STUDENT SUPPORT POLICY

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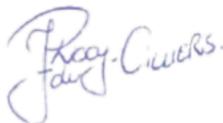
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1.   Introduction

The Da Vinci Institute is an accredited private higher distance education provider offering qualifications on NQF levels five to ten, which are registered on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). This policy forms part of the institutional Integrated Quality Management System and details the principles for ensuring that programme offerings adhere to academic standards and empower students to contribute to the transformation of their communities, society and the economy of the future. This approach is underpinned by the Business-driven Action Learning discourse on the co-creation and distribution of relevant knowledge.

The Da Vinci Institute endeavours to provide a personalised, innovative teaching and supportive learning environment. Students are supported within a partnership framework where, while students take responsibility for their own learning, they are actively supported by The Institute. The intention of this approach is to foster students' independence while also identifying and being highly responsive to individual student needs.

 'Distance learning' represents an approach to learning that focusses on opening access to education and training provision, by utilising a range of resources, free from the limitations and constraints of time and space, offering flexible learning opportunities to students. Distance learning (DL) is linked to developments in information and communication technologies, closely aligned with emerging learning needs and trends relating to information access and application of learning.

2.   Definitions

Term	Definitions
Institution	An organisation - founded for an educational purpose. May also be known as a "provider" of education services.
Management	The body responsible for, and in control of the institution and its processes
Principles	Ideas or propositions that serve as the foundation for a system of beliefs and behaviour that is used to govern the institution
Student	A person enrolled at The Institute
Study period	The period of time in which students are required to undertake studies related to an academic programme
Distance Learning	Distance education is a mode of provision based primarily on a set of teaching and learning strategies (or educational methods) that can be used to overcome spatial and/or transactional distance between educators and students. It avoids the need for students to discover the curriculum by

Term	Definitions
	attending classes frequently and for long periods. Rather, it aims to create a quality learning environment using an appropriate combination of different media, tutorial support, peer group discussion, and practical sessions (DHET, 2014:20).
At-risk student	A student who is disengaged, inactive, not progressing academically or who is at risk of not succeeding in his or her studies.
Student Support Specialist	A person who provides guidance related to personal and study-related problems.
Referral process	The procedure for the student/parent/lecturer/other person to inform the Student Support Specialist that the student requires support, and for the Student Support Specialist to involve other parties such as professional specialists (psychologists, psychiatrists, etc.)

3.   Regulatory Framework

This policy is benchmarked against, and should be read in the context of the relevant legislation, government policies and regulations underpinning the principles against which institutional policies, processes and standard operational procedures are developed, implemented and maintained.

Relevant legislation

 I.   Council on Higher Education: Qualification sub-framework 2013
 II.   Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 as amended by Act 39 of 2008
 III. Higher Education Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South Africa No. 535 of 2014
 IV.   Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF): Government Gazette Vol. 481, July 2005
 V.   National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008
 VI.   Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-school System: Government Gazette No. 37811, Vol. 535, 7 July 2014

Applicable Da Vinci documents:

 I.   D19 - Assessment and Moderation Policy
 II.   D18 - Invigilated Assessment Policy
 III. E5 - Appeals Policy
 IV.   D4 - Teaching and Learning Policy
 V.   E4 - Student Representatives, Membership and Termination Policy
 VI.   Student Contract

VII.   D14 - Library and Learning Resources Centre Policy

    a.   B14 - Disability Policy

4. Scope

The Student Support policy describes the conditions supporting and governing:

4.1   All registered students in all years of study

4.2   All staff involved in student support.

5. Purpose

The purpose of the Student Support policy is to provide guidance to students who seek or require institutional support to succeed in their studies. The policy further provides guidance to staff regarding their responsibilities to ensure that adequate support is provided to meet student needs so that students can achieve their full academic potential. The policy focusses on the early identification of at-risk students and the actions required to respond to personal and academic issues that could adversely affect students' educational achievement.

6. Distance Learning Students

Da Vinci's distance-learning (DL) students demonstrate the following characteristics:

6.1.   Students are likely to be employed while studying

6.2.   Students are typically adult learners rather than recent school leavers

6.3.   Students learn mostly remotely through technology-mediated support but may attend face-to-face tuition support workshops

6.4.   Students study mostly after hours as opposed to during normal office hours

6.5.   Students do not engage face-to-face with other students on a daily basis, but engage with other students via technology-mediated platforms

7. Student Support Services

The Institute offers the following support services available to all students:

7.1.   Academic support that is provided by qualified academic staff

7.2.   Administrative support that is provided by the Heads of Programmes, Programme Co-ordinators and Programme Conveners

7.3.   Learning, motivational and psycho-social support from the Student Support Specialist

7.4.   Information Technology (IT) Support provided by the IT helpdesk (refer to A7 – Communication Policy)

7.5.   Library and Information services provided by Da Vinci's Information Officer (refer to D14 – Library and Learning Resources Centre Policy)

7.6.   Research support (refer to D9- Research Framework)

7.7.   Financial Support that is provided by the Accounts Department

8.   Academic Support

Academic Support involves the following:

8.1.   Support for all forms of communication, including, among others, telephone calls, walk-ins, e-mails and faxes from students involving academic queries

8.2.   Support in the form of programme orientation or onboarding for all students, where students also receive Academic Writing support

8.3.   Online and/or face-to-face engagements with the Information Officer on Academic Writing and Referencing and other forms of Information Literacy, including navigating the online Library resources

8.4.   Online and/or face-to-face engagement between lecturers and students regarding module or course content

8.5.   Online and/or face-to-face engagement between lecturers and student regarding assessments and assessment feedback

8.6.   Student feedback and Lecturer feedback are used to inform Institutional processes and practices

8.7.   Students attempting research modules and post-graduate studies are allocated lecturers or supervisors who provide research support including assisting students with a research plan, advising them on methodological choices, feedback regarding work-in-progress and ensuring that they meet the required standards for research reports, dissertations and theses

8.8.   Programme Conveners in conjunction with lecturers identify 'at-risk' students who are then referred to the Student Support Specialist for intervention

9.   ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Administrative Support involves the following:

9.1.   Receiving and processing enquiries from prospective students to facilitate the enrolment process

9.2.   Sending programme and module-specific information to prospective students

9.3.   Providing guidance for and resolving queries regarding the Online registration platform

9.4.   Providing guidance on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process for those candidates who may be considered for an alternative form of entry to a programme, should they not meet the regulatory and institutional entry requirements

9.5. Onboarding and orientating students in the use of the Learning Management System

9.6. Administering and responding to queries regarding the educational enabled technologies, such as the Learning Management System and the online invigilated assessment platform

9.7. Provision of IT Support

9.8. Scheduling of Tuition Support sessions

9.9. Support for all forms of communication, including, among others, telephone calls, walk-ins, e-mails and faxes from students involving administrative queries

9.10. Support in any appeals process

9.11. Support through the complaints process

9.12. A dedicated Student Support Specialist provides coaching to all students in terms of their studies, learning styles and time management skills.

10. Financial Support

Financial Support involves providing the following:

10.1. Flexible payment options

10.2. Internships

10.3. Learnerships

11. Principles of Student Support

The Institute's student support initiatives are guided by the following principles:

11.1. Every student and his or her academic progress is important to The Institute. The Programme Conveners make all efforts to get to know the students individually

11.2. Student support is central to the activities of the Institute

11.3. Technology will be used to enhance administrative and educational experiences but will never replace human contact

11.4. Accurate, timely and up-to-date information will be provided to students

11.5. Accommodate all students including those with special needs (refer to B14 – Disability Policy).

Student support at The Institute includes:

11.6. Technology mediated Interaction on the Online Learning Management System

11.7. Providing elective tuition support sessions through face-to-face or technologically mediated means

11.8. Providing students with well-designed, fit-for-purpose courseware

11.9. Regular proactive follow-up interventions with students, such as academic and emotional support sessions, and early detection of "at-risk" students i.e. a student who is disengaged or who is not coping with the work-load

11.10. Assisting students during their studies to link their studies to their roles and functions at the workplace and/or the broader community

12. Identifying At-Risk Students

At-risk students, which includes RPL students, will be identified and monitored. The students' names will also be marked on the Institute's Academic Reports. Once identified, the PCon will contact the student support specialist who will consult with the student and decide on what kind of assistance the student requires. A record trail will be kept by the PCon who will report on the students' progress.

Students are considered at-risk when one or more of the following applies:

12.1. The student has failed multiple assessments

12.2. The student fails to submit assessments on time

12.3. The student does not meet deadlines and/or has outstanding assessments

12.4. The student does not submit work-in-progress for supervisor feedback and input on a regular basis and is not making significant progress with his or her studies as indicated in the supervisor's quarterly progress reports on the student

12.5. The student demonstrates difficulty in mastering academic writing and referencing

12.6. The student who requests on-going assistance with their academic work without evidence of significant improvement

12.7. The student self-identifies as being "at-risk" due to personal or professional challenges and is falling behind with their work

12.8. The student admitted through the RPL processes

12.9. The student who applies for a deferral of studies

12.10. The student who is resuming his or her studies after a deferral

12.11. The student who is not engaged and does not take part in online discussions or peer driven discussions.

13. Remedial Action

The provision of support is to promote academic engagement. The following remedial actions will apply if a student is identified as being at risk:

13.1. Da Vinci will provide support by introducing interventions and monitoring the effectiveness of the interventions

13.2. All at-risk students will receive additional student support from a Programme Convener

13.3. Encourage inactive students to resume their studies earnestly

13.4. For students who fail assessments, the Programme Convener reviews the marker feedback and contacts the student who may need additional engagement with the lecturer or be referred to the Student Support Specialist

13.5. For students who do not meet deadlines and do not submit on time, or who have outstanding assessments, the Programme Convener refers them to the Student Support Specialist

13.6. Students who have difficulty mastering academic writing and/or or referencing, the Programme Convener refers the student to the Information Officer

13.7. Students who request academic assistance, may be referred to a specific lecturer for coaching or to the Student Support Specialist depending on the nature of the request

13.8. Students who self-identify as at-risk due to personal or professional challenges are provided with mentoring and oversight activities which assist students through their studies and research, by referring them to area specialist(s)

13.9. For students who receive Credit Transfer, the Programme Convener tracks their progress and if need be, refers the student to the Student Support Specialist for further consultation

13.10. Where students are applying for deferral of studies, the Programme Convener refers the student to the Student Support Specialist

14. Counselling

The Institute provides counselling support for students experiencing psychological problems, trauma, normal developmental challenges, difficulty in adjusting to the study environment, emotional problems, health problems, academic issues or any concern with which the student might need help. Students will be assisted based upon short-term, time-limited counselling that emphasises life-skills. Consultations are documented. Students with more specialised counselling needs will be provided with advice to consult the relevant professionals. If the student is referred to an external resource, it is the student's responsibility to schedule the appointment with the relevant practitioner.

14.1. Counselling Process

The Institute has a dedicated Student Support Specialist, referred to here as the Counsellor, who provides counselling sessions for all students in terms of the challenges and issues listed above. The criteria for the counselling process are as follows:

14.1.1. Informing all students of the counselling process
14.1.2. Detailing the specified roles of the counsellor and counselee in the counselling relationship

14.1.3. Fostering positive well-being by encouraging students from a holistic perspective; academically, socially, emotionally and physically

14.1.4. Imparting individual and group counselling by offering guidance, care and support in challenging situations for students. In circumstances where the Student Support Specialist is of the opinion that he/she is unable to assist the student, the student will be referred to the relevant practitioner

14.1.5. Ensuring that student affairs are kept confidential except when the lives of other students could be endangered

14.1.6. Providing assistance in times of crisis

14.1.7. Keeping student files are confidential and secure

14.1.8. Formalising the documentation for the external referral process.

14.2. Referrals

14.2.1. The focus of providing counselling at The Institute is to offer short-term counselling; should a student require more intense therapy, then he/she would be referred to an external professional specialist.

14.2.2. Should a student be referred to an external professional or organisation, it is essential to follow-up so that the student can be tracked and further supported by The Institute if necessary.

14.3. Confidentiality

14.3.1. Each student is entitled to privacy in his/her session with the counsellor. Confidentiality is a primary characteristic of counselling

14.3.2. No private information that is shared between a counsellor and a counselee may be communicated to other parties without the written consent of the counselee – except in situations where the counselee may be involved in self-harm (in particular attempted suicide or suicidal threats), or if there is a real danger of harming others. Counsellors are legally and ethically required to address these kinds of imminent safety risks, even if it involves breaking confidentiality. An attempt will always be made by the counsellor to work together with the counselee in this regard in order to show sensitivity to the situation

14.3.3. Any issues concerning self-harm (in particular suicide threats or tendencies), or potential harm towards others must be reported to the Executive Dean, or, if not available, to the Registrar or another member of EXCO. In those life-threatening situations only, is the notion of confidentiality breached as it is regarded to be in the best interests of the student.

14.4. Documentation

14.4.1 All counselling that takes place must be documented in the counsellor's confidential file by noting the following:

a. The date of the interview session
b. Name of the student
c. Student number
d. Their year of study
e. Programme enrolled for
f. Person who referred the student
g. Nature of problem or issue
h. Action taken.

14.4.2.   The Counsellor must submit a report to the relevant Head of Programme, Programme Coordinator or Executive Dean including the following information:

a. The number of students counselled
b. Their year of study
c. The programme enrolled for
d. Time spent on each counselling session
e. The focus of the problem can be noted as being personal, social or academic.
f. Any recommendations for review

15.   Review of This Policy

Regular review and amendment of this policy will be done in line with the approved institutional and regulatory requirements, when required or every three years. This will take place in consultation with the relevant quality assurance structures at departmental and institutional level, under the auspices of the official custodian of this policy, namely the Executive Dean.