Rhodes University Online Education Policy

Policy Volume	Academic Teaching & Learning
Policy Chapter	Teaching & Learning Policies
Responsible Committee/Unit/Division/Faculty	Teaching & Learning Committee
Responsible Chairperson/Director/Manager	DVC: Academic and Student Affairs
Dates of First and Subsequent Council Approvals	New Policy
Policy Approval Pathways (e.g. committee, Senex, Senate, Council)	Teaching & Learning Committee →Faculties → IPC Shape & Size Committee → Senate → Council
Revision History: Approved Reviews	N/A
Review Cycle (e.g. every 2/5/7 years etc.)	3 years
Next Review Date	2022

1. POLICY PARTICULARS

1.1. Policy Title	Rhodes University Online Education Policy
1.2. Policy Statement (State in a single paragraph the policy mandate and how this relates to the University Mission and Vision)	Rhodes University is a traditional university located in Makhanda in the Eastern Cape. It is a residential institution, and students not in residence live in reasonable proximity to campus. The Institutional Development Plan 2018 – 2022 notes a headcount enrolment target of 8367 for 2018, of which 2430 (or approximately 29%) is postgraduate. An important purpose of the University is to provide face to face tuition at the undergraduate level. Although it is acknowledged that total headcount must grow over time (the IDP identifying a target of 9500 for 2022), growth at postgraduate level is a particular focus. The primary mode of the provision at the undergraduate level is contact. Over the past two decades, Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) have become an integral part of teaching and learning practices in higher education. Many young people are proficient in the use of technologies and social media. This should be harnessed to engage with students about their learning outside of formal classroom spaces. Courses are increasingly designed by combining or blending face-to-face facilitation of learning with the online provision of opportunities for student engagement with university teachers, their peers, resources, tasks and assignments through the institutional learning management system and various other digital platforms. As many of those interested in pursuing further studies at postgraduate level have already entered the world of work and as Rhodes University occupies a fairly remote location relatively far from major urban areas, it is likely that the aim of increasing student enrolment numbers, especially at the postgraduate level, will best be achieved by drawing on various forms of online education provision.
1.3. Reason for Policy (What this policy aims to achieve)	The purpose of this Policy is to guide the provision of online education of courses and programmes for Rhodes University students. Currently, this provision is envisaged as occurring primarily through online or blended modes. The Policy, therefore, aims to ensure that, in the case of blended provision there is coherence between face-to-face and online aspects of any course/programme and that both modes of delivery are designed such that students are guided towards the exit level outcomes of a programme effectively and efficiently. The Rhodes University Policy on Curriculum Development and Review sets out the principles to be used in curriculum development for all courses/programmes offered by the Institution. All programmes involving any form of online education provision will need to draw on these principles. One principle involves the need for 'alignment' whereby all elements of the programme (for example purpose, learning outcomes, associated assessment criteria, learning materials, pedagogical approaches, assessment tasks) are congruent and that they support students' attainment of learning outcomes. Assessment needs to be aligned with the Rhodes University Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning. Online provision should be evaluated in line with the principles contained in the Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Course Design.
1.4. Policy Objective/s (What are the measurable objectives of this policy)	To ensure that: ● The University provides high-quality education (courses and/or programmes); consistent with Rhodes University's mission and vision, to diverse students through an environment where learning may take place both face-to-face and through various forms of online education provision appropriate to the level of study. ● The University meets the higher education and professional development needs of students through well-designed courses taught and assessed in ways that enable students to meet the set outcomes. ● Students are enabled to fulfil their degree requirements through forms of provision appropriate to their level of study. ● The University provides ongoing support to both students and lecturers for online, face-to-face and blended learning.

1.5. People affected by this Policy (e.g. All units of the University)	All teaching staff All students Information and Technology Services Division Institutional Research, Planning and Quality Promotion (IPRQP) Division of Student Affairs CHERTL
1.5. Who should read this Policy (People who need to heed this policy to fulfil their duties)	All teaching staff All students
1.6. Implementers of this Policy (Who will manage the implementation of this policy)	Registrar, HoDs, all teaching members of the academic staff, CHERTL, Information and Technologies Services Division and IRPQP
1.7 Website address/link for this Policy	https://www.ru.ac.za/institutionalplanningunit/policies/policiesa-z/

2. RELATED DOCUMENTS, FORMS AND TOOLS

(University Policies, Protocols and Documents (such as rules/policies/protocols/guidelines related to this policy)

Relevant Legislation (Legislation/Regulatory requirements/Organisational Reports – name these)
Rhodes Statute Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework Constitution of RSA National Qualifications Act (1997) Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications Policy (2015) Policy on Provision of Short Courses White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) Higher Education Act: Policy for the provision of distance education in South African universities in the context of an integrated post-school system (2014) Draft Policy Framework for the Provision of Open Learning and Distance Education in South African Post-school Education and Training (2017)
Related Policies
The Rhodes University Policy on Online Education needs to be read in conjunction with the following: Rhodes University Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning Rhodes University Policy on Curriculum Development and Review Rhodes University Policy on External Examining Rhodes University Plagiarism Policy Rhodes University Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning Rhodes University Policy on Short Courses Rhodes University Quality Assurance Framework Rhodes University Language Policy Acceptable Use Policy including Network policy and Password Policy Database Management Policy Emergency Access to ICT Accounts & Information Policy Emergency Access Policy Web Policy Collection Development Policy (2011)

Library Display Policy (2000)
Related Protocols
Brief Guide to the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses
Brief Guide for Designing a Curriculum and Constructing a Course Document
Copyright & Takedown
Public Acceptable Use Policy
Guidelines to the use of email
Identity Framework
Acceptable Use Examples
Guideline to Hardware and Software Support Services
Guidelines to network connection
Guidelines to password
Educational Technology Strategy
Staff & Student Data Privacy Statement (forthcoming)
Process Flowchart for Applications for New Programmes
Forms and Tools (documents to be completed in support of this policy implementation)
Policy template

3. POLICY DEFINITIONS

(Technical or Conceptual terms used in the policy)

No	TERM	DEFINITION
3.1	Programme	Refers to all the learning activities designed to enable a student to meet the outcomes necessary for the award of a qualification.
3.2	Distance education/learning	Distance learning is a learning arrangement that allows students to study remotely without having face-to-face instruction at a designated location. Structured learning materials for independent study may be designed as part of or to complement campus-based contact teaching. In the past, distance education was facilitated by postal correspondence. Distance education is now also offered via online learning platforms.
3.3	Online education provision	Refers to the use of educational technologies to mediate the curriculum, and can refer to offerings where learning activities take place fully online as well as through the use of blended or mixed methodologies.
3.4	Contact mode or face-to-face provision	A mode of teaching and learning that occurs on the Institution's premises (or a site of the Institution) where students interact face to face with teachers, tutors or supervisors, in lectures, tutorials, seminars, practicals, etc.
3.5	Blended provision	Comprises a combination of online education and face-to-face provision.
3.6	Mode	The mode of a course describes the dominant mix of methods of delivering, interacting, and mediating the curriculum. Rhodes University will use the DHET definitions as a basis for describing the mode of delivery.
3.7	Qualification	Refers to the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by a higher education institution.

3.8	Course	Refers to one of the following: a credit-bearing component attached to a qualification; or a non-credit-bearing offering used for the purpose of continuing education and professional development. Accredited courses are identified by a course code in the university handbook. Courses can be broken down into smaller modules or units addressing specific topics or taught by different individuals.
3.9	Online, on-site learning versus online, off-site learning	Online, on-site teaching and learning refers to the use of educational technologies to mediate the curriculum and can refer to offerings where learning activities take place fully online as well as the use of blended or mixed methodologies within physical campus locations while online, off-site learning involves the above, but students access materials while off-campus.

4. PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THIS POLICY

Rhodes University strives to carry out the following, as far as is reasonably practicable:

4.1 Ensure that online provision complements face-to-face teaching in a coherent fashion so that the best aspects of both modalities are drawn upon, and risks are mitigated and managed within the framework of the overall programme

4.2 Ensure that all programmes and courses offered intending to make use of various forms of online education provision are scrutinised and approved by academic governance structures

4.3. Ensure that support is available for staff wanting to design and teach courses/programmes using online and/or blended modes.

5. DIRECTIVES FOR IMPLEMENTING THIS POLICY

(Actions and processes by which the objectives of the policy will be achieved.)

5.1. Delivery of online education and blended provision
- The design of a programme, including online and blended learning, will follow the principles laid out in the Rhodes University Policy on Curriculum Design and Review.
- Online and blended learning will be considered as integral to the design of the programme. The same academic standards for quality and other requirements for traditional courses apply to courses that make use of online education provision.
- Support for programme design will be available from the Educational Technology specialists located in the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL).
- CHERTL will not provide support for courses whose design has been outsourced to private providers or that are offered on platforms not normally supported by the Unit or the I&TS.
- Permission to offer a new programme incorporating online (both online on-site and online, off-site learning) provision will be sought via Faculty Boards, the Institutional Planning Committee, Senate and Council and will be subject to scrutiny regarding the availability of resources, including information and communication technologies. A programme will only be submitted for accreditation once approval has been obtained via these structures. Furthermore, application for DHET PQM approval and CHE accreditation must be successfully processed before offering such new programmes.
- No special permission is required to change the provision of an existing course/programme/short course from fully face-to-face to blended on-site teaching and learning. It is important to ensure that online components of all courses are designed, facilitated and assessed in educationally sounds ways. Support for such course/programme design will be provided by the Educational Technology specialists in CHERTL.
- Correspondence and communication between academics/tutors and students should be from official platforms.

5.2. Expectations on the University, its staff, and students

Learning is a partnership between staff across the University and students. There is a shared set of expectations between staff and students, and the following apply specifically in relation to online education:

5.2.1 Departments offering online courses/programmes shall ensure that students are provided with:
- structured opportunities to learn to use the various online course delivery applications/tools prior to the official commencement of a course or programme;
- study materials for a course or programme that meet the expectations of Rhodes University in respect of the quality of teaching and learning;
- an appropriate contingency plan, which would come into operation in the event of failure of the designed mode of delivery;
- from the outset of the student's study, at least one identified contact person, either local or remote through email, telephone and post, who can give constructive feedback on academic performance;
- information about when and how they may contact staff, a clear schedule for the delivery of their study materials and for assessment of their work;
- regular opportunities for communication and engagement with teaching staff
- a clear and realistic explanation of the expectations placed upon them for the study of the programme or module, and for the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning.
- details of the minimum technical requirements for the computer facilities required to access the online materials or engage in online course-related activities;
- appropriate opportunities to give formal feedback on their experience of the programme;
- access to all relevant academic policies, protocols and guidelines including the Rhodes University Online Education Policy.

5.2.2. Faculties shall ensure that:
- courses are offered by members of the teaching staff who have appropriate skills, and opportunities to receive appropriate training, development and support;
- all aspects of assessment are provided in line with the institutional Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning.

5.2.3. Students shall ensure that:
- they have regular and reliable access to the internet with appropriate firewall protection and a computer that meets the minimum technical requirements set by the programme;
- when not in attendance, they make their own arrangements for IT support to resolve technical failures relating to their internet service provider, firewall protection and their computer hardware and software as the University can only answer queries or provide support for University-owned equipment;
- when not in attendance they seek support when necessary, such as that normally provided by their lecturers and units such as Students Affairs; such support will be provided wherever possible and practicable.
- they understand the basic terms and descriptions used in computing so that they can follow instructions about how to use their computer to study and communicate;
- they engage with the learning materials and mode of delivery;
- they conform to the schedule for the programme delivery and assessment, monitor the receipt of materials and alert the University if materials cannot be accessed;
- they take responsibility for developing their IT skills, where appropriate;
- they regularly check their email accounts to which essential information may be sent by the University.

5.2.4. The Information and Technologies Services Division shall ensure that:
- institutionally supported systems have the capabilities for the design of educationally sound online courses and programmes;
- they resolve technical failures relating to institutional internet provision and firewall protection;
- delivery systems for the online and blended provision of courses/programmes are secure, reliable, fit for its purpose, and have an appropriate availability and life expectancy;
- a help-desk facility is available to students, whether they live and learn on-campus or conduct a large part of their studies while off-campus.

5.2.5. CHERTL will ensure that:
- they provide professional development opportunities for online and blended provision, including consultation about course design, assessment and the evaluation of teaching and courses;

- they provide opportunities for consultation and advice regarding the development and use of specialised digital materials and other media appropriate to various forms of online education provision;
- Educational Technologies specialists provide technical assistance to lecturers and students who make use of institutionally funded and supported educational platforms and tools.

5.2.5 The Library will ensure that:

- academic materials are accessible by authorised students through the web from anywhere at any time;
- simultaneous access to the same electronic documents is available when necessary.
- access to content in different formats (text, audio, video, animation) as required for teaching and learning is available;
- preservation of electronic study material/documents is facilitated.

5.3. Assessment strategies

Assessment is integral to teaching and learning and has the capacity, not only to measure learning but also to develop learning. It is therefore important that the assessments for online and blended learning courses/programmes are well planned. It is imperative that online assessments and feedback practices are conducted in principled ways that are in line with the Rhodes University Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning. Course designers and teaching staff should consider ways in which educational technologies can be used to design formative assessment tasks that contribute to students' development of disciplinary knowledge and practices.

Strategies for authentication of student identities (such as personal logins on RUconnected) for assessment purposes should always be in place and enhanced when necessary. Oral assessments (via Skype, Zoom or any other emerging technology) with internal and external examiners should be arranged where feasible or necessary as a way of authenticating student identities and to complement written submission/s.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

(Roles and responsibilities of Key personal/Divisions/Faculties/Departments)

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
ROLE 1 Heads of Departments	Heads of Departments are responsible for gaining permission from Faculty Boards, the IPC, Senate and Council before a programme is submitted for accreditation.
ROLE 2 Course Coordinators	Course coordinators are responsible for following the principles outlined in the Rhodes University Policy on Curriculum Development and Review as they design programmes incorporating online and blended provision. They are also responsible for ensuring that the assessment plans of programmes are in line with the principles of the Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning and that courses are reviewed on a regular basis.
ROLE 3 Lecturers and tutors	Lecturers are responsible for the design of courses. Lecturers and tutors are responsible for facilitating courses and providing assistance to registered students.
ROLE 4 CHERTL	CHERTL is responsible for providing professional development opportunities and support for teaching and learning across levels of study and modes of provision. CHERTL can advise and offer consultation to assist lecturers in making appropriate choices in relation to, online course design, facilitation and materials development.
ROLE 5 Human Resources Division	The Human Resources Division is responsible for ensuring that the University employs sufficient academic, administrative and professional staff to ensure the optimal, continuous and consistent delivery of quality online education to students.
ROLE 6 The ITS Division	The Information and Technologies Services Division shall ensure that: • institutionally supported systems have the capabilities for the design of educationally sound online courses and programmes; • students have regular and reliable access to the internet with appropriate firewall protection when on campus;

	- they resolve technical failures relating to the institutional Internet Service Provider and firewall protection on campus; - the tools and technology used in centralised teaching venues are up to date and functional; - the tools and technology used in remote sessions are operational and accessible; - a student help-desk facility is available to both face-to-face and distance learning students via the team of student support technicians; - in conjunction with the Education Technology specialists who will facilitate the adoption of strategy and training in the use of tools, ensure that the latest technology is researched and supported in line with established protocols.
ROLE 7 IRPQP	The Institutional Research, Planning and Quality Promotion Office is responsible for providing support for accreditation of programmes and the quality assurance of courses and programmes.

7. CONTACTS

Area of Concern	Division/Faculty/Department	Telephone	Email
Policy statements, objective and directive	DVC: Academic & Student Affairs		dvc.academic@ru.ac.za
IT-related concerns	Director: I&TS		n.ripley@ru.ac.za
Quality assurance concerns	Director: IRPQP		R.Nnadozie@ru.ac.za
Online education course design and support	CHERTL	8171	Chertl-admin@ru.ac.za

8. POLICY REVIEW PROCEDURE
(Actions and processes by which the policy will be reviewed)

Any changes to this policy may be recommended to the Teaching and Learning Committee. This policy and any subsequent amendments will be published and distributed to all concerned within the University.
Communication of the review process

9. POLICY CONTEXT: RELEVANT DOCUMENTS CITED/CONSULTED/ADOPTED

1	Rhodes University Curriculum Development and Review Policy
2	University of Winchester Distance Education Policy
3	University of South Africa (UNISA) Open Distance Learning Policy
4.	Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: A Good Practice Guide (2014) CHE
4	The Florida State University Distance Learning Policy and Process
5	UCT Online Education Policy
6	2013 DHET White Paper for Post-School Education and Training
7	2014 Policy for the provision of distance education in South African universities in the context of an integrated post-school system
8	2017 Draft Policy Framework for the Provision of Open Learning and Distance Education in South African Post-school Education and Training
9	RU Collection Development Policy (2011)
10	RU Library Display Policy (2000)

LIST OF APPENDICES