Case Eight: Peer Collaborative Learning at the former Technikon Southern Africa

Fritz Dresselhaus, Academic Development Centre, former Technikon Southern Africa
fdressel@tsa.ac.za
With members of the Peer Collaborative Learning Action Research Team

Editor's introduction

The peer collaborative learning project which this case study describes was motivated by a concern to improve overall institutional retention and pass rates at Technikon Southern Africa (TSA) - a concern captured in the 'Results' section of the quality criteria:

> **13.8** Sufficient numbers of learners complete the individual programmes and courses successfully to justify the cost in time and person power for the design of the programmes, courses and learner support system.

The case study is interesting because it attributes part of the reason for low retention rates to insufficient learner support, and reports on a project to improve **learner support** in cost-effective ways.

The quality criteria refer to peer support structures specifically - see quality criterion no 7:

> Learners are provided with a range of opportunities for real two-way communication through the use of various forms of technology for tutoring at a distance, contact tutoring, assignment tutoring, mentoring where appropriate, counselling (both remote and face-to-face), and the stimulation of peer support structures.

However, as the case study illustrates, the TSA peer collaborative learning project does more than simply 'stimulate' peer support structures. It aims to resource, organize, and maintain structures for peer support in subjects in which retention rates are particularly low.

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges for TSA, is the need to improve pass and retention rates of learners. Institutional research at TSA over the last few years indicates that current strategies are not adequately addressing this matter.

Various factors that could possibly contribute to lack of effective retention strategies at TSA have been identified as the following:

- Diminishing resources (funds and human capital);
- Lack of generic life skills and competencies amongst higher education learners;
- Dwindling number of learners;
- Entry level of learners registered;
- General absence of truly mature learners ('adult learners');
- Current teaching practice being more lecturer-centred than learner-centred;
- Lack of understanding among decision-makers regarding appropriate learner support in distance education;
- Lack of planning, co-ordination, integration and monitoring of current support strategies.

The transformation of higher education, lack of resources and the need for effective learner support strategies resulted in the adoption of peer collaborative learning (PCL) at TSA as just one possible intervention measure. Before considering PCL in any detail, a brief background to TSA is provided.

Technikon SA is a higher education and training institute consisting of four academic divisions (Economic and Management Sciences, Community Sciences, Public Safety and Criminal Justice and Applied Natural Sciences and Engineering) which offer formal courses ranging from certificate to doctoral level, reinforced by unique learner support technology.

In 2002 there were 58 170 learners registered at TSA. There was a staff complement of over 1 000 and more than 70 learning programmes. TSA also has 26 regional and branch offices throughout South Africa. Most of TSA's learners are from South Africa, but there are also registered learners in Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and elsewhere in Africa.

Over the years, and following the adoption of the integrated learner-centred distance education model, TSA has developed from a traditional correspondence institution into an educational institution aimed primarily at providing its learners with decentralized support wherever they might be.

Learners have a wide choice in terms of different staff to consult (advisors, lecturers, counsellors, tutors, markers, assessors, moderators, etc.); multiple learning sites (for example. at home, local libraries, learning centres, Internet cafes, the regional offices); and access to either face-to-face tutoring, or tutoring through use of various media (telephone and e-mail).

However, as a result of rapid changes in learner profiles, learner needs, curriculum design, subject content and technological developments, the well-established tutor system at TSA, intended as a means of academic support, has become somewhat less effective than was initially envisaged. In addition, retention and throughput rates on certain of the programmes are less than satisfactory. This has led to an investigation into alternative means of decentralized academic support at TSA. Peer Collaborative Learning is one of the interventions that has been explored.

Background of Peer Collaborative Learning

PCL is an academic support strategy aimed at assisting learners to understand the subject and improve their performance. It targets 'high-risk' subjects, or academic subjects that have generally proved to be difficult over the last three years.

Quality Criterion	**7.22**	Learner performance is monitored and learners at risk identified. Timeous educational intervention is provided for such learners.

According to Rochelle (1992:20), peer collaborative learning is a process of learning whereby a small group, together with a facilitator (peer) as an active participant, manages the learning session in such a way that there is a construction of shared meaning. Talking through concepts and experiences improves understanding of the subject for academic success and simultaneously enhances the intellectual, social and cognitive skills of the individuals involved.

Quality Criterion	**7.1**	Learners are encouraged to create and participate in 'communities of learning' in which the individual learner thinks and solves problems with others engaged in similar tasks.

Peer facilitators are usually senior learners who have performed well in the subject, and who can now help new learners. The kinds of support which peer facilitators give differ in a number of ways from tutorials offered as part of the learner support system across TSA as a whole. Apart from the obvious difference that PCL tutorials are run by peers who have themselves passed through the course rather than tutors/lecturers who are regarded as experts, the methodology in PCL tutorials differs from conventional tutorials in being oriented towards study skills and ways of tackling the subject in which participants are central to the learning process, asking and answering questions instead of waiting for questions from a tutor. One of the reasons for using peer collaborative learning is that it is based on a co-operative learning model, rather than a competitive one.

Since the first research study conducted as far back as 1898, there have been nearly 600 experimental and over 100 correlation studies conducted on co-operative, competitive and individualistic efforts (Johnson & Johnson, 1992:6). Based on research findings, it appears that co-operation, as opposed to competitive and individualistic efforts, typically results in:

- Higher achievement and greater productivity;
- More caring, supportive and committed relationships;
- Greater psychological health, social competence and self-esteem.

The idea of co-operative learning and collaborative teaching is supported by three theoretical perspectives. According to the first, the cognitive approach, which focuses on strategies of information processing, learning is maximized when learners 'act on information in ways that make it more meaningful', such as organizing it, making their own connections with it and applying it to new contexts (Svinicki, 1991:30). This active learning can be more easily achieved in small groups in which, in the absence of an 'expert', group members engage to help each other make meaning. The second perspective, motivational theory, is concerned with how learning is 'initiated and sustained'. It advocates giving 'responsibility for learning back to the students and using innovative methods' (Forsyth & McMillan, 1991: 55). Collaborative learning does both. Finally, from the third perspective, the kind of environment

most conducive to learning is thought to be 'dialogue', characterized by interaction and co-operation. Learners are more willing to take 'responsibility for their educational experience' as compared with the traditional situation of teacher/lecture mode. In sum, collaborative learning, endorsed by all three theoretical viewpoints, appears to be the more promising approach (Billson & Tiberius, 1991: 23).

Initial implementation of PCL at TSA in 2002/2003

PCL was implemented on a fairly informal and regionally fragmented basis in 2002/2003, and a great deal was learned from the process.

The PCL process involved a broad spectrum of stakeholders and necessitated the development of certain procedures to give structure to the informal programme and to eliminate opportunities for irregularities. Procedures were developed to identify:

- Appropriate facilitators and learners to be involved in the strategy;
- Subjects for which PCL should be used.

Procedures for payment and for scheduling of sessions had to be developed. Sessions were scheduled according to the profile of the learners at each TSA branch office/centre. Employed learners could attend classes in the evenings and on Saturdays, while unemployed learners could attend classes during normal business hours. Peer collaborative learning sessions were organized at TSA learning resource centres, so that learners could have access to resources and facilities available there.

Quality Criterion	**7.5**	In selection of venues and times for contact sessions, travel time and expense for learners are considered. Care is taken to place suitable sites of learning close to where students live/work.

Even from the initial rather fragmented implementation of PCL in 2002 and 2003, there were a number of benefits. Evaluations revealed that cognitive support as well as affective and social support goals were achieved. Almost all learners who participated in the PCL programme submitted the compulsory assignment as summative assessment to obtain a year mark, which means that they were granted admission to the examination.

However, several learners dropped out of the programme after submitting their compulsory assignment. This means that although these learners obtained a year mark and admission to the examination, they missed out on the benefits of an important aspect of the work, namely examination preparation. There were also some problems with attendance. After-hours attendance was hampered by safety and security concerns, for example using public transport/taxis to travel to a township after a class. In addition, some learners who were employed, could only attend the evening sessions.

Refinement of pilot for 2003/2004

As a result of the successes of the first pilot, the approach was piloted again with first year learners registering for a PCL course during the second registration cycle in August 2003. The purpose of the second pilot was to develop PCL as an integrated academic and learner support programme with policies and procedures in place for the institutional management of PCL and a training manual consisting of 11 units covering various topics such as PCL teaching and learning strategies, and the formation and functioning of groups. In addition, it is intended to publish the results of the PCL intervention, indicating the effectiveness of the learners' learning experience. The various policies and procedures are thus much more refined and carefully documented than was the case with the initial implementation.

Selection of PCL facilitators and subjects in which PCL will be used

The selection of PCL-leaders and the selection of subjects to be facilitated were seen as two critical success factors in this project.

Quality Criterion	**8.13**	Arrangements are in place for the proper recruitment, training, monitoring and payment of the necessary part-time and contract staff.

The following set of criteria was identified for the appointment of facilitators. PCL appointments should:

- Reflect the demographics of the particular region;
- Be second or preferably third year learners in the applicable subject;
- Be current learners registered at Technikon SA;
- Have obtained at least 60% in the applicable subject;
- Be multilingual;
- Have good interpersonal skills.

The subjects used in the PCL pilot were identified by TSA Regional Academic Managers on the grounds that learners find them particularly difficult and that the drop out rates in these subjects are high. These subjects include: Financial Accounting, Marketing, Economics, Business Management, IT skills, Business Law and Personnel Management.

Critical phase intervention strategy

The PCL operating procedures were designed around the critical phases for a learner within one academic year. The rationale for using the critical phases was to help identify the various reason(s) why learners drop out. The most prominent reason cited for learner cancellations at TSA is 'personal reasons' which accounts for approximately 55% of cancellations. As PCL focuses on both cognitive and affective aspects of learning, it has potential to address at least some of the personal reasons for course cancellation.

Quality Criterion	**7.21**	Before each critical phase of a course/programme, each learner is contacted and encouraged to participate.

Within the academic year of a distance education learner, there are a number of critical phases or hurdles that learners must overcome. The principle that is applied is to pro-actively schedule PCL sessions before each critical learning event. This is a departure from a remedial type of intervention in which the learner is only assisted after a failed learning experience.

The following diagram shows these critical phases.

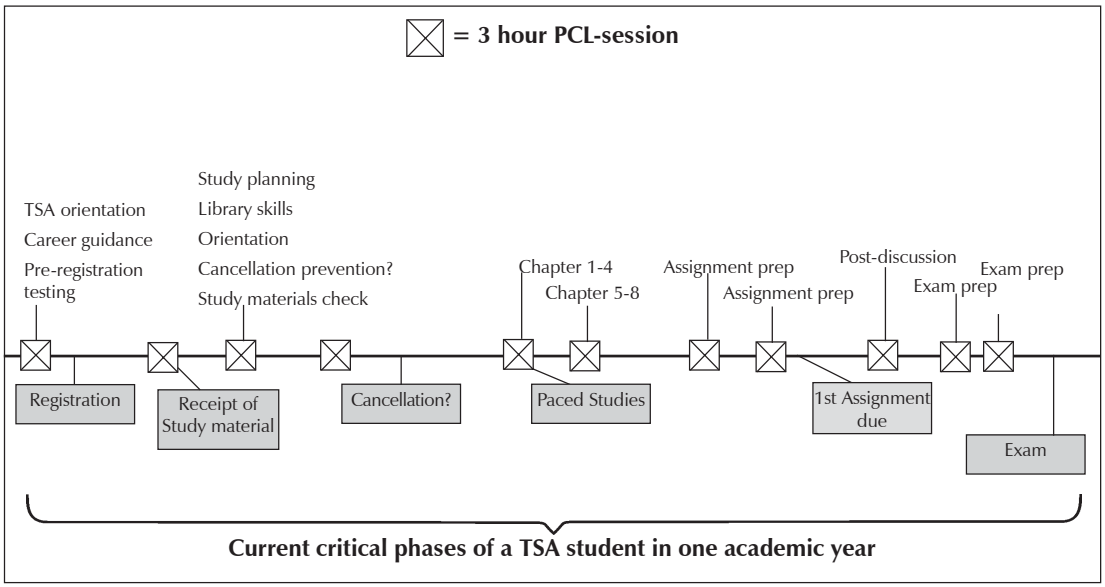


Figure 1: PCL critical phase intervention strategy: from remediation to pro-active

Critical phases are indicated in the grey blocks. It should be noted that there are a number of subjects where one or more assignments are written and in such cases PCL sessions are scheduled before the due dates. It should also be noted that sessions are scheduled before each learning event - the emphasis therefore is on pro-active intervention rather than on remediation after the learning event. Through this strategy the distance education institution can scaffold and support the learner during critical periods in his/her studying career.

Quality Criterion	**9.8**	Appropriate schedules are developed for all activities forming part of the distance education system, with due attention given to lead times needed to meet deadlines.

Table 1: Typical timetable for PCL

No.	Tutorial session/activity (each session is three hours)	Date
1	Start of PCL registration: General info session	7 Sept 2003
2	General TSA orientation	30 Sept 2003
3	Study management: (Study plan, materials, library orientation, cancellation issues, etc.)	13 Oct 2003
4	Chapters 1-4	27 Oct 2003
5	Assignment preparation (1)	19 Nov 2003
6	Assignment preparation (2)	10 Jan 2004
7	Post-assignment discussion	31 Jan 2004
8	Chapters 5-9	26 Feb 2004
9	Chapters 10-14	17 Mar 2004
10	Revision (1)	31 Mar 2004
11	Revision (2)	15 April 2004
12	Examination preparation (1)	29 April 2004
13	Examination preparation (2)	5 May 2004
14	Post examination session	

In addition it was planned that the subject lecturers themselves would facilitate at least three sessions, particularly around assignment preparation and examination preparation, but this did not happen due to lecturers' work pressure. It has been suggested that perhaps regionally appointed tutors could support the peer tutors in this way.

Preparation for each PCL session

The PCL facilitators are supported to implement the above approach to co-operative learning by careful session by session preparation, integrating main campus lecturer, regional academic manager and regional tutor.

The PCL facilitators are themselves learners who, in most cases, have been exposed to classroom expository teaching by a teacher during their long school careers. It was observed in previous sessions that the PCL facilitators all too often reverted to the 'teach and tell' method - a methodology they were exposed to for over twelve years of schooling.

It is therefore important to design and to develop session preparation to structure the three hour long PCL sessions in ways that include meaningful activities. These activities will lead, prompt and assist the PCL facilitator to manage the group, rather than to teach the group.

The main part of the session preparation form is completed by the subject lecturer at the main campus. The session preparation form is then passed on to the various regional academic managers in the various regions, who then in turn refine the session preparation form together with the regional tutor and the PCL facilitator.

Quality Criterion	**7.6**	Tutors are selected and trained for their crucial role in encouraging active engagement of each learner in the course/programme.

The session preparation form contains four sections, the functions of which are as follows:

1. **Pathfinder Activity**
   During this activity, generic academic skills (critical cross-field outcomes) are facilitated. Learning management skills (for example setting a study timetable) are emphasized. For example, groups might compile a table on the topic of 'School learning vs Distance education' to highlight some of the challenges that they face; or make a year planner with deadlines for important activities, and extend this into a monthly and even a weekly planner.
2. **Subject Specific**
   The learner is paced through the academic year by 'chunking' the subject matter into manageable parts. The learner is then paced through the academic year. For example, learners discuss negative and positive perceptions of the subject, look at what is expected of learners in relation to prescribed or recommended books, discuss activities completed in preparation for the session (such as summaries of certain sections or definitions of concepts, or reports on field visits).
3. **Long-term Examination/Assignment Planning**
   The habit of many learners to wake up a day before the examination and then get into a 'cramming' session is well known. Long-term assignment and examination preparation already starts at the first session and is reinforced within each PCL session thereafter. For example, in an assignment preparation session, groups might review a list of frequently used terms in assignment/examination questions, and analyze the assignment topic together, word by word. Or they could review a past paper, and together prepare a memorandum for it.
4. **Homework Assignment**
   It is important for learners to be prepared for the next session. By arriving prepared at the next session, learners can transact and construct meaning and actively contribute to the group. Examples of such homework assignments include thinking of personal examples of concepts discussed in the study materials, or discussing study timetables with friends and family.

Feedback on success of PCL sessions

Quality Criterion	**7.24**	Feedback is sought from tutors/ mentors as well as from learners for the review of courses and programmes.

Feedback from the learners is obtained via a questionnaire that is filled in by learners after each session.

The following comments were compiled from the questionnaires (Report compiled by Lehlohonolo Rakhomo, Period: Four months - December 2003 to mid-February 2004 Date: 20 February 2004).

- Learners highlighted that collaborative learning provides several opportunities to interact, practise, learn and to understand the need for working in a group. Working in groups forces members to put in greater effort in order to be at the same quality level as the rest of the group.
- Learners discovered that PCL could be a good friendship builder and it allows them to get to know other people. This learning approach is very productive as learning is not only through study materials, it takes place alternatively from teammates.

- PCL is a very enriching process for both facilitators and learners. It is rewarding that learners learn by themselves, learn more, learn interpersonally, feel more involved, and feel more dedicated and more confident.

References

Billson, J.M. & Tiberius, R.G. (1991). 'Effective Social Arrangements for Teaching and Learning'. In R.J. Menges, M.D. Svinicki (eds). *College Teaching*: *From Theory to Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Forsyth, D.R. and McMillan, J.H. (1991). 'Practical Proposals for Motivating Students'. In R.J. Menges, M.D. Svinicki (eds). *College Teaching*: *From Theory to Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Johnson, R.T. and David, W. (1992). 'Cooperative Learning: Two Heads Learn Better than One'. http//:www.context.org/ICLIB/IC18/Johnson.htm.

Johnson, R.T. and David, W. (1994). 'An Overview of Cooperative Learning'. http://www.co-operation.org/pages/overviewpaper.html.

Rochelle, J. (1992). 'Learning by Collaborating: Converging Conceptual Change'. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 2. pp. 235-276.

Svinicki, M.D. (1991). 'Practical Implications of Cognitive Theories'. In R.J. Menges, M.D. Svinicki (eds). *College Teaching*: *From Theory to Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Case Nine: Tutor learning, student learning: the B Ed Honours programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Carol Thomson and Carol Bertram
School of Education, Training and Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus
thomsonc@ukzn.ac.za and bertramc@ukzn.ac.za

Editor's Introduction

While there are references to other aspects of the programme - such as recruitment of students, administration and quality assurance - in this case study the focus is on (i) the contribution of assessment policies and practices and (ii) the roles of tutors in supporting the learning of B Ed Honours students. The authors offer a detailed account of the assessment processes and of the substantial tutor development work done by senior programme staff to facilitate tutors' success as supporters of student learning. They argue that while investment in tutor development adds to the costs of the programme, it has substantial benefits for both tutors and students. The case illustrates how the following key elements of the quality criteria for **assessment** and for **learner support** are addressed:

6.1 Assessment is recognized as a key motivator of learning and an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It is used to inform teaching practice and to inform the curriculum.

6.11 Where part-time tutors are involved in assessment, they are trained for the task, and academic staff monitor and moderate both formative and summative assessment to promote reliability and fairness.

7.6 Tutors are selected and trained for their crucial role in encouraging active engagement of each learner on the course/programme.

7.8 The tutor/learner ratio is sufficiently small to enable tutors to know their learners as individuals, be able to support them in their studies, and monitor their progress.

The authors have included two appendices which may be of interest to other distance education providers. Appendix 1 offers generic assessment criteria which can be used across a range of assessment types. Appendix 2 is a copy of the tutor contract used in the B Ed Honours programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Introduction

Since 1999 the School of Education, Training and Development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal has offered the Bachelor of Education Honours degree as a distance learning programme with regular tutorial support. The B Ed Honours is a post-graduate qualification for teachers who already have a four year teaching qualification. It is offered part-time over two years through a combination of Saturday tutorials at regional learning centres and independent study from self-instructional material.

Quality Criterion	**7.5**	In selection of venues and times for contact sessions, travel time and expense for learners are considered. Care is taken to place suitable sites of learning close to where students live / work.

The programme began as a partnership with the South African College of Teacher Education (SACTE) which was based in Pretoria. In 1999, tutorials were offered at twenty seven regional learning centres in Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal with a total enrolment of 1900 students. The partnership ended in August 2000 when SACTE was incorporated into UNISA. After that it was no longer possible to enrol students who did not live in KwaZulu-Natal, and the number of regional learning centres decreased. In 2004, there are a total of 525 students enrolled at seven regional learning centres in KwaZulu-Natal. Tutorials are offered in Durban, Empangeni, Kokstad, Newcastle, Ladysmith, Pietermaritzburg and Vryheid.

Prior to 1996, only teachers who had a degree and a professional qualification could enrol on the B Ed Honours. This meant that most students were secondary school teachers, since they had a degree. The National Qualifications Framework opened access to all teachers with a four year diploma qualification. This has changed the student profile so that the majority of students are now primary school teachers and do not have a degree. The profile of students in 2003 (n = 570) showed that 71% were women, 83% taught in the General Education and Training band and 8% had English as their home language. In 2001 (n = 554), 17.5% of students had a degree (these figures are not available for the 2002 cohort of students).

After the completion of the comprehensive marketing campaign implemented with the initial launching of the B Ed (now B Ed Honours) programme in 1999, a survey clearly indicated that word of mouth was by far the most effective way of making students aware that the University was offering the programme. In the light of this, and the prohibitively high costs of radio and newspaper advertising, marketing of the B Ed Honours for 2004 was primarily done by handing each of our present students two envelopes which contained a letter of introduction, an information booklet, a registration form and a deposit slip. They were asked to hand these 'information packs' to friends who might be interested in further study. These 'information packs' were also sent to all students who asked for information. The role of the information booklet is to inform students comprehensively on key aspects of the curriculum and rules before they decide to register.

Quality Criterion	**9.9**	The enrolment practices include provision of accurate, helpful information to prospective learners.

In addition, copies of a pamphlet providing very limited information on all the programmes offered by the School of Education, Training and Development, were posted to the 6000 schools in KwaZulu-Natal. There is no evidence that this action had an appreciable impact as the number of recruits remained very similar to those for 2003.

The B Ed Honours programme

Quality Criterion		
	7.9	There are sufficient contact sessions to ensure that the learners are able to achieve the outcomes of the course.

Quality Criterion		
	7.10	These contact sessions are integrated into the course design, rather than being an add-on extra.

Quality Criterion		
	7.11	The teaching and learning activities at contact sessions acknowledge learners' existing knowledge and experiences and provide opportunities for guided integration of the new knowledge and skills as contained in the course materials.

The B Ed Honours Professional Development Studies programme offers a fixed curriculum of eight modules. These are: *Reading and Writing Academic Texts, Psychological Perspectives of Teaching and Learning, Assessment, Curriculum Studies, Leading and Managing a Learning Organization, Classroom Studies, Environmental Education* (students in Pietermaritzburg may choose Teaching in Adult Basic Education instead of Environmental Education) and *Understanding Research*. Most students study two modules per semester. Examinations are written in the July and December school holidays. For each module there are 21 hours of tutorial contact time, divided into three six-hour sessions, and one three-hour session.

The purpose of the tutorial sessions is to deepen and extend students' understanding of the learning material which is the 'teacher' and to provide a place for students to meet with colleagues and to articulate their understanding of concepts.

Designing and implementing assessment policies and practices to support learning

Assessment strategy

The B Ed Honours programme has both an academic and a professional focus and the two do not always sit easily together. There are on-going discussions amongst programme staff as to whether we should be assessing teachers' ability to craft coherent academic texts, or their ability to apply new theories to their own classroom practice, or both. A recurring debate is how much weighting to give to the structure/form of a piece of writing and how much to the content. Staff feel strongly that students cannot be assessed on the structure and form if these are not explicitly taught. Thus the curriculum has recently changed to include a module titled *Reading and Writing Academic Texts* which explicitly teaches the stages of an academic essay, as well as strategies to achieve coherent writing. For this module, the assessment tasks are the drafting and re-writing of a coherent essay in the genre of an academic argument.

Quality Criterion		
	7.2	Academic support is built into the design of the course materials.

Other modules have assessment tasks which do not require students to construct an academic argument, but still require coherent writing and clear communication. For example the module *Psychological Perspectives of Teaching and Learning* requires students to analyze a case study using the theoretical concepts they have learned. The *Understanding Research* module requires students to critique and evaluate a research article. Generally assessment tasks have a strong emphasis on requiring teachers to use the theoretical concepts that they are learning to reflect on and to evaluate their own practice.

Quality Criterion		
	6.2	Assessment information (including learning outcomes, assessment criteria as well as assessment procedures and dates) is provided in all courses, modules or topics.

The programme uses both formative and summative assessment. All assignment tasks and assessment criteria are set out in the Student Guide for the relevant module.

For each module, **formative assessment** consists of Assignment 1 and four portfolio tasks. Assignment 1 and the first portfolio task are submitted at the first tutorial session, and the other portfolio tasks are submitted at subsequent tutorial sessions. The purpose of the portfolio tasks is to help students to keep working steadily throughout the semester, and to give them an incentive to work meaningfully through the Learning Guide. Portfolio tasks also serve a developmental function in that they give students feedback throughout the course as to whether they are understanding key concepts. They also give students the opportunity to practise writing. Portfolio tasks are typically short pieces of writing (one page) which may require students to summarize the key ideas from a reading, or a unit of work, or to respond to a case study, or reflect on their own practice using new theoretical concepts they are learning. These tasks are sometimes assessed by the tutor, or may be self- or peer-assessed during tutorial sessions.

Quality Criterion		
	6.6	A range of parties is involved in assessment of learners.

Assignment One is also a short piece of writing (1 page) which is usually self- or peer-assessed in the first contact session. Its purpose is to ensure that students come to the first contact session having studied the required units of the Learning Guide. It also gives students immediate feedback at the first contact session, so that they can ascertain if they are 'on track' with the course so far. A student is given 1% for submitting each of the four portfolio tasks and Assignment One, and these contribute 5% to the final module mark.

Assignment Two is a longer piece of writing (typically 4 pages). It is worth 10% of the final module mark. Students submit Assignment Two at the second contact session. Assignment Three is worth 20% of the final module mark and is submitted at the third contact session. This final assignment is a task that requires students to integrate their learning over the whole module. If students are not able to attend the session, they post their assignments to the University.

Quality Criterion		
	6.4	There is a range of formative and summative assessment tasks and methods which ensure that all learning outcomes are validly assessed.

Quality Criterion		
	6.12	The assessment strategy includes systems for internal and external moderation that meet the requirements of the accreditation body.

Summative examination papers are set on the principle that no more than 20% of the paper should consist of questions that require recall only, and that a minimum of 30% of the paper must be allocated to a piece of extended

writing. Examination papers are submitted to a Curriculum Committee made up of module co-ordinators, and are evaluated by colleagues in terms of the clarity of the questions, the higher order thinking skills that are being assessed and the transparency of the assessment criteria. Examination papers are then re-worked by module co-ordinators before they are submitted to the external moderators for comment.

The summative examination is worth 65% of the final module mark. We are often criticized by students for having such a heavy weighting on the examination. There are two key reasons for this policy decision. First, the University rule states that if the coursework counts for substantially more than one third of the final mark, it must be externally examined. It would be very difficult to have the course work of 250 students externally examined. As it stands at present, the examination is externally examined. The second reason is that it is not possible to know whether assignment work is genuinely the work of the student who hands it in, especially since many students work together in informal study groups. In an examination, the student is not able to receive outside assistance.

Supporting the development of tutors as competent assessors

Assignments Two and Three and the examination scripts are marked by a panel of tutors at the university. All tutors contracted for the delivery of a module are expected to mark Assignment Two, as it is seen as an important learning and developmental process for tutors, and also gives them insights into problems that students in their tutorial group may have with some key concepts. Module co-ordinators can then evaluate any difficulties that certain tutors may be experiencing as markers. For example, some tutors are slow readers, and thus are slow markers. Specific tutors are invited to be part of the marking panel for Assignment Three and for the examination. Module co-ordinators choose the most competent markers to be part of these panels.

Quality Criterion	**6.10**	Staff involved in assessment are assessment-literate and competent to assess student learning at the level required by the programme.

The panel marking process begins with a standardization process. The module co-ordinator copies three different assignments or examination scripts for each tutor. The assessment criteria are distributed and discussed. The programme has a generic rubric of assessment categories. (See Appendix 1). A module co-ordinator may adjust the rubric to fit the content of a specific assignment task more accurately, or may use the rubric together with a set of discrete assessment criteria. These assessment criteria are given to students together with the assessment task.

Quality Criterion	**6.11**	Where part-time tutors are involved in assessment, they are trained for the task, and academic staff monitor and moderate both formative and summative assessment to promote reliability and fairness.

Once the criteria have been discussed, each tutor marks the three sample assignments or examination scripts. Then each assignment or script is discussed in terms of the mark category to which it should be assigned. These discussions are vital, as each tutor needs to come to a common understanding of how the assessment criteria are applied and interpreted. This standardization process can take up to two hours.

Once tutors begin to mark the assignments or scripts, the module co-ordinator begins the moderation process. Thus a percentage (10 - 20%) of each tutor's work is moderated 'in process', rather than a batch of scripts being moderated at the end of the day. The module co-ordinator can immediately discern if a tutor is applying criteria too strictly or too leniently. The co-ordinator can also monitor the type of comments that the tutor writes. Tutors are encouraged to use their comments to 'coach from the margins' and both to encourage students and give them explicit guidance on how to improve their work. Unhelpful comments such as 'unclear' or 'what do you mean here?' are discouraged.

Cost of panel marking

Panel marking by tutors in a centralized venue is described by the Minimum Targets for Distance Education in South Africa document as 'best practice' (see Section Two). Certainly the staff on the B Ed Honours programme would agree that it is the best way to promote reliability and fairness. However, this practice comes at a price. Using an example of nine tutors coming to the university to mark 250 scripts, the total cost at the time of writing was R13 260, which includes one night's accommodation and travel expenses for six tutors (assuming that three tutors live in Pietermaritzburg). This translates into a cost of R53 to mark each script, of which R30 is paid to the tutor. It does not include the cost of the module co-ordinator.

If tutors did not come to Pietermaritzburg to mark, the cost would be R30 per script, which is paid to the tutor. However, experience has shown that when scripts which have been marked by individual tutors are returned to the module co-ordinator for moderation, many have to be remarked due to inconsistencies and inadequate understanding of criteria. Thus 'in-process' moderation at a panel marking session results in higher levels of reliability and fairness.

Feedback to students

Individual assignments contain specific comments which should enable students to see clearly how they have met or not met the assessment criteria. From a student evaluation (n=182) of the *Understanding Research* module in 2003, 92% of students said that they found that the feedback on their assignments was constructive and useful. 70% said that they understood why they received the marks that they did for assignments. This means that there are still a number of students who do not know why they receive a particular mark. This may be because they are unable to recognize the criteria, although these are made explicit. It also means that markers need to work harder to ensure clear and useful feedback goes to each student.

In addition to comments on individual assignments, each student receives a general feedback letter which accompanies the assignment. This letter is written by the module co-ordinator and explains to students the nature of common mistakes in the answering of the task and models the type of answer that was expected.

The second assignment is returned to students two weeks before the third assignment is due, so that students can make use of comments to improve their performance on the final assignment.

Quality Criterion	**6.13**	Marking procedures for both formative and summative assessment ensure consistency and accuracy of marking, grading, and provision of feedback to learners.

Contestation of results

Very few students contest the marks that they receive for assignments. Those that do, phone or write a letter to the module co-ordinator, who deals with the complaint. However, the programme director does receive a number of letters (from about 5% to 10% of students) once the promotion results of a module are released. These letters usually request that the university give the student a condoned pass on a module, regardless of how low the mark awarded. The University rule is that scripts cannot be re-marked. However, students may see their examination scripts in order to see where they failed to meet the requirements for a pass. If students are not able to come to the university, the module co-ordinator writes a short letter explaining which questions were well-answered and where the student failed to meet the requirements of the paper.

Quality Criterion	**6.15**	An appeal system is in place for when students have a complaint about the fairness of the assessment.

Tutor selection, training and support: in support of student learning

Although elements of the quality criterion for learner support refer to a range of factors, the discussion here focuses on tutors and the quality assurance mechanisms which govern their participation in the B Ed Honours programme.

In any de-centralized, mixed-mode model of delivery, the success of a programme/ course depends critically on the effectiveness of tutors to facilitate the learning process. The B Ed Honours programme is totally dependent on tutors to carry the conceptual, theoretical and applied thrusts of a module, as articulated in the learning materials, to students. The attention given, therefore, to the selection, training, support and development of tutors is considerable and will be outlined below. However, despite commitment to delivering a quality programme, there are still areas in need of further attention. These will be indicated at relevant points in the discussion which follows.

Selection of tutors

Quality Criterion	**7.6**	Tutors are selected and trained for their crucial role in mediating learning from the course materials.

Tutors who apply to teach on the B Ed Honours programme, must have, in the first instance, a minimum of a B Ed Honours degree or equivalent, and teaching/ field specific experience. 'Field specific' experience here refers particularly to tutors teaching on the *Environmental Education* module and/or the *Adult Basic Education* module. As few school-based educators have experience in teaching in these two fields, tutors are sometimes drawn from outside the school context. However, the vast majority of tutors on the programme are teachers.

Prospective tutors submit Curriculum Vitae, and these are kept on file for future consideration even if tutors are not appointed. All tutors, when first appointed, are invited to state their preference for the module they would like to teach on. Although it is not always possible to give all tutors their first choice, most are placed according to their preferences. As the B Ed

Honours has been running for several years now, many tutors have found a particular module niche for themselves, and as a consequence have been re-appointed each semester in which that particular module is offered. This has not only given rise to an increasingly stable tutor body in several modules (a very desirable goal in mixed-mode programmes), but also facilitated immense personal development and growth for tutors themselves. Tutors in several modules now contribute as much to curriculum thinking and development, as do module and programme co-ordinators, a context which serves the academic integrity of the programme extremely well.

Once tutors have been appointed, they are required to sign a contract which spells out all their responsibilities, as well as the financial and practical implications of not fulfilling these. (See Appendix 2). One copy is given to the tutor, and one copy is lodged in the tutor's file which is kept in the administration section of the School.

Quality Criterion	**7.24**	Feedback is sought from tutors/ mentors as well as from learners for the review of courses and programmes.

Quality Criterion	**7.23**	Performance of tutors and attendance of tutors and learners at contact sessions is monitored regularly. Monitoring data is analyzed and acted upon.

Each tutor completes an evaluation form at every contact session. These are returned to the distance education office with student attendance registers.

Office staff submit evaluations to module co-ordinators, distance education administrators determine whether tutors have attended contact sessions and, if informed beforehand of tutor absence, make alternative arrangements for students and adjust the payment of tutors.

Programme staff have recognized for some time that an ideal selection process should also include an interview with a prospective tutor and/or the completion of a 'selection task'. Unfortunately, until 2003, and for reasons mostly related to too few full-time academic staff being appointed to the programme to manage such a process, this was not possible. However, in 2003, this process began in one module and will be extended to all modules by 2005.

What constitutes an effective selection task has been the subject of much discussion within the programme. Content/conceptual module knowledge is one key competence required of a tutor. Another is the ability to respond to student writing constructively and according to the kinds of criteria already established in the programme; that is, with a balanced emphasis on meaning and form, within a context of predominantly English additional language speakers. There is a range of possibilities for tasks. The task designed for the module whose staff implemented a selection process for 2004, required prospective tutors to read the prescribed module texts, and then respond to key questions set by the module co-ordinator. In order to answer these questions, tutors had to demonstrate the ability to synthesize and analyze texts at an advanced level, and apply theory to practice. On the strength of their performance, they were either appointed or not.

Other types of selection tasks that are likely to be set in the future include 'marking' a small number of student assignments, and/or designing contact session activities that would profitably extend students' knowledge of a module. These tasks have been identified as those which might most effectively identify the kinds of tutors the B Ed Honours programme wants:

tutors who engage fully with the reading texts i.e. who can synthesize and analyze a range of different points of view, who are sensitive to, and informed about working within an English additional language context, and who adopt an interactive and learning centred approach in their teaching.

Quality Criterion	**7.8**	The tutor/learner ratio is sufficiently small to enable tutors to know their learners as individuals, be able to support them in their studies and monitor their progress.

The programme has an ideal tutor: student ratio of 1:25. In some regional learning centres, where there is only one group of students, the group may comprise only 15 students. On average there are 12 tutors on a module which is offered to approximately 250 students.

Initial tutor training

Tutor training usually runs for one and a half to two days over a weekend, well before the first contact session of a semester starts. As the University of KwaZulu-Natal runs a fully semesterized B Ed Honours programme, tutor training takes place twice a year. All tutors are brought to Pietermaritzburg and accommodated in local hotels and/or bed-and-breakfast establishments. All costs for accommodation and travel are borne by the School of Education. Tutors are paid R4 500 per semester to attend tutor training, tutor for 21 contact hours, mark Assignment One and the portfolio tasks on their own, and panel mark Assignment Two.

The following figures reflect the costs involved in the B Ed Honours tutor training session held in February 2004. The total cost (travel, food and accommodation) of training the 48 tutors was R34 120, of which the greatest cost was travel claims at R22 400. This works out at R35 per student on each module. It does not include the remuneration of tutors, co-ordinators and administrative staff.

In preparation for a tutor training weekend, tutors are expected to be fully conversant with the Learning Guide, the Student Guide, and any other materials specific to a module. In addition, tutors must complete Assignment One, and often Assignment Two (or any other of the tasks set for students that a module co-ordinator deems relevant for tutors to complete). This requirement is based on the premise that it is only when one attempts to write a set assignment oneself that a full realization of the demands of the task become apparent. Having a sizeable set of completed assignments with which to work during training (there is always a small number of tutors who, for one or other valid - or invalid! - reason, do not bring completed assignments), allows a module 'team' to collaboratively engage with the many issues embedded in what it means to 'respond to writing'.

Quality Criterion	**7.6**	Tutors are selected and trained for their crucial role of teaching on assignments by giving constructive feedback.

Quality Criterion	**7.7**	Tutor training places particular emphasis on equipping tutors to analyze and assist learners with language and learning difficulties.

As indicated in the discussion on assessment above, determining what constitutes an appropriate grade for an assignment, and reaching consensus on this, is no simple matter. At tutor training, because this is the first time a particular constellation of tutors comes together, considerable time is spent on this aspect of the teaching and learning process.

The success of a tutor training weekend depends critically on a module co-ordinator's capacity to create a meaningful programme, and deliver this within a context characterized by ease, harmony and collegiality. The very short period allocated to tutor training means that time is spent in an intense, unrelenting engagement with teaching and learning processes. There needs to be a sound relationship between module co-ordinators and tutors in order to sustain tutors' interest, concentration and co-operation.

While the present tutor training system has served the B Ed Honours programme admirably for a number of years, an extended training period (either two successive weekends or a four day residential component) would lead to a richer and more 'embedded' teaching and learning experience than is currently the case. Unfortunately, in a programme such as this one, there are simply no further opportunities to appropriate more time in the calendar year. While this might be seen to undermine the effectiveness of the programme, it is hoped that tutor support and development which follows training, counters this possibility.

On-going tutor support

The responsibility for providing academic support for tutors rests with module co-ordinators, who are in turn, supported by each other, the programme director, and the qualifications director. 'Support' in the context of the B Ed Honours programme, means firstly, that a module co-ordinator keeps in close contact with her/his tutors - telephonically and/or through fax/e-mail - and is available at any time for consultation. Secondly, tutors are supported through the visits which module co-ordinators make to regional learning centres while contact sessions are being held. As there are seven regional learning centres, a module co-ordinator may only visit a centre once during a semester. Nevertheless, tutors regard a visit as very important as it gives them an opportunity to clarify any uncertainties they may have about the module/ student issues, and get feedback from module co-ordinators on their performance. Each module co-ordinator is required to compile a written report on tutor observations s/he has conducted during a visit to a regional learning centre, a copy of which is given to the tutor concerned. Another copy is filed in the tutor's file at the university.

The panel marking contexts established for assignment and examination marking provide further support to tutors. At these sessions (which may last one or two days), tutors and module co-ordinators have another opportunity to spend focused time with each other - beyond that dedicated to assessment issues - and address new concerns that may have arisen during the semester thus far. The extensiveness of the tutor support system now operating in the B Ed Honours programme thus provides numerous opportunities for quality assurance.

Sustained tutor development

In many respects, tutor support and tutor development are synonymous for it is difficult to imagine that the tutor support processes outlined above do not contribute to their conceptual and theoretical development, and the development of their teaching/ facilitation skills. However, the degree to which this development takes place,

Quality Criterion	**8.8**	Staff development is regarded as the responsibility not only of the individual, but also of the particular department (programme) and educational provider in which the individual works.

depends mainly on how long a tutor stays on the programme, and more specifically, how specialized they choose to become, that is, by focusing their energies on one module (and certainly not more than two modules) and the level of commitment that they bring to the programme. No-one should be under any illusion that people elect to take on part-time tutoring work over and above a full-time job and family demands for purely altruistic reasons. Many tutors on the B Ed Honours programme do so primarily to earn additional income. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that tutors stay on the programme for a number of different reasons: they enjoy the opportunity to teach adults, they find the experience personally enriching, they gain new knowledge and experience and they feel that they are part of an important process of teacher development.

It is hoped that these descriptions have provided some insights into the attempts of the B Ed Honours staff to promote quality teaching and learning in a mixed-mode programme at a face-to-face institution.

Appendix 1: Assessment categories and descriptions of University grades

Although each assignment will usually have specific assessment criteria, these are the general assessment criteria applied to the marking of exams and assignments.

%	Broad description	Detailed description
0% - 29% FAIL	EXTREMELY WEAK	Random points which can be give minor credit; poor or no referencing; serious language difficulties.
30% - 39% FAIL	WEAK	Hard to understand; sketchy; clear misunderstandings of key points; serious omissions and mistakes; no attempt to analyze; no evidence of reading; no or poor referencing; possible serious language difficulties; serious plagiarism.
40% - 49% FAIL	NOT SATISFACTORY	Unclear; unstructured; lacks understanding; important omissions and flaws; no comprehensible argument or analysis; poor or no referencing; possible language difficulties; serious plagiarism.
50% - 59% PASS	SATISFACTORY	Intelligible; covers main points; lacks firm structure; shows understanding of key points; indicates reasons, but thin and flawed; repetition of course material; poor referencing; possibly some language difficulties; maybe a little plagiarism.
60% - 68% PASS	SOUND	Clear; covers main points; well structured; sticks to the topic; shows firm understanding; language does not intrude on meaning; offers reasons; no serious flaws; no plagiarism; well referenced.
69% - 74% PASS	GOOD	Full; clear; insightful; logically structured; fully referenced; shows solid understanding; no plagiarism; well reasoned; evidence of additional reading; refers to authorities; strong language competence.
75% and over	EXCELLENT - IMMEDIATELY RECOGNISABLE AS WELL ABOVE THE AVERAGE	Outstanding coverage of relevant material; thorough/comprehensive; never strays from the topic; extremely well structured; correct genre; evidence of independent thought and reading beyond the course material; creative and original presentation; fully referenced; strong language competence.

Appendix 2: B Ed Honours (2004) tutor contract

This document constitutes an agreement between the School of Education, Training and Development, Pietermaritzburg and.....

1. Description of work to be done

As a tutor, you are required to:

- Attend an initial tutor training workshop (for which your subsistence and travel will be paid).
- Prepare thoroughly for this tutor training workshop. This includes:
  - Reading and understanding the contents of the Learning Guide/s (and any additional reading material given to you) at a depth that will allow you to engage actively in debates around key issues and concepts.
  - Completing any written tasks identified by a module co-ordinator as essential for the tutor training process.
- Prepare thoroughly for each contact session.
- Arrive at 08:45 punctually for all contact sessions and remain at the tutorial venue until 16:00.
- Get to know your students in your class in terms of their backgrounds, interests, experiences, expectations and academic weaknesses and strengths.
- Maintain a tutor file (which will be given out at tutor training) which reflects the nature and quality of your engagement with the module (through a series of reflections on different aspects of the module, and any other documents/ materials you and/or your module co-ordinator consider relevant).
- Maintain the following records in your tutor file:
  - Class register
  - Portfolio marks
  - Assignment submissions
  - Assignment results
- Ensure the confidentiality of the student data sheets in your file.
- Ensure that portfolio marks are with the local agents on the stipulated dates.
- Critically reflect on each contact session and complete an evaluation report to this effect. Guidelines will be provided.
- Mark Assignments One and Two and all portfolio tasks.
- Commit to any development processes deemed necessary by co-ordinators.

If you do not fulfil any of these tasks, the University reserves the right to terminate your contract at any time and with immediate effect.

2. Duration of the contract

The duration of the contract is six months only (February 2004 to July 2004) with no further expectations of employment.

3. Payment

You will be paid for completed tasks only. It is your responsibility to inform the University by Wednesday afternoon or Thursday morning if you will not be available for the contact session on Saturday. You will not be paid for that contact session.

Your remuneration for tutoring will be R4500 (before tax), which will be paid in four monthly payments at the end of March, April, May and June.

_____

Tutor

_____

B Ed Honours
Qualification Director

Case Ten: The establishment of a unit for distance education in a face-to-face institution: the University of Pretoria

Johan Hendrikz
Distance Education Unit, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria
jhendrik@postino.up.ac.za

Editor's introduction

This case study of the establishment of a Unit for Distance Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria (UP) raises a number of issues pertinent to traditional face-to-face institutions that wish to introduce large-scale distance education programmes. It focuses on **management and administration**, but raises issues pertinent to **policy and planning**, **learners**, **human resource strategy**, **collaboration**, and **information dissemination** as well.

Firstly, both the quality criteria and the minimum targets (see Section Two) underline the need for the deliberate establishment of institutional systems to manage the complexities of large-scale delivery. In this case study, there is careful consideration of which of the existing systems designed for contact tuition can be used/adapted, and which systems need to be specially designed to meet the needs of distance education. It should be noted that there are no hard and fast rules, and certain decisions made at the University of Pretoria are based on context-specific factors which might differ from those in other contexts. However, deliberate decisions have to be made - it cannot be assumed that existing systems in a face-to-face institution will automatically be suitable for distance education provision. The case study illustrates the following element of the **policy and planning** criterion very well:

> **1.5** Prior to offering programmes of study by distance education, the provider has explicitly designed systems for administering and teaching learners at a distance and has planned for contingencies in order to meet its stated aims in terms of academic quality and standards.

The second issue that the case study deals with effectively is staffing (**human resource strategy**) of distance provision in a face-to-face institution where staff do not characteristically have an expectation of distance education commitments. The case study discusses challenges for redefining and reallocating workload and providing sufficient staff development for new responsibilities. It also asks a difficult question: How much of an academic programme can be outsourced to other agencies/people and still be regarded as part of a university's offerings? Or, put in another way: What functions does the mother institution have to

perform in order to be honest in claiming that the programme is theirs? The recent problematic history of public/private partnerships in South Africa makes it all the more urgent to answer this question responsibly - and the quality criteria provide a guideline.

> **10.8** In the case of public private partnerships, the public partner takes full academic and quality management responsibility, and ensures that learner rights are protected.

Finally, although the case study is primarily about how to manage distance education in a face-to-face institution, the point is made quite correctly that in education, it is the curriculum that should lead, rather than what is convenient from an administrative point of view. The case study therefore describes the academic model (how the teaching and learning is organized), and shows how the administrative model was built around the academic model.

What is not explored in the case study, however, is whether or not the academic model is the most desirable one. The academic model shows one particular solution to the distance education problem of how to balance the need for flexibility/openness with the need to provide structured support for learners. As will be seen in the case study, an inevitable result of allowing continuous registration is that, in each academic cycle, there is opportunity for only one contact session period. In the opinion of the editors, optimal flexibility (students can register when it suits them and there are two examination sessions per year) is achieved at the cost of more frequent opportunities for support. Although the quality criteria for programme development support the notion of openness:

> **3.15** To facilitate access, entry requirements for the programme are as open as possible.

this is balanced by an emphasis on learner support:

> **7.9** There are sufficient contact sessions to ensure that the learners are able to achieve the outcomes of the course.

For the target audience, successful achievement of the qualification is likely to be more important than being afforded the opportunity of registering at a range of different times in the year.

Introduction

The University of Pretoria started presenting distance education programmes in 1996 in partnership with National Private Colleges. In 2001 in the changing higher education environment, there were indications that the partnership with an external provider was not working satisfactorily. In 2002 the agreement was terminated and it was decided to phase out the students in the system over three years. All these students will be phased out by 2005.

A new phase in delivering distance education at the university began with the termination of the contract.

Research and planning

In 2001, the Executive of the University of Pretoria nominated a committee to investigate the potential for a distance education initiative in the Faculty of Education. The committee undertook wide-ranging research and developed a business plan with a ten-year prediction capability. The investigation found that:

- There was a need for in-service training of teachers in South Africa, and
- University of Pretoria had the necessary expertise and infrastructure to present the programmes in a cost-effective way that would conform to all the necessary quality requirements.

The committee also determined the minimum number of students needed in each of the programmes to achieve economies of scale.

Quality Criterion		
	1.4	The provider or programme management team can provide a rationale for the use of distance education or electronic learning methods for the delivery of the programme/course to the intended target learners.

The Faculty of Education wants to make a contribution to improving the quality of education in South Africa, and considers the use of distance education methods in the delivery of in-service teacher education a crucial way of doing this. It was decided that three programmes would be offered: two programmes leading to the Advanced Certificate in Education (one focusing on Education Management, and one on Learners with Special Educational Needs), and one programme leading to B Ed Honours. There were two reasons for selecting these programmes. The university had the capacity to develop the programmes and the investigation revealed a need in the market that made the numbers economically viable.

Quality Criterion		
	3.1	The programme is developed in terms of a needs analysis based on an audit of existing courses and programmes, market research, liaison (where appropriate) with industry and professions, national and regional priorities, and the needs of the learners.

The Executive approved the plan in March 2002 and the Unit for Distance Education was established in the Faculty of Education on 1 April 2002.

The first step was the development of a business plan, a 'route map' without which it would not have been possible to implement the initiative in a structured way. The business plan was and is the benchmark against which all development is tested.

Quality Criterion		
	3.8	Programme planning and budgeting are aligned, with potential income clearly identified, and appropriate levels of resource set aside for course design and development, for administrative systems and for supporting learners.

The business plan is not a detailed analysis of each business process, but provides the broad framework of activities and the estimated income and expenditure on, for example, developing study material, printing brochures, the structure and number of staff needed for student administration and the expenditure needed for capital items such as computers and telephones. A good business plan is particularly important in an academic institution, where it is often erroneously assumed that the academic component of programme development and delivery is the only expense. Particularly in large scale distance provision,

Quality Criterion		
	9.24	Proper budgetary processes are in place to ensure that the allocation of resources reflects the goals, values and principles of the educational provider.

there are numerous costs (such as, for example, cost of envelopes and postage/despatch) which can cripple an initiative if not taken into account.

Quality Criterion	**9.27**	Proper evaluation systems are in place to compare estimated goals and budgets with actual achievements.

As the Unit's work began, the business plan was used to determine whether all the necessary activities were being undertaken and what the possible costs could be. Necessary adjustments to the business plan to bring it into line with actual costs and structures will be referred to later.

Management system

Quality Criterion	**1.5**	Prior to offering programmes of study by distance education, the provider has explicitly designed systems for administering and teaching learners at a distance and has planned for contingencies in order to meet its stated aims in terms of academic quality and standards.

The necessity of developing or adapting systems that would be appropriate for large scale distance provision was a priority from the outset.

There was a specific decision that the Unit for Distance Education would not have an autonomous infrastructure, resources and processes, but would be integrated as far as possible with the existing infrastructure, systems and processes of the University. There were two reasons for this decision. First, it was a decision that made financial sense. Why should costs be incurred to develop additional systems if the existing ones could easily be adapted? Second, a signal would be sent out that distance education is not just a 'second-rate, secondary' initiative, but forms an integral part of the core business of the university. The case study will reveal that specific structures and systems had to be developed in view of the particular nature of distance education. However, this happened only after it was determined that the existing systems and structures did not serve the best interests of distance education. In adopting this approach, the University therefore confirmed its commitment to distance education.

The office of the distance education initiative consists of the manager, administrative officer, accountant and instructional designer. The Manager: Distance Education reports to the Dean of the Faculty of Education and acts as the 'conductor' of the initiative to ensure that all business processes operate in an integrated manner. For example, to get tutorial letters sent to students on time, the manager needs to ensure that:

- The post office knows ahead of time when there will be a bulk shipment;
- Printers are informed of when large quantities of printing need to be done;
- Academics know the due date for submission of print-ready tutorial letters.

The marketers in the field also need to be kept in the loop. They must, for example, know when final applications for a specific enrolment will be accepted and processed. The distance education manager is also specifically responsible for ensuring that delays and bottlenecks in the chain of activities are identified, that the impact on activities further down the chain is estimated, and that measures are put in place to manage the situation.

A matrix management system was put in place. This means that particular business processes for distance education were placed within another established structure. Staff involved fall under the line authority of that structure, while the Unit for Distance Education exercises functional authority over staff involved in each particular business process. An example of functional authority is that the manager of the printers can expect staff to print enough stock, do packaging timeously, and inform him if there are bottlenecks. However, he does not have the authority to tell staff at the printers exactly how they should organize the work and who must do it.

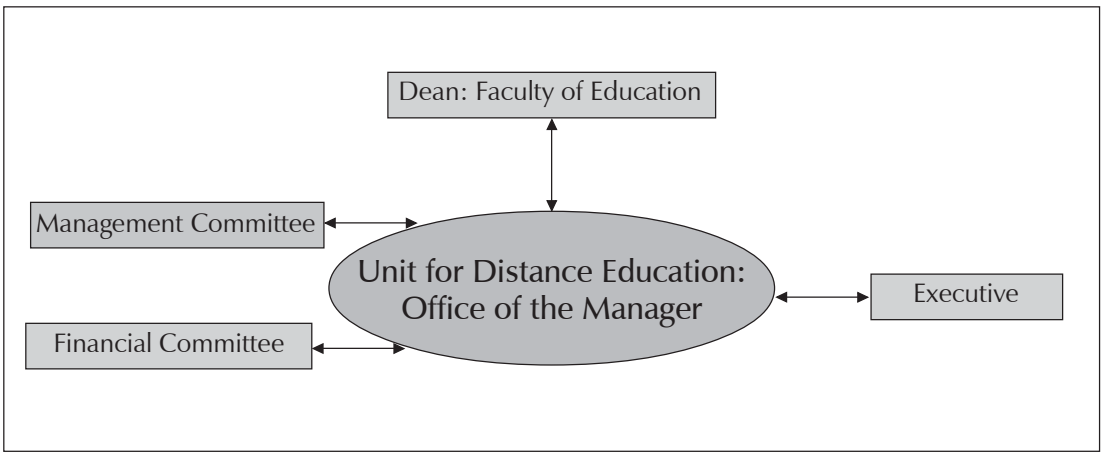
The Manager is supported by an Executive that meets weekly to provide support and advice in managing the initiative. The Executive consists of an expert from the Department of Telematic Learning and Educational Innovation, Academic co-ordinator, Co-ordinator for student administration, Accountant for the division, Instructional designer and Dean of the Faculty of Education.

There is also a Financial Committee consisting of the Manager, Accountant of the Unit, the member of the Executive of the University charged with distance education and the Director of finance. That senior managers of the University of Pretoria serve on the Financial Committee, indicates the high priority assigned to monitoring the financial management of the initiative. This Committee meets monthly to analyze the financial statements of the Unit and to discuss deviations.

The Executive Commitee of the university has also nominated a Management Committee for Distance Education that acts as a Board of Directors and meets twice per year. The Committee consists of all senior managers of entities that are linked to any activities involving the use of distance education. Extensive reports on the initiative are delivered at these meetings. This Committee meets under the chairmanship of the Dean of the Faculty of Education. The Committee acts as an advisory body and ensures that all the relevant senior managers of the University are informed of the initiative.

Quality Criterion	9.1	There are clear lines of accountability within the educational provider, between the educational provider and its governing structures, and between the governing structures and the community.

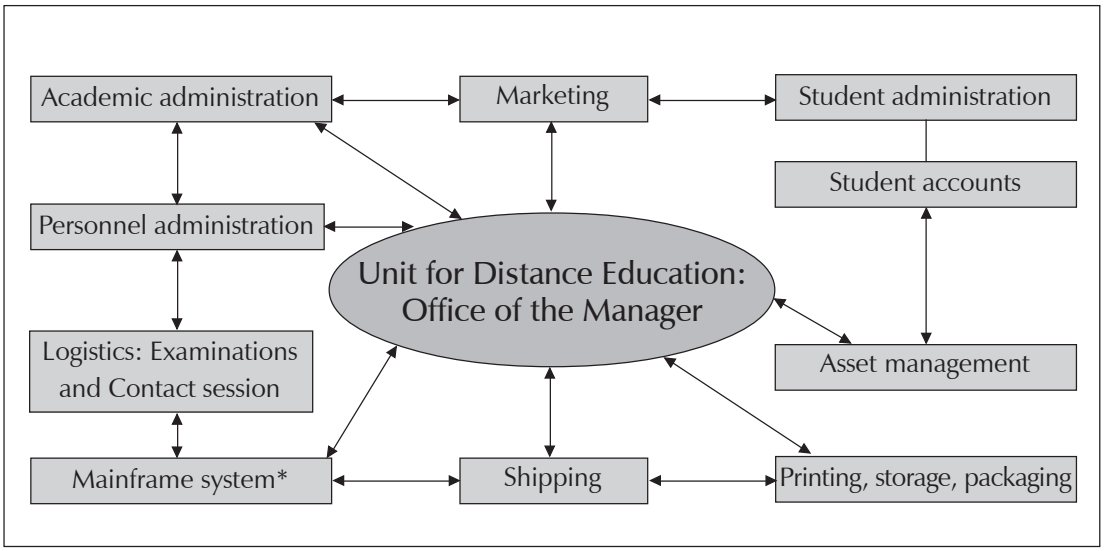
Figure 1: Management structure



Implementation

The very first step in establishing the Unit for Distance Education was to determine the academic model, to identify the business processes and to indicate where these processes were to take place. In the context of this case study, the academic model refers to the organizing framework within which the programmes will be presented. The model specifies such things as how the academic cycle will work, the place and role of assignments, role of contact sessions and when examinations will take place. In other words, it indicates how the academic programmes will be organized and managed. After the academic model had been established, an administrative model was built to support the academic model and not vice versa.

Figure 2: Administrative model



* Student Data Base System

The use of existing resources, structures and processes within the University was a primary objective. Where existing systems/processes were not usable, decisions had to be made either to adjust them or consider the purchase of a new system.

After all business processes had been identified, it was determined that it would be better to outsource some functions right from the start. It was decided, for economic and infrastructural reasons, that marketing and logistical management of examinations and contact sessions would be outsourced. It was more economical for the University to employ existing specialist service providers with appropriate infrastructure than to create the necessary infrastructure and employ the experts needed. However, the University specifically required providers to be able to conform to the quality criteria of the University. If this had not been possible, the University would not have followed that path and would itself have put the infrastructure in place.

Academic model

Motivation for academic model

The academic model was developed with three goals in mind:

- To improve access to studies and to give students the opportunity to adapt their studies to their personal circumstances;
- To provide support to adult students;
- To structure the study programme of students in such a way that the momentum of the academic cycles will facilitate the learning process to such an extent that students complete their studies in the minimum period of time.

The model makes it easy for students to register. However, at the same time, it allows for support to be provided to students through contact sessions held twice a year, but also through compulsory formative assignments and rules about numbers of modules that can be studied at any one time. It is designed to support students to complete their studies successfully in a minimum amount of time.

Description of model

Students can enrol at any time during the year. The date on which they enrol determines the academic cycle they follow. The academic programme runs in six month cycles:

- 1 October - 31 March, and
- 1 April - 30 September.

There are therefore two academic cycles that each contain the same core elements. The core elements of, for example, the April - October academic cycle are:

- 1 October - 31 March: Students enrol and receive their learning materials and Tutorial Letter No. 1 at the time of their enrolment.
- 31 March: Closing date for enrolment.
- April: Students receive Tutorial Letter No. 2 and Administrative Letter No. 1 specifically focusing on the July contact sessions.
- June: Due date for Assignment No 1.
- July: Three-day contact session in the school holidays.
- July: Closing date for the October examination registration.
- August: Due date for Assignment No. 2.
- August: Tutorial Letter No. 3 and Administrative Letter No. 2 focusing on the October examination.
- October: Examination.

Quality Criterion	9.8	Appropriate schedules are developed for all activities forming part of the distance education system, with due attention given to lead times needed to meet deadlines.

The modules for each programme are grouped in blocks. For the six modules in the ACE programme, there are two modules per block. For the twelve modules of the B Ed Honours programme, there are three modules per block. There are, therefore, three blocks for the ACE and four blocks for the B Ed Honours programme.

The academic model is constructed in such a way that students have to study in a disciplined manner.

- Firstly, a student receives only two opportunities to write the examinations for a single module. Thereafter he/she has to re-register for that module.
- Secondly, a student is also not allowed to register for an examination unless he/she has submitted the two compulsory assignments for the module. In addition, students are encouraged to put effort into the two assignments for the module because they count for 10% and 30% of the final mark respectively.
- Thirdly, the University sends out learning materials in blocks to help students organize their learning in such a manner that they study a manageable number of modules in each cycle. If they take on too many modules, the possibility of failure is increased.

Administrative implications of the academic model

All structures and systems at the University were developed for the normal contact academic year. The distance model differs in many respects, for example:

- A student can schedule his/her own study to a certain extent - deciding when to register for what modules for a particular examination session;
- Academic cycles do not fall within the normal academic year for the university;
- Calculation of the final mark for each module differs from the way in which marks are calculated for other university programmes.

This has implications for the administrative systems that need to support the programme. For example, the flexible model of delivery makes it more difficult to track student progress, necessitating the development of a more sophisticated student database system capable of statistical analysis to determine how well students are progressing (see section 6 below).

Initially, it was difficult to convince relevant staff that the distance education initiative is also a mainstream activity of the University. There was a general view that the academic model developed for the distance education programmes should be integrated into the existing systems and processes of the University. It took time to convince administrative staff that administration of distance education should be based upon the academic model rather than the other way around. Because many adjustments had to be made to existing work and administrative processes, there were often requests and temptations to follow the easy course and adjust the academic model to make the administrative work easier.

The implications of the academic model for administration are demonstrated by the complex processes for shipment of learning materials necessitated by the academic model.

At the start of their studies, students do not receive all learning materials for all the modules of a specific programme. Students receive their learning materials in blocks. A student receives learning materials for Block One immediately after registration. Students then receive learning materials for subsequent blocks after each examination session, regardless of whether they wrote the examination and irrespective of the examination result obtained for any module for which an examination was written. This is because students, after they have received their learning materials for a particular block, can decide not to take their examinations for the modules in that block at the earliest opportunity. Even if students fail a module they must still receive the latest tutorial letters for the relevant cycle. This means that the shipping system has to follow each student's progress through the programme to ensure that the right information is sent to the student at the right time.

Mainframe system adjustments (Student data base system)

Under-estimation of the extent and complexity of processes was one of the problems in the administrative environment. The problem was exacerbated by the complexity of the academic model. The most complex changes that had to be introduced were the adjustments to the mainframe student system. Many expensive lessons were learned in this and only after eighteen months could it be accepted that the mainframe system indeed catered for the complicated variables of each student's programme.

There had to be one database containing all information on a student as well as integrating different functions. A single data system is necessary in order to track what is going on at all levels, to ensure quality and to enable management of the total value chain.

Specifications in line with the academic model were compiled for the Department of Information Technology to programme into the mainframe student system. It proved to be one of the most intensive and complicated programmes yet developed for the University. An important lesson was the need for thorough testing of new programmes or adjustments before implementation. In spite of visits to other universities also offering distance learning, many mistakes were made. Much could be learned from one another, but the unique nature of each institution will ultimately determine the nature of, for example, structures and processes. Only now, after two years, is a fully integrated mainframe student system for distance education in place.

A number of programmes were developed specifically for distance education. These include:

- A mark system;
- An examination registration system;
- An assignment system;

- A contact session system;
- A dispatch system; and
- A system to extract statistics.

Quality Criterion		
	2.2	The management of information system provides for the tracking of student performance (for example, in assignments, examinations, or even attendance at contact sessions) and can be used to identify at risk learners and those learners who, though registered, are inactive. It can also be used to determine completion and throughput rates.

In developing the systems, it was imperative to ensure that the database could also be used to extract specific statistics for use as management information. In many cases it is impossible to ensure quality without using comparative statistics.

An example is that every module co-ordinator receives a complete comparative academic profile of his/her students which includes information on:

- Number of students that wrote the examination compared to the number of students registered for the module;
- How many failed;
- How many handed in assignments;
- What the average mark was for assignments;
- What the average mark for the examination was; and
- How many students attended the contact session.

Quality Criterion		
	2.4	Learner information is used to design programmes, courses, materials, learner support, and counselling services that are flexible and learner-centred.

The information is provided for the past three examination sessions. The information enables the co-ordinator to better prepare tutorial letters and to further improve presentations at contact sessions.

Student administration

A decision was taken to adjust the University's existing mainframe student system and integrate the distance education student administration systems with that of the Faculty of Education. In this system, some processes and structures were new, while others were adapted. The existing processes for handling applications and registration were retained.However, due to different billing structures the student accounting system had to be adjusted. Distance students, in contrast to contact students, do not pay extra for learning materials (study guides and textbooks), the examination fees are included in the overall study fee, they pay for the full programme at the start of their studies and not annually. They can, however, pay their study fees in instalments over twenty four months.

Quality Criterion		
	9.9	Enrolment practices include provision of accurate, helpful information to prospective learners, as well as efficient handling of money and registration information.

Printing, warehousing, packaging and dispatch

Functions such as printing, warehousing and dispatch can be undertaken internally or externally. In order to decide whether these functions should be outsourced or not, quotations were obtained from both the University printer and external printers. Considerations of price and administrative linkages led to a decision in favour of the University printer.

As student numbers grew, it became necessary for the University printer to make extensive adjustments. These were, among others:

- Developing an inventory system to exercise control over the warehouses;
- Finding large storage and packaging areas;
- Appointing additional staff and training existing staff in packaging procedures.

Work undertaken for distance education at present accounts for more than 20% of the University's printing and this is expected to increase.

The printing works undertakes two types of shipment: continuous shipment and bulk shipment. Continuous shipment entails shipment of new students' learning materials as they register. This type of shipment is the same for all students in the same programme, so that the same production line processes can be used in this type of packaging.

Bulk shipments of additional learning materials occur at least twice a year. In view of the personalized academic model, all these packages have to be individually made up which is very time and staff intensive. For example, in the bulk shipment of April 2004, more than 7000 individual packages were packed and shipped. Because mistakes can easily occur in the packaging process, it was necessary to develop control mechanisms to ensure that every package is correctly packed.

The shipment of learning materials is one of the most crucial steps in any distance learning programme. Should students not receive their learning materials, they cannot begin any academic activity.

The shipping system requires that students receive the correct learning material at the right time. As has been pointed out above, the flexible academic model adopted makes dispatch of materials one of the most complicated programming challenges.

The mainframe system had to be adjusted and a programme had to be written so that packages could be marked as 'packed' by means of a barcode reader. A system was developed at the University post office so that packages could be marked as 'shipped' by a barcode reader. This system now enables student administration to answer queries of students wanting to know when their packages were shipped, what was in them and the tracking number of the package. All packages are delivered by external courier to post offices. The agreement with the University stipulates that the package should reach the relevant post office within three days.

Quality Criterion	**9.10**	The production and delivery of course materials is fast, accurate, and reliable. Where existing systems prove inefficient, creative alternatives are found.

Management and development of processes

The number of registrations has grown very rapidly and within a year literally thousands of assignments, answer sheets, application forms and other items have been processed. Computerized programmes are now being used to increase efficiency. It was also necessary to continuously analyze the mass of activities undertaken by individuals. The concept of performing activities in the minimum of time and with the minimum effort while increasing output to the maximum has become important.

Quality Criterion	**9.12**	There are clear procedures to receive, record, process, and turn around assignments.

Existing staff have worked extremely hard at new and unfamiliar administrative tasks such as processing approximately 20 000 assignments twice a year. Furthermore, it was necessary to focus on working 'smarter', rather than merely 'harder'. A good system that cuts corners without cutting quality is essential in order to manage this kind of workload.

The role of staff in successful development and execution of particular processes is of the utmost importance. Staff attitude towards distance education was initially not very positive. Academic staff in particular did not accept distance education work as a part of the core business of the Faculty. There was a perception among some academic staff that distance education is of a lower academic level than contact education. There was also resistance to additional work required because initially the performance management system did not recognize the new responsibilities undertaken by staff.

It has taken about two years to establish distance education provision as a mainstream activity and to guide staff to regard it as such. It is now also accepted that the quality of the distance education programmes is at least as high as that of the contact programmes, evidence being that study guides developed for the distance learning programmes are now also used for the contact programmes.

Management of examinations and contact sessions

Quality Criterion	**10.5**	In the organization of consortia for programme development or delivery, structured contractual relationships are formed to protect the interests of all parties including the learners. Performance expectations are defined in contracts and agreements.

From the beginning, it was decided that there were experts in the external environment to support the University in the logistics of examinations and contact sessions. As with marketing (see below), a detailed contract containing all aspects, but especially expected outputs, was drawn up. The agency contracted is therefore bound to particular quality criteria. It was the University's view that the whole image of the university would be compromised if the integrity of the examinations could not be ensured.

Examinations

Two years after the introduction of the programmes, distance learning students are sitting for their examinations at more than a hundred examination centres. In April 2004, more than 12 000 examination papers were written.

During each examination period at least 10% of examination centres are visited by staff members of the university to ensure that invigilators adhere strictly to all instructions. To date, there has not been a single bottleneck at any examination centre that has led to students not being able to take the right examination at the right time and place. In the examination in April 2004, only fifteen (0.125%) cases of irregularities were reported.

Quality Criterion	**6.16**	Arrangements for locally-administered summative assessments are secure.

Contact sessions

Ten contact session centres have been established throughout South Africa, and logistics/administration, attendance of students as well as performance of presenters is monitored.

Quality Criterion	**9.11**	There are systems to organize decentralized support for remote learners - grouping of learners, allocation of tutors, location of suitable sites of learning.

Extensive administrative and logistical processes have been put in place to ensure that contact sessions run smoothly. For example, each presenter receives a full folder containing all information, both academic and administrative, pertaining to his/her module. An average of 65% of registered students attend these contact sessions - with more than 120 presenters involved. Three types of feedback on contact sessions are obtained - from students (communication, administration, venues and on quality of presenters), from presenters (on academic issues and concerns per module) and from group leaders (on administration, logistics, venue, team spirit, academic issues).

Quality Criterion	**11.8**	Staff, learners, and other clients are involved in the process of quality assurance and quality review.

Technology

Although the university uses technology extensively in the education of contact students, this cannot happen in the distance education field. At this stage, access to computers and the Internet is too limited. An analysis of the technology profile of our students revealed that only 8% of them had e-mail access, although 98% had mobile telephones. In view of this, all programmes are paper-based.

Quality Criterion	**4.4**	Choice of media and technology is justified in the light of the aims of the course, required learning outcomes, learner needs, capacity to access and use the technologies, the physical features of the teaching sites and available facilities and services.

Because students have good access to mobile telephones, this technology is used extensively, in particular to motivate students and to support administrative processes. In this process, we have learnt how precisely an SMS message must be sent in order to convey the maximum

information. If the message is not precise, the receiver becomes confused and the university is inundated with enquiries.

The mainframe system has been adapted to enable students to receive an SMS message as soon as his/her first package of learning material is sent. The message informs the student that his/her package has been sent and contains the post office reference number. This was done to reduce the number of packages returned. In all other shipments, students are informed that a shipment has taken place and that they must enquire at the post office.

It has been found that students who are reminded through an SMS message that they have to register for a contact session, respond immediately and positively.

A pilot project has been put in place enabling 27 post-graduates in Botswana who have e-mail facilities to submit their assignments electronically. The assignments are marked using the 'track changes' feature and sent back to the students. The results of the project will determine how electronic submission of assignments will be handled in future.

Quality Criterion	**9.5**	There are effective systems for communication with current and potential learners, with key outside bodies, with governance structures, and with all staff and tutors involved in courses.

In spite of the fact that so few students have access to the Internet, it was decided that there should be a web presence. It was also decided that, for the present, a static site that will be a mirror image of everything the students receive in hard copy, will be developed so that students who want to glance through tutorial letters, administrative letters and important target dates will be able to do so online if they have access to the Internet. The site will also serve as an archive for lecturers who want to look at, for example, previous versions of tutorial letters.

Marketing

Because the programmes presented by the Faculty of Education through the use of distance methods are aimed at a specific niche market and there are marketing agencies that work in this market segment, one of these agencies was appointed on contract for a set period.

Quality Criterion	**12.4**	The provider's advertisements are truthful, objective and informative and meet the clients' needs.

An extensive contract that protects the integrity of the University in particular and the professional conduct of those associated with it, was signed. For example, marketers are expected to interact honourably with prospective students and to provide the correct information to students.

Quality Criterion	**12.5**	In the case of public private partnerships, public partners monitor the advertisements of private partners to ensure alignment.

The marketing agency is briefed in detail annually on the programmes and the agency is required to present a written report to the Executive twice a year. Marketing sessions are also visited in order to control the quality of the marketing communication. All marketing material is developed and provided by the Unit for Distance Education to ensure that the corporate image of the University is consistently projected.

Financial management

It would not have been possible to establish the Unit for Distance Education on a firm base if a comprehensive business plan containing expected income and expenditure for a projected period of ten years had not been developed beforehand. The projected income linked the expected number of students to class fees and took into account the future subsidy. Expected expenditure projected staff costs and capital and operating costs. Operating costs calculated in detail such costs as expected programme development costs, printing costs, shipment, student support, the cost of marking assignment and examination papers and marketing.

One of the greatest challenges was to reconcile the business plan with the real operating costs of the business. For example, the staff structure for administration had to be adjusted and the academic model ultimately decided upon had financial implications which could not be foreseen. For example, it was necessary to appoint a more senior financial management staff member than was foreseen in the business plan. After approximately two years the budget is in line with reality and financial projections can be performed more accurately.

One of the challenges of the programme was to reconcile the development of the academic model with the projected expenditure. Small decisions such as expecting one additional assignment per module can have a significant impact on staff expenditure and infrastructure. For example, if the decision is made to have one extra assignment, it means that, with current enrolments:

- 7000 more assignments per cycle have to be processed;
- Envelopes and postage expenses are vastly increased;
- Additional markers have to paid; and
- Additional help hired to assist with entering the marks.

This means that any adjustment has to be considered carefully because financial implications of such decisions could have drastic long-term consequences.

Quality Criterion	**9.26**	Budgeting procedures are in place to deal with the allocation of resources and monitoring of expenditure. The budgeting procedures are flexible enough to promote and enable constructive experimentation in design and delivery methods.

Asset management

This component of the programme includes three aspects, namely physical facilities, computer equipment, telephones and furniture. The staff model determined how these aspects were to be handled. For example, because there was a decision to house student administration of distance education in the Faculty of Education, existing faculty space had to be re-allocated, adjusted and expanded. This also had a direct impact on, for example, decisions relating to the purchase of fax machines and photocopying machines as there were already some of these machines in administration.

The type of staff model for academic appointments determined how many offices, computers and telephones were to be made available. Decisions had to be taken on the type of infrastructure to be made available for service providers. Because capital expenditure can consume a large

part of a budget, purchases were handled particularly conservatively. A lot of effort was expended in making sure that what was envisaged in a particular process was well understood before finally making space available and purchasing equipment such as furniture and computers.

Personnel management

Academic staff

Quality Criterion	**3.7**	Human resource planning is an integral part of programme development.

Quality Criteria	**8.10**	Academic workload is measured in terms of the following: • course design • preparation of course materials • piloting of courses • devising and participating in assessment strategies • tutoring, particularly online tutoring • supervision of tutors/markers/other staff • management of courses • monitoring the success of the course • research and evaluation • contact hours with learners.

Quality Criterion	**8.13**	Arrangements are in place for the proper recruitment, training, monitoring and payment of the necessary part-time and contract staff.

Quality Criterion	**8.6**	Staff are trained, monitored, and supported for the specialized roles and tasks they perform, including the design, management and delivery of electronically offered programmes.

To develop an academic personnel model specifically for distance education staff members was a complicated matter within a face-to-face institution.

Firstly, existing staff members who are experts in many of the modules were not able to take on the full additional workload that the distance programmes required.

In the end a model was developed that provided for the appointment of additional lecturers and external service providers responsible for marking assignments and examination papers and presentation of contact sessions. The service providers are appointed in terms of a Service Agreement to perform specific tasks at a fixed tariff on request. These contractees are called service providers and not tutors because at the University of Pretoria, the concept of a tutor in contact programmes is not the same as in distance programmes.

Secondly, aside from workload issues, there were also problems of lack of capacity. Staff appointed to run face-to-face programmes may be experts in their fields, but that does not necessarily make them good writers of distance education material. Existing staff therefore had to be trained for this new task and, in some instances, external people brought in to help with the writing of learning material. In addition, an instructional designer was appointed to work closely with academics to ensure that all learning material conforms to the minimum quality criteria.

There are complex and contentious issues for which satisfactory solutions have not yet been found. These include:

- Should existing staff members employed for face-to-face provision receive additional remuneration for their involvement in distance education?
- Does the existing performance management/achievement evaluation system cater sufficiently for the unique nature of the distance education model?
- How much of the distance education work can permanent staff members outsource to service providers, without endangering the academic integrity of the programme?

With regard to the last point, it is important to ensure that external service providers are given clear contracts which specify responsibilities and standards of performance. In addition, they need to be properly trained for the tasks that they are required to perform.

Currently, each module has a module co-ordinator who is a permanent staff member with responsibility for selecting and training a module team of up to six members. These teams are presenters at contact sessions, and markers of assignments and examinations. The module co-ordinator is responsible for monitoring the work of module teams, based on feedback. It is the specific task of the academic co-ordinator to ensure that module co-ordinators take full responsibility for the protection of the academic integrity of their modules. The relevant departmental heads also play an important role in this.

Quality Criterion	**8.2**	The main responsibility for programme development, course design and monitoring of programme delivery is that of properly qualified academic staff.

Administrative staff

The staff structure did not develop in practice as it was foreseen in the business plan. A quality administrative support system was non-negotiable. Consequently, it became necessary to develop not only new staff structures, but also to institute new functions and processes for those structures.

In some cases specific additional staff had to be appointed to do certain tasks (for example, to help open envelopes before the closing date for handing in assignments), while in other cases the job descriptions of existing staff members were amended as needed. For example, staff at student accounts previously responsible for loan applications from face-to-face students, had to handle new processes for the loan applications of distance education students.

Quality Criterion	**8.5**	The educational provider employs sufficient administrative and technical staff to handle the specialized tasks of registry, despatch, management of assignments, administrative support, as well as technical IT support to learners and staff .

There was initially little understanding among administrative staff of the urgency with which some steps in the chain of activities had to be completed. Hard work has been needed over the past two years to establish a culture among all staff that the work they had to do was to be completed both within the time agreed upon and at the quality level required. Staff had to learn that non-achievement in one of the links in the chain of activities can have a significant impact on other links in the chain and that delays can negatively affect the student. For example:An administrative letter that is posted late can result in a student not receiving information on registration for an examination in time.

It continues to be a major challenge to encourage staff, both administrative and academic, to adhere to deadlines and to create an awareness that not meeting these deadlines can contribute to students' poor performance.

Quality Criterion	**9.8**	Appropriate schedules are developed for all activities forming part of the distance education system, with due attention given to lead times needed to meet deadlines.

Quality assurance

As programmes run in six-month cycles, it takes a long time to rectify or test certain activities. For example, if there is a logistical problem during the April examinations, a plan to correct the problem can only be tested in October. It will take a number of years to resolve all the logistical difficulties.

It has been necessary to establish instruments to measure the quality of every component of the chain of operation. A culture of self-evaluation has had to be developed in each staff member and output achievements have had to be improved. This is also a daunting task that is continually being addressed.

Mechanisms have been put in place to assure quality of academic programmes which include:

- Monitoring of contact sessions and examinations;
- Feedback from students, presenters, and group leaders on administrative as well as academic issues; and
- Use of external local and international experts as critical readers of the learning material.

There are also plans to amend learning material development and revision processes in order to enhance the quality of materials.

Conclusion

In this case study an overview of the challenges of establishing a distance education unit within a face-to-face university has been provided. It emphasizes that, without the support of the institution as a whole, and in particular of senior management, the initiative would be difficult to establish and maintain.

Secondly, the development of a business plan, and continual monitoring of activities against the business plan, are essential for the implementation of such an initiative.

Thirdly, among the biggest challenges in establishing the initiative have been to establish distance education as an integral mainstream activity of the University. Because the academics and administrative staff involved in the initiative initially saw distance education as a peripheral activity, the complexity and comprehensive nature of the attempt to establish the initiative were seriously underestimated. This led to the learning of expensive lessons.

Fourthly, clear decisions had to be made about which of the existing university systems could be used or adapted for distance education, and which were so particular to distance education that they had to be developed from scratch. The academic model has to drive the development of systems, rather than the other way round.

Finally, streamlining all the business processes is dependent on a very good student data system. For effective continuous quality monitoring, it is important to be able to extract detailed academic and administrative information from the system.

After two years, the systems are largely in place, but they need to be continually adjusted in the light of feedback and analysis of monitoring data. In particular, mechanisms need to be found to ensure that insights gained from critical reading of the learning material are implemented in revised versions of the material.

Case Eleven: The Leadership and Management for Change course at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: quality criteria and dialogic space

Peter Rule and Anne Harley
rulep@nu.ac.za
Centre for Adult Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Editor's introduction

In the first part of the case the authors reflect on the experience of developing and piloting the *Leadership and Management for Change* course with reference to a number of the quality criteria. These include **collaborative relationships**, **programme development**, **course design**, **course materials**, **learner support**, **assessment** and **quality assurance**. This experience has led them to suggest modifications to elements of some of the criteria. In the second part they introduce the concept of dialogic space in distance education and argue that, in relation to the NADEOSA Quality Criteria, this concept facilitates understanding of how certain of these criteria might be considered as working together. While aspects of a course such as course design, materials and assessment clearly overlap and are mutually constitutive, there is a danger that course evaluation by way of discrete quality criteria may promote an atomistic view of what is offered by a provider. The authors argue that the concept of dialogic space is productive for holistic understanding of the quality of a distance education course.

The authors of this case have used the invitation to write for this book to discuss how the criteria relate to their work - so the criteria are in the text, rather than in the margin.

The course

In 2003 the Centre for Adult Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg piloted a course titled *Leadership and Management for Change*. The course was mixed-mode in format, including CD-ROM-based instruction, e-mail discussions and a face-to-face workshop. The learners were members of human rights organizations in southern Africa. The pilot proved to be a valuable learning experience for course facilitators, for whom this mode of delivery was new.

Collaborative relationships

Two organizations were involved in developing, managing and running the *Leadership and Management for Change* course. One was Fahamu, an NGO that supports progressive social change using information and communication technologies. Fahamu is dedicated to strengthening the capacity of not-for-profit organizations working on human rights issues in Africa. It produces electronic newsletters and distance learning materials, conducts research and runs CD-ROM-based courses. Fahamu is based in Oxford, U.K. and in Durban, South Africa. The Centre for Adult Education (CAE) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, was commissioned by Fahamu to develop materials for a CD-ROM based leadership and management course, as well as to facilitate the course.

The Centre for Adult Education is part of the School of Education, Training and Development of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and is based at the university's Pietermaritzburg campus. Founded in 1979, CAE has been involved since its inception in adult education work specifically aimed at empowering local communities. It is known for its experience in and knowledge of the theory and practice of adult and adult basic education.

This collaborative relationship meant that Fahamu's expertise in electronic media and distance education could be combined with the CAE's strengths in adult education, materials development and organizational development. The collaboration was not primarily conceived in the interests of cost-effectiveness but rather to develop, pilot and 'perfect' a particular course as a prelude to wider provision.

Collaboration always involves relations of power and possibilities of conflict as well as of synergy and complementarity. Difficulties within the partnership, common in distance and open learning partnerships, were in a sense compounded by the fact that this was a pilot and that the *Leadership and Management for Change* course is one of a suite. Biggs (cited in Robinson, 2002:111) presents four categories of research partnerships: contractual, consultative, collaborative and collegiate, each of which has a different configuration of decision-making and power relations. CAE's relationship with Fahamu was a contractual one according to which CAE was contracted to develop a course and implement a pilot of the course. As the project unfolded, the relationship shifted in some ways to a consultative one as CAE and Fahamu engaged around issues of course delivery.

To some extent, the relationship problems arose from a lack of clarity about roles. Thus the Centre saw itself from the inception as a partner, whilst Fahamu saw the Centre as a contracted service provider. This inevitably (and correctly) meant that managerial and administrative power lay in the hands of Fahamu; but such authority was sometimes in conflict with the facilitative role required of the Centre, and hence the educational objectives of the course from the perspective of the Centre. So administrative/ management decisions regarding, for example, the location and timing of the workshop, and the contracting of a co-facilitator, impacted on the quality of facilitation and the educational impact of the course. On reflection, there needed to be a much clearer synergy between administrative and educational objectives (John, 2003).

Quality criterion 10 states that:

> In the interests of cost-effective provision of education and training, collaborative relationships are formed and collaborative projects are undertaken wherever possible.

However, the focus on cost-effectiveness, while essential, is possibly too narrow since this is not the only rationale for collaboration in distance education. Collaboration has other benefits and pitfalls relating, for example, to the quality of the curriculum and the efficient administration of a distance education course. An alternative formulation of this criterion which would take into account the wider contexts and implications of collaboration might be:

> In the interests of cost-effective provision, efficiency of delivery and curricular quality, collaborative relationships are formed and collaborative projects are undertaken wherever possible.

Programme development

This section outlines the principles and processes of programme development by providing some background information on the origins of the Adilisha project, an initiative of Fahamu in association with the University of Oxford, and discussing the development of the programme in relation to quality criterion 3. The course is one of a suite of courses offered by Fahamu as part of its Adilisha project which seeks to strengthen the campaigning, advocacy and organizational capacity of human rights and advocacy organizations in southern Africa.

The programme as a whole, as will be seen, matches quality criterion 3:

> Programmes are flexible and designed with national needs as well as the needs of prospective learners and employers in mind; their form and structure encourage access and are responsive to changing environments; learning and assessment methods are appropriate to the purpose and outcomes of the programmes.

The development of the programme was informed by the developmental needs of human rights organizations and their staff. A number of surveys conducted in the1990s had identified a need among African NGOs for knowledge and skills related to human rights work, such as fact-finding, investigation and monitoring. However, they had also highlighted generic weaknesses common within the non-governmental sector, such as:

- many had poorly defined organizational goals and objectives;
- many lacked clearly defined strategic plans;
- some had undemocratic organizational structures, with, for example, gender imbalances at leadership level [Adilisha Project Summary www.fahamu.org/ad_projsum.html 01/09/18].

Fahamu's own research (Manji et al, 1998) suggested that few in the leadership of these organizations had undergone leadership training, or been trained in management or organizational development, and that a large proportion of these organizations had little

experience in basic financial management skills, or of fundraising. In Fahamu's 1998 survey, training in management and organizational development was identified as a priority by virtually every human rights organization (Manji et al, 1998).

In addition to identifying these 'gaps' in knowledge and skills, Fahamu also identified a number of weaknesses in the typical training methodology of face-to-face workshops. One was that participants usually have a diverse range of experience and knowledge of the subject to be covered. Considerable time thus has to be spent at each workshop bringing all participants to a point of common understanding of basic concepts and principles before any further development can begin. In addition, workshops tend to be fairly costly, particularly when they involve participants who are widely dispersed (as is often the case, even within a single country). A further limitation is the lack of follow-up and support after the workshop. This context led Fahamu to believe that there was a real need for a different kind of training to be developed that would be appropriate to the actual work and context of the NGOs in both its content and its delivery.

Fahamu's approach combined the direct, face-to-face, human interaction of workshop-based learning with information and communications technology, in particular the growing access to and availability of electronic mail and the Internet. Fahamu's survey of the capacity of human rights organizations in eight southern African countries, conducted in 1998, demonstrated that more than 80% of organizations had one or more (Windows-based) computers, the majority of which had modem connections to a local Internet Service Provider. Virtually all had an e-mail address, and the majority used e-mail (www.fahamu.org.uk/rights/context). The mixed mode approach thus provided an opportunity for delivering training in the region and for overcoming some of the limitations of workshop-based training. IT-based training would allow learners to:

- Work at their own pace;
- Access documentation and resources from around the world with relative ease;
- Use practical examples from their own work situation;
- Obtain inputs from a wider range of international expertise than would otherwise be feasible in a conventional course; and
- Receive 'mentoring' support while dealing with day-to-day challenges at work (www.fahamu.org.uk/rights/context).

The Adilisha courses are thus distance-learning courses that involve using CD-ROM-based interactive materials facilitated by e-mail over a period of about eight weeks, combined with regional four-day face-to-face workshops and subsequent supervised projects in which learners have an opportunity to apply their new skills. By providing learners with learning materials in interactive format on CD-ROMs they would be able to develop their understanding of the subject to a sufficient depth to get the very best out of the workshop that they attended as part of this course. Once learners were enrolled, they would be linked via an electronic mailing list to all others participating in the course. They would also be linked to the course tutor who would guide them through the learning, assess their assignments, and give them feedback on any queries they might have (www.fahamu.org.uk/rights/adprojsum1.html).

Given the levels of connectivity among African NGOs and the expense of workshop-based training, one could argue that the form and structure of the Adilisha courses 'encourage access and are responsive to changing environments' (quality criterion 3).

Learning and assessment methods, which are considered more fully under **Learner support** below, are designed to encourage interaction among course participants and application to real contexts. The remainder of this case study focuses specifically on the *Leadership and Management Course for Change* developed by CAE.

Course design

This section discusses the content and process of course design, and relates them to aspects of quality criterion 4:

> The course curriculum is well-researched, with aims and learning outcomes appropriate to the level of study; content, teaching and learning and assessment methods facilitate the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes; there is an identified process of development and evaluation of courses.

The course is a comprehensive guide to leadership and management within non-governmental organizations. Modules include: *Introduction dealing with definitions of leadership, management and governance*; *Understanding your context*; *Understanding your purpose*; *Planning and evaluating performance*; *Managing people*; *Organization*, *structures and systems*; *Managing resources*; *Managing relationships*; and *Managing yourself*. The course curriculum was 'well-researched with aims and learning outcomes appropriate to the level of study' in the sense that:

- it addressed the identified organizational development needs of human rights activists in the region;
- at a theoretical level, it was grounded in Open Systems Theory, which sees organizations as part of a bigger system, and thus both affected by, and affecting, the context within which they work.

Fahamu used rigorous quality control measures during the development phase. Each course was put out to tender on a variety of websites and e-newsletters. Applicants were required to submit a detailed proposal, outlining their approach to the material as well as their experience in the content. Successful applicants signed a contract with Fahamu which tied payment to satisfactory completion of various products. The first of these was a detailed outline of the course, including content (structured into modules and units), activities for each unit, and outcomes for each unit. After submission by the developers this was scrutinized by Fahamu and 'content expert' advisers, and detailed comment provided (it should be noted that in a number of cases, developers were at this point paid off, and the development of the course again put out to tender). If Fahamu felt that the outline was satisfactory, the next stage of development began. This was a complete first draft of the CD-ROM component of the course, including all activities, assignments, etc. The draft was reviewed by two external reviewers, as well as Fahamu, and again detailed comment was provided. Once again, if this draft was felt to be unsatisfactory, the developer/s were paid off, and new developers sought. Regional workshops were also held for all the developers of each course,

to discuss and agree on course design issues and comment on various drafts of each course. A final draft was then submitted. This was then placed on a CD-ROM, using Macromedia. There was thus a very thorough and rigorous 'identified process of development and evaluation of courses' (quality criterion 4), and it is clear that:

> **4.14** The education provider requires relevant competence of authors, consultants and others that are brought into the course design and development process.

Course Materials

In developing the materials, it was critical for us that, as quality criterion 5 states:

> The content, assessment, and teaching and learning approaches in the course materials support the aims and learning outcomes; the materials are accessibly presented; they teach in a coherent way that engages the learners; there is an identified process of development and evaluation of course materials.

This section describes certain aspects of the materials and links them to these requirements. The CD-ROM formed the core of the course materials, although learners also received a file containing additional information about Fahamu, Adilisha, and support materials to help them in working through the CD-ROM. Learners were also sent a copy of Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood*, which was required reading in preparation for the workshop.

It was recognized from the start that the CD-ROM would ultimately serve a dual purpose - that of training material, and of reference material. However, it remained crucial that learners (and potential learners) did not see the CD-ROM as sufficient in and of itself. The CD-ROM material as it stands was developed so that it largely met the outcomes identified in the original course outline. In other words, by working through the course and completing all of the activities, a learner should have achieved **all** of the outcomes to a considerable extent. However, the workshop remained critical in ensuring that those outcomes which relate to complex reflexive thinking (for example, strategic thinking and planning) and inter-personal skills were further developed to the level required.

Since many of the participants would be using English as an additional language, the materials were developed at a level that would allow someone with some secondary schooling to be able to cope - although in fact during the piloting of the course most of the learners had a considerably higher level of education than this. While an attempt was made to ensure that although the materials were of a very high quality academically, the style of language was relatively informal:

> **5.5.5** The language level of the materials is appropriate for the target learners and the materials assist learners with the particular difficulties that learning- through-reading and learning at a distance require.

Regarding structure, the materials consist of sequential sections and units, which scaffold learning by helping learners build on prior knowledge as they work through the course. Each unit contains activities which learners were expected to complete, some of them requiring written work,

some of them requiring on-line completion (for example, matching exercises), and some of them requiring the submission of assignments. Formative assessment was, therefore, carefully woven into the materials, providing opportunities for self- and tutor-assessment, while the e-mail discussions and face-to-face workshop brought in a dimension of peer assessment:

> **5.5.7** Active learning and teaching approaches are used to engage learners intellectually and practically, and cater for individual needs.

The course is divided into a series of sections, divided in turn into modules, which are then further divided into units. The sections conform to the five things identified in the introduction to the course as being critical to good leadership and management of NGOs - context, activities/work done, structure and systems, resources, and relationships, with an introductory section and a concluding section which focuses on self-management. The course offers a carefully developed argument about how and why leadership and management within organizations working for change needs to be premised on certain fundamental principles, so that as they work through it, learners understand why, for example, particular structures or management systems are more appropriate than others. In the course:

> **5.5.8** Content is presented in the form of an unfolding argument, rather than discrete bits of information that have no obvious connection.

The course also scaffolds knowledge, and learners are asked to work through it chronologically at least initially, since they will otherwise not have the necessary prior knowledge of critical concepts to engage fully with the material. On the CD-ROM, learners can access a full course outline at any time, and are also shown on screen exactly where they are within a specific unit at any one time.

Each section, module and unit begins with an introductory section, which broadly follows a Situation, Problem, Question, Response (SPQR) format (what is the present situation, from the point of view of the reader, derived from the reader's own likely experiences; what is the problem inherent in the present situation, as seen by the reader; what are the questions posed by the problem as identified; how will this course deal with these problems and how will that be done). The first screen of each module uses talking heads which state a particular problem commonly experienced by NGOs. The use of the SPQR format and the talking heads is intended to help learners identify more closely with the material, to see its relevance to them, and to indicate the kind of things that will be covered in that module. The course designers have addressed the requirement of quality criterion 5 that the materials 'teach in a coherent way that engages the learners'.

In the pilot programme, ensuring that there were activities appropriate to the level of the course, and which helped the learners engage with the content whilst furthering their understanding of it, was clearly of critical importance. We used a range of different kinds of activities, some of which were interactive, but many of which were not. The use of activities which did not make use of the interactive possibilities of the medium was deliberate, since this allowed learners to print these out and do these activities at home/off-line.

A number of the activities related to the two case studies which were used throughout the CD-ROM component of the course. Stories and examples relevant to the learners contexts were also used extensively (See Figure 1 below). The case studies involved two (fictitious) organizations, and were constructed for use in a variety of ways, such as exploration of different kinds of organizational structures; investigation of organizational history and its impact on the organization; contextual analysis. This allowed learners to see the inter-relatedness of the issues covered in the course, something which was felt to be critical for a true understanding of leadership and management. It allowed learners to see how history and context (covered at the beginning of the course) related to, and impacted on, staff management, organizational systems and policy, etc. covered much later in the course. Learners were thus required to move backwards and forwards across course content to make these links. The relevance of the materials to learners' contexts, together with the ease of navigation of the CD-ROM, address the requirement that the materials be 'accessibly presented' (quality criterion 5).

Figure 1: Example of story used in L*eadership and Management for Change* course materials

Read the following story. Whilst you read, make notes about the things in the personal lives of the people the stories are about that affect their work:

Bongani works as a fieldworker for Children's Partnership, an organization working with child prostitutes in Zambia. Bongani discovered nearly four years ago that he was HIV positive. At first he did not want to tell anyone at work, but he finally decided that since he encouraged others to live positively, he should do likewise, and he told everyone at work.

His colleagues and the Executive Director of the organization have been very supportive, and Bongani feels very good about having told them. He has stayed well, and has been as productive as ever. However, this winter he developed bad flu, and since then has been constantly sick.

The use of CD-ROM obviously allowed a level of interactivity which is simply not possible in paper-based materials. We had never worked with the medium before and found it difficult to make the conceptual leap required. As a result, whilst we were able to make use of interactivity in a number of activities (as in the examples mentioned above, and also included a video clip of a very bad meeting which we used in a series of activities to explore meeting skills) it is likely that we have not yet fully exploited the potential of the new medium.

Learner support

Providing learner support on the course proved to be a considerable challenge and a steep learning curve. Learners initially received and worked through course materials on CD-ROM, supplemented by e-mail discussions. Facilitators held e-mail discussions by setting a topic related to the materials each week and posing a number of questions related to it on a tutor list, to which all learners had access. Learners posted their views and were able to engage with the topic and each other's positions. Once they had completed the course and submitted two assignments, they met with their facilitators in a four-day face-to-face workshop to consolidate learning. Thus, in terms of quality criterion 7, the course provided a range of opportunities for two-way and inter-group communication, both remote and face-to-face:

> Learners are provided with a range of opportunities for real two-way communication through the use of various forms of technology for tutoring at a distance, contact tutoring, assignment tutoring, mentoring where appropriate, counselling (both remote and face-to- face) and the stimulation of peer support structures. The need of learners for physical facilities and study resources and participation in decision-making is also taken into account.

The e-mail discussion played an important role in stimulating peer support as learners were able to share their organizational experiences and dilemmas, and receive feedback and advice from one another. Four learners from Zimbabwe, for example, were able to get to know and support each other via e-mail within a difficult socio-political context and to establish enduring relations which lasted beyond the course. The e-mail forum was crucial to establishing a virtual community of learning.

One of the learnings that emerged from the e-mail facilitation was the need to structure the discussion with weekly topics and questions, linked to learners' progression through the materials. This signaled to learners where they should be in the course and provided them with a virtual opening to test and refine their ideas. The topics were not simply a recap of course content but an attempt to link course content with learners' experiences and perceptions. One topic, for example, was: 'Is there such a thing as an African style of leadership?' Learners drew on models of leadership in the materials as well as on their own organizational experiences within an African context. The e-mail discussions thus helped to create a dialogue, not only between learners and tutors and among learners themselves, but also between the course content and the learners' contexts. This links to the idea of the course as a *dialogic space*, which we develop further below.

The face-to-face workshop was perhaps the highlight of the course. First of all, it enabled course participants to put a face to the e-mail persona that they had encountered virtually. It also gave facilitators an opportunity to address specific areas of weakness that they had identified in the assignments. For example, most learners struggled with the task of developing a force-field analysis of their organizations in their first assignment. By working on this task together at the workshop, they were able to master the technique. Another benefit of the workshop was that learners were able to share their own organizational experiences and human rights contexts with each other.

Techniques which worked especially well at the workshop were simulation and role play. These involved learners setting up an organization in response to a particular context, generated from the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood*; writing a proposal to and receiving feedback from a funder (Mr Axe of Viking Aid, role-played by one of the facilitators); and dealing with a number of 'curve balls' as an organization. One example is provided below:

> Your director has taken a decision that, given the tight funding environment, no more over-time will be paid. You are all under enormous pressure to complete a project according to contractual deadlines, and are having to work considerable overtime. What do you do?

Learners role played these scenarios, taking on different roles in each case (Director, Secretary, Field Worker, Chair of the Board) with some sitting out as observers. They then came out of role into a debriefing session which analyzed what had happened and linked it to course themes. Feedback from learners indicated they appreciated role play and simulation as ways of linking

course content to organizational situations. As the workshop evaluation report states: 'The integration of the CD-ROM content into different practical simulations provided deeper insights into leadership and management.'

In our reflections on learner support, we identified a number of moves that constituted the facilitation role within the e-mail forum. These are consistent with Holmberg's concept of 'guided didactic conversation' (Holmberg, 1983). These included:

- Adding their own views as facilitators;
- Attempting to extend the discussion (by deepening, broadening, and/or personalising);
- Redirecting as necessary;
- Encouraging more students to participate in the debate; and
- Summarizing the discussion that had taken place that week.

One of these moves is exemplified in the e-mail note displayed below:

Figure 2: Example of e-mail note from course facilitators to learners

Deepening and broadening the debate
Dear B
Thanks for the comments.
The rest of you are being very quiet! What do you think? Are African leaders more inclined or less inclined to be corrupted/corrupt than leaders in other parts of the world?
And is it possible for leadership in NGOs to be based on everybody, rather than somebody? Do you have any ideas about how this could work?
What's your own experience of leadership in NGOs?
Anne, Peter, Vaughn

Besides the e-mail facilitation of group discussions and the face-to-face workshop, learner support also occurred through assignment tutoring. This will be further elaborated in the section below.

Assessment

The course was based on the assumption in quality criterion 6 that:

> Assessment is an essential feature of the teaching and learning process.

Assessment took the form of two formative assignments while learners were working through the materials and a summative project which they completed after the workshop. The workshop itself served the purpose of assessing whether learners had come to terms with the course and its application to their contexts. The following element of the quality criterion on assessment is relevant:

> **6.4** There is a range of formative and summative assessment tasks and methods which ensure that all learning outcomes are validly assessed.

The assignments were designed to assist learners in engaging with the course materials, on the one hand, and in relating these to their own organizational contexts and experiences, on the other. The first assignment required that learners analyze the contexts of their organizations using analytical tools (such as SWOT [1]), stakeholder analysis and force-field analysis, which they encountered in the course materials. In the second assignment they had to analyze their organizations themselves, focusing on aspects such as vision and mission, objectives, structures and programmes. The project activity, which they completed after the workshop, gave them two options. Either they could develop a strategic planning process for their organizations or they could plan a strategic review.

The assessment process was an important part of course learning since it entailed formative feedback on drafts and the opportunity for learners to revise and resubmit either their assignment as a whole or specified parts thereof. Learners and their facilitators thus engaged in a dialogue around their assignments and, through their assignments, their organizational contexts and programmes.

As a form of assessment, the quality of the learners' participation at the workshop indicated that they had a thorough grasp of the course materials and were able to relate them to their organizational contexts.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance was built into the process of programme development, course design and course delivery in a number of different ways. It was particularly important since the course was delivered as a pilot with a view to evaluating its effectiveness and revising it where necessary. This is consistent with quality criterion 11 which indicates that:

> There is an integrated framework at a policy and practice level that informs a clear cycle of planning, implementing, monitoring, reflection and action to ensure that learners' and staff needs as well as the needs of other clients are met.

As indicated above, the conceptualization of the programme was based on research undertaken by Fahamu on the needs of non-profit organizations engaged in the human rights field. Fahamu's quality assurance of the materials has been explained above. During the implementation of the course, the CAE facilitators held regular monitoring meetings to assess the progress of the course and the performance of learners, and liaised with Fahamu around emerging problems. This resulted in the revision of aspects of course delivery, such as the consolidation of e-mail discussion around set topics and the presentation to learners of a time-frame for working through materials.

Fahamu employed external evaluators to conduct a summative evaluation of the course materials and structure, the difference the course made to individuals and the wider gains. The evaluators assessed the materials, monitored the e-mail activity during the course and attended part of the face-to-face workshop. An additional part of the summative evaluation was a workshop attended by participants on all the Adilisha suite of courses, including the *Leadership and Management for Change* course, to provide feedback on the courses and make recommendations for their improvement. Their evaluation report, together with CAE's final report and recommendations, provided a sound basis for the further development of the course. In summary, the evaluators found that the materials were 'genuinely innovative in the field they seek to serve' and that the

CD-ROM format was 'of a very high quality and generally found to be user-friendly'; the structure of the course - eight weeks of individual study followed by an intensive face-to-face workshop and then an eight week supervised project - 'generally worked very well'; tutorial support, both in mentoring and supervision, was of a very high standard; the word 'empowerment' described learners' responses to the course in regard to personal learning and organizational applications; and the course had produced benefits in terms of professional networking. The evaluation stated that it was too early to assess the impact of courses on organizations, but recommended that organizations look at several members doing the course together to maximize impact (Allsop and Odayan, 2003:13-14).

The course as dialogic space

In this section we briefly discuss the notions of dialogue and dialogic space, and then relate them to the *Leadership and Management for Change* pilot course. In relation to the Quality Criteria, the notion of dialogic space provides an understanding of how certain of these criteria might be understood as working together. While aspects of a course such as course design, materials and assessment, for example, clearly overlap and are mutually constitutive, there is a danger that discrete quality criteria might promote an atomistic view. The concept of dialogic space can play a role in understanding the quality of a distance education course holistically.

Dialogue has a rich and polyvalent resonance within the western philosophical tradition as well as in emancipatory discourses of the South (See for example Bakhtin, 1981; Buber, 1964; Freire, 1970; Gadotti, 1996; Habermas, 1972). Paulo Freire, in the setting of mid- and late-twentieth century Latin America, develops the notion of dialogue in relation to education, in particular to adult literacy. For Freire, dialogue is not merely an educational technique; it is something fundamental to the process of becoming a human being. He sees it as an act of communication in relationship that shapes one's orientation to others and the world: 'Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it' (Freire and Shor, 1987:98). Freire emphasises the relation between dialogue and political action; dialogue is not simply talking for its own sake. It is part of a praxis of transforming the world: 'Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know, we can then act critically to transform reality' (Freire and Shor, 1987:99). Thus Freire links dialogue, and the changed consciousness that arises from it, to an explicit political agenda of liberation from oppression.

In the literature on distance education, the notion of dialogue resonates with Keegan's inclusion of two-way communication between teacher and learner as a definitive component of distance education: 'the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue' (Keegan, 1990:44); and with Holmberg's notion of 'guided didactic conversation' which is 'simulated through the students' interaction with the pre-produced courses and real through the written and/or telephone interaction with their tutors and counsellors' (Holmberg, 1988:115). Perraton (1988), in working towards a theory for distance education, identifies three levels of dialogue: on paper (similar to Holmberg's simulated conversation of the student's elaboration of the text); face-to-face sessions between tutor and student (Holmberg's 'real' or 'direct' conversation); and group discussion. He also gestures towards another level of dialogue: that between the distance education course and the learner's context of knowledge and experience:

> Learning is more effective if, through dialogue between student and teacher, the student can be shown how the new matter he is learning relates to what he already knows, relates to his environment. (Perraton, 1988:35)

We characterize emancipatory adult education projects and programmes as *dialogic spaces* - particular social and educational sites which enable dialogue - because they feature dialogue at a number of related levels: between project participants such as teachers and learners and within their conventional roles (Freire's terms 'teacher-learner' and 'learner-teachers' are applicable here); within project participants as they engage in self-reflection, both at the time of their involvement and subsequently; between the projects and other sectors of society, such as the workplace and the community; between discourses within the project such as academic disciplines, critical thinking and the discourse of political struggle. The projects might also be characterized as microcosmic instances of dialogue between the past and the future regarding the nature of society.

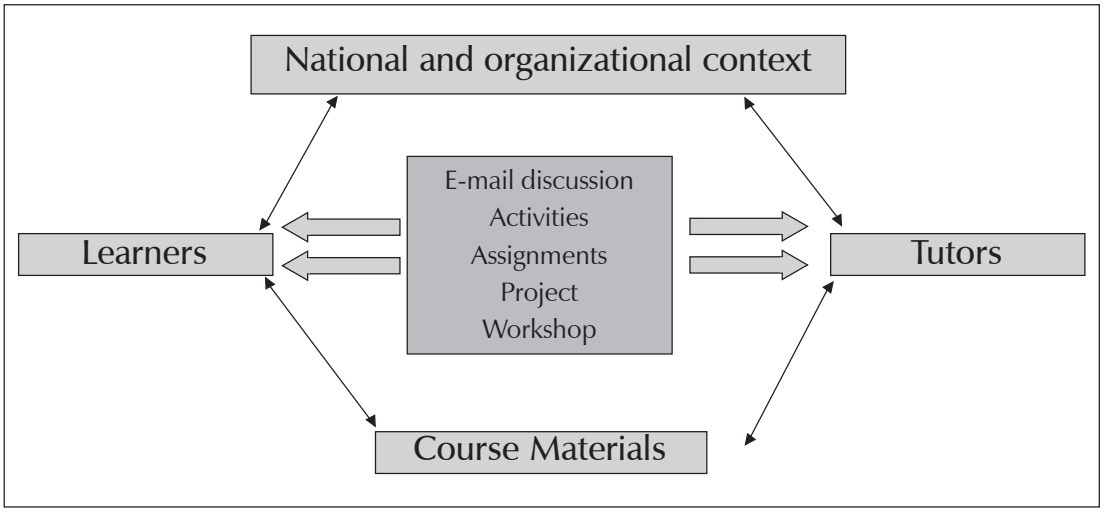
The notion of space in a distance education course is obviously different from that which would apply to an exclusively face-to-face learning format. In distance education space might be the actual physical space of an occasional meeting of facilitator and learners, or the virtual space of an e-mail discussion, or the individual zone of learning in which the learner engages with course materials and writes assignments. In distance education, the notion of dialogic space might be understood as the composite and complex learning space constituted by virtual, face-to-face and intrapersonal aspects.

The *Leadership and Management for Change* course was a dialogic space in the sense that it created a dialogue among and within learners and facilitators around issues of organizational transformation. Course participants related themes and issues in the materials to their own organizational contexts. They did this through e-mail discussions, assignments, face-to-face interactions at the workshop, and a summative project. The role of the facilitators was to facilitate this dialogue by posing topics and questions via e-mail, responding to learners' comments by deepening and extending discussion, providing formative feedback to learners' assignments, and engaging with learners and their organizational contexts at the workshop. In this process, the facilitators were also learners as they came to know the learners' organizations, concerns and contexts, and learned from the learners' experiences and insights.

A course in itself, as a set of materials, a regime of assignments, a format of discussions, is not necessarily dialogical. Materials, assignments and formats can be more or less amenable to dialogue, but even the most progressive, learner-centred, contextualized materials can be taught in a monological way. Dialogue arises in the process of engagement as course participants relate the course content and processes to their own contexts. In this regard, facilitation, both within and around the course materials, is crucial.

The diagram below and the brief summary that follows attempt to capture this understanding of the *Leadership and Management for Change* course as a dialogic space. The arrows represent dialogue between and among various course components. The peripheral boxes represent the participants, content and contexts involved in dialogue. The central box represents the processes that facilitate dialogue.

Figure 3: The *Leadership and Management for Change* course as a dialogic space



- Tutors and learners develop a community of learning, initially a virtual community which later becomes 'real' at the workshop where they meet face-to-face.
- Dialogue occurs as learners engage with course materials, facilitators and fellow learners, and relate the course content to their organizational contexts.
- The tutors facilitate this dialogue through e-mail discussions, assignments, projects and the face-to-face workshop.
- Through this the course develops as a *dialogic space* in which learners can explore issues of organizational transformation.

Conclusion

A number of issues concerning quality criteria arose from the piloting of the *Leadership and Management for Change* course. First, the ratio of tutors to learners was high: three tutors for thirteen learners. Learners thus received very thorough and punctual responses to their assignments and e-mail comments. One consultant connected to the course called it 'the Rolls Royce model of distance education' and it would not have met requirements for cost-effectiveness. The favourable ratio could be justified on the grounds that this was a pilot version and there was a need to build capacity among tutors to roll out the course on a wider scale. One tutor could easily facilitate e-mail discussions, mark assignments and run a workshop for a group of about 15 learners on the course but if the number of learners doubled there would be a problem in providing high quality learner support.

A second issue concerns the limitations of support, even within a very well-resourced course, where the aim is to effect change beyond the course and its participants. The course aimed to equip learners to effect positive changes in their organizations. However, learner support, in the form of virtual and face-to-face facilitation, feedback on assignments, and so on, helped learners to work through the course rather than to change their organizations. Besides participation in such a course, other factors which influence the possibility of transformation are the

receptiveness of the organization to change, the leadership style, the socio-economic context, the confidence and competence of the change agent, and the presence or absence of post-course support for participants. By linking content concretely to context within a dialogic space, the course gestured towards organizational transformation rather than effecting it, and this is all that it could do. What happens after the course is up to the participants and their organizations - a sobering realization for those in the 'Education can change the world' school. Thus quality criteria for distance education do not necessarily guarantee a positive impact on education or society beyond the course, since there are other external factors at play there.

References

Allsop, T. and Odayan, M. (2003). *Adilisha*: *Evaluation Report*. External evaluation report commissioned by Fahamu.

Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*: *Four Essays*. M. Holquist (ed). Austin: Texas University Press.

Buber, M. (1964). *Between Man and Man*. London: Collins.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

Freire, P. and Shor, I. (1987). *A Pedagogy for Liberation*: *Dialogues on Transforming Education*. London: Macmillan Education.

Gadotti, M. (1996). *Pedagogy of Praxis*: *A Dialectical Philosophy of Education*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Habermas, J. (1972). *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.

Harley, A., John, V., Rule, P. and Aitchison, J. (2003). *Leadership and Management for Change*: Report on the pilot, February - July 2003. Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal.

Holmberg, B. (1983). 'Guided Didactic Conversation in Distance Education'. In D. Stewart, D. Keegan and B. Holmberg (eds). *Distance Education*: *International Perspectives*. London: Routledge. pp.114-122.

John, V. (2003). 'Educational 'Action Research' Partnerships: Whose Action and Whose Research?' Paper presented at the Kenton Conference, Worcester, Western Cape.

Keegan, D. (1990). *Foundations of Distance Education*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Manji, F., Njuguna, E. and Jaffer, M. (1998). Enhancing the capacity of human rights and advocacy organisations in southern Africa. Report to the International Development Research Centre. (IDRC: Centre File 97-5924-00).

Mood, T. (1995). *Distance Education*: *An Annotated Bibliography*. Englewood, Col.: Libraries Unlimited.

Perraton, H. (1988). 'A Theory for Distance Education'. In D. Stewart, D. Keegan and B. Holmberg (eds). *Distance Education*: *International Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Robinson, M. (2002). 'Research in Action and Research for Action: Working in a Participatory Action Research Framework with a Government Department'. *Journal of Education*, 28. pp.105-121.

Endnote

[1] SWOT refers to a way of analyzing practice in terms of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Case Twelve: Self-evaluation in the e-learning unit at the University of Pretoria

Jill W Fresen
Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation, University of Pretoria
jill.fresen@up.ac.za

> 'Meaningful change is brought about by individuals taking action to change their own situations, and making their practice more relevant to those they are serving.' (McNiff, 1996, p.xv)

Editor's introduction

This case study describes the processes and instruments used to elicit feedback from lecturers and students on the services and products of the e-learning unit at the University of Pretoria. It shows a particular 'evaluation technique' that can be used to enable 'learners, and other clients' to contribute to quality review, and therefore illustrates the quality criteria for **quality assurance:**

11.5 The provider engages in benchmarking and uses appropriate monitoring and evaluation techniques to gather and analyze data to use as a basis for setting priorities and planning for quality improvement.

11.8 Staff, learners, and other clients are involved in the process of quality assurance and quality review.

However, the case study also illustrates neatly (mainly in the kinds of questions that are asked in the student and lecturer feedback questionnaires in the attached appendices) the relevance of criteria that refer to the conditions necessary for successful use of e-learning - criteria relating to **human resource strategy**, **learner support**, and **management and administration**.

Staff development for design and delivery of e-learning:

8.6 Staff are trained, monitored, and supported for the specialized roles and tasks they perform, including the design, management and delivery of electronically offered programmes.

Student access to relevant technology:

7.17 Learners have access to the facilities (for example, libraries) and equipment that are necessary for their successful learning.

Orientation to and ongoing learner support for students involved in e-learning:

7.3 Learners are carefully oriented to the teaching and learning methods on the programme, particularly if electronic learning methods are used.

Development of learners' computer skills:

> **7.4** Where appropriate, the development of competence in the use of information and communication technologies is built into the learning outcomes of the programme.

Technical assistance:

> **7.18** Learners are provided with technical support for each educational technology hardware, software, and delivery system required in a programme.

Training in the use of the technology for both staff and students:

> **9.23** Staff and learners are trained in the use of the equipment, facilities, and communication and information systems.

Reliability of delivery using the selected technology:

> **9.20** In the case of electronically offered programmes, the provider ensures the reliability and predictability of a 'fit-for-purpose' teaching and learning delivery platform.

What is also critical is the importance of ascertaining the nature of the contribution that e-learning can make to the teaching and learning experience. E-learning does not automatically improve teaching and learning - there needs to be continual reflection on whether or not it does. The lecturer experience and satisfaction survey asks a number of questions that assist lecturers to reflect on whether or not e-learning 'adds value' to the learning experience.

Introduction

This case study describes part of a self-evaluation exercise carried out by the e-learning unit of the Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation (TLEI) at the University of Pretoria (UP), from 2001 onwards. The results reported here are part of a comprehensive effort to design and implement a formal quality management system for e-learning, back-grounded by an ISO 9000 approach to quality assurance (see Fresen, 2004). The goal of the self-evaluation exercise is to encourage reflective practice by academic and support staff so that the action-reflection cycle becomes habitual in every role player, in order to promote continuous quality improvement.

Background to the e-learning unit

Education innovation is a key strategic initiative at the University (University of Pretoria, 2002). TLEI is a service department which assists and supports academic staff in education innovation and the enhancement of quality in the design delivery and support of teaching and learning activities.

The term 'distance education' is sometimes used synonymously with 'online learning', in the sense of 'technology-assisted distance learning'. The preferred term in this case study is 'web-supported learning'(WSL), which implies that the Internet is used as a supportive

delivery medium to enhance and support the teaching and learning process. Web-supported learning is used in this case in a face-to-face context, rather than for distance education, in which the learner is separated from the provider in space and time. The University of Pretoria promotes a model of flexible, blended learning, which encompasses a range of electronic and face-to-face delivery mechanisms and support systems, using appropriate, cost-effective combinations of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The e-campus of the University of Pretoria is an electronic extension of contact teaching and learning activities and other facilities and services. Student Online Services and Lecturers Online provide Internet-based platforms that enable students and staff to access an integrated educational environment from the campus or from their places of work or residence (TLEI, 2002). This infrastructure enables asynchronous access to preparatory, remedial, reinforcing and reference materials, interactive assessment activities, and administrative functions.

Learning management systems (LMSs) have emerged as one of many software systems available to deliver WSL. They are designed with a view to enabling enriched interactive educational communication on the web, and to offer enhanced support to instructors and students as they use the Internet as a medium for learning. The University makes use of the commercially available LMS, WebCT. WebCT offers the following functionality (WebCT(r), 2002):

- Provides access to information and resources;
- Establishes WSL communities;
- Enables electronic assessment; and
- Allows student tracking, self-paced learning and off-campus access.

Lecturers may choose to utilize WebCT at various levels of complexity. Many lecturers begin by using web-supported components at the lower level of simply providing information and resources. Part of the change management role of TLEI is to provide training and support in how to facilitate effective, collaborative and meaningful learning on the web.

Quality Criterion	**8.6**	Staff are trained, monitored, and supported for the specialized roles and tasks they perform, including the design, management and delivery of electronically offered programmes.

Student feedback

A crucial element in a self-evaluation exercise is student feedback.

Quality Criterion	**11.8**	Staff, learners, and other clients are involved in the process of quality assurance and quality review.

In April 2001, the field of student feedback was researched and a student evaluation survey for WSL was developed, using ideas from Hannafin & Peck (1988) and Ramsden (1991): the WebCT Experience Survey (see Appendix 1 to this case study). The survey was programmed in a shareware software package and implemented on Student Online Services, the campus-wide portal from where students access their web-supported courses. Completing the surveys is a voluntary activity for all students registered for at least one web-supported module. Since 2002 the survey has been administered at the end of each semester, namely in July and December. The following response figures were recorded.

Table 1: Number of respondents to the Student WebCT Experience Survey

	2002		2003	
	Sem I	**Sem II**	**Sem I**	**Sem II**
Number of respondents[1]	386	1 476	4 650	1 130
Total number of WebCT students[2]	10 000	14 000	17 000	20 000
Response rate	3.86%	10.54%	27.35%	5.65%

The findings from Semester I, 2003 are summarized here. A wealth of data was gained from the questions designed to provide information such as browser usage, access to technology and usefulness of library resources. The most encouraging findings were that 75% of technical problems were resolved within 24 hours and 66% of students found 'anywhere, anytime' learning to be convenient. Valuable information was volunteered in the open questions, which asked for positive points, negative points and suggestions for improvement.

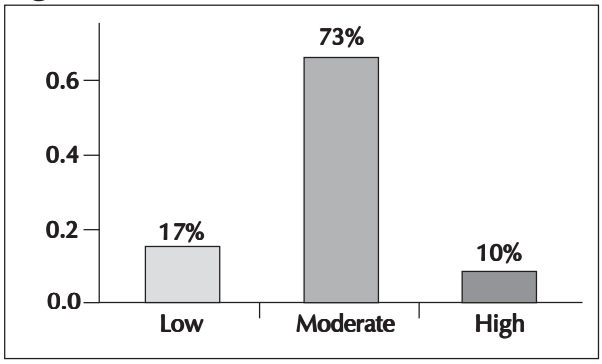
The questionnaire measures more than service and support to students. Items were written according to the following categories:

a. Technical adequacy and technical support;
b. Educational support (supportive resources and training);
c. Affective domain (feelings and emotions of students);
d. Interactivity (use of the communication tools in WebCT);
e. Perceived learning;
f. Lecturer involvement in facilitating WSL.

The first three categories were used to generate a Frustration Index (FI) and the last three categories were used to generate a Satisfaction Index (SI). These indices reflect respectively student frustration or satisfaction with their WSL opportunities.

The findings for the Frustration Index are shown in Figure 1. The percentage of respondents is on the vertical axis and reflected as a percentage on each bar. The levels of the frustration index were grouped according to the categories Low, Moderate and High. These are shown on the horizontal axis.

Figure 1: Levels of the Frustration Index



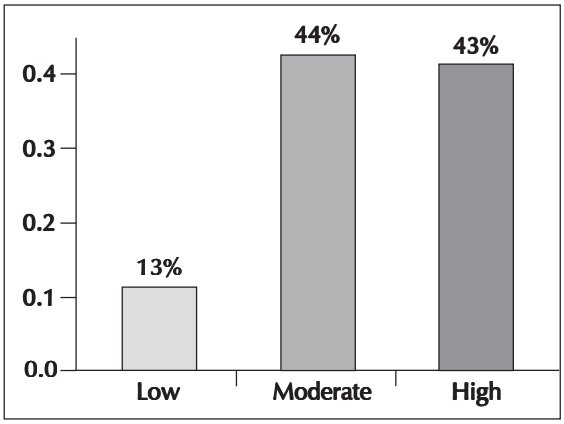
The Frustration Index shown in Figure 1 indicates that 83% of respondents experience moderate to high levels of frustration in their web-supported courses. This statistic is rather high - efforts will need to concentrate on reducing levels of student frustration.

The Frustration Index was investigated in further detail to ascertain the contributing factors. The following factors contributed to student frustration with WSL:

- Insufficient computers available on campus;
- Insufficient printing facilities available on campus;
- Extent of technical difficulties experienced;
- Insufficient support from the student CD-Rom;
- Inadequate student training in WebCT;
- An impersonal learning experience;
- Slow response from classmates;
- Feelings of annoyance and/or stress.

The findings for the Satisfaction Index are shown in Figure 2. The percentage of respondents is on the vertical axis and reflected as a percentage on each bar. The levels of the Satisfaction Index were grouped according to the categories Low, Moderate and High. These are shown on the horizontal axis.

Figure 2: Categories for the Satisfaction Index



It can be seen from Figure 2 that only 43% of respondents experience high levels of satisfaction. Improvement efforts will concentrate on increasing this statistic.

The following factors contributed to the Satisfaction Index:

- Feeling comfortable communicating via online tools;
- Feeling more freedom to express oneself than in a traditional classroom;
- Learning from the contributions of other students;
- Promoting one's ability to work as a team or group member;
- Promoting one's ability to plan one's own work;
- Experiencing an enriching learning environment.

Some of the qualitative responses to the open question about **positive** aspects of WSL highlighted the need for lecturer commitment and involvement, as seen from the sample

of student comments given below:

- Discussions with the lecturers and students;
- Contact with lecturers improved;
- Communication with lecturers is made easy;
- Can contact lecturers online;
- The online web has a great impact towards our learning;
- I learned to communicate more to the point and concise;
- It helped me to interact with my fellow student mates and lecturers;
- Learning is best communicating with other people;
- Long distance interaction between lecturer and students;
- Lecturer's and fellow students' contributions.

Lecturer feedback

Lecturer feedback was not formally gathered until 2004. During January 2004, pilot interviews were conducted with a group of 22 lecturers across various faculties, to obtain feedback from lecturers who have been involved in WSL for at least one year. The interview schedule was the Lecturer Experience and Satisfaction Survey, a mix of structured and open questions (see Appendix 2).

Quality Criterion	**9.20**	In the case of electronically offered programmes, the provider ensures the reliability and predictability of a fit-for-purpose teaching and learning delivery platform.

Quality Criterion	**9.23**	Staff and learners are trained in the use of the equipment, facilities, and communication and information systems.

The factors which contribute to lecturer satisfaction with WSL are a sense of security which needs to come from technical reliability and technical support. Some strong reaction emerged with respect to major upgrades to the IT infrastructure, which occurred at the beginning of 2004. Despite timely notification, the extensive technological changes resulted in uncertainty and frustration among lecturers.

Staff and student training were mentioned as vital to ensuring the quality and success of WSL.

Online communication and interaction were recognized as providing benefits in the teaching and learning situation, but organizational and administrative advantages are more practical and quicker to achieve. Several responses reflected the difficulties with respect to the human element - getting the commitment of lecturers and motivating and encouraging students to participate actively in WSL.

Many positive comments were elicited on services rendered by TLEI, for example:

- I really enjoyed working with the team. You people make ME look good!
- Polite, knowledgeable, quick turnaround time, bends over backwards for clients.

- I am amazed every day by the outstanding, enthusiastic and helpful manner in which TLEI encourages, supports and leads us.
- Organized, involved, quick feedback provided.
- The instructional designer really helps us tremendously - she is a valued team member.
- I believe that the instructional designers do not receive adequate recognition for their hard work!
- You were always a phone call away - thanks for that.
- The dedication and outstanding support of TLEI staff members are highly appreciated.
- I have had excellent service. The instructional designer is always willing to help and extremely positive.

The responses to the Lecturer Experience and Satisfaction survey can be summarized as being overwhelmingly positive. There was strong agreement that the e-learning component adds value to the learning experience for students. Excellent support and service from TLEI are valued by lecturers.

Where there were reservations or qualifications to statements, these could be explained by the type and level of WebCT usage in a particular department. Some respondents indicated that they would like to refresh their knowledge of WebCT and engage in the use of WSL at deeper and more interactive levels.

Conclusion

This case study shows that it is important to consider the needs and feedback of 'clients' at both ends of the teaching and learning endeavour, namely lecturers and students. Summative evaluation is an important part of the instructional design process (Smith & Ragan, 1993). It contributes one type of measurement to close the feedback loop and to inform the quality improvement cycle. Ongoing research in TLEI is now focusing on additional measures, both qualitative and quantitative, to evaluate the impact of e-learning and the return on investment for the University.

References

Fresen, J.W. (2004). 'In Search of Factors Contributing to the Quality of Web-supported Learning in Higher Education'. Doctoral thesis under preparation. University of Pretoria.

Hannafin, M.J., & Peck, K.L. (1988). *The Design, Development and Evaluation of Instructional Software*. New York: MacMillan.

McNiff, J. (1996). Introduction. In P. Lomax (Ed). *Quality Management in Education: Sustaining the Vision through Action Research*. London: Routledge.

Ramsden, P. (1991). 'Performance Indicators of Teaching Quality in Higher Education: The Course Experience Survey'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 16(2). pp.129-150.

Smith, P.L., & Ragan, T.J. (1993). *Instructional Design*. New York: Macmillan.TLEI (2002). Annual Report: Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

University of Pretoria. (2002). *Strategic Plan 2002-2005*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

WebCT (r). (2002). Web Course Tools. 'Commercially Available Learning Management System for Web-supported Learning'. See http://www.webct.com.

Endnotes

1 These are distinct individuals, since the survey was offered via a single link on Student Online Services and completed once by each individual WebCT student who chose to participate.

2 These are distinct individuals, according to their student numbers.

Appendix 1: WebCT experience survey

Dear Student

We are evaluating the quality of the WebCT courses at the University of Pretoria. Please take 3 minutes of your valuable time to complete this WebCT Experience survey. We need to know if you had technical or access problems and how you experienced online learning in general.

Question 1 (You may mark more than one option)	
How do you gain access to a computer?	
☐ My own computer at home	**V1**
☐ My own computer in the residence	**V2**
☐ My computer at work	**V3**
☐ IT computer labs	**V4**
☐ Informatorium computer labs	**V5**
☐ Other computer labs on campus	**V6**
Question 2	
When you need to access a computer on campus, can you find one available?	**V7**
☐ Yes, I always find a computer.	1
☐ I find it difficult to find an available computer.	2
☐ No there is never a computer available.	3
Question 3	
Do you make use of computer facilities on campus for your other University work (e.g. assignments, WebCT), apart from practical computer classes?	**V8**
☐ Yes	1
☐ No	0
Question 4	
If so, for what purpose do you make use of campus computer facilities, besides for practical computer classes? (You may mark more than one option)	
☐ To read my e-mail	**V9**
☐ To access my WebCT course/s	**V10**
☐ To browse the Internet	**V11**
☐ To complete assignments	**V12**
☐ To compile my own notes	**V13**
☐ Not applicable	**V14**
Question 5	
Do you experience a sincere need for printing facilities on campus?	**V15**
☐ Yes	1
☐ No	0
Question 6	
If so, do you find it easy to find a printing facility on campus when you need one?	**V16**
☐ Yes, a printing facility is always available.	1
☐ I find it difficult to find a printing facility.	2

Continues on page 194

Question 6 (continued)	
☐ No, I can never find a printing facility.	3
☐ Not applicable.	4
Question 7	
What is your gender?	**V17**
☐ Male	1
☐ Female	2
Question 8	
What is your age group?	**V18**
☐ Younger than 21	1
☐ 21-25	2
☐ 26-39	3
☐ 40 +	4
Question 9	
Approximately how many times per week did you log on to your web-supported course?	**V19**
☐ Less than once per week (e.g. 3 times per semester)	1
☐ 1 to 5 times per week	2
☐ 6 to 10 times per week	3
☐ More than 10 times per week	4
Question 10	
What was the approximate duration of your online sessions?	**V20**
☐ 1 to 30 minutes	1
☐ 31 to 60 minutes	2
☐ 1 to 2 hours	3
☐ More than 2 hours	4
Question 11	
What Browser do you usually use?	**V21**
☐ Netscape 3.0 or less	1
☐ Netscape 4.0 or later	2
☐ Internet Explorer 3.0 or less	3
☐ Internet Explorer 4.0 or later	4
☐ Konqueror (Unix)	5
☐ Mozilla (Unix)	6
☐ Other Browser	7
Question 12	
What type of technical difficulties did you experience? (You may mark more than one option)	
☐ None	**V22**
☐ Slow Internet access	**V23**
☐ UP network/server being down	**V24**
☐ My Internet service provider being down	**V25**

Question 12 (continued)	
☐ Logon/registration problems	**V26**
☐ Too much material to download	**V27**
☐ Attempted downloads were incomplete/aborted	**V28**
☐ Lack of technical support	**V29**
☐ Some links in the course did not work	**V30**
☐ Other	**V31**
Question 13	
How often did you experience technical difficulties of any sort?	**V32**
☐ Less than once per week (e.g. 3 times per semester)	1
☐ 1 to 5 times per week	2
☐ 6 to 10 times per week	3
☐ More than 10 times per week	4
Question 14	
How long did it take for technical problems to be solved?	**V33**
☐ Half a day	1
☐ 24 hours	2
☐ 2 - 6 days	3
☐ 1 week or longer	4
☐ Never solved	5
Question 15	
To whom did you go to with your technical difficulties? (You may mark more than one option)	
☐ My lecturer	**V34**
☐ The Telematic Learning and Education Innovation personnel	**V35**
☐ Support at Student Online Services	**V36**
☐ My fellow students	**V37**
☐ Client Service Centre	**V38**
Question 16	
If you received the standard Welcome Student CD-Rom, what is your opinion of it?	**V39**
☐ It's great.	1
☐ It's reasonable, but needs improvement.	2
☐ It's poor.	3
☐ Not applicable.	4
Question 17	
Consider the student orientation / training session for WebCT. (You may mark more than one block)	
☐ The session equipped me sufficiently to participate in my web-based course.	**V40**
☐ I could not logon during the session.	**V41**
☐ I was still confused after the session.	**V42**
☐ I feel my basic computer skills are inadequate.	**V43**
☐ I think more student orientation is required.	**V44**

Continues on page 196

Question 17 (continued)	
☐ I did not attend the session.	**V45**
☐ There was no orientation session for my WebCT course.	**V46**
Question 18	**V47**
I felt comfortable communicating via online communication tools.	
☐ Strongly disagree	1
☐ Disagree	2
☐ Agree	3
☐ Strongly agree	4
☐ I don't know / Not applicable	5
Question 19	
Web-supported communication helped me to express myself more than I would have in a traditional classroom.	**V48**
☐ Strongly disagree	1
☐ Disagree	2
☐ Agree	3
☐ Strongly agree	4
☐ I don't know / Not applicable	5
Question 20	
The lack of people's faces, voices and/or body language makes the learning experience impersonal.	**V49**
☐ Strongly disagree	1
☐ Disagree	2
☐ Agree	3
☐ Strongly agree	4
☐ I don't know / Not applicable	
Question 21	
I became frustrated because my classmates were slow to respond to my e-mail and/or discussion messages.	**V50**
☐ Strongly disagree	1
☐ Disagree	2
☐ Agree	3
☐ Strongly agree	4
☐ I don't know / Not applicable	5
Question 22	
I learnt from the contributions made by other students.	**V51**
☐ Strongly disagree	1
☐ Disagree	2
☐ Agree	3
☐ Strongly agree	4
☐ I don't know / Not applicable	5

Question 23	
Web-supported learning helped me to develop my ability to work as a team/group member.	**V52**
☐ Strongly disagree	1
☐ Disagree	2
☐ Agree	3
☐ Strongly agree	4
☐ I don't know / Not applicable	5
Question 24	
Web-supported learning helped me to develop my ability to plan my own work.	**V53**
☐ Strongly disagree	1
☐ Disagree	2
☐ Agree	3
☐ Strongly agree	4
☐ I don't know / Not applicable	5
Question 25	
I found the web-supported course to be an enriching learning experience.	**V54**
☐ Strongly disagree	1
☐ Disagree	2
☐ Agree	3
☐ Strongly agree	4
☐ I don't know / Not applicable	5
Question 26	
I experienced feelings of annoyance and/or stress during this learning experience.	**V55**
☐ Strongly disagree	1
☐ Disagree	2
☐ Agree	3
☐ Strongly agree	4
☐ I don't know / Not applicable	5
Question 27	
I found the opportunities for 'anywhere; anytime' learning convenient.	**V56**
☐ Strongly disagree	1
☐ Disagree	2
☐ Agree	3
☐ Strongly agree	4
☐ I don't know / Not applicable	5
Question 28	
What were the positive aspects you experienced during your web-supported courses? (Please answer in point form and limit your response to a maximum of 4 points.)	
.....	**V57**
.....	**V58**
.....	**V59**
.....	**V60**

Continues on page 198

Question 29 What were the negative aspects you experienced during your web-supported courses? (Please answer in point form and limit your response to a maximum of 4 points.)	 **V61** **V62** **V63** **V64**
Question 30 What suggestions can you make to improve your web-supported courses? (Please answer in point form and limit your response to a maximum of 4 points.)	 **V65** **V66** **V67** **V68**

Appendix 2: E-learning lecturer experience and satisfaction survey

Using electronic media in teaching is a different process and experience from conventional face-to-face teaching in terms of changes to pedagogy and the adoption of ICTs. The commitment and willingness of academic staff to adopt e-learning enables the University to respond to growing demands from students for electronic access and to maintain and improve the quality of learning effectiveness.

Important factors contributing to the satisfaction of lecturers involved in e-learning are opportunities for effective online interaction with students with diverse backgrounds and interests, as well as opportunities for leadership, research, publications, recognition, collegiality and professional development (Lorenzo & Moore, 2002). Ongoing staff training and development are essential to ensure staff readiness for online teaching and ICT developments (Oliver, 2002).

Please contribute to our research by completing this survey to establish the extent of lecturer involvement and satisfaction with e-learning and the associated support services at the University of Pretoria.

Department:					
Programme:					
Delivery medium:	WebCT		Multimedia		
Project Leader:					
Date:					
Overall effectiveness of the WebCT course or Multimedia programme ('e-learning component')					
	Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral N/A**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
In my opinion, the e-learning component adds value to the learning experience for students.					
The e-learning component promotes active learning / problem-based learning / learner-centred activities.					
I used the e-learning component to support me in my administrative tasks.					
I found that the e-learning component supported me in the facilitation of learning.					
Rank these online tools according to:	**Discussion**	**e-mail**	**Chat**	**Calendar**	
Frequency of your use of the tool: **0=never; 1=seldom, 2=monthly; 3=weekly; 4=daily**					
Your opinion of the tool's usefulness: **0=useless; 1=supportive; 2=indispensable**					

Continues on page 200

My overall evaluation of the worth of this e-learning component in enhancing the teaching and learning experience:	A Excellent	B Very Good	C Good	D Poor	E Un-acceptable
What do you perceive as the worth or value of the e-learning component?					
	High impact	Inter-mediate	Web Page Design	WebCT Designer	Facilitation of e-learning
Which WebCT or facilitation training course/s did you attend?					
Did you attend each training course before, during or after you presented your module? (b=before; d=during; a=after)					
Learning outcomes					
	Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral N/A**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
The e-learning component contributed to the achievement of subject specific learning outcomes.					
In what way?					
The e-learning component provided meaningful assessment opportunities.					
In what way?					
The e-learning component enhanced the learning experience due to instructional design features, e.g. activities, chunking, resources, interaction.					
In what way?					
Problems experienced					
What problems did you as a lecturer experience in the design and development of this e-learning component?					
What problems did you as a lecturer experience in the facilitation / presentation of this e-learning component?					
Benefits experienced					
What benefits did you as a lecturer experience in the design and development of this e-learning component?					
What benefits did you as a lecturer experience in the facilitation / presentation of this e-learning component?					

Overall evaluation						
Might there be lessons learnt from this implementation that could be shared for future use?						
What effect or impact has this e-learning component had on teaching and learning in your department?						
Quality of service from Department of Telematic Learning and Education Innovation and AIS						
In the interests of continuous improvement, please rate the service you received from the following units:						
Project Management	A Excellent	B Good	C Satisfactory	D Poor	E Not applicable	F Unaware of service
Education Consultancy	A Excellent	B Good	C Satisfactory	D Poor	E Not applicable	F Unaware of service
Instructional Design	A Excellent	B Good	C Satisfactory	D Poor	E Not applicable	F Unaware of service
Graphics	A Excellent	B Good	C Satisfactory	D Poor	E Not applicable	F Unaware of service
Information Service (AIS)	A Excellent	B Good	C Satisfactory	D Poor	E Not applicable	F Unaware of service
Other comments related to service and support provided for e-learning:						

Case Thirteen: The quality assurance process for undergraduate courses in the Department of Linguistics at UNISA

Penny Sanderson
Department of Linguistics, University of South Africa
sandepj@unisa.ac.za

Editor's introduction

This case study offers a detailed account of how staff in the Department of Linguistics at the University of South Africa (UNISA) address the key criterion of **quality assurance** in distance education. The author describes a process that has led to the provision of 'an integrated framework at a policy and practice level that informs a clear cycle of planning, implementing, monitoring, reflection and action to ensure that learners' and staff needs are met' (quality criterion 11). The case also addresses quality criteria in relation to **course design** and **course materials** by describing how courses and materials are developed and evaluated. Three examples of data capturing instruments are included as appendices:

1. A quality assurance form for completion by course writers and course leaders;
2. A quality assurance form for completion by critical readers;
3. A questionnaire to students.

Study material development and design in the Department of Linguistics at UNISA

The Department of Linguistics at UNISA is a federal department incorporating Linguistics, Applied Linguistics and Translation. We offer about 15 undergraduate semester length modules, primarily in Linguistics and Interpreting. Each of these modules is offered to distance learners through printed and electronic course material and tutorial letters. Learners submit assignments and write a final examination. The course material is designed, written, edited, proof read and translated by the academic staff in the department. In the past this team usually consisted of two to four people but recently UNISA has broadened the concept of the team approach to course design to include not only academics, but also instructional designers, graphic artists and so on. This case study focuses on the efforts of UNISA's Linguistics Department to design and implement a quality assurance system for evaluating its undergraduate courses.

Why did we need a quality assurance system?

The Undergraduate Tuition Committee in the Department of Linguistics decided in 2000 that we needed an internal system against which to assess our distance education course offerings. We felt that as a department we needed to ask ourselves whether we were doing the right things in the right way and if we were really achieving what we wanted to achieve. Individual staff needed feedback on their strengths and weaknesses as far as writing study material was concerned - for example, to determine their future training needs, and individual courses needed to be looked at in terms of content, teaching, design, readability and student response. Although we believed that this team approach was a good start to the process of course design and development, we also needed to monitor how our courses were actually working and whether they were successfully meeting students' needs.

The idea was to integrate an ongoing quality assurance process into our ordinary tuition duties, in order to give continuous attention to quality maintenance and to improvement of course design and materials. We felt that the evaluation needed to be multidimensional, incorporating self-evaluation by those who wrote and ran the course, peer review by other academics and feedback from students. In addition, the process needed to be simple, not too time-consuming and preferably not too stressful, either for those doing the evaluation or those whose courses were under the spotlight.

Quality Criterion	**11.8**	Staff, learners, and other clients are involved in the process of quality assurance and quality review.

We decided that over a period of time we would look at all our modules, with the proviso that they had already been offered for at least one semester so that some feedback from students and student assessment data (pass rates, dropout rates and so on) were available. A policy decision was taken that we would not turn our study material into a Guide (which runs in unchanged form for three years) before the quality assurance process had taken its course. Our three first-year modules were evaluated in 2001, followed by the five second-year modules in 2002 and third-year modules in 2003 and 2004. In looking at courses on the same level in the same year, we hoped to get some overall sense of how they compared and if they made up a coherent package that did justice to linguistics as a domain or whether there were inconsistencies or gaps in our offerings.

Quality Criterion	**11.3**	There is a clear cycle of planning, development, documentation, reporting, action and review of policy and procedures.

After a departmental workshop, we came up with the quality assurance procedure outlined below as a starting point, knowing that any evaluation system has to start somewhere and that the system would improve as we went along and learned from our experiences.

The assessment team

To ensure continuity and familiarity with procedures, two individuals from the Departmental Tuition Committee were appointed to drive the process. It is always one of these two individuals who functions as the team leader for each quality assurance team. The Tuition Committee identifies and appoints other team members, always including the current module

leader and several critical readers, for example, one who is familiar with the content and the field, and one who is familiar with the level at which the course is offered. We often choose another departmental member who is unfamiliar with the field and can therefore offer a fresh perspective on whether the course content is sufficiently accessible and clear. An instructional design expert from UNISA's Bureau for Learning Development and outside experts from other departments or other universities are also used as critical readers if available.

The assessment process

Standard forms are given to each team to fill in and a timeframe is specified. Three standard forms have been devised, one for the course writer or module leader, that is, the person who is most familiar with the course and how it is working in practice, one for the various critical readers, and a student questionnaire. These are reproduced in Appendices 1 to 3.

We have found that really useful information is elicited through the student questionnaire (Appendix 3), and students are encouraged to submit these with their assignments by being awarded a bonus of 5% for doing so. Questions have been added to the questionnaire and modified over the years, and one suggestion for further improvement is to make this data more quantifiable and suitable for statistical analysis, for example, by using Likert scales in the questions, though this could result in the loss of some of the detailed information obtained from more open-ended questions.

The first step requires the course leader to put a package together, including all materials for that course for the last semester in which it ran (study guide, prescribed book, tutorial letters, examination papers, examination results, assessment criteria, questionnaires received from students, and so on). The course leader writes a self-evaluation of the course (on a standard form), including a list of the outcomes, a description of formative and summative assessment practices, student support and a short strengths/weaknesses analysis.

The package is then circulated successively to each of the critical readers. All the critical readers read the same master copy of the study material and make suggestions and corrections on the same hard copy. The end result is a marked-up copy with input from several different people at the relevant points in the study material and this has proved invaluable for future revision. Each critical reader then fills in the same standard form, ending with conclusions that highlight the strengths of the course and suggest ways of addressing weaknesses.

Quality Criterion	**11.7**	Staff development is a fundamental strategy to promote quality service provision.

The final stage of the process is a workshop attended by the entire quality assurance team. This is an open session and invitations are extended to other members of the Department who may be interested in participating.

The workshops normally last one to two hours and have generally proved to be honest, cordial and constructive, with a surprising degree of consensus between different readers, including the students. The usual format is a brief overview by the course leader which focuses on the course, its purpose and how it is working in practice. Suggestions and

recommendations are then made by each critical reader in turn after which there is general discussion. All the quality assurance forms and the marked-up copy of the course material are handed over to the module leader as a guide for future revision and plans for future action are made. The Departmental Tuition Committee then follows up regularly to check that the agreed revisions and improvements do take place within the agreed timeframes.

Quality Criterion	**11.9**	There are clear routines and systems for quality assurance and staff are familiar with those that relate to their work.

Outcomes and recommendations

The kinds of suggestions and recommendations that have resulted from the evaluation process have been quite wide-ranging. They tend to fall into two groups, namely short-term improvements that can be effected for the following semester or year, and longer-term recommendations. Short-term recommendations have included issues such as correcting typographic errors, breaking up long chapters into smaller, more manageable chunks, changing the format of the assignment and examination, improving the quality of scanned illustrations, adding extra tasks or shortening the course by giving students choices between sections of the work. Some of the longer-term, more labour-intensive suggestions have included doing away with a prescribed book that accompanied a module, moving a module from second-year to third-year level, reworking and simplifying particular study units that stood out as much more complex and demanding than the others, and even merging two or three modules into one.

Benefits

We believe that the quality assurance process has resulted in better course material and better service to students. It has also instilled in the Department a culture of ongoing reflection, appraisal and improvement with regard to tuition. Course writers have enjoyed the opportunity to have their hard work scrutinized, praised and acknowledged, and to be given ideas for future improvements. Critical readers have learnt from and enjoyed the opportunity to evaluate and compare courses and to express their opinions in a way that is tactful and adds value. Identifying strengths and good features in some modules has allowed us to transfer these to new modules we write. Many good ideas and workable solutions to problems have been generated simply by getting a diverse group of people around a table to talk about a course.

The quality assurance procedure has also made us more confident about turning our study material into Guides that run for three years and about posting our study materials on the Internet in electronic form. Being a federal department teaching Linguistics, Applied Linguistics and Translation, it has given us better insights into each other's disciplines and improved intradepartmental co-operation. More staff are now familiar with particular courses and have been able to give discussion classes or assist students if called upon to do so. We hope that our experience of evaluating courses and of having our own courses evaluated will mean that we are ready and enthusiastic rather than anxious if an externally-imposed system of quality assurance becomes a university or government requirement.

Appendix 1: Quality assurance form for course writer(s)/course leader

Please attach the following documents to this completed form and tick the appropriate box. (The documents should relate to the semester that has just been completed.)

	Copy of official syllabus
	Study guide
	All other tutorial letters for the course
	Prescribed book or reader
	Examination paper and memorandum
	Mark summary (i.e. statistics relating to student assignment and examination results)
	Completed questionnaires returned by students
	Tutor guidelines
	Group visit package (overheads, handouts etc.)

Information sheet

General				
1. Course code				
2. Level	1st	2nd	3rd	M
3. Team members and roles, e.g. writers, critical readers, current module leader etc.				
4. Semester and year, e.g. S2 2004				
5. Which programmes does the course serve?				
Study Package				
6. No. of pages of guide students have to read				
7. No. of pages of prescribed book students have to read				
8. Total no. pages students have to read				
9. Approximate no. terms that must be learnt				
10. No. of figures/diagrams/illustrations				
11. No. of tasks built into the material				
12. Readability measure for guide (if available)				
13. Readability measure for prescribed book (if available)				
Student Statistics				
14. No. students registered				
15. No. assignments received				
16. Average percentage in assignment				
17. No. students who wrote the examination				
18. Pass rate (% passed/written)				
19. Average percentage in examination				
20. Dropout rate (% not written/registered)				

Self-assessment

1. What is the purpose of the module?

2. What are the outcomes?

3. What is taught and how?

4. How does this module relate to/complement other modules on the same level and the departmental offerings as a whole?

5. How are students assessed?

6. Are there choices within the module? If so, which sections do students tend to choose and in which do they do best? (Attach data if possible).

7. How is student support built into the course?

8. How many student queries were received and what was the nature of these queries?

9. What do you see as the strengths of this course?

10. What do you see as the possible weaknesses of this course?

11. Any other comments?

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix 2: Quality assurance form for critical readers

Scale: [1] Definitely [2] Mostly [3] To some extent [4] Mostly not

Tuition					Comments
1. Does the course content match the official syllabus?	1	2	3	4	
2. Is the course content up-to-date?	1	2	3	4	
3. Is student support successfully built in?	1	2	3	4	
4. Is the material suitable to the level in terms of content complexity/term density?	1	2	3	4	
5. Is the material suitable to the level in terms of style/language accessibility?	1	2	3	4	
6. Is the prescribed book suitable in terms of its content?	1	2	3	4	
7. Is the prescribed book suitable for the level in terms of its style/language accessibility?	1	2	3	4	
8. Is the course material outcomes-based?	1	2	3	4	
9. Are the outcomes clear?	1	2	3	4	
10. Are the outcomes achievable?	1	2	3	4	
11. Are the outcomes assessable?	1	2	3	4	
12. Are the tutor guidelines successful?	1	2	3	4	
13. Is the group visit package successful?	1	2	3	4	
Editorial					
14. Is the layout attractive?	1	2	3	4	
15. Average no. of editorial errors per page?	1	2	3	4	
Assessment					
16. Is the course efficient in terms of the amount of marking required?	1	2	3	4	
17. Are assignment and examination questions appropriate for students at that level?	1	2	3	4	
18. Are the assessment methods varied? (e.g. formative and summative, self-evaluation and lecturer evaluation, written and oral exams etc.)	1	2	3	4	
19. Are there enough tasks in the guide /workbook?	1	2	3	4	
20. Are the tasks properly integrated into the material to make a coherent whole?	1	2	3	4	

21. Are the tasks relevant and meaningful? (i.e. do they relate clearly to the study material, expected outcomes, student needs and possible problems?)	1	2	3	4	
22. Are tasks varied? (e.g. portfolios, simulation, data collection, MCQs etc.)	1	2	3	4	
23. Is there sufficient feedback to self-assessment tasks?	1	2	3	4	
Student Results					
24. Are examination results in line with departmental standards?	1	2	3	4	
25. Do assignment and examination marks correlate?	1	2	3	4	
26. Is the dropout rate acceptable?	1	2	3	4	
Questionnaires					
27. Do first-language English students respond positively to the course?	1	2	3	4	
28. Do second-language English students respond positively to the course?	1	2	3	4	
Translation					
29. Is the translation clear and accurate?	1	2	3	4	
30. Average no. of editorial errors per page?					
31. According to the questionnaires, do Afrikaans students respond positively to the Afrikaans course?	1	2	3	4	
Conclusions					
32. What do you see as the strengths of the module?					
33. What do you see as the weaknesses of the module?					
34. What recommendations can you make for future improvement?					

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix 3: Student questionnaire

In this portfolio task (30 minutes) we ask you to reflect on your experience of the course as a whole.

Name .....

Mother tongue .....

I am registered for a ..... degree/programme

and my chosen majors are .....

Why did I choose to take this course?

Which study unit did I enjoy the most and why?

Which study unit did I enjoy the least and why?

Was the course material easy to understand or difficult?

Do I have a better understanding of other language groups/cultural groups than I did before?

Does the course have any practical applications in the real world, e.g. for the work I currently do?

What aspects would I like to know more about or study further?

How could the course be improved?

Other comments about the course

Case Fourteen: The Masters programme in International Trade Law offered by the Faculty of Law, University of Stellenbosch

Maryla Bialobrzeska
South African Institute for Distance Education
marylab@saide.org.za

Editor's introduction

As with the case study on the Fort Hare B Prim Ed, this case study has been written by an outside researcher. The case study is based on work done for the Council on Higher Education.[1]

With higher level postgraduate programmes, the distinction between face-to-face and distance delivery tends to become blurred. This is mainly because students do increasing amounts of independent work - a feature of distance study. However, it is also true that students at higher postgraduate levels want a relationship with a particular institution because of the specialist expertise that resides in that institution, rather than because of general effectiveness in teaching, learning and research, or because of proximity to their home or place of work. It makes sense, therefore, to use distance education methods to make specialist expertise as widely available as possible for postgraduate studies. This case study analyzes carefully how the Stellenbosch LLM uses technology for this purpose, and exemplifies the criterion:

> **1.4** The provider or programme management team can provide a rationale for the use of distance education or electronic learning methods for the delivery of the programme/course to the intended target learners.

A second feature of postgraduate programmes in a globalized higher education environment, is the use of technology to facilitate collaboration in programme design and delivery across distances which would not previously have been conceivable. Even though challenging from a management and technical perspective, collaboration is a condition of globalization. This case study illustrates well the quality criterion for **collaboration**:

> **10.** In the interests of cost-effective provision of education and training, collaborative relationships are formed and collaborative projects are undertaken wherever possible.

As the author indicates, this case study also assists reflection on the relationship between two other quality criteria: **results** (in the sense of success rate for students) and **learner support**. Although there are compelling arguments for distributing postgraduate programmes widely through the use of distance and electronic learning methods, it cannot be assumed that

learners at postgraduate levels can do without learner support. In particular, providing adequate supervision of postgraduate research using distance education methods is an abiding challenge. Although the case study argues differently, perhaps a reason that a fair proportion of students do not complete the research report (and therefore do not graduate), is the difficulty of undertaking research at a distance and in a language which may not be their own.

Background

Introduction

In 1998, the University of Stellenbosch, traditionally a face-to-face institution, formally committed itself to offering distance education in selected postgraduate niche programmes. A decision was also made that technology that would facilitate the optimal degree of synchronous delivery should be employed.

Stellenbosch refers to the mode of distance delivery it uses as interactive telematic education (ITE). The purpose of this case study is to examine one such programme, the LLM in International Trade Law, with specific focus on:

- The use of a range of media for delivery of the LLM programme;
- The collaborative approach to delivery of the programme (use of experts from different institutions);
- The importance of language support not only for foreign students, but for South Africans whose first language is not English; and
- The significant difference between module pass rates and programme throughput in the LLM and the reasons for this.

These four aspects of the programme design and delivery will be discussed in relation to the relevant Quality Criteria for distance education in South Africa.

Brief overview of the LLM programme

Quality Criterion	4.1	The course is designed with national needs as well as the needs of prospective learners and employers in mind.

The LLM in International Trade Law course work masters degree has been offered as a face-to-face programme by the Faculty of Law since 1997. Because of numerous requests received from legal practitioners across the country to be accommodated on the programme, it was adapted for distance education delivery in 1999.

It is noteworthy that in 2003, the enrolment on the face-to-face version of this programme was 30 while on the distance education version the enrolment was 50, which is a substantially larger number of students than on the face-to-face programme. The distance education programme is designed for part-time study over a period of two years.

This programme comprises the following modules:

- International Commercial Arbitration;
- Public Law Aspects of International Trade;
- International Business Transactions A and B (which for the distance education programme will normally be consolidated into a one-year course); and
- Research Report submitted by the student.

The LLM is targeted at attorneys and advocates, providing specialized postgraduate training for qualified lawyers. South African law faculties largely neglected international trade law during the apartheid era as a result of sanctions. Now with South Africa's resurgence as an important trading nation, this field of law is becoming more and more important. However, although International Trade Law remains a highly specialized and as yet rather underdeveloped field of law in South Africa, this programme is highly thought of even beyond South Africa. This is evidenced in each new student intake: specifically on the face-to-face version of the LLM, a significant number of the students are foreign, predominantly from Germany.

On successful completion of the LLM, it is envisaged that South African legal practitioners involved in commercial work (particularly those acting on behalf of clients involved in international and regional trade investment) and legal advisors of companies and government departments will be in a position to extend their professional practice by operating in this field.

Brief overview of programme delivery

Apart from the research project mentioned above, in each of the four modules students are required to do an assignment, which entails application of rules and principles studied in the given area of law in order to solve a legal problem. Assignments serve to scaffold preparation for the examination that is written at the end of each module. The assignment is weighted at 40% of the final mark allocation for the given module.

As part of the interactive telematic education approach, satellite technology is used to broadcast the lecturer's input to students. The rest of the teaching and learning relies largely on the students' self-study of extensive readers comprising case studies, legislation, rules and legal articles. Course notes and tutorial letters prepared by the lecturers support self-study.

Quality Criterion	**4.2**	The elements of the course and the relationships between them are consciously planned.

In line with the University's policy for postgraduate study programmes, the language of instruction is English.

Student profile

In 2003, 50 students enrolled on the programme. Of these, 36% were African, 8% Coloured, 4% Indian and 52% White. 76% of the students were male and 24% were female. The majority of the students were between 35 and 45 years old. Although the data on language is only approximate, on a conservative estimate it appears that at least 50% of the students were not first language English speakers. Most of the students were located in Gauteng, Western Cape and Eastern Cape, with a few dotted around the rest of South Africa. Five are located outside of the country. All are practising lawyers.

Quality Criterion	**2.1**	The provider has developed a learner profile that identifies the characteristics and situation of distance education learners.

Selected aspects of programme design and delivery

Use of a range of media for programme delivery

The design of the LLM International Trade Law programme is characterized by the use of a range of media for delivery. These include various forms of print based materials, satellite broadcasts and/or video.

Quality Criteria	**3.4**	There is a careful analysis of the most appropriate technologies to support: • The provision of course materials to learners • Other teaching and learning processes • Management and administration of the programme.

Quality Criterion	**3.5**	The selection of technologies is based on the needs, resources and capabilities of the learners and the provider, and the purposes of the programmes on offer.

The print-based component of the programme is substantial. For example, in the semester module, International Commercial Arbitration, the two-volume reader adds up to about 2 800 pages. Tutorial letters, course notes and lectures broadcast by satellite are used to mediate the content, serving to introduce and frame sections of independent study. Video copies are made of all satellite broadcasts and are available to all students.

The way in which this range of media is integrated for programme delivery is discussed in greater detail below.

Print-based materials

As stated above, print-based materials form a major part of each module. Students are expected to spend an average of 8 to 10 hours each week working through the articles, legal case studies, legislation and rules contained in the two-volume reader. A set of course notes accompanies each reader. In modules which make use of one or more textbooks, these are provided by the university as part of the materials pack. The cost of all materials including the textbooks is factored into the fees.

The course notes that accompany the readers assist students initially to work through these texts. Prior to each satellite broadcast lecture, students also receive a tutorial letter which serves both as a guide for what is to be covered in the lecture as well as a response to questions and concerns raised by students in the previous lecture. In commenting on the programme, students said that the technical nature of much of the presented content

required a lot of preparation preceding the lecture. If one were not well-prepared for the lecture, it would be difficult to keep up.

Satellite broadcasts

The LLM in International Trade Law is an example of a small-scale highly specialized niche programme that, through the use of satellite broadcasts, facilitates access to students unable to attend lectures on campus. While the initial capital outlay required for setting up and equipping the broadcast studios at Stellenbosch University was a considerable expense, receiving the broadcast does not entail great expense. The equipment required is a television set, a satellite dish and telephones. Once the equipment is purchased, the cost per study centre is R250 per two hour satellite broadcast session, which includes the services of a 'technical support' staff member in each centre whose function it is to open the centre, switch on the TV, help students to log on, and so on. This means that centres can be set up on an ad hoc basis to accommodate the needs of individual students. The use of this medium for programme delivery is thus flexible enough to reach individual students in small towns in far-flung areas across the whole of South Africa.

Stellenbosch University has a partnership agreement with the University of Port Elizabeth and together they share 30 studios situated in various centres (in schools, libraries, community centres etc.) across South Africa. However, to meet the geographic spread of the 2003 student intake on the LLM programme, only 12 of the possible 30 centres were used. In seven of the 12 centres, only one or two students attend lectures.

Synchronous or real-time lectures broadcast by satellite take place on a Saturday to accommodate the students who are all in full-time employment. Four two-hour lectures, totalling eight hours are delivered during the 15 week semester. Although in these sessions students are spatially separated from the lecturer, the fact that they take place in real-time effectively means that these lectures serve as contact sessions. This medium also has the technical capacity to facilitate interactivity by offering the possibility of discussion between the lecturer and the students via satellite phone. The lecturers use these sessions primarily to frame new content, to focus on application of relevant principles of statutory provision, to distil problems and challenge students to engage critically with the content. Student respondents remarked that this medium helped to 'take the distance out of distance education by 'seeing' the lecturer'. The fact that these 'contact' sessions are integrated into the delivery of this programme serves not only to support students academically but also provides an opportunity for the lecturer to monitor attendance and participation by students.

Quality Criterion	**7.10**	Contact sessions are integrated into the course design, rather than being an add-on extra.

During the lecture observed,[2] the lecturer structured a number of questions into his presentation, but was forced to try and elicit responses from students, as in this particular session, the students were not very forthcoming. This raises another important point, namely that it is not the medium

Quality Criterion	**4.4**	Choice of media and technology is justified in the light of the aims of the course, required learning outcomes, learner needs, capacity to access and use the technologies, the physical features of the teaching sites and available facilities and services.

alone that is important, but rather, how it is used in combination with other media and/or learning and teaching strategies. In discussion with the lecturer he reflected on the importance not only of provider-initiated support, but of encouraging students to meet and interact with each other. He commented on the fact that where such 'communities of learning' had been established, the level of debate and general engagement in the satellite sessions had been much richer.

In terms of choice of media and technology, the LLM illustrates criterion 4.4 very well. The use of satellite broadcasts as a key component of the delivery strategy in the LLM International Trade Law programme is 'justified' on various grounds. In terms of 'learner need' - given the highly specialized nature of this course, there would, for example, not be much point in appointing non-specialist tutors. The 'need' is for technology that can expose students to the expert lecture. For this reason the use of this medium is particularly appropriate. Secondly, it promotes 'access' to students who do not live and work within easy reach of the Stellenbosch campus (the University of Stellenbosch is currently the only institution in South Africa offering this programme). Moreover, as seen above, the fact that this medium is 'flexible' enough to facilitate delivery to individuals or very small groups of students further underscores this point. To this end 'the choice of media and technology is justified in the light of the aim of the course' which is to provide specialized postgraduate training to qualified lawyers - who are most likely to be spread around the country in full-time employment and thus unable to study full time on campus.

While the nature of law as a field of study is canonical, within this orthodoxy, the programme requires students to apply themselves critically to problem solving in the relevant applied situations. The satellite lectures (and tutorial letters) are a key means to framing and distilling problems, challenging students to focus on practical application of relevant principles and statutory provision, thereby supporting students in their attainment of the 'required learning outcomes' such as Outcome 2 of the LLM programme, 'the ability to find, read, analyze, interpret and critically evaluate legal literature from all sources...' and Outcome 4, 'demonstrate knowledge and ability to work with relevant legislation and other legal instruments on a comparative basis to solve relatively complex problems likely to arise in practice'.

Quality Criterion	**4.9**	Content, teaching and learning strategies and assessment are carefully structured to facilitate the achievement of the learning outcomes.

The medium has the potential to be interactive, thus affording students the opportunity to engage in dialogue with their lecturers. Given that the satellite technology can fairly easily and cost effectively be made accessible to individual and small groups of students, means that it 'is justified in terms of learner needs and capacity to access and use the technologies'. Additionally, as already stated, receiving the broadcast does not entail great expense. The maintenance of the centres dotted around the country does not require high level technical skills, thus justifying the use of the satellite technology in terms of the 'available facilities and services'.

Video recordings

Video recordings are made of each broadcast and serve as backups for students who are unable to attend a given broadcast, or who would simply like a recording for their own study purpose.

The university has a service agreement with Telkom that supports the delivery of the satellite lectures, and the rates of connectivity stand at 98.4%. However, videos can serve as backups in case problems in transmission occur. This helps to ensure that provision is not disrupted and that teaching and learning can go on.

Quality Criterion	**9.22**	There are emergency methods of communication for use in the event of a failure of the primary channel of communication, and these are fail-safe.

The videos are also sent to the five students who are studying outside South Africa and who are therefore unable to receive the satellite broadcasts.

To summarize, the use of the above range of media was carefully considered in the programme and course design to facilitate delivery that is appropriate to the nature of the programme/course, the capacity of the institution and the needs of the students.

Systems and processes that support the integration of a range of media into programme delivery

Within the university, the Division of Institutional Design is dedicated to supporting academic staff in courseware design. The emphasis in the Division of Institutional Design is on skilling people to do their own materials development, rather than functioning as a 'design bank'. The Strategic Initiatives Division (previously called the Division for Distance Education) offers training and technical support for lecturers to use the satellite technology effectively.

Quality Criterion	**4.15**	The educational provider gives authors, consultants, and others involved in the course design and development process necessary guidance and training regarding aspects of distance education in order to assure quality in their work.

During the delivery of the satellite lecture observed, the lecturer in question was clearly very well prepared and made full use of the time allocated and the technological features available. Over and above the lecture mode employing a power point presentation, the lecturer used a range of techniques to facilitate learning:

- Readings from texts that had been specially highlighted were included in the presentation so that students could follow the texts on their TV screens;
- Key points were written up on the white board provided;
- Questions were directed to particular students using the satellite telephone; and
- An interactive quiz was set up which students responded to by pressing specific keys on their satellite telephones.

In another satellite lecture observed, use was also made of a short video clip. Successful use of satellite broadcasting as a medium for programme delivery is time consuming

Quality Criterion	**4.16**	An appropriate infrastructure exists within the educational provider to administer the range of elements of the course efficiently.

as it requires thorough preparation to avoid embarrassing silences, fumbling for relevant texts and so on. Any attempt at 'busking' one's way through a lecture of this kind would be even more obvious than in an ordinary classroom situation. The lecturer concerned commented that it required on average between four and six hours to prepare one two-hour session. Equally important is the technical ability of the studio technician to properly manage the smooth transitions from one mode of presentation to the other during the video broadcast; for example, the ability to switch the camera focus from the power-point to the whiteboard without causing any delays.

The programme co-ordinator of the Department of International Trade Law works in close collaboration with the Strategic Initiatives Division to co-ordinate the reproduction and delivery of print-based materials such as the readers, tutorial letters, assignment briefs, and so on. This division is also responsible for sending out the video copies of the satellite sessions to students. Tutorial letters and assignment briefs are developed by the relevant lecturers and are sent electronically to those students who have e-mail access. The rest are sent by courier service as the post is considered to be too unreliable.

The lecturer sets examinations and the papers are distributed and collected by the central University examination division.

Quality Criterion	**9.10**	Production and delivery of course materials is fast, accurate, and reliable. Where existing systems prove inefficient, creative alternatives are found.

Depending on whether student queries are of an administrative or of a more academic nature, they are directed to either the Strategic Initiatives Division or the LLM programme co-ordinator. Student respondents all confirmed that systems for materials delivery were effective. Where hitches occurred, these were resolved by administrative staff - 'all it takes is one phone call!'

Quality Criterion	**7.17**	Learners have access to the facilities (for example, libraries) and equipment that are necessary for their successful learning.

Additional infrastructural support is offered by the library, which has made specific provision for distance education students by appointing a designated librarian to deal with distance education students.

A specialist legal librarian's services are also used to assist distance education students enrolled in Law programmes. The students are allocated 200 rands worth of photocopying (taken from their fees). They may thus request the librarian to send them photocopied articles. Librarians also do searches for the students, who confirmed that this service was invaluable, especially when they were preparing their research reports.

A collaborative approach to programme delivery: Use of experts from other institutions

International Business Transactions A and B is a compulsory double module consolidated into a one-year course. One of its three components is Charter Parties in Shipping Law. To offer this component, the specialist knowledge of the Professor of Maritime Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), a recognized expert in this field, has been brought in. Working

collaboratively with the other academics involved in the design and delivery of the above course, this professor is responsible for all aspects of the design and delivery of this particular component. This includes taking responsibility for compiling and updating the reader each time the component is offered, preparing tutorial letters, assignment briefs, lecturing and marking and providing feedback on the assignments. It also includes setting examinations with informal input from at least one colleague and marking the relevant component.

Quality Criteria	**10.1**	Wherever possible, collaborative relationships are formed for: • sharing developed courses; • jointly developing new courses; • sharing facilities such as libraries and learning centres; • sharing regional centres for learner registration, distribution of study material, and examinations; • jointly delivering programmes; • collaborating in research.

Quality Criterion	**10.5**	In the organization of consortia for programme development or delivery, structured contractual relationships are formed to protect the interests of all parties including the learners.

This collaborative approach is facilitated by a contractual arrangement set up between the two Law Faculties at the respective universities. It is a straight financial transaction whereby Stellenbosch buys in the expertise of the professor. This collaborative relationship is seen to be both cost-effective and promoting quality. Outsourcing delivery is used as a strategy for providing education in a specialist field which Stellenbosch University would otherwise not have had the capacity to offer. The result is therefore one in which through the collaboration on the joint development and delivery of programmes/courses, the ultimate quality of the qualification as a whole is enriched.

A similar arrangement exists between the University of Stellenbosch and the Bremen University Law Faculty in Germany. The LLM International Trade Law Programme Convenor and Professor in International Business Transactions teaches one of the LLM modules in Bremen each year. Closer to home, the Law Faculties at the three Western Cape universities, University of Stellenbosch, University of the Western Cape and the University of Cape Town have entered into a collaborative agreement whereby students registered for a course work LLM at any one of the three universities, may elect to do a module at either or both of the other universities.

The importance of language support for students whose first language is not English

Learner Support

Given that the LLM is a higher level postgraduate degree targeting professionally employed people, it is probably fairly safe to make certain assumptions regarding academic support, namely that these students have been through at least five years of previous study (LLB) and that they can therefore take responsibility for their own needs and are able to be proactive in requesting support when necessary. In general, it has been found that this is so.

Yet, in the self-evaluation process undertaken by the Law Faculty in 2003, a concern was raised regarding the language ability of students on the LLM in International Trade Law programme. As already mentioned, the language of instruction on this programme is English and the students are required to write the research report in English. However, more than 50% of the students are not first language English speakers (this includes those whose first language is Afrikaans). Unfortunately, many lack the English language skills to write proficiently.

It was noted that this problem places both the students and the lecturers involved under enormous pressure as students struggle to produce the required reports and lecturers have to spend extended amounts of time on marking and reworking reports with students.

The university has a Language Centre, but it offers tutoring of English language skills only to foreign students such as the German students on the face-to-face LLM programme. In terms of learner support, the quality criteria specifically call for early identification of problems. However, by the university's own admission, this has not been done in respect of language support. To remedy the situation, the Department of International Trade Law has also suggested the following:

- Entry level tests for English additional language speakers to facilitate early identification of inadequate writing skills for unassisted completion of research projects;
- Language courses focusing on writing skills provided by the University;
- A University facility that will assist students to improve their written work before it is handed in for assessment.

In the context of South African higher education in general and distance education in particular, the question of language is clearly one that needs additional investigation. In this case study, the issue of language serves to underscore the importance of appropriate academic support for students as a key factor contributing to the student's having a fair chance of succeeding - even in a high level postgraduate qualification.

The significant difference between pass and throughput rates

While the focus of this subsection deals with some of the reasons for the significant difference between pass and throughput rates in this programme, it might be useful to set out briefly the assessment procedures and processes used so as to contextualize the issues pertaining to success rates on this programme.

Brief Overview of Assessment Procedures

The assessment strategy for the LLM in International Trade Law programme offered by distance education includes the following:

- One assignment for each of the four modules (each assignment is approximately 2 000 words);
- One written open-book examination at the end of each of the four modules; and
- A research project of 10 000 - 15 000 words to be completed by each student after successful completion of the course work. This research task is weighted to be equivalent to a whole module. There is no time limit placed on completion of the research report.

Graduation is dependent on successful completion of all of the above.

Quality Criterion	**6.4**	There is a range of formative and summative assessment tasks and methods which ensure that all learning outcomes are validly assessed.

The assignments afford an opportunity for formative assessment. Each student receives detailed written feedback on their assignments and the lecturer also writes a commentary noting general issues and in some instances

model answers are also provided. These are distributed to all students. Lecturers use the lecture session as an opportunity for giving feedback on assignments. The assignments count for 40% and the examinations count 60% of the final mark.

Quality Criterion	**6.14**	There are clear procedures to receive, record, process, and turn around assignments within a timeframe that allows learners to benefit from formative feedback prior to the submission of further assessment tasks.

The professor responsible for delivery of the International Commercial Arbitration module said that he spent two full days marking and preparing commentary on each assignment. So even though, at a first glance, a 2 000 word assignment might appear to be rather little at master's level, the assignments are in effect problem-based legal case studies that require a succinct legal opinion. The reading and preparation that is required to produce these assignments is clearly as important as the actual written formulation.

All students commented on the usefulness of the feedback received on assignments and said that it also served as excellent support for examination preparation. The examination at the end of each module serves as a strategy for summative assessment.

Success Rate

The success rate of students on a programme can be understood in two broad ways:

1. **As the course/module pass rate** - the number of students that pass a particular course or module within a given programme.
2. **As the programme throughput rate** - the number of students within a particular student cohort that successfully complete an entire programme. In this case study, throughput has been calculated on the basis of two student cohorts, the 1999 and 2000 intake. Although the LLM is considered to be a two year, part-time programme, in both instances an additional two years has been factored in on the assumption that students on this programme are all in fulltime employment in demanding professional positions and thus have significant time constraints. It is therefore reasonable to allow more time for completion. So a period of four years has been allocated for the calculation of throughput results (also remembering that in fact the Law Department itself places no time constraints on the completion of the research report).

The following tables show both kinds of success rates in the LLM programme.

Table 1: Module pass rates for two cohorts (1999 and 2001) across all four modules of the LLM in International Trade Law

	International Commercial Arbitration (1 Module)			Public Law Aspects of International Trade (1 Module)			International Business Transactions (Results of 2 Modules combined)		
	No of students enrolled	No that passed	Total %	No of students enrolled	No that passed	Total %	No of students enrolled	No that passed	Total %
1999	43	39	**91%**	41	34	**82%**			
2000							59	46	**78%**
2001	25	22	**88%**	36	23	**64%**			
2002							42	29	**69%**

Note: The course pass rate is calculated by comparing the enrolment figure with the final percentage number of students that pass the given module.

Table 2: LLM in International Trade Law programme throughput rates for two cohorts (1999 and 2000)

Date of enrolment	No of students enrolled	No of students successfully completed by 2003	Total %
1999	41	19	47. 5%
2000	20	73	5%

Note: The programme throughput rate is calculated by comparing the enrolment figures in 1999 and 2000 respectively and with the final percentage number of students that successfully complete the whole LLM programme by 2003.

It can be seen from the tables that the course/module pass rates on the LLM programme are significantly higher than programme throughput rates.

A significant difference between pass and throughput rates is not uncommon in distance education. It is a cause for concern because it could reflect on the quality of the programme - that it does not keep track of students sufficiently well or provide sufficient guidance or support for the more difficult modules/components. However, pass/throughput rate differences could simply be a reflection of the greater flexibility offered to students through the use of distance delivery. Students might not have the time to do more than one course at a time, or might want to take only certain courses so as to qualify for certain work-based promotions, or because they are interested only in those courses rather than the whole degree.

In the LLM programme, while the difference between course pass rates and programme throughput might seem large, it is in fact not as significant as it seems. Differences between pass and throughput rates in many distance education programmes are typically even larger than the ones reflected in this case study (for example, throughput rates on many longer

programmes, especially at the dedicated distance institutions, may be well under 10%). In addition, the reason for the difference can largely be attributed to the student's purpose for studying (or, in a few instances, non-payment of fees), rather than failure of the programme to track or support students.

Students interviewed all reflected their satisfaction with the quality of the programme and felt that they had attained the intended outcomes.

Quality Criterion	**13.4**	Learners and recent graduates are generally satisfied with the programme (in particular it learner support and assessment practices) and its staff.

The programme has also been evaluated and the academic and professional community is satisfied with its quality.

Quality Criterion	**13.3**	Expert peers/professional bodies are satisfied with the relevance and quality of learning achieved by learners on the programme.

As all students are practising attorneys or advocates, it appears that they are more concerned about gaining the knowledge and skills required to practise in this field than in obtaining the qualification. Despite successfully completing the four modules, they defer completion of the research component indefinitely, and therefore never obtain the LLM qualification.

Quality Criterion	**13.5**	Employers/ the professions/ the community (as appropriate) are satisfied with the quality of the graduates from the programme.

Also of interest is the fact that when compared, there was no significant difference between the success rate of the LLM offered through distance education and the LLM offered residentially. This supports the notion that the difference is attributable not to quality differences in mode of delivery, but rather to relevance to professional need.

However, the relatively small numbers of students that complete the programme successfully are a cause for concern for a providing institution, if not for its students. The per student cost of the programme design and delivery automatically rises in inverse proportion to the number of students that successfully complete the programme. Additionally, the state subsidy paid out for throughput is forfeited. So although pass, throughput and retention rates are monitored, and are proportionally not as bad as in some distance education programmes, the difficulty does need to be addressed.

Conclusion

In examining some selected aspects of programme design and delivery this case study focused on aspects of good practice as well as problematizing a number of related issues. Overall, the research clearly demonstrates that the LLM in International Trade Law is a good example of a quality distance education programme, responsive to a clearly identifiable need.

The use of the particular range of media is appropriate given the nature of the programme which requires the expert input of the lecturer to mediate a strongly text-driven programme. The use of the satellite technology for this purpose facilitates access to mature, professionally employed students that are spread across the country, providing an opportunity for highly specialized professional development that is directly relevant to the workplace.

Although this medium does have the potential to be used interactively, allowing for dialogue between student and lecturer, it was noted that this aspect of the technology may be under-utilised. While student respondents remarked on the fact that this medium helped to 'take the distance out of distance education' they also reflected that they still feel intimidated by the technology and the notion that they 'might make a fool of themselves and that so many other students around the country would hear'. It therefore seems that despite the careful scaffolding of the delivery in this programme, the lack of opportunity for students to share ideas with one another is an area that could be improved on, possibly by setting up some kind of e-mail discussion group.

The collaborative approach to design and delivery on the LLM programme, in this case the buy-in of expertise from another higher education institution, has enriched the quality of the programme considerably in a cost effective way. In addition, the relationship which has been set up between the three universities in the Western Cape serves as a particularly imaginative model for regional collaboration on small enrolment specialist courses.

Given South Africa's history of poor language teaching at school level and the multilingual nature of our country, issues around students' language ability need to be carefully examined. Even on this higher post graduate programme targeting qualified legal practitioners, the students' lack of English writing skills has been identified by academic staff as a problem. Some measures have been suggested for dealing with this issue in the context of this programme. However, the importance of language support in distance education as a whole needs attention.

The often significant differences that typically occur between acceptable course pass rates and very low programme throughput rates in South African distance education programmes are a cause for concern. While the differences on the LLM programme are not necessarily significant, it remains an important but unresolved issue in the delivery of this programme.

Endnotes

1 Council on Higher Education. (2004). *Enhancing the Contribution of Distance Higher Education: Report of an investigation led by the South African Institute for Distance Education.* Pretoria: Council on Higher Education

2 The case study researcher, in addition to interviews and document review, observed two satellite broadcast lectures.