directorates in workshops on the requirements for the renovations. Work group meetings, research on requirements for library facilities and space, as well as information gathered during visits, to renovated libraries were integrated in these requirements.

It is important to note that the facilities need to provide services according to the strategies of the university and should provide suitable facilities and space for clients involved in teaching and learning, as well as research, in these two libraries. The project requires a visionary team with a deep understanding of the needs, interacting with the Library and the university's vision of future teaching and learning and research requirements.
With regard to the space planning, building design and flexibility are key to the project (planning for future technology, changing library collections, possible future expansion, changing user-demographics, etc). Aspects to consider include user demographics, standards and guidelines and design for users, collections and staff. The renovation plans have been signed off and these plans will ensure enhanced services to and facilities for library staff as well as clients. Once the project has been signed off by the Minister of Higher Education, the implementation can commence.

4.4 What activities or facilities have you recently implemented or acquired or are you planning to implement or acquire in the next 12 to 18 months related to this focus area? Why have you chosen these particular activities or facilities? What is the need or problem they are intended to address?

4.4.1 ICT infrastructure and access

In this regard, the following initiatives have been undertaken:

- The Electronic Content Management (ECM) project

- The Student Relationship Management (SRM) system – to enhance Unisa's responsiveness to student queries, requests and suggestions, which is aimed at improving overall service delivery to students

- An online centralised booking system (Archibus) – to effectively manage venue bookings across the institution

- The Teacher Resource Centres (TRC) project – in collaboration with the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Unisa will roll out 45 TRCs nationally. (These will be primarily for the use of the Unisa College of Education student teachers, but will also be open to DBE teachers and the surrounding communities.)

4.4.2 Technology enabled tools and resources

In this regard, the following initiatives have been undertaken:

- The Academy for Applied Technologies in Teaching and e-Learning has initiated the following projects (more information obtainable from the AATTeL website): Podcast/vodcast hosting, the E-portfolios project, interactive videos and graphics, the CEDU iPad assessment project, Sakai OAE, the Tagging the learning material project, computer-based testing and Apps for teaching and learning.

- The institution has introduced an online registration system.

- The Open Education Resources (OER) project have been adopted.

- Video conferencing upgrades have been undertaken, which will incorporate SmartBoard technology and Scopia Desktop to optimise teaching and learning.

- Regional Offices have introduced Technology Day events, at which ICT invites technology vendors to exhibit their products that are targeted at and priced for students.

4.4.3 Library facilities

In this regard the following initiatives have been undertaken:

- A collaborative initiative between Unisa and the Universities of Fort Hare and Walter Sisulu University to build a library in East London that will jointly serve their students

- A collaborative initiative between the Public Library and the Limpopo Regional Office

4.5 What are the challenges or problems related to this focus area that still need to be addressed in your institution?

4.5.1 Teaching and learning spaces

- The institution would need to reflect on the impact of the blended learning approach, specifically with regard to what constitutes "teaching and learning spaces" – for example, virtual teaching and learning spaces and the implication for current developments in the institution.

- Some regions are battling to provide sufficient teaching and learning space (Mpumalanga and KZN) – the issue of how much space is sufficient space would need to be interrogated.

- Consideration needs to be made regarding the length of contracts with external partners at the regions as yearly contracts pose challenges.

4.5.2 ICT infrastructure and access

- The institution would need to reflect on their ICT policies and the challenges brought about by the advancement of technology, particularly in relation to teaching and learning needs.

- Student access to technology remains a challenge at Unisa and the institution has to find solutions to this problem, this extends to rural areas where connectivity remains a

huge problem.

- Reliable ICT infrastructure must be prioritised.

- The institution has to address students' competency to participate in online environments, in order to maximise utilisation of institutional online initiatives.

- Affordability of devices and data bundles remains a challenge for students – negotiations are ongoing with the vendors and service providers for attractive and competitive pricing.

4.5.3 Technology enabled tools and resources

- The collaboration between the AATTeL and the Department of ICT needs to be clarified and strengthened in order to enable the AATTeL to function effectively and achieve its intended purpose. This also includes receiving the necessary support from all other stakeholders.

4.5.4 Library facilities

The project (see also 6.4 for more information) to renovate the libraries in Muckleneuk and on the Science Campus was submitted to the ministry for approval. The final planning dates and communication campaign will be adjusted once this process has been finalised. This is hampering the improvement of the facilities for enhanced services.

5. FOCUS AREA 4: ENHANCING COURSE AND PROGRAMME ENROLMENT (3-6 pages)

(Including admissions, selection, placement, readmission refusal, pass rates in gateway courses[1], throughput rates, management information systems)

5.1 Which aspects of your institution's strategic plan relate to this focus area? (Please quote from the strategic plan.)

The Council approved the "Unisa 2013-2015: Towards a High Performance University" report, which identifies a number of key institutional imperatives, one of which is academic. The main goal, in terms of this imperative, is to "improve academic performance in Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation and Community Engagement to enhance the institutional impact and student success". The goal is further elaborated on in The Institutional Operational Plan: 2014 (IOP) and action 1.1.3 in the IOP is to "manage student enrolments".

The inclusion of enrolment management, as an activity in the IOP, followed on the decision of Council, towards the end of 2013, that the pattern of unbridled growth that has characterised

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[1] "Gateway courses" are those courses that have a large impact on students' ability to progress. Typically they are prerequisites for other courses, and often they have large enrolments. At many universities, examples of gateway courses are first year Mathematics and Economics. In some cases, if students fail a gateway course they automatically have to extend their studies by one or two semesters.

the institution over the last few years, can no longer be tolerated. Since the institution did not have an enrolment plan to manage enrolments, it required the development of a comprehensive enrolment management plan that had to be based on a zero percentage growth strategy. To accommodate first time entering students, it was further decided that admission and selection criteria and academic progression rules were to be enforced.

5.2 What activities do you currently have in place related to this focus area that are successful? What evidence do you use to conclude that they are successful? (Do not provide detailed evidence, just a description of the type of evidence you collect.)

5.2.1 Admission, selection, progression

Unisa has a comprehensive Admissions Policy and Council approved generic admission criteria. In addition, colleges have college specific admission criteria, which are further augmented by qualification specific admission criteria. In the past the Admissions Policy was not fully implemented and readmission criteria and academic progression rules were not applied. The academic progression rules are now successfully being applied to the cohort of students who registered for the first time in 2013. In terms of the Council approved enrolment plan, readmission and academic progression rules will now also be applied to students registered before 2013. The institutional plan, which includes college specific enrolment plans, also provides for selection criteria, but these will only be implemented in 2016.

5.2.2 Module success and throughput

The university's Directorate of Information and Analysis (DIA) periodically produces reports for the SSF, STLC and MANCOM focused on:

1. students' success (modular views) using various filters (college, CESM, funding group, qualification group, gender, etc.);

2. throughput analyses – the DIA has developed a model of conducting cohort studies based on the course load expected for distance education and the maximum time allowable for completing qualifications in terms of Unisa's Admission Policy;

3. modules at risk – in the past the SSF used one formula for determining modules at risk, namely modules with student enrolments larger than 1500 and having module success rates lower than fifty percent. As from May 2014 the DIA, in collaboration with the SSF, has developed a more nuanced formula for determining modules at risk that particularly takes into consideration the uniqueness of each college. Various initiatives are used in the university to mitigate failure in modules at risk. The SSF annually considers modules that will have face-to-face tutorials at the various regional learning centres using the list generated by the DIA of modules at risk. At the end of each examination seating, the DIA produces information about students who are only left with twenty four credits or less to complete a qualification. These students are then provided additional support by academic departments and provided with a further summative assessment opportunity;

4. examination results per exam sitting – the analyses of these exam sitting results enables the institution to keep track of students' progress periodically;

5. academic exclusion – as from 2013 students, who do not make appropriate progress by passing 36 credits (24 for extended learning programmes) per annum (two consecutive semesters), will be prevented from re-registering. The DIA reports provide the university with a measure of the impact of this admission policy requirement.

The DIA also provides other analyses specifically asked for by any unit of the university. As part of various institutional research initiatives, the DIA produces many reports which provide information about the issues covered in this focus area. All the DIA generated reports are available to each staff member through the HEDA portal.

5.2.3 Management Information Systems

Any staff member in the institution can receive customised reports about any area of their responsibility from the DIA, upon request. Some of the more regular information requests are then standardised by providing the users with a system to self-generate the reports. Most departments, including regional learning centres, involved in student advising and counselling are able to generate Structured Query Language (SQL) reports that provides readily available information.

Several processes which are used by academic departments have built-in information that can be accessed by a click of the button. The in-house built examination processing programme (XMO) provides information about students' performance in formative assessments and analyses of examination results for the particular examination process that can be used for moderation purposes. During the course of the academic year, teaching staff can access information on formative assessments using the Unisa Learning Management System (LMS) (myUnisa). Various other information (number of students accessing the LMS, information on online discussion forums, etc.) needs are available of myUnisa.

5.3 What activities related to this focus area have you initiated during the past three or four years that have not been as successful as you had hoped? In what ways were they unsuccessful? What do you think might be the reasons for the lack of success?

5.3.1 Admission, selection, progression

Enrolment management has only been phased in at Unisa since 2013. At this point it is too early to speculate whether it is successful or not. What is clear is that the implementation of academic progression rules are already affecting student behaviour in the sense that students are taking a higher course load to ensure that qualifications are completed within the allowed time. It does not seem as this has affected the throughput rates and early indications are that it may have a positive effect. However, as indicated, it is too early to pronounce on the overall success or not of enrolment management at Unisa.

5.3.2 Module success and throughput

Although the Science Foundation Programme (SFP) is producing positive results, the processes involved and the degree of impact has not been according to expectation. In this regard, the science colleges (CAES and CSET) have revised the model for the SFP and a new

model will be used as from the 2015 academic year.

The university had acquired infrastructure to broadcast lectures using satellite technology. The Independent Communication Authority of South Africa (ICASA), however, did not provide Unisa with a license necessary for this purpose and the institution had to broadcast through other vendors. In addition, the logistics were onerous and accessibility to this technology by students was minimal, since most students are working during broadcasts. Satellite broadcasting of lectures, like all other synchronous technologies targeted at increasing student success (e.g. discussion classes, radio lectures) could, therefore, not be done at a large scale and was discontinued. The institution, however, still provides for the usage of synchronous technologies, albeit on a small scale (e.g. video conferencing, discussion classes – specifically requested by academic departments – and compulsory practical classes).

5.3.3 Management Information Systems

The IOP identified the need for a tracking system that will provide management information to college managers in an accessible and useful manner. The tracking system project, however, did not materialise as planned. DISA had progressed well with a system of providing dashboard information for each module, including mapping out how early warning systems will be generated to each stakeholder to ensure there is timely interventions for students at risk. According to DISA, the server capacities required for such intensive computation were not available and the process was aborted. In addition, DISA could only provide for a section of the processing required by a fully-fledged tracking system and there was no owner for this process to galvanise the resources required for such a huge project.

Similarly, academic departments often require information in formats not meant for the high level reports generated by various support departments. Acquisition of the drilled-down information and customised reports is often a challenge, since such information needs to be accessed from the Academic and Information Management System (AIMS), SMPD, ICT, HRIS, DSAR and DSAA.

5.4 What activities have you recently implemented or are you planning to implement in the next 12 to 18 months related to this focus area? Why have you chosen these particular activities? What is the need or problem they are intended to address?

Council approved the enrolment plan in April 2014 and, subsequently, a major initiative will be to implement the enrolment plan, especially, the management component thereof, over the next two years. At the highest level the enrolment plan consists of determining the number of students in each qualification, providing for admission criteria and, finally, providing for selection criteria. Each one of the components requires a fundamental redesign of the existing registration system and it is for this reason that these are receiving attention. The enrolment plan will address the problem of unbridled growth, which Unisa has experienced over the past few years. It will also allow the institution to address capacity issues in the context of an open distance learning institution. In a distance education environment capacity cannot be determined by space, as is often the case in a residential context. The main driver in a distance environment would be to determine the number of students and, in that context, to determine the required capacity.

5.5 What are the challenges or problems related to this focus area that still need to be addressed in your institution?

The main challenge in implementing the enrolment management plan is to ensure that the required ICT systems are in place. Over the past few years it has become clear that the existing student system is not capable of dealing with the large number of students. A decision has therefore been taken to replace the students system with a new system. Since enrolment management is an integral part of the student system and it is only now being implemented, it is of the utmost importance to ensure that the two processes are synchronised.

6. OTHER AREAS THAT AFFECT STUDENT SUCCESS (2-5 pages)

(Areas that do not fall within the four focus areas)

6.1 Briefly describe other activities your institution is undertaking to promote student success (beyond the four focus areas).

N/A

6.2 What other challenges or problems does your institution face in promoting student success?

N/A