DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

NO. 335   **07 APRIL 2017**

CALL FOR COMMENTS ON THE OPEN LEARNING POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

I, Bonginkosi Emmanuel Nzimande, MP, Minister of Higher Education and Training, hereby publish the '*Open Learning Policy Framework for South African Post-School Education and Training*' for public comment under the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 97), Continuing Education and Training Act (Act No. 16 of 2006) and the Skills Development Act (Act No. 97 of 1998).

The full document is available on the website of the Department of Higher Education and Training (www.dhet.gov.za).

All interested institutions, persons and organisations are invited to comment on the policy framework. Comments should be submitted no later than 21 days (3 weeks) from the date of publication of this notice.

Comments in writing should be directed to Mr Lerato Modiba, email address: Modiba.L@dhet.gov.za, Telephone: 012 312 5724. The name, address, telephone number, fax and email address of the person, governing body or organisation responsible for submitting comments must also be provided.

DR BE NZIMANDE, MP

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

DATE: 24/03/2017

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Open Learning Policy Framework for Post-School Education and Training

8 March 2017

Table 1: Policy status

POLICY	
1. Name of Policy	Open Learning Policy Framework for Post-school Education and Training
2. Name of responsible Directorate	Career Development and Open Learning
3. Name of coordinator	Trudi van Wyk
4. Coordinator contact details	vanwyk.t@dhet.gov.za
5. Status of policy (State whether it is still a draft or whether the policy is approved. If it is a draft, provide the version date and version number)	Second Draft for public comments Version 2.1
6. Date approved (if applicable)	
7. Gazette Details	
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Glossary

Blended learning: The provision of structured learning opportunities using a combination of contact, resource-based, and/or distance education methodologies, with different levels of ICT support to suit different purposes, audiences, and contexts.

Distance education: A mode of education provision based primarily on a set of teaching and learning strategies (or educational methods) that are used to overcome spatial and/or transactional distance between educators and learners. It is not necessary for learners to attend classes frequently and for long periods. Instead, it may use a combination of face-to-face interactions, different media, learner support mechanisms, discussions, and practical sessions.

e-Learning (also referred to as 'technology-enhanced learning'): e-Learning uses ICT to access programmes or courses. It involves the use of electronic devices (for example computers and mobile devices) to provide, access or interact with learning materials, interact with peers and lecturers, participate in discussions and do assessments. e-Learning can take place online, offline, or in a combination thereof.

Internet: The global system of interconnected computer networks that use the Internet Protocol suite (IP) to link billions of devices worldwide. It is a *network of networks* that consists of millions of private, public, academic, business, and government networks of local to global scope, linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless, and optical networking technologies. The Internet carries an extensive range of information resources and services, such as the inter-linked hypertext documents and applications of the World Wide Web (WWW), electronic mail, telephony, and peer-to-peer networks for file sharing. The Internet has no centralised governance in either technological implementation or policies for access and usage; each constituent network sets its own policies.

Learning management system (LMS): A multi-user software programme for delivering programmes and courses to learners, registering students, administering, tracking, reporting on and documenting their participation, progress, performance and achievement/results. This information is accessible to lecturers, tutors and administrators, and, in most cases, information on each student is made available to the individual concerned, enabling students to track their own progress.

Learning content management system (LCMS): A multi-user software programme enabling lecturers, instructional designers and course/materials developers to create, develop, modify, store, re-use and organise e-learning content. It includes a centralised repository of learning materials and resources archived so as to be searchable and adaptable for use in any online course. Ideally, an LCMS should be entirely compatible and integrated with the LMS used by the same organisation.

Massive open online course (MOOC): An online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the World Wide Web. Currently most institutions do not award credit for completing MOOCs; however, many award a non-formal certificate of completion on payment of a fee. There is an international move towards recognising learning obtained through MOOCs in formal learning programmes.

Mode of provision: The method/s by which learning is taking place. There is a move away from traditional, single mode institutions (where all courses and programmes are mediated either by distance or contact-based methodologies) to dual and mixed-mode institutions where courses and programmes are mediated by a range of distance, resource-based and contact-based methods, with the blend of methods varying from context to context. Internationally there is a move away from individual programmes being accredited either as contact or distance provision.

Online learning: The predominant use of the Internet to learn. Learners have to be connected to the Internet to access and interact with learning materials, interact with peers and lecturers, participate in discussions and do assessments.

Open (and) distance learning (ODL): The use of distance education methods to support the realisation of open learning purposes and principles. Omission of the 'and' as in 'Open Distance Learning', and possibly the use of the acronym 'ODL", imply erroneously that ALL distance programmes are based on open learning principles. This policy framework does not support this term because of the ambiguity associated with its meaning.

Open learning: An educational approach which combines the principles of learner-centredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems.

Open Educational Resources (OER): Any educational resources (including curriculum maps, course materials, textbooks, streaming videos, multimedia applications, podcasts, and any other materials that have been designed for use in teaching and learning) that are published under an open licence and are available for use without an accompanying need to pay royalties or licence fees. Openly licensed content can be produced in any medium: text, video, audio, or computer-based multimedia.

Post-schooling (in the South African context): The provision of education and training opportunities to all people who have left school. It includes education and training for out-of-school youth, and institutions offering second chance learning, Technical and Vocational (TVET) colleges, Community Education and Training (CET) colleges, and education and training offered by the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), universities of technology and universities, private providers and other training colleges and institutes.

Resource-based learning: Learning which actively involves a range of resources (both human and non-human) in the learning process.

Social networking: Interacting and networking with others in a social online environment such as *Facebook* or *Twitter*.

Student support: This can be divided into four elements, namely academic support, counselling support, administrative support and technology support:

1. Academic support may refer to a wide variety of instructional methods, educational services or educational resources provided to students in an effort to help them accelerate their learning progress, catch up with their peers, meet learning standards, or generally succeed in their learning endeavours. Academic support includes but is not limited to face-to-face tutorials, remedial interventions and library services.

2. Counselling support is about life and counselling support for students in the form of career guidance, study skills and computer skills training and assistance for students facing crisis situations and adjustment issues.

3. Administrative support is about providing students with timely, accurate and accessible information to assist with all phases of the learning process.

4. Technology support is about providing students with access to technology, the necessary information relating to computer elements required to support course software, directions for using essential tools like email, chat and discussions for asynchronous and synchronous interaction with lecturers and tutors, and assignment drop boxes.

Technology-enhanced learning: Structured learning mediated through software applications using digital resources (usually combinations of text, audio and visual/video files) and communication, and accessed through a range of fixed or mobile hardware devices. Such learning provision may be on-line and synchronous (e.g. real-time conferencing), on-line and asynchronous (e.g. text-based discussion forums) or off-line (e.g. interactive or resource-based CD/DVD/flash drive). ICT can support learning in contact, blended and distance programmes.

Acronyms

CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CET	Community Education and Training
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
Digital-DF	Digital Development Fund
DST	Department of Science and Technology
DTPS	Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services
FET	Further Education and Training (now replaced by TVET)
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
LCMS	Learning Content Management System
LMS	Learning Management System
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NDP	National Development Plan
NEET	People that are not employed, in education or training
NOLA	National Open Learning Agency
NOLF	National Open Learning Forum
NOLS	National Open Learning System
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OER	Open Education Resource
OLII	Open Learning Implementation Index
OL-RIM	Open Learning Review and Improvement Model
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
PSET	Post-school Education and Training
QC	Quality Council
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SACPO	South African College Principals' Association
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
SAIVCET	South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training
SANREN	South African National Research Network
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SEIAS	Socio-Economic Impact Assessment System
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
Umalusi	Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training
USAf	Universities South Africa
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

Preamble

Since the establishment of the Department of Higher Education (DHET) in 2009, South Africa has been building a new post-school education and training system (PSET) that is responding to the social, economic and transformative needs of the country.

The Department's Strategic Plan: 2015 to 2020, which is informed by the vision espoused in the National Development Plan (NDP), the 2014-2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework and the 2014 *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training*, identifies expanded access to education and training opportunities and diversified provision based on open learning principles to improve learning across the PSET sector.

This *Open Learning Policy Framework for South African Post-school Education and Training* has been developed in the context of:

(i)   the strategic intention laid out in the 2014 *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* to expand this system significantly;

(ii)   the commitment of the DHET to implement open learning principles and approaches across the PSET system in a structured and systematic way;

(iii) mounting pressure to expand access to more cost-effective and flexible education and training; and

(iv)   increasing, but far from equal, penetration and affordability of information and communication technologies (ICT) across South Africa.

The DHET does not view open learning as the only solution for the many challenges in the post-school sector in South Africa. Rather, the Department is committed to encouraging institutions to adopt open learning approaches, and to supporting institutions to introduce open learning practices as one practical way of addressing crucial issues of widening access to affordable, quality learning opportunities. This is the policy framework's purpose and explicit goal. However, international research and local experience strongly suggest that in pursuing this goal, a shift towards open learning approaches will also nudge the post-school sector towards taking on board discernible changes in the ways new generations of learners are beginning to view learning, education and training.

Open Learning Policy Framework for South African Post-school Education and Training

1. Introduction

1.1   Background and rationale of the policy framework

The Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr BE Nzimande, MP has repeatedly affirmed that employment is essential for creating social stability in South Africa. People who do not have a reasonable hope of finding decent work – or creating their own sustainable livelihoods – have little to lose and have little stake in maintaining a stable society.

One of the obligations of the DHET is to increase access to educational opportunities for those who experience barriers to learning and for young people who are not in education, training or employment (NEET). Such barriers include:

i.   geographic isolation from campuses or learning centres within reasonable proximity;

ii.   lack of reliable access to digital infrastructure, adequate bandwidth, the internet and ICT;

iii. inability to take time off from work or family obligations for structured learning;

iv.   discrimination on the basis of physical disability, gender, age, social class or race;

v.   a lack of qualifications considered necessary as requirements for admission to particular programmes;

vi.   financial constraints and an inability to meet the cost of studies; and

vii. past experience of content-based, transmission-type pedagogy and assessment that restrict accessibility, alienate the learner or contribute to a loss of confidence.

The DHET has adopted 'open learning' as a strategy to increase access to education and training opportunities for all and to construct quality learning environments which take account of learners' context and use the most appropriate and cost-effective methods and technologies. The DHET supports the development of open learning opportunities as an integral part of the post-school education and training (PSET) system, and not as an add-on or second-best to face-to-face and/or classroom engagements. There is an intention to forge networks of institutions and learner support centres, and to promote innovation and opportunities for lifelong learning.

1.2   Scope of the policy framework

Following the policy directives presented in Chapter 7 of the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training*, this policy framework sets out the strategic intent of the DHET in steering the PSET system towards increasing access and improving quality cost-effectively through open learning. The scope of this policy is national; it is aimed at the entire PSET system, including universities, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges and community education and training (CET) colleges, as well as skills providers, but not at the schooling sector. It also covers, where appropriate, private providers.

Distance education, online learning, technology-enhanced learning and e-learning (see par 2.1.2) all offer greatly increased access, while the latter ICT-based modalities also offer a growing range of innovative and effective teaching and learning methods (increasing learners' chances of success). However, this policy framework views these modalities as significant means of achieving open learnings rather than as being synonymous with open learning.

1.3   Purpose of the policy framework

The purpose of the policy framework is to provide a framework for, and to direct, the implementation of open learning in the PSET system as outlined in the 2014 *White Paper for Post School-Education and Training*.

The policy framework aims to:

i.   provide a framework for building a shared, common PSET system, making extensive use of open learning approaches and distance education methodologies;

ii. set out guiding principles and specific objectives for the implementation of open learning in the PSET system that will guide the decision-making and activities of government, PSET institutions, the staff that work in them and the learners learning in the PSET system;

iii. provide a high level strategy for implementing open learning approaches in the PSET system in a structured, integrated manner;

iv. identify instruments and mechanisms for steering the PSET system towards increasing access and quality through the incremental adoption of open learning approaches and through appropriate monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance; and

v.   provide a framework for co-operation and collaboration among the DHET, institutions and skills providers to implement open learning approaches in an organised and systematic way.

1.4   Policy development processes

In February 2013 the DHET developed a *Concept Note: Open Learning in Post-School Education and Training* to provide a vision for the future delivery of open learning in the PSET system that would be sustainable and meet the needs of a wide range of learners from the vocational and continuing education and training sector and the university sector, as well as the needs of NEET youth. The concept note created a common understanding of open learning for the PSET system, and served as the starting point for the development of this policy framework.

The DHET initiated a consultative process to elaborate on the understanding of open learning and related terms; propose pilot initiatives to embed open learning principles within the existing PSET system; and identify related policy implications for Adult Education and Training (as it was then) including community education and training (CET); Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges; Skills Development; University Education and Career Development Services.

Workshops were held with key stakeholders to discuss the vision and principles of open learning in the South African context, and to identify large-scale education and training needs at a provincial and national level,

possible ways of responding to these needs, and whether programmes could be designed which would address these needs while incorporating the principles of open learning. Participants included, among others, representatives of non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and DHET, and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). A University sector seminar and two TVET college seminars were convened to discuss key challenges in these sectors, and to identify critical success factors and elements to be included in open learning in South Africa.

Emanating from this consultation process, a *Concept Framework for an Open Learning System in Post-School Education and Training in South Africa* was presented to the DHET. This document made a number of recommendations which shaped subsequent policy in the 2014 *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training*, and in this Policy Framework.

Based on the conceptual framework and policy recommendations made in the *Concept Framework for an Open Learning System in Post School Education and Training in South Africa*, as well as the outcomes of a Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIAS) done on the viability of a policy framework, the DHET developed a draft *Open Learning Policy Framework for Post-school Education and Training*.

The draft policy framework was extensively consulted within the DHET, and with the DBE, institutions, and various organisations.

1.5 Evidence-based policy development

This policy was developed by integrating experience, judgement and expertise with the best available external evidence from research. A widely consultative approach and the SEIAS methodology were included that represents a more rigorous, rational approach that gathers, critically appraises and uses high quality research evidence to inform policymaking and professional practice.

Evidence used:

i.   Understanding of the policy environment (national and international context);

ii. Appraising the likely effects of policy changes, choosing between different policy options and subsequently assessing their impacts (SEIAS methodology);

iii. Demonstrating the links between strategic direction, intended outcomes and policy objectives, to show the clear lines of argument and evidence between current practice and the aims outlined in the policy (theory of change);

iv. Determining how to meet the strategic goals or intermediate objectives (strategic objectives and implementation strategy); and

v.   Influencing institutions, partnerships and stakeholders to achieve and implement policy goals (implementation strategy).

1.6 Structure of the policy framework

The policy framework is organised into six sections, namely an introduction; the conceptual framework; the strategic intent; monitoring and evaluation; the implementation strategy and the concluding statement.

The conceptual framework provides a definition and explanation of the concept 'open learning', and distinguishes it from concepts and terms with which it is frequently conflated or associated. It also outlines the principles that underpin open learning in the PSET system. Sections follow on international trends, agreements and treaties relevant to open learning, and on the legislative and policy context in South Africa.

The document furthermore sets out the policy framework's strategic intent. The DHET's vision of open learning for post-school education and training is presented, followed by the theory of change underpinning the means for achieving that vision as they are set out in the policy framework. Aligned with the 2014 White Paper, it then identifies five strategic objectives based on the central goal of creating an enabling environment for the implementation of open learning in PSET. It also emphasises the importance of advocacy and communication.

Within the context of the DHET's monitoring and evaluation framework, this policy framework then outlines the instruments for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of open learning.

The high level implementation strategy addresses the co-ordination needed to ensure the sound and sustained implementation of open learning; formulates the policy instruments and steering mechanisms to be used in implementation; and mandates the formation of a National Open Learning Forum (NOLF). Finally brief descriptions on institutional implementation, funding, and the evaluation and review of the policy framework are provided.

2. Conceptual Framework

The South African Government affirms its commitment to opening the doors of learning and removing unnecessary barriers to education and training for everyone, especially those who have been marginalised in the past. One of the ways to achieve this is to apply open learning approaches in PSET.

2.1 Open learning concepts

2.1.1 Defining open learning

Adhering to the 1995 *White Paper on Education and Training* definition, and the definition outlined in the *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training*, this policy framework sees open learning as:

> '… an **approach** which combines the principles of learner-centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems'.

Open Learning enables many people to take advantage of cost-effective and meaningful, quality education and training opportunities throughout their lives. The DHET will strive to make this possible through acknowledging the diversity of learning contexts of learners in South Africa; reducing barriers to learning; sharing expertise, knowledge, and resources; and increasing access to diverse learning opportunities.

2.1.2 Open learning principles

The key open learning principles underpinning this policy framework are:

i.   learners are provided with opportunities and capacity for lifelong learning;

ii.   learning processes focus on the learners and contexts of learning, build on their experience, and encourage active engagement leading to independent and critical thinking;

iii. learning provision is flexible, allowing learners to increasingly determine where, when, what and how they learn, as well as the pace at which they will learn;

iv.   learners have access to learning opportunities, and unnecessary barriers to access have been removed. This includes providing free access to learning materials; access to cost-effective value-added services such as learning support, tutoring and counselling; and cost-effective registration and assessment opportunities;

v.   prior learning and experience is recognised wherever possible;

vi.   arrangements for credit transfer and articulation between qualifications facilitate further learning;

vii. providers create the conditions for a fair chance of learner success through learner support, contextually appropriate resources and sound pedagogical practices; and

viii. open learning is embedded in, enhances and expands the current education and training system (programmes and qualifications), and is not an add-on or a second-best to the current system. It can, however, also provide learning opportunities for non-formal learning.

These principles are integrated in the strategic objectives of this policy framework and are not addressed individually.

2.1.3   Open learning and diverse modes of provision

Internationally and in South Africa, there is a tendency to conflate or equate open learning with distance education, e-learning, online learning or blended learning and other terminology.

Open learning is not a synonym for distance education. The term 'distance education' describes a collection of modes of delivery for the provision of structured learning in which the learner and the educator[1] do not have to be in the same place at the same time for learning to take place. It provides techniques of educational design and provision that when used appropriately can be open insofar as they can provide better chances of success to vastly more people who would otherwise not be able to access learning programmes, and at greatly reduced cost once initial expenditure has been covered.

The DHET does not advocate the use of concepts that integrate open learning and distance education such as 'open distance learning' or 'Open and Distance Learning' (ODL). These have created a misperception that distance education is inherently 'open'. This is a challenge, not only because poor distance education practice can easily close opportunities of actual learning, but equally because it incorrectly assumes that only distance education strategies are open. In campus-based education and training, blended learning combines various forms of e-learning with more traditional methods such as lectures enabling students to access a diverse range of educational experience, and to pursue part of their studies at a time and place of their own choosing.

Another term that is sometimes used is 'resource-based learning' that only refers to learning which actively involves a range of resources (both human and non-human) in the learning process. This also includes the use of electronic (online and offline) technologies, and in specific information and communication technologies (ICT) in the learning process. This policy framework noted the misconception that e-learning or the structured use of electronic technology itself provides a truly open system.

Although the use of ICT has opened up learning and teaching in many ways, open learning does not necessarily mean e-learning or technology-enhanced learning. In situations where access to internet connectivity or devices is severely limited, it may make sense to open access to learning opportunities via non-electronic means such as print media. Furthermore, the employment of sophisticated e-learning technology, especially programmes that are fully online, will *exclude* many learners who lack access to the necessary devices and/or reliable internet connectivity. Thus although online learning can potentially accommodate different ways and styles of learning (making for greater accessibility), and enable the construction of a potentially richer learning environment, it simply does not equate to open learning.

While all the learning modalities mentioned above (distance education, resource-based learning, e-learning, online learning and blended learning) are important *vehicles* for open learning, none of them should be *equated* with open learning, and open learning has no conceptual value as a synonym for any of them. Rather, it is a

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[1] 'Educator' is used in a general context and include teachers, lecturers, and instructors. When the document refers specifically to PSET, the word 'lecturer' is used that include also the instructors in practical components and skills development programmes.

general approach to education and training based on a set of open learning principles. When the term 'open learning' is used in this policy framework, it refers to any education and training (mode) which follows open learning principles, and is not specific to any particular mode of delivery.

2.1.4   Open learning as an ideal

As a principle-based concept, open learning presents an ideal or goal rather than an absolute, all-or-nothing imperative. Thus, in the context of this policy framework, learning programmes and courses cannot for the most part be fully 'open'. Most importantly, open learning should not be considered as an add-on to existing education and training offerings, or seen as a second-best option, but should be recognised as a principled approach to learning which has the capacity to transform teaching, learning and access to education and training in quite radical ways, whatever mode is used.

2.1.5   Access, flexibility, quality and success

Open learning is fundamentally about access and success, with flexibility of provision contributing to expanded access, and quality of provision contributing to improved student success. Its aim is that more learners should have better access to learning opportunities throughout their lives, including access to quality learning materials and learner support. It furthermore focuses on better throughput, and higher success rates. In addition, and crucially in developing countries like South Africa, open learning can contribute substantially to cost-efficient provision to the benefit of both the education fiscus and learners.

On one hand open learning is focused on *removing barriers* to access created by various factors such as geographic distance from educational campuses, timetable scheduling that is incompatible with people's working lives or family responsibilities, unaffordable fees, alienating pedagogic practices, lack of access to technology, lack of physical educational infrastructure, and discrimination on the basis of gender, age, race, ethnicity, social class, language or disability.

More flexible provision allows learners more scope to determine where, when, what and how they will learn, as well as the pace at which they will learn and whether they wish to acquire certification at the conclusion of a course. In addition, open learning recognises formally assessed prior experience and learning (not necessarily academic learning) as parallel to formal education in qualification admission requirements, and encourages arrangements for credit transfer and articulation between qualification programmes in order to facilitate lifelong learning.

At the same time, open learning is also focused on the need for the learners who benefit from wider access to learning opportunities to be successful in pursuing those opportunities; thus open learning is focused on providing education and training of the highest possible quality. In some senses this emphasis on quality is an extension of the access principle, placing the learner at the centre of the teaching and learning process, and building accessibility into the very design of programmes, courses and learning materials. In providing learner support (in-text, via phone or any other platform, online or face-to-face), sound open learning practice takes full cognisance of the individual learner's context and needs. This focus on the learner, on access, on success and on

quality should extend to the design of learning text itself, of the graphic material and experiential activities, where these elements are re-thought with the learner and his/her context in mind, and are imaginatively constructed to eliminate the barriers commonly created by alienating presentation.

2.1.6   Cost efficiency

While the four priorities outlined above are the essential foci of open learning, the emphasis on extending access to learning opportunities also has the potential to contribute to cost efficiency, with benefits for both national education expenditure and learner alike. Operational and ongoing costs may be kept low, both through economies of scale (in cases where enrolment numbers are substantial and expenditure on additional physical infrastructure is unnecessary or limited) and by making use of open education resources (OER) and open licensing (see section 3.2.5).

However, it must be noted from the outset that the motive of cost efficiency needs to be viewed in context. Cost-benefit ratios and economies of scale in open learning are complex rather than absolute, and should not be taken for granted. The possible necessity of putting in place expensive technological infrastructure, and the need for collaboration in developing the high-quality courses and learning materials which produce not only deeper and more satisfying learning, but also higher success rates, usually result in considerably higher levels of initial expenditure than more traditional approaches. However, this expenditure may diminish over time in the case of large-enrolment courses and programmes as economies of scale have an incremental effect.

2.2   International trends

The next section briefly describes current international trends in open learning. These should be read against the complex background of the poverty and exclusion from resources and facilities experienced by many in the townships, informal settlements and rural villages of South Africa, as well as the relative privilege, cultural capital and access to facilities experienced by the middle class. It should furthermore be read in the context of fundamental rights and transformational issues of access, non-discrimination, redress of inequalities, equality and equity.

2.2.1   Expanded access through open learning

Worldwide, governments are facing a growing demand for expanded access to post-school education and training, equity of provision, cost-effectiveness and improved quality of teaching and learning. Throughout the developing world populations are increasing, and globally (including in more developed countries) rising unemployment and changes in employment patterns and the organisation of work, as well as an increasing trend towards lifelong learning, are driving up the demand for affordable post-school education and training. Furthermore, knowledge- and service-based economies, today highly dependent on ICTs and automation, and accompanied by high rates of de-skilling and re-skilling, are increasingly dominant in both developed and developing countries. All of these factors tend to increase the social demand for qualification upgrades, re-skilling and other forms of lifelong re-education and training, over and above the demand pressures resulting from population growth and an inability on the part of many young school-leavers to find employment.

In the face of increasing pressure for expanded access to post-school education and training, many governments have turned, or are turning to open learning approaches, devising ways to make learning opportunities available to larger numbers of learners, particularly those who have been excluded in the past. In so doing their aim is also to find cost-efficient options as the costs of post-school education and new educational infrastructure escalate. In effect, many are looking to distance education, and more recently to specifically online learning, as ultimately cost-effective means to cross-subsidise their campus-based programmes.

2.2.2   Developments in Information and Communication Technologies

At the same time, the rapid pace of development in ICT opens up new ways to make learning more flexible, accessible and in many cases, more effective and more satisfying. If access is to be extended to as many as possible, then technologies that extend availability to more potential learners, even if not to all, need to be utilised.

2.2.3   Learning content management systems

Worldwide, educational and training institutions, and many national governments, have established learning management systems (LMSs) to manage the large volumes of student data resulting from massive enrolments, and to track learners' progress, allow student-to-lecturer and student-to-student communication. In most cases, LMSs are integrated with learning content management systems (LCMSs), which enable lecturers, instructional designers and course/materials developers (as well as students, when this is encouraged) to create, store, manage, adapt and re-use e-learning content.

2.2.4   Use of open educational resources

A trend promising to change the face of education and training is the proliferation in the use of open educational resources (OER), open education licensing policies and OER repositories in both school and post-school education and training, often driven by public policy and facilitated by the extensive use of ICT in materials development.

2.2.5   Blended learning

Blended learning is becoming increasingly common in both contact and distance modes, drawing on best practices in both online and face-to-face methods. In contact mode situations, this is often combined with a flipped classroom approach in which typically, short video lectures are viewed or readings done by students at home before class, while 'lectures' are devoted to discussions or structured activities. Such innovations require a change in the mindset of lecturers and institutions, rather than vast expenditure.

2.2.6   Massive Open Online Courses

A conspicuous trend in the past decade has been the proliferation of courses which are freely open to anyone with access to the internet, or at relatively limited cost if some form of certification is involved. These Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) provide access to a vast array of free courses available on the Internet, in many

cases by reputable international institutions. Many of these courses include links to relevant open access databases containing bibliographic and other information of particular value to more ambitious learners, post-graduate learners and course developers. An increasing volume of research on assessing and assuring quality in MOOCs points to the validity of this quality assurance, as well as to the positive impact of at least some MOOCs in terms of cost-effective delivery and quality.

While debate continues regarding the efficacy of MOOCs to promote quality learning experiences, especially at undergraduate level, a MOOC could provide an opportunity for institutions to secure high quality learning content and activities which might be implemented as part of a mediated course. There is an increasing need to develop national policies affording credit recognition for successfully completed MOOCs offered by accredited institutions. In many cases however, the content of MOOCs is not available under an open licence, being available only to individuals learning for the duration of the course offering.

Studies done on MOOCs in developing countries demonstrate that they are not only well accepted, but also that the population of MOOC learners in these countries is more diverse than in developed countries, and is largely composed of low- and middle-income students. It also finds that students in developing countries are also much more likely to complete an online course and obtain formal certification than their counterparts in the developed world.

2.2.7 New types of open institutions

To overcome financial barriers to access, new types of open institutions are emerging which make extensive use of digital technologies. Such institutions aim to increase access to education through reducing costs by making use of open source software, free content licensing and the open web. Courses are fully online and learners who meet admission criteria are able to register worldwide. Course forums, online study forums, collaborative discussions and peer-to-peer engagement are extensively used, with assessment and examinations completed online.

2.2.8 Cross-institutional collaboration

Networks of institutions are formed, sharing courses and freely offering them online for learners worldwide. Partner institutions in such networks provide affordable ways for learners to gain academic credit towards qualifications from recognised institutions. Such cross-institutional collaboration supports innovation and growth in technological infrastructure, contains costs, and increases access to, and the quality of, education.

2.2.9 Emphasis on active learning approaches

Another welcome trend is the growing emphasis in higher education on deeper learning approaches, engaging students in critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and self-directed learning. Project-based learning, challenge-based learning and inquiry-based learning are fostering more active learning experiences inside and outside the classroom.

2.2.10　Recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer

Recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer are not new processes in education and training. However, the advent of open learning with its emphasis on extending access, and new learning opportunities such as MOOCs, are generating renewed interest in these means of achieving admission to, or advanced standing in, academic programmes through the assessment of prior learning, or learning by means other than conventional courses.

2.2.11　Digital badges

Digital badges are a relatively new form of recognition of learning achievement. These are a form of online recognition of a skill achieved, or a project, course or programme element successfully completed, even if a full qualification is never pursued. They provide a visible motivation for the learner, and can be displayed in any digital format, used for recognition of learning that has been achieved, and shared in applications for employment or to study further. This innovation resonates with the trend towards learners opting for informal learning, purpose-driven learning, just-in-time learning and learning packaged in small units.

2.2.12　Popularity of non-formal and informal learning

In addition to learning that is formally accredited and managed under the auspices of departments of education, or college or university administrations, non-formal learning and informal learning are gaining in popularity. Non-formal learning refers to a type of learning offered by institutions that does not have a formal credential or certification as an outcome. Informal learning by contrast is not managed by an institution at all, but is rather managed by the individual learner. LCMSs are increasingly being used to produce 'curated content' for informal learning – information that is sorted, verified and presented as learning that is accessible, meaningful, engaging and relevant to learners' needs.

The current trend towards informal learning is a consequence of the evolution of a range of tools and services characterised by greater interactivity, collaboration among internet users and content providers, extensive network connectivity (often through mobile devices), and sophisticated communication technologies. Instead of passively downloading content off the Internet, users themselves take an active role in generating web-based content. Learners are able to compile their own curriculum and digital learning materials, and form social learning networks or learning communities.

2.2.13　Mobile technologies

The most significant technological advance is the widespread use of smartphones and other mobile devices that place enormous computing power in the user's hands. Increasingly, a majority of young students are expressing their preference for mobile learning: educational software, material and communication that are designed specifically for such mobile devices.

'Bring Your Own Device' is a learning concept related to mobile technologies that opens up learning inside and outside the classroom. Institutional policies allow students to bring their own mobile devices with them into the

classroom or other learning environments, where they are able to use these to connect to the institution's network and learning systems, and to communicate with other students and peers.

The above trends contribute significantly to current changes in how teaching and learning are taking place (pedagogy), what is being learnt and what learners are choosing to learn (content), and how learners interact with the teaching and learning environment (technology). This policy framework acknowledges these trends and their relevance for the South African PSET system.

2.3   Legislative and policy context in South Africa

This section gives a short synopsis of the current legislative and policy environment in place to regulate and direct open learning in South Africa. Open learning is ultimately aligned with the following right set out in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Act 108 of 1996): 'Everyone has the right (…) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.'

2.3.1   White Paper on Education and Training (1995)

The *White Paper on Education and Training* (1995), which laid the foundation for the new Education and Training System in South Africa, affirmed the Government's commitment to opening up learning and removing barriers to education for those who had been disadvantaged by South Africa's past. Based on the principles of access, equity, quality, equality and redress, it called for the adoption of open learning principles in order to meet the increasing need for expansion and quality provision in the system. It formulated the definition of open learning adopted by the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014), as well as this policy framework. It also called for the establishment of a National Open Learning Agency (NOLA) that would work with the then Department of Education to promote open learning in education and training, develop an open learning system for South Africa and explore 'the capacity of existing institutions which might form part of the national open learning system'.

2.3.2   White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2014)

The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014) supports the development of a PSET system based on open learning principles, where quality learning environments are constructed which take account of student context and use the most appropriate and cost-effective methods and technologies.

In the White Paper the DHET commits to build an expanded, effective and integrated PSET system. In chapter 7, 'Open Learning through Diverse Modes of Provision', the DHET commits itself to working towards a PSET landscape based on open learning principles, and to broadening models of educational provision so that people have easier access to meaningful opportunities throughout their lives. This undertaking includes building a network of educational institutions supported by learning support centres and appropriate technology, collaborating in the development of learning materials, and committing to the development and use of OER. It also supports the intention to use digital technology where appropriate to enhance access, improve communication and generally optimise student engagement.

The 2014 White Paper envisages e-learning being incorporated into different modes of provision, including face-to-face, as digital technology becomes more accessible in South Africa. It is thus committed to collaboration with the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services and the Department of Science and Technology, to facilitate increased bandwidth and reduced costs for educational purposes. Further mechanisms to build capacity for staff and students to use technology effectively, will also be supported.

This policy framework is aimed at taking further the policy outlined in the 2014 White Paper, in particular the mandate set out in Chapter 7 of that document.

2.3.3   Higher education legislation and policies

Section 38.1 of the Higher Education Act (Act No 101 of 1997) supports collaboration and partnerships in higher education between public universities. In alignment with the Act, the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universitie*s *in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* signals the intent of the DHET to draft a policy on partnerships and collaboration that will likely also formalise opportunities for institutions to collaborate on the offering of programmes, that in itself open up learning.

White Paper 3 on the Transformation of the Higher Education System (2007) promoted the development of a flexible learning system, including distance education and resource-based learning, built on open learning principles. It mandated increasing student enrolments based on open learning and distance education, with particular emphasis on women. Furthermore, this White Paper required the then Department of Education to support the development of a national network of centres of innovation in course design and development, as this would enable the development and franchising of well-designed, quality and cost-effective learning resources and courses, building on the expertise and experience of top quality scholars and lecturers in different parts of the country.

As in the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014), the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (2014) recognises the impact of ICT on the provision of education in the higher education sector, and supports the creation of an enabling environment for appropriate integration of ICT, and the expansion of distance education provision in an orderly manner in which access and quality issues are at the forefront.

Though its focus is only on universities, it highlights open access to higher education opportunities for those who cannot attend traditional campus-based provision, the need for quality assurance to ensure that distance education provision offers a reasonable chance of success, and the potential of distance education to lower costs per student by amortising curriculum design, materials development and some teaching costs across larger numbers of learners and by obviating the need for continuing investment in physical infrastructure. Among its key provisions are promoting the development and use of Open Educational Resources (OERs), and an undertaking to work towards every post-school student having reasonable access to affordable connectivity.

It is important to note that while this policy framework recognises the utilisation of multiple delivery options, the higher education system for public universities continues to differentiate simply between contact and distance provisioning for funding purposes, thus the policy proposes a more nuanced funding system.

In the wider national policy context, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) published in 2014 the *Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Programme Accreditation Criteria and Good Practice Guide*, which makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the implications of using ICT in support of both distance and classroom-based education, and provides clear and detailed guidance in the carefully thought-out choices that course and materials designers must make when employing ICT in support of learning.

2.3.4   Technical and Vocational Education and Training legislation and policies

In order to reach the 2030 NDP target of 2.5 million enrolments set for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, the DHET has to rethink how institutions work, the long-term impact of technological advancements, and how TVET colleges need to structure themselves around increasing the employability of their students by considering additional, technology-based means of education and training delivery.

The Continuing Education and Training Act (Act No 16 of 2006) commits to 'ensure access to basic adult education, further education and training and the workplace through continuing education and training by persons who have been marginalised in the past such as women, the disabled, and the disadvantaged'. It further commits to 'provide optimal opportunities for learning, the creation of knowledge and the development of intermediate- to high-level skills, in keeping with international standards of academic and technical quality.' The act furthermore emphasises the provision of opportunities for life-long learning.

The traditional way of providing education and training through face-to-face modalities is not sustainable in the current resource-constrained environment. Thus sustainable, alternative open learning approaches and methodologies such as distance education and online learning have to be considered.

White Paper 4: A Programme for the Transformation of Further Education and Training (1998) commits to the development and expansion of high-quality, flexible, innovative Further Education and Training (FET) (now TVET) institutions, based on the principles of open learning and responsiveness to the needs and demands of all learners of 15 or over. Open learning approaches and a system increasingly orientated towards lifelong learning and responsiveness to the needs of learners and communities, would widen participation, promote equity and social mobility, and improve the quality of life of our people.

This White Paper envisages an open learning philosophy and programme-based approach to provision encouraging institutional diversity, the use of multiple sites of learning and the growth of 'virtual' institutions: 'Learning will take place in the workplace, at community facilities and in learners' private homes. Some learners will use the Internet and other technologies to access learning via a network of institutions, who might be located very far apart and who need have no formal, centralised organisation or structure.'

2.3.5   Community Education and Training legislation and policy

The Continuing Education and Training Act (Act No 16 of 2006), as described above, also has relevance to Community Education and Training (CET) colleges.

The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014) describes CET colleges as a new type of institution that will be provided with adequate infrastructure so as to be responsive to the need of local communities, including empowering communities to embrace technology effectively to access the world of work and to embark on life-long learning.

The *National Policy on Community Education and Training Colleges* (2014) provides a framework for the provision of a diverse range of programmes, including different modalities for delivery. In the long term, online programmes are going to be one of the critical modes of provision for delivery of community education and training programmes.

2.3.6   Skills development and workplace-based training

The Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142), and Recommendation 2004 (No. 195) encourage the development of education, training and lifelong learning, including policies that promote and sustain public and private investment in the infrastructure needed for the use of information and technology in education and in specific in training.

The Skills Development Act (Act No 97 of 1998) requires that learners have access to high quality and appropriate education and training, and to skills development opportunities accessible in a work-integrated approach. It emphasises the relevance of education in the workplace and learning 'on the job'. Open learning approaches, and specifically technology-enhanced learning, open a world of simulations and real world applications to support and reinforce theoretical training. The Act also provides clear directives to the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) regarding their function of providing education and training opportunities.

According to the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) III, people have to be capacitated and empowered to create their own opportunities in developing sustainable livelihoods. Online methodologies provide the opportunity to the entrepreneur to learn while earning his/her livelihood.

2.3.7   Registration of qualifications and accreditation of programmes

With the promulgation of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No 67 of 2008), three Quality Councils (QCs) were established to ensure the accreditation of qualifications within their respective sub-frameworks. Any qualification, regardless of mode of provision, has to be registered on the NQF through the standard established processes. The QCs are also responsible for the quality assurance processes relevant to their respective sub-frameworks and the institutions which deliver their qualifications.

The quality assurance regime has a responsibility to consider how to ensure that programmes and courses offered using open learning approaches and related methodologies have the same structure of quality assurance as other means of provision.

2.3.8 Transfer of credits

The DHET published the Articulation Policy (No 373, Government Gazette No 39867, 30 March 2016) to provide purposes, principles and recommendations to inform the articulation practices of role-players in the PSET system. It facilitates the access, progression and mobility of students between and within the three sub-frameworks of the NQF.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has already developed a Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework (2014), which is binding on the three Quality Councils and on institutions, as per the NQF Act (Act No 67 of 2008). This policy must also be tested against the offering of open learning approaches and related methodologies, and *vice versa*. The policies which exist, such as the Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) policy, are enabling, but the implementation of these policies tends to be hampered by entrenched attitudes.

2.3.9 Recognition of prior learning and articulation

With the introduction of 'open learning' approaches in programmes and courses from national and registered international institutions, companies and organisations, the implementation of RPL has become more urgent than ever, to enable students to be acknowledged for what has been learnt through such programmes or courses, or through any other system, irrespective of the mode of provision.

The Minister has published the *RPL Co-ordination Policy* (No 381, Government Gazette No 39876, 31 March 2016), which is a clear statement and indicator that supports and recognises the need to open access to education for students, and acknowledges that RPL is an important component of addressing this need. SAQA has published the *National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning* (2014), which provides for the operational implementation of RPL by the three QCs, professional bodies and education and training institutions. The three QCs will need to align their RPL policies within these policy frameworks.

Many institutions have policies on RPL for admission to, and advanced standing within, a qualification. Candidates entering a programme, who have completed online courses, should be provided access through RPL.

2.3.10 Quality assurance mechanisms

The QCs have the executive responsibility for quality assurance in education and training, and the promotion thereof. They develop and implement a system of quality assurance for education and training, including programme accreditation, institutional audits, quality promotion and capacity development, standards development and the implementation of the relevant Qualifications Sub-Framework. The QCs also have a responsibility to ensure that online course and programme offerings through various blended learning and delivery methodologies should be accredited in order to promote quality education and training in South Africa.

2.3.11 Technology-enhanced learning, and information and communication technologies

The *White Paper on e-Education* (2004), which addressed e-learning for the school and post-school sectors, saw ICT and e-learning as critically important tools in the struggle against poverty, underdevelopment and

marginalisation (p 10), and drew attention to the inequalities between those with access to ICT and those with little or no access. Developments in ICT would create access to learning opportunities, remove barriers to learning, redress inequalities, improve the quality of learning and teaching, and deliver lifelong learning – all principles of open learning. In addition this White Paper saw e-Education as more than developing computer literacy and the skills needed to operate various types of ICT; it needed to support larger systemic, pedagogical, curricular and assessment reforms that would facilitate improved education and advance higher order thinking skills. e-Learning would not replace teachers, but would rather enhance the quality and reach of their teaching if it was thoughtfully selected and integrated into educational planning and management.

2.3.12   Cross-border education

Because the development of the internet and associated telecommunication avenues affords almost instant access to a huge amount of information, the way is open for formal learning programmes and other learning resources to be distributed on a global scale. Unfortunately, it also opens the way for opportunistic purveyors of dubious information as well as those who unscrupulously exploit the unwary.

Open learning greatly increases the possibility of cross-border offerings, both for the offering of programmes and courses to South African students by providers outside South Africa, and for the provision of courses and programmes beyond South Africa's borders by South African institutions. Although online programme offerings have to be seen as a viable mode of provision, the provision in South Africa by private and foreign institutions or companies must be regulated in accordance with South African law. Likewise, programme and courses offered outside of South Africa's borders by South African-based institutions must be properly regulated by the appropriate bodies in South Africa.

In the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014), the DHET commits to supporting the international exchange of research, scholarship, academics and students, as well as academic partnerships between South African and other universities.

According to *the Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (2014), the DHET is in a process of developing an agreed framework of principles and guidelines for action by all bodies and institutions in South Africa concerned with offering and receiving cross-border university education, and offering joint degrees within a range of diverse partnership models. It is further recommended that cross-border education be aligned to the new policy on internationalisation of higher education.

2.3.13   Gaps and duplication

The DHET acknowledges that there are gaps and duplication in the legislative and policy environment when specifically looking at open learning. The DHET will carefully analyse the environment, make recommendations for streamlining legislation and policies, and address the gaps that exist.

3.   Strategic intent

3.1   Vision and outcomes espoused in the policy framework

The DHET's vision is a South Africa in which we have a differentiated and fully-inclusive post-school education and training system that allows South Africans to access relevant, quality post-school education and training, in order to fulfil the economic and social goals of participation in an inclusive economy and society. In line with the DHET's vision, open learning has four outcomes:

i.   open learning principles are progressively harnessed in all PSET institutions;

ii.   ICT is used as an enabler for teaching and learning in PSET;

iii.   high quality, shared teaching and learning resources are increasingly available as OER; and

iv.   learners in the PSET system are provided with an efficient open learning system with viable options for learning.

Therefore the overarching open learning policy goal is to support the development and expansion of a post-school education and training sector based on open learning principles, which will complement rather than replace traditional classroom/campus-based provision. The policy framework steers the sector towards making increasing use of cost-effective modalities conducive to open learning, in the interests of increased *acc*ess (translating into increased enrolments) and increased *success* (translating into improved throughput, success rates and employability), without sacrificing learning quality. These modalities should be used in ways that are responsive to the contexts of the learner and the workplace, in as many disciplines, programmes and courses as possible.

The policy framework mandates the setting up of a network of educational institutions, complemented by a network of learning support centres enhanced by internet connectivity for learners and staff. These networks will make available a wide range of learning opportunities to potential learners, closer to their homes and at times and dates appropriate to their individual circumstances. It will also make more efficient use of existing infrastructure, make well-researched, high-quality open education resources (or OER) nationally available, and lay increasing emphasis on independent study as preparation for subsequent lifelong learning.

3.2   Strategic objectives of the policy framework

The strategic objectives direct the DHET to the implementation of open learning approaches in the PSET system.

3.2.1   Develop an enabling environment for open learning provision in PSET

The DHET will take forward the current transformation of distance education in South Africa within the context of open learning as rapidly as possible. This embraces a range of elements including:

i.   a model for open learning that ensures increased access to high quality programmes that are cost-effective and give learners a fair chance of success;

ii.   a policy environment conducive to open learning;

iii.   ICT used in a progressive and effective way to support open learning;

iv.　an assessment and examination regime that ensures integrity and credibility, especially for TVET and CET colleges, and that accommodates open learning contexts;

v.　recognition of prior learning, articulation and quality assurance in an open learning context; and

vi.　diverse funding strategies supporting open learning across the PSET system.

These elements are spread across the strategic objectives of this policy framework.

(a)　Address legislation, policy and practice

According to the National Education Policy Act (No. 27 of 1996) the Minister is empowered and mandated to determine national education policy as well as institutional policies in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and this Act. This policy framework is the first attempt to provide an overarching policy environment conducive to open learning at national and institutional levels.

The Minister has already published a policy statement on the provision of distance education in universities. However, the legislative and policy environment across the PSET system supporting broader open leaning approaches is uneven and gaps, inconsistencies and duplication exist.

The DHET will:

i.　develop an open learning model for PSET;

ii.　do an environmental scan of legislation, policies and practices in the PSET system and identify gaps, inconsistencies and duplication related to open learning;

iii.　complete the legislative and policy environment that will guide and standardise the provision of open learning across the entire PSET system;

iv.　embed open learning in the national quality assurance system for PSET. This includes the revision and implementation through the QCs, of the quality standards for distance education published in *A Distance Education Quality Standards Framework for South Africa* in 1996;

v.　use open learning approaches to recognise prior learning and facilitate articulation where gaps exist, in particular taking account of non-formal learning such as that recognised by means of digital badges;

vi.　initiate the establishment of key structures for the successful implementation of open learning;

vii.　initiate research and development on open learning, help build a network of public and private open learning institutions and practitioners, and facilitate their efforts to translate open learning principles into effective practice;

viii.　stimulate ongoing debate around open learning and related issues among all people involved in education; and

ix.　monitor and evaluate the application of open learning approaches and distance education methodologies.

(b)　Standardise quality assurance across post-school education and training

Quality assurance is an imperative across PSET, irrespective of the mode of delivery. Quality assurance of open learning approaches and related modalities are not different from the quality assurance of any institution,

qualification, programme or course. The same principles and activities apply, regardless of the mode of delivery. However, the DHET, SAQA and the three QCs have to accommodate new ways of teaching and learning such as massive online open courses (MOOCs) and e-learning in their quality assurance practices.

The DHET will work with the three QCs to assist institutions in the implementation of quality open learning, including the adaptation of quality assurance mechanisms for open learning. These measures will complement the normal monitoring and assessment roles and activities of the QCs in the PSET sector, including institutional audits and programme accreditation. Common indicators will be developed and agreed on to measure and report on the progress in the achievement of open learning in PSET.

This mechanism will also be used to make recommendations on how to improve the implementation of open learning in PSET institutions. Rather than developing discrete measures of quality for open learning practices, the generic core criteria and other instruments used in audit and accreditation processes will be augmented by additional guidelines specific to these forms of learning (as has already been done for universities in the CHE's *Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide and Accreditation Criteria*).

(c)   Develop and establish a national open learning system

Traditional institutional-based, face-to-face methodologies will not be able to respond to the expansion of the PSET system envisaged in the 2014 *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training*. Furthermore, the costs associated with traditional teaching and learning pose a significant barrier to learners that want to enter, or are in the system. An environment for open learning has to be created by organising multiple options and distributed provision of learning opportunities, enabling learners to succeed who would otherwise be unable to participate in the PSET system.

The development of a National Open Learning System (NOLS) is key to increasing access to learning opportunities for South Africans.

The NOLS is a system that:

i.   contains high quality, self-directed, interactive learning materials (online or offline) that enable learners to select and complete modules, including robust formative assessment;

ii.   tracks learner progress and achievement;

iii.   recognises prior learning, and identifies gaps in learners' knowledge or skills prior to doing a module;

iv.   makes available post-assessments for evaluating attainment of learning outcomes and obtaining recognition of learning (in the form of digital badges);

v.   links to learner support such as telephone/online support, ICT support and support centres providing a supportive 'home' for distance learners;

vi.   links to institutions to enable practical learning and assessments;

vii.   links to workplaces to enable work-integrated learning; and

viii. prepares learners for formal assessment such as examinations and trade tests to obtain qualifications.

It will furthermore provide opportunities for the collaborative development, use and re-use of interactive learning materials available as open educational resources.

The DHET will develop the NOLS.

Programmes and courses will be made systematically available through the NOLS, based on the needs and priorities of the PSET system. The DHET's branches will be actively involved through a NOLS Steering Committee in identifying priorities, developing funding mechanisms and monitoring the implementation of the NOLS.

The DHET, through collaboration with PSET institutions, experts, industry, entities and associations/formations will develop learning opportunities with high quality open learning materials that will be made available as OER on the NOLS.

Materials and courses on the NOLS will:

i.   systematically and coherently cover the requirements of the identified qualifications, especially the newly registered National Occupational Qualifications;

ii.   be activity-driven to encourage the active engagement of learners in their own learning;

iii.   be designed to promote independent study;

iv.   build in a range of learner support mechanisms, and where appropriate include opportunities to interact with fellow learners and, where possible, with staff;

v.   include regular formative and summative assessment;

vi.   be quality assured from the outset, including experimental trialling; and

vii.   be made available through open licensing as OER.

Any institution will be able to use, adopt or adapt these materials for any mode of not-for-profit provision.

Learners will be able to progress through programmes and courses on the NOLS, their prior learning will be recognised, their learning will be recorded, and they will be prepared for registration and formal assessment at a relevant institution for obtaining a formal qualification if this is their wish.

3.2.2   Apply open learning approaches in PSET institutions

Current provision in PSET institutions is limited, and is not able to respond to demands for increased access to a diverse range of education and training opportunities due to infrastructure and resource constraints. Therefore current PSET institutions have to apply flexibility in their modes of provision.

(a) Institutionalise open learning

Diversity of provision is seen in the 2014 *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training* as a strategic enabler to improve access to, and success in, learning across the PSET system. The deployment of open learning approaches and related modalities in PSET institutions cannot be left to chance in the hope that it will happen. It is important for the DHET and PSET institutions to share the same understanding of open learning and how it applies to teaching and learning.

The DHET, together with institutions, will develop and implement an Open Learning Communication Strategy that will promote open learning, and enable PSET institutions not only to understand its nature and value within their institutions, but also to build capacity in the application of open learning approaches. This includes stimulating continuing debates on the use of the media and assuming responsibility for the development of a specific media-related policy.

An effective open learning environment requires the use of teaching and learning strategies that incorporate quality self-directed and learner-centred learning as part of the pedagogical design. PSET institutions therefore have to grapple with issues such as the active engagement of students, appropriate learning resources to support more independent learning, the development of staff to enable effective teaching and learning through online provisioning, support for students, appropriate technologies and media, and assessment strategies with a strong emphasis on timeous, formative feedback.

Although some PSET institutions have already implemented open learning approaches at various levels, there is a need for continuous professional development. This includes understanding the basics of open learning, change management, effective and appropriate pedagogy, and the development of high quality, self-directed learning materials and courses, learner support and assessment.

It is necessary for the DHET and institutions to provide leadership in the development of appropriate management, administration, teaching and learning to bring about change and apply open learning approaches.

Institutions will:

i.   critically review and improve their current modus operandi to increase access to quality provision within a resource-constraint environment; and

ii. report on implementation within existing monitoring and evaluation frameworks and tools.

The DHET will:

i.   support institutions in the development of a review and improvement model; and

ii. together with institutions, invest in professional development programmes in various aspects of open learning, including distance education delivery and course design using open education resources.

(b)   Adopt diverse modes of delivery

The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014) acknowledges that to date, conceptions of how learning programmes are designed and delivered have tended to be restricted to a choice between face-to-face (classroom-based) programmes and programmes offered at a distance. Increasingly there is a need to consider mixed-mode and blended programme delivery, with the 'mix' being determined by the needs and the contexts of learners as well as the requirements of the curriculum.

Institutions have to have a contextual understanding of the needs of different learners, and the benefits and demands of different modes of delivery. Institutions will give careful consideration to mixed-mode and blended programme delivery, and apply it within their own context.

The DHET will provide support to institutions in implementing a diverse range of delivery modes.

(c)   Establish a network of high quality providers

The successful and cost-effective implementation of open learning approaches requires sharing and collaboration within a network of institutions. According to the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014), the DHET expects that institutions will collaborate in sharing infrastructure, learning resources and staff capacity in order to improve access, quality and cost-effectiveness of provision. This includes groups of institutions collaboratively developing and delivering programmes. Such a network will provide a wide range of learning opportunities to more students, but also allow for students to study closer to their homes, and at times appropriate to their contexts. Other advantages include the development and availability of well-researched, high quality national learning resources (made available as OER – see Section 3.2.5), and more efficient use of existing infrastructure.

The DHET expects institutions to offer a limited range of programmes in order to ensure that economies of scale enable them to be delivered at significantly lower cost than face-to-face alternatives, without compromising quality. Measures such as Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) planning will be put in place across the PSET system to address unnecessary duplication of public provision in some areas at the expense of a lack of provision in others.

PSET institutions are expected to collaborate in:
i.   sharing experience and expertise;
ii.   developing and delivering programmes;
iii.   developing and sharing infrastructure, learning resources and ICT;
iv.   establishing or supporting learning support centres; and
v.   mentoring learning centre personnel.

The DHET will support institutions to collaborate within and across sectors (universities, TVET and CET colleges, skills providers and industry), in designing, developing and providing programmes, including professional development in course design, materials development and administration/management required in open learning.

In specific the DHET will establish collaboration networks to develop open learning courses and materials for TVET and CET college lecturers that can be offered by different universities.

3.2.3   Create a post-school distance education landscape based on open learning principles

The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014) states that: 'The DHET will work toward creating a post-school distance education landscape based on open learning principles. This landscape will complement the traditional campus-based provision.'

Distance education provision has to rise to the multiple challenges of:
i.   providing greater access (in terms of both numbers and diversity);
ii.   offering students a reasonable expectation of turning access into success;
iii.   providing courses or programmes of proven quality; and

iv.   ensuring that these are also affordable.

Therefore the DHET supports the offering of distance education in PSET institutions in an integrated, planned and systematic way.

Work still needs to be done in terms of:

i.   using distance education methodologies for TVET and CET colleges;

ii.   exploring ways to accommodate practical and work-based learning components for distance education students, particularly in TVET and CET, and particularly where adequate or suitable facilities are lacking on campus or in the particular vicinity;

iii.   improving throughput and success in distance education;

iv.   providing adequate support to distance education learners;

v.   developing an assessment and examination regime which accommodates distance education contexts, especially for TVET colleges; and

vi.   building the capacity of PSET institutions to administer, manage, offer and support distance education.

(a)   Implement sectoral models for distance education provision in PSET

Distance education is widely used in planned and coordinated ways in universities. Higher Education has an implementation policy for distance education, includes it as part of their PQM planning, and reports on the application of distance education methodologies annually. It focuses primarily on steering mechanisms viz. planning, funding arrangements and quality assurance. Similar arrangements do not exist for TVET and CET colleges, or private higher education institutions and colleges.

The DHET will:

i.   develop a distance education model and policies for TVET and CET colleges;

ii.   initiate the establishment of key structures for the successful implementation of distance education; and

iii.   participate in the development of infrastructure (administration systems, learner support centres and ICT) necessary for the successful implementation of programmes across the PSET sector using distance education methods.

(b)   Support distance learners

One of the fundamental principles of open learning is the provision of learner support. Most learners require extensive support in their learning endeavours as well as engagement with experts and peers in order to be successful. The mere act of making learning materials available does not in itself constitute an open learning opportunity. In South Africa, with its particular legacy of unequal access to learning opportunities and quality teaching and learning materials, the need for comprehensive learner support is particularly critical.

Student support covers four elements, namely academic support, counselling support, administrative support and ICT/technology support:

i.   Academic support includes a wide variety of instructional methods, educational services or educational resources provided to learners to help them accelerate their learning progress, catch up with their peers,

    meet learning standards, or generally succeed in their learning endeavours, such as face-to-face tutorials, telephonic support, remedial interventions and library services. In TVET and CET colleges particular support should be given in key subject areas such as Mathematics and foundational programmes;

ii.   Counselling support includes career guidance, study skills and computer skills training and assistance for students facing crisis situations and adjustment issues;

iii.   Administrative support includes timely, accurate and accessible information to assist the learning process;

iv.   ICT/technology support includes access to technology and directions for using essential tools like email and chat.

The DHET expects PSET institutions to pay particular attention to the provision of adequate student support in addressing open learning approaches and distance education methodologies. Specific attention will be given to learner support centres. Government, institutions and community-based organisations have already established a variety of multi-purpose centres of various kinds in local communities that can immediately serve as sites for learner support or provision of distance education programmes. These could provide educational, administrative and logistical support, as well as access to digital and online materials, including access to the NOLS and online library services. They could also be used for contact sessions, particularly in the evenings, over weekends and during school holidays, as well as for supervised assessment in compliance with regulations governing summative assessment in TVET.

Existing and new centres will form a network of learner support centres across the country. The DHET will, together with institutions, develop a sound business model for learner support centres.

Strategic partnerships will be established to extend provision of centres in strategic localities remote from, or under-served by, PSET institutions.

Inter-institutional co-operation in the facilitation of learner support, coupled with sharing high quality resources, is particularly important when implementing distributed learning. Such co-operation will be fostered.

The functionality of selected public libraries can be extended at minimal cost to establish learning support centres on their premises, and in some cases librarians could be re-trained to staff such extended institutions, offering assistance in activities such as writing skills, group learning and co-operative learning.

Internet connectivity and bandwidth are particularly lacking in vast areas of rural South Africa. The establishment of a network of ICT-enabled learning support centres will play an essential role in bringing reliable internet connectivity to a growing number of learners, opening up an array of open and online education and training to many who would otherwise be deprived of it.

(c)　　Assure quality of cross-border distance education

The development of the internet and associated telecommunication avenues opens the way for formal and informal learning courses/programmes to be distributed on a global scale. Learners can access courses/programmes from international providers, and South African institutions can participate globally.

Unfortunately, this globalisation of learning also opens the way for opportunistic purveyors of dubious courses/programmes, as well as those who unscrupulously exploit the unwary.

The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014) sees the regulation of cross-border distance education programmes as being 'as important as any regulation that occurs within our borders', and commits to supporting the international exchange of research, scholarship, academics and students, as well as academic partnerships between South African and other universities. According to the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (2014), the DHET is in a process of developing an agreed framework of principles and guidelines for action by all bodies and institutions in South Africa concerned with offering and receiving cross-border university education, and offering joint degrees within a range of diverse partnership models. This framework will be extended to include TVET and CET colleges.

The DHET will continue to pursue and honour inter-governmental agreements designed to curb fraudulent or inferior distance education at source, and to ensure that providers of cross-border education meet acceptable criteria and are subjected to suitable quality assurance supervision in their home countries.

The DHET will ensure that:

i.   cross-border education and training regulations are in place, transparent and enforced;

ii.   full, clear and correct information is available to learners;

iii. qualifications are transparent, and institutions co-operate fully in verifying qualifications and disqualifying fraudulent documents;

iv.   effective quality assurance processes are in place; and

v.   DHET and distance education providers maintain a collegial dialogue on the subject locally and internationally.

The DHET, SAQA and the three QCs undertake to review the existing mechanisms aimed at ensuring that providers of cross-border education and training meet acceptable criteria and guidelines for cross-border distance education.

3.2.4   Improve access to information and communication technology as an enabler for distance education

The globalised world has already reached the stage where ICT are virtually indispensable for meaningful participation in modern life, including in education and training. Institutions are making increasing use of modern ICT to develop and offer learning programmes. However, reliable connectivity and access to maintained and compatible ICT are extremely unequal across the population, and institutions are not optimally collaborating and sharing ICT infrastructure.

According to the National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper (2016) the South African Government's goal is to 'ensure (that) everyone, regardless of who they are (therefore all PSET learners), where they live or their social or economic standing, can benefit from the opportunities offered by ICT, either on an individual or shared basis'.

Recent increases in the availability of bandwidth, cloud services and affordability of end-user mobile devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphones encourage the hope that this goal may be attainable. To extend this sort of infrastructure to all PSET learners remains a challenge.

The *National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper* (2016) provides for innovative funding strategies, including the implementation of an e-Rate (a discount of at least 50% on Internet services provided) to public TVET and CET colleges and higher education institutions, as well as the establishment of a Digital Development Fund (Digital-DF) to 'extend access to digital government services, including e-education programmes. This could include support for extending access through public "hot spots" via public entities.'

In the 2014 *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training*, the DHET expresses its intension to improve ICT access by:

i. developing an integrated ICT plan that will provide strategic direction for the improvement of equitable access to and use of appropriate technology across the post-school education and training system;

ii. prioritising collaboration with the Department of (Telecommunication and Postal Services) Communications and other government departments and stakeholders to facilitate increased bandwidth and reduced costs for educational purposes, with particular emphasis on reaching those in more remote areas;

iii. engaging with stakeholders to negotiate easier access to and reduced costs for Internet-enabled devices;

iv. bidding for funds to ensure that a comprehensive, enabling ICT infrastructure is put in place for all post-school institutions, particularly providers of distance higher education; and

v. facilitating the shared establishment and management of ICT-enabled, networked learning support centres in areas where home-based provision is likely to be difficult in the short to medium term.

In order to remain relevant and to accommodate the increasing demands of modernisation, institutions have to maximise the use of appropriate digital technology; collaborate and share infrastructure; embrace OER and the sharing of materials and resources; and build staff capacity in the use of ICT for teaching and learning.

The DHET and institutions will work towards affordable/free broadband connectivity on-campus for all learners and staff.

The DHET will:

i. review and align the ICT legislative and policy environment in support of the PSET system;

ii. develop an integrated ICT plan for the PSET system that is aligned to the national e-Skills Plan and the *National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper* (2016) of the Department of Telecommunication and Postal Services (DTPS);

iii. work with the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and DTPS to extend the South African National Research and Education Network (SANREN) into all public TVET and CET colleges and higher education institutions to provide broadband access to all PSET institutions and campuses;

iv. work collaboratively with the PSET community so that staff and learners in public PSET institutions have access to affordable mobile devices;

v. develop a strategy to support TVET and CET colleges with expertise to develop, manage and maintain campus and institutional ICT infrastructure;

vi. enable the development of institutional, inter-institutional and learner support centre ICT policies and plans (aligned to national policies) with appropriate financing strategies. These polices also include user security and protection of personal information (according to the Protection of Personal Information Act (Act No 4 of 2013) policies; and

vii. facilitate the professional development of managers, administrators, support personnel and lecturers in the use of ICT for teaching and learning as well as the management of ICT for teaching and learning.

3.2.5 Make high quality, shared teaching and learning resources available as open educational resources

The effectiveness of open learning is mainly based on the provision of high quality teaching and learning resources across the system. In order to make this endeavour cost-efficient, the collaborative development and sharing of well-designed, quality teaching and learning resources as OER is paramount in open learning. One of the critical success factors to this end is the adoption of an effective resource development model and related policies for the PSET system.

Open Licences have been developed to ensure that copying and sharing happen within a structured legal framework that is more flexible than the traditional 'all rights reserved' status of copyright. This allows for more flexible use, re-use and adaptation of materials for local contexts and learning environments, while still allowing authors to have their work acknowledged.

The DHET supports investing in the design and development of high quality learning resources as a strategy for increasing, and assuring the quality of, provision in the entire PSET system.

The DHET will:

i. develop, in consultation with stakeholders, an enabling policy environment for the development, use and distribution of OER;

ii. facilitate the process of collecting and compiling available OER in the PSET sector, including all publicly initiated and funded PSET materials, in repositories to serve the PSET system;

iii. provide support for the production and sharing of learning materials as OER in institutions in the PSET system. In particular, all materials developed by the DHET and institutions through public and donor funding will be made available as OER;

iv. invest in materials development and ensure that high quality teaching and learning resources will progressively be made freely available as OER to use, re-use and repurpose. To this end the DHET will develop a materials development model that will make use of content experts in institutions, academia and industry (where appropriate), coupled with experts in materials design and development;

v. consider adopting open standards for materials produced by government, agencies and institutions receiving government support for developing publications, to ensure full access to and use/sharing of resources, spanning both research and educational publications;

vi.   develop an appropriate licensing framework for use by the DHET and institutions within an overarching policy framework of intellectual property rights and copyright in the PSET system;

vii. contribute to raising awareness of key OER issues. These could include writing up and sharing case studies of good practice to support implementation efforts, assisting stakeholders to understand issues around Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), open licencing, quality in OER, and how IPR are being challenged and reshaped by the rapid digitisation and online sharing of information and resources;

viii. consider the development of OER as one of the priorities for recognising staff excellence in PSET institutions; and

ix.   support the sustainable development and sharing of quality learning and teaching materials.

3.3   Advocacy and communication

As recognised in the strategic objectives of the policy framework (see 3.2.2a), all facets of open learning have to be advocated and communicated within and beyond the PSET system in order to make effective use of open learning approaches to increase access to, and improve the quality of, PSET offerings in cost-efficient ways.

The DHET will develop, in consultation with stakeholders, an open learning advocacy and communication strategy at national level.

Institutions, as part of their implementation, will also embark on extensive advocacy and communication of open learning, firstly internally (management, administration, staff), and to learners, prospective learners, parents and the broader community.

The DHET and institutions will work together to ensure that everyone understands the advantages and the implications of open learning and its related areas.

4.   Monitoring and evaluation

As a principle-based approach, open learning is in itself difficult to quantify and therefore to monitor and evaluate its implementation. The evidence for open learning manifests itself in the extent to which the principles which constitute open learning (see paragraph 2.1.2) are being implemented. Open learning is further manifested in specific modalities of provision such as distance education, technology-enhanced learning, online learning and blended learning.

However, evidence-based decision making has become an indispensable practice universally because of its role in ensuring efficient management of population, economic and social affairs. Policy improvement cannot bear fruit without systematic and consistent measurement of the inequality gap.

The DHET is committed to the implementation of the open learning principles, and data on its implementation will be collected and aggregated in order to monitor and evaluate the systemic implementation of open learning in the PSET system.

4.1   Monitoring and evaluation instruments

The DHET, within the first two years of implementation of this policy framework, will initiate the process of developing an Open Learning Implementation Index and an Open Learning Review and Improvement Model (OL-RIM), open learning indicators as well as a standardised process of collecting and reporting on progress. Through these two instruments, the implementation of open learning in institutions will be monitored and evaluated.

4.1.1   Open learning indicators

Open learning indicators will be developed and monitored within existing monitoring and evaluation frameworks and tools such as the regulations governing reporting of higher education institutions, Higher Education Act (Act No 101 of 1997), section 41 read with section 69, as published in Government Gazette No. 37726 Notice No 464 of June 2014. This will enable the DHET to receive reports from public universities. Currently universities are reporting annually to the DHET as prescribed by the Regulations for Reporting by Public Higher Education Institutions.

Open Learning performance indicators will be included as part of the governance and teaching and learning indicator process.

The same process will apply to public TVET and CET colleges. In terms of Section 12(1) of the CET Act (Act No 16 of 2006), College Councils are encouraged to establish special sub-committees. One of the sub-committees will be an Open Learning Sub-Committee that will support and monitor implementation of open learning at each college. TVET and CET colleges will follow a similar integrated reporting mechanism to that used by universities to report annually on national action plans on social inclusion.

The DHET and institutions will develop open learning indicators and monitor them within existing monitoring and evaluation frameworks and tools where they exist. Where indicators, frameworks and tools do not exist,

the DHET will develop such indicators, frameworks and tools in order to have a uniform monitoring system across the PSET system.

4.1.2   Open Learning Implementation Index

In order to realise the implementation of open learning in institutions, it is important that inequalities between institutions with regard to open learning be measured. An Open Learning Implementation Index (OLII) will be developed for measurement of the implementation of open learning in institutions. This index will provide a high-level quick scan of the level of implementation, with the explicit purpose of managing government performance more inclusively. It is a new concept and a pioneering initiative with no international comparison.

This index will be calculated and reviewed annually. There is a need to embark on the production of an analytical summary that reveals unique challenges and opportunities. This analytical work also enhances intellectual debates that are critical for policy review and interventions.

The OLII is not a substitute for the monitoring and evaluation frameworks that exist in PSET institutions, and should be embedded in the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System.

The DHET will initiate the development of an Open Learning Implementation Index (OLII) that will measure implementation of open learning in institutions.

4.1.3   Open learning review and improvement model

In the medium to long term, the effectiveness of the enabling environment that has been created will be constantly monitored and reported. The OLII will be used to develop an Open Learning Review and Improvement Model (OL-RIM).

The OL-RIM will respond to two realities, viz. the increasing emphasis on increased access to PSET, quality of PSET offerings, articulation and recognition for studies, and the high cost of conventional approaches to external quality assurance.

The OL-RIM will be designed to be high in effectiveness and low in cost, targeting decision makers at institutional level. The model has to be suitable for all PSET institutions of all types and sizes. It will be a self-administered approach which supports the institution in reviewing itself, with the recommended option of getting the institutional findings verified by a quality professional or even a panel of verifiers.

The DHET will initiate the development of an Open learning Review and Improvement Model (OL-RIM) that will support institutions in reviewing themselves in terms of open learning implementation.

4.2   Monitoring the implementation of the policy framework

The above processes and instruments will also be used to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the policy framework. Systemic indicators will be identified to report on the PSET system's progress. It must be realised that the implementation of open learning is not a goal in itself; rather it addresses the bigger systemic issues of access, success, quality and cost.

5. Implementation

5.1 High level implementation strategy

A high level Implementation Strategy for Open Learning in the PSET system has been developed based on the strategic objectives in 3.2, the advocacy and communication outlined in 3.3, and the monitoring and evaluation framework outlined in 4. The implementation strategy outlines implementation over the short term (2018/9), Medium Term (to align it with the Medium Term Strategic Framework of Government: 2019/20 – 2021/2) and Long Term (up to 2030). The implementation strategy is only indicative, and a detailed implementation plan will be developed once the policy is published.

5.1.1 Develop an enabling environment for open learning provision in PSET

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
(a) Address legislation, policy and practice	i. Develop an open learning model for PSET	DHET Institutions Entities SAQA 3 QCs			
	ii. Do an environmental scan of legislation, policies and practices in the PSET system and identify gaps, inconsistencies and duplication related to open learning	DHET			
	iii. Complete the legislative and policy environment that will guide and standardise the provision of open learning across the entire PSET system	DHET			
	iv. Embed open learning in the national quality assurance system for PSET. This includes the revision and implementation through the QCs, of the quality standards for distance education published in 'A Distance Education Quality Standards Framework for South Africa' in 1996	DHET SAQA 3 QCs			
	v. Use open learning approaches to recognise prior learning and facilitate articulation where gaps exist, in particular taking account of non-formal learning such as that recognised by means of 'digital badges'	DHET SAQA 3QCs Institutions			

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
	vi. Establish key structures for the successful implementation of open learning	DHET			
	vii. Initiate research and development on open learning, help build a network of public and private open learning institutions and practitioners, and facilitate their efforts to translate open learning principles into effective practice	DHET Institutions Research Community			
	viii. Stimulate ongoing debate around open learning and related issues among all people involved in education	DHET Institutions Entities SAQA 3 QCs Research Community			
	ix. Monitor and evaluate the application of open learning approaches and distance education methodologies (see 4.1)	DHET Institutions Entities SAQA 3 QCs			
(b) Standardise quality assurance across post-school education and training	i. Assist institutions in the implementation of quality open learning, including the adaptation of quality assurance mechanisms for open learning	SAQA 3 QCs DHET Institutions Entities			
(c) Develop and establish a national open learning system	i. Develop the NOLS	DHET			
	ii. Make programmes and courses systematically available through the NOLS, based on the needs and priorities of the PSET system	DHET Institutions			
	iii. Establish a NOLS Steering Committee	DHET			
	iv. Develop learning opportunities with high quality open learning materials that will be made available as OER on the NOLS	DHET, through collaboration with PSET institutions, experts, industry, entities and associations/formations			
	v. Build in a range of learner support mechanisms	DHET Institutions			

5.1.2 Apply open learning approaches in PSET institutions

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
(a) Institutionalise open learning	i. Develop and implement an Open Learning Communication Strategy to understand open learning, its nature and value within institutions, and to build capacity in the application of open learning approaches (see 3.2.2a, 5.1.6)	DHET Institutions Government Communication and Information Services (GCIS)			
	ii. Provide guidelines for, and engage with institutions on, the development of particular programmes in appropriate modalities reflecting open learning, as well as enrolment planning processes that address national and student needs on the one hand, and institutions' capacity to deliver on the other (see 4.5)	DHET Institutions Entities SAQA 3 QCs SAIVCET			
	iii. Draft guidelines on partnerships and collaboration in open learning (see 5.3)	DHET SAQA 3 QCs			
	iv. Review and improve current *modus operandi* to increase access to quality provision within a resource-constraint environment	DHET Institutions			
	v. Report on implementation within existing monitoring and evaluation frameworks and tools (see 4.1, 5.1.7)	DHET Institutions			
	vi. Support institutions in the development of a review and improvement model (see 4.1.3, 5.1.7)	DHET			
	vii. Invest in professional development programmes in various aspects of open learning, including distance education delivery and course design using open education resources	DHET Institutions			
(b) Adopt diverse modes of delivery	i. Consider mixed mode and blended learning programme delivery and apply it within institutional contexts	Institutions			
	ii. Develop a supporting mechanism to institutions in implementing a diverse range of delivery modes, including draft guidelines on partnerships and collaborations in open learning (see 5.3)	DHET			
(c) Establish a network of high	i. Measures such as Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) planning will be put in place across the PSET system to address unnecessary	DHET			

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Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
quality providers	duplication of public provision in some areas at the expense of a lack of provision in others (see 3.2.2c)				
	ii. Collaborate in sharing experience and expertise; developing and delivering programmes; developing and sharing infrastructure, learning resources and ICT; establishing or supporting learning support centres; and mentoring learning centre personnel	DHET Institutions Entities			
	iii. Support institutions to collaborate within and across sectors (universities, TVET and CET colleges, skills providers and industry), in designing, developing and providing programmes, including professional development in course design, materials development and administration/ management required in open learning	DHET			
	iv. Establish collaboration networks to develop open learning courses and course materials for TVET and CET college lecturers that can be offered by different universities	DHET			

5.1.3 Create a post-school distance education landscape based on open learning principles

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
(a) Implement sectoral models for distance education provision in PSET	i. Develop a distance education model for TVET and CET colleges including an implementation policy for distance education in TVET and CET colleges (including private providers); using distance education methodologies for TVET and CET colleges; improving throughput and success in distance education; providing adequate support to distance education learners; adapting the assessment and examination regime, especially for TVET colleges, so that it accommodates distance education contexts; and building the capacity of PSET institutions to administer, manage, offer and support distance education	DHET			
	ii. Initiate the establishment of key structures for the successful implementation of distance education	DHET			
	iii. Participate in the development of infrastructure (administration systems, learner support centres and ICT) necessary for the	DHET			

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Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
	successful implementation of programmes using distance education methods.				
(b) Support distance learners	i. Develop a sound business model for learner support centres	DHET			
	ii. Form a network of learner support centres across the country, including existing and new centres	DHET Institutions Entities Local Government Government Departments			
	iii. Establish strategic partnerships to extend provision of centres in strategic localities remote from, or under-served by, PSET institutions	DHET Institutions Entities Local Government Government Departments			
	iv. Co-operation in the facilitation of learner support, coupled with sharing high quality resources	DHET Institutions Entities Local Government Government Departments			
	v. Train librarians/centre managers and personnel to offer assistance in activities such as writing skills, group learning and co-operative learning	DHET Institutions Entities Local Government Government Departments			
(c) Assure quality of cross-border distance education	i. Ensure that cross-border education and training regulations are in place, transparent and enforced	DHET SAQA 3 QCs			
	ii. Ensure that full, clear and correct information is available to learners	DHET Institutions SAQA 3QCs			

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
		Professional bodies and associations			
	iii. Ensure that qualifications are transparent and institutions co-operate fully in verifying qualifications and disqualifying fraudulent documents	DHET, Institutions, SAQA, 3QCs			
	iv. Put effective quality assurance processes in place	DHET, SAQA, 3QCs			
	v. Maintain a collegial dialogue on the subject locally and internationally	DHET, Institutions, SAQA, 3QCs, Professional bodies and associations			
	vi. Review the existing mechanisms aimed at ensuring that providers of cross-border education and training meet acceptable criteria and guidelines for cross-border distance education	DHET, SAQA, 3QCs			

5.1.4　Improve access to information and communication technology as an enabler for distance education

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
(a) Implement sectoral models for distance education provision in PSET	i. Demonstrate that institutions maximise the use of appropriate digital technology; collaborate and share infrastructure; embrace OER and the sharing of materials and resources; and build staff capacity in the use of ICT for teaching and learning	Institutions			
	ii. Review and align the ICT legislative and policy environment in support of the PSET system	DHET			
	iii. Develop an integrated ICT plan that will provide strategic direction for the improvement of equitable access to and use of appropriate technology across the PSET system	DHET, DTPS, DST			

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
	iv. Extend SANREN into all public TVET and CET colleges and higher education institutions to provide broadband access to all PSET institutions and campuses	DHET DTPS DST			
	v. Engage with stakeholders and the PSET community to negotiate access to Internet-enabled devices at reduced costs	DHET DST DTPS			
	vi. Develop a strategy to support TVET and CET colleges with expertise to develop, manage and maintain campus and institutional ICT infrastructure	DHET			
	vii. Enable the development of institutional, inter-institutional and learner support centre ICT policies and plans (aligned to national policies) with appropriate financing strategies	DHET Institutions Local Government Government Departments			
	viii. Facilitate the professional development of managers, administrators, support personnel and lecturers in the use of ICT for teaching and learning as well as the management of ICT for teaching and learning	DHET Institutions			

5.1.5   Make high quality, shared teaching and learning resources available as open educational resources

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
(a) Make high quality, shared teaching and learning resources available as OER	i. Develop an enabling policy environment for the development, use and distribution of OER including the adoption of an effective resource development model and related policies for the PSET system	DHET			
	ii. Develop a structured legal framework that is more flexible than the traditional 'all rights reserved' status of copyright for the PSET system	DHET			
	iii. Facilitate the process of collecting and compiling available OER in the PSET sector, including all publicly initiated and funded PSET materials, in repositories to serve the PSET system	DHET Institutions			
	iv. Provide support for the production and sharing of learning materials as OER in institutions in the PSET system	DHET Institutions			

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
	v. Develop a materials development model making use of content experts and experts in materials design and development	DHET Institutions			
	vi. Invest in materials development and ensure that high quality teaching and learning resources will progressively be made freely available as OER to use, re-use and repurpose	DHET			
	vii. Adopt open standards for materials produced by government, agencies and institutions receiving government support for developing publications, to ensure full access to and use/sharing of resources, spanning both research and educational publications	DHET			
	viii. Develop an appropriate licencing framework for use by the DHET and institutions within an overarching policy framework of intellectual property rights and copyright in the PSET system	DHET			
	ix. Raise awareness of key OER issues (these could include writing up and sharing case studies of good practice to support implementation efforts, assisting stakeholders to understand issues around IPR, open licencing, quality in OER, and how IPR are being challenged and reshaped by the rapid digitisation and online sharing of information and resources	DHET Institutions Professional Bodies Associations			
	x. Develop OER as one of the priorities for recognising staff excellence in PSET institutions	DHET			
	xi. Develop a sustainable model for the development and sharing of quality learning and teaching materials	DHET			

5.1.6 Advocacy and communication

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
(a) Ensure that all facets of open learning have to be advocated and communicated within and	i. Develop and implement an Open Learning Communication Strategy to understand open learning, its nature and value within institutions, and to build capacity in the application of open learning approaches (see 3.2.2a and 3.3)	DHET Institutions Other stakeholders			
	ii. Embark on extensive advocacy and communication of open learning, firstly within their own institution (management, administration,	Institutions			

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
beyond the PSET system	staff) and to learners, prospective learners, parents and the broader community (see 3.3)				

5.1.7 Monitoring and evaluation

Objectives	Activities	Responsibility	Short Term 2017/8 – 2018/9	Medium Term 2019/20 – 2021/2	Long Term 2022 onwards
(a) Ensure that open learning implementation is monitored	i. Develop an Open Learning Implementation Index	DHET Institutions			
	ii. Support institutions in the development of an Open Learning Review and Improvement Model (OL-RIM) (see 4.1.2)	DHET Institutions			
	iii. Develop open learning indicators as well as a standardised process of collecting and reporting on progress (frameworks and tools)	DHET Institutions			
	iv. Report on implementation within existing monitoring and evaluation frameworks and tools (see 4.1)	DHET Institutions			

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5.2   Co-ordination mechanisms

The DHET, through the Directorate: Open Learning, will provide strategic leadership in the implementation of open learning in the PSET system, working with PSET institutions. The DHET will devise deliberate steps to build and maintain a cohesive and efficient NOLS with its associated content/learning management system that reflects open learning principles as far as is appropriate for each type of need experienced by post-school learners. DHET will work with other government departments, agencies, organisations and institutions to carefully plan, communicate, implement, monitor and evaluate open learning in the PSET system.

In the short term (2018/9 – 2020/21), the DHET will work closely with institutions to develop and implement instruments to assist institutions in the increasing implementation of open learning. These include the establishment of networks of open learning providers, open learning courseware designers and materials developers, and learning support centres, as well as a PSET Open Learning Forum.

5.2.1   Policy instruments and steering mechanisms to be used in implementation

Existing mechanisms of institutional planning, funding arrangements and quality assurance will be used to create an enabling environment for the uptake of open learning, and to steer the entire post-school sector in a way that will encourage and stimulate the increasing use of open learning in distance, face-to-face contact and mixed modes of delivery. These steering mechanisms will be employed to encourage, incentivise and support institutions to increase and improve access to learning opportunities, removing as many barriers to such access as possible, and to assist institutions to construct high quality learning environments which take account of the learners' contexts and employ technology appropriately and efficiently.

5.2.2   The South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training

The South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAIVCET) will be instrumental in providing necessary and appropriate support for the realisation of open learning and distance education in the TVET and CET college sectors. The Further Education and Training Colleges Amendment Act (Act No 1 of 2013), Sec 43B (b) and (c) directs SAIVCET to 'assist and support the Minister in the development of distance education and training, including open learning' and to 'assist and support colleges in the development of learning, teaching and assessment materials'. It also assigns the functions of research, innovation, promotion of dialogue and professional development to SAIVCET.

SAIVCET will therefore:
  i. develop an open learning and distance education model for TVET and CET colleges, including means of accommodating practical and work-based components for distance education students;
  ii. upgrade the technical knowledge and pedagogical skills of existing staff in TVET and CET colleges in open learning;
  iii. provide a forum for experts to develop open learning materials for TVET and CET college programmes;
  iv. advise the Minister on open learning and distance education in TVET and CET colleges;

   v. initiate research on open learning and distance education in TVET and CET colleges, and the college system as a whole;

  vi. promote dialogue and the co-ordination of open learning and distance education in TVET and CET colleges;

 vii. promote RPL through open learning; and

viii. monitor and evaluate the application of open learning approaches and distance education methodologies in TVET and CET colleges.

5.2.3   National Open Learning Forum

In order to support institutions in the implementation of open learning, the DHET will establish a National Open Learning Forum (NOLF) to:

i.   provide overall direction for open learning implementation in the country;

ii.   determine priorities for open learning implementation in the country;

iii. advise the PSET system on implementation of open learning; and

iv. drive the national advocacy and communication strategy for open learning.

This forum will establish, on a needs basis, sub-structures to drive and promote specific areas within open learning such as OER and open licencing; quality assurance and learner support, to name a few.

5.3   Institutional implementation

The DHET, in collaboration with other entities and organisations such as SAQA, QCs and SAIVCET, will provide guidelines for, and engage with institutions on, the development of particular programmes in appropriate modalities reflecting open learning, as well as enrolment planning processes that address national and student needs on the one hand, and institutions' capacity to deliver on the other. These guidelines, together with historical data on student success and throughput rates, will influence decisions about the desirability and hence recognition of programmes of particular types, designations and modes of provision. Public institutions' PQMs and enrolment plans must be approved by the DHET prior to applications for programme accreditation through the relevant quality assurer.

Institutions may enter into partnerships to facilitate the provision of support for open learning. The obligations of such partners must be clearly spelled out. The DHET will draft guidelines on partnerships and collaborations in open learning. It is imperative that institutions have met all the quality assurance requirements of the relevant QC, and thereby take full responsibility for the quality of the learning programmes in question.

Provision of open learning will also necessitate appropriate staffing arrangements and the professional development of managerial and administrative as well as academic staff.

5.4   Funding

The implementation of the policy framework will be part of the core activities of the DHET and institutions, and therefore be incorporated in the funding allocation for institutions. The DHET will determine funding norms and provide guidelines for funding open learning. The DHET will ensure that the funding of open learning, and of

distance education provision in specific, is based on empirical evidence of the relative costs of different modes of provision.

Open learning initiatives driven by the DHET such as the NOLS will be funded initially through the European Union Sectoral Support Programmes Budget. Funding has been secured for the implementation of the initial and second phases of the Open Learning initiative, up to 2025.

Measures will be taken early in implementation of the policy framework to ensure that open learning policies and practices gain a firm foothold in a number of TVET and CET colleges and universities, that initially limited open learning programmes and other initiatives are well-managed and sustained, and that the momentum toward further development and innovation is maintained.

Some of the DHET's strategic funding priorities will be to:

i.   modify the relevant budgetary frameworks and funding norms to recognise the importance and status of open learning, including the development of quality OER;

ii. raise awareness of key open learning and OER issues;

iii. review the funding formula which assumes a neat and obvious division between contact and distance education;

iv. fund continued technical infrastructure development in order to allow for increased and enhanced access to programmes;

v.   support the sustainable development and sharing of quality learning materials as OER; and

vi. review National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funding in order to facilitate the appropriate support of learners availing themselves of open and distance learning opportunities.

The DHET accepts that the although open learning and distance education may be accompanied in the long term by financial advantages accruing from expanded enrolments and relatively low expenditure on new physical infrastructure, the initial costs of establishing the necessary ICT networks, software and other infrastructure, in addition to the heavy cost of course and materials development for quality self-directed learning, tend to outweigh any shorter-term cost benefits. Integrated budget planning and carefully monitored and reviewed expenditure will therefore be needed.

5.5   Reviewing the policy framework

As outlined in paragraph 3.5, the developed instruments will be used to monitor the implementation of the policy framework over a period up to 2030 to align it with the goals of the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (2014). The policy will be reviewed every five years after implementation commences.

5.6   Effective date of the policy

The policy will come into effect on the date of publication in the Government Gazette.

6.   Conclusion

As pressure mounts, at times dramatically, for increased access to affordable post-school education and training in a context of fiscal stress and global economic uncertainty, many South Africans look to e-learning, online learning, distance learning and open learning to provide at least partial solutions. Although they often overlap in practice, each of these forms of education has in itself a different type of contribution to make.

Open learning has the potential to open up new avenues of access to learning, and to make learning a more engaging and intrinsically rewarding experience for those who can have sustained access to it. Distance education is well-known for increasing the educational reach of institutions, and for providing learning opportunities to many who would otherwise be deprived of formal learning. Like distance education, open learning focuses directly on making access to learning a primary goal, and may use the benefits of e-learning and online learning to achieve this end. Open learning, however, is driven by a concern for social justice and therefore motivated by the need for redress, equity in access to opportunity, flexibility and choice, and by an equal concern for quality and real success in learning.

All of these forms of education need to be carefully planned, selected and implemented with pedagogic effectiveness and appropriateness in mind as the first consideration, and not as an afterthought subordinate to the need for a healthier balance sheet, or to the desire to be known for being equipped with the most up-to-date technological aids.