Strategic Plan

for the Centre for Academic Development

2016- 2020

for the Vaal University of Technology

By

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Introduction

The Centre for Academic Development (CAD) was launched with the appointment of the new Executive Director at the end of 2011 by the Vaal University of Technology. The CAD was

created in response to the ambitious plans the university has concerning a number of key objectives as set out in *VUT's Strategic Plan 2016-2020*, which are to:

- Increase the adoption of eLearning and contribute to the success and engagement of students
- Enhance the student experience, skills, and satisfaction to increase retention and throughput
- Enable greater access and flexibility in the delivery of quality teaching and learning
- Encourage a culture of innovation and continuous improvement in learning and teaching
- Establish an environment that will encourage uptake and embed eLearning in core practice
- Support the institutions goal to deliver a "student-centered" learning experience

The above mentioned objectives are aligned with VUT'S vision to be "a university that leads in innovative knowledge and quality technology education." The objectives also align with the VUT mission, which is "to produce top quality employable and entrepreneurial graduates who can make an impact to society" by:

- Adopting cutting-edge technology and teaching methods
- Producing a scholarly environment conducive to learning and innovation, and
- Developing a Curriculum that meets the needs of society in Africa and beyond.

The CAD's vision is to be a leading research-informed centre that promotes creative and innovative teaching and learning experiences by developing all students and staff to reach their optimum potential both locally and globally. The mission of the centre is to optimize the maximum potential of the university by developing transformative, innovative curricula with stakeholders (academia, industry and professional bodies) utilizing and integrating appropriate traditional and digital technologies to enhance the teaching and learning experiences and practices. As a leading centre we will creatively enhance academic development through learning, student, tutor, language, staff, and cognitive brain development. Interventions will be implemented through proper research, peer, self-evaluations and assessment. Furthermore, we will strive to develop academic leadership by providing training programmes that will optimize academic potential. The values of the staff employed in the centre should reflect the following:

1. Tenacity – Striving with self-confidence through planning and management for envisioned goals
2. Fostering – Creating a nurturing work environment which promotes professionalism
3. Ubuntu – Embracing the uniqueness of each member and the value of human dignity
4. Innovative – Trend setters in teaching and learning

The following through the strategic planning process with all staff in the CAD was considered to be the four strategic objectives:

- To achieve excellence in teaching, learning and assessment the CAD will offer quality programmes, promoting active learning as part of the curriculum to address the multi-faceted needs of academic staff.

- To contribute towards academic leadership transformation the CAD will offer innovative customized leadership development programmes.

- To ensure access and retention for success the CAD will develop and implement quality student-centered programmes.

- To develop and implement teaching, learning, assessment and curricular approach aligned to VUT Teaching and Learning model

Background and Focus of Work

The need for academic development and support arises from the increasing of access to South African higher education since 1994, which has resulted in the admission of a new category of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Cross & Carpentier, 2009) who may also face the additional pressure of being first generation students (De Jager & Van Lingen, 2012; Higher Education News, 2012; Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007). It is commonly known that a significant percentage of contemporary students is academically and socially under-prepared for higher education (Scott, et al., 2007). The amalgamation of the traditional and the new has resulted in a diverse student population with a range of distinctive needs and goals. Subsequently, the need to support the transition to university life in the South African higher education context is magnified (Van Schalkwyk, Leibowitz & Van der Merwe, 2009).

The work of the centre aligns itself within the field of academic development and support. Academic development and support can be defined as the enhancement of teaching and learning with a particular emphasis on supporting academic staff and students. Academic Development and support is implemented in five focus areas within the centre. The Center focuses on the following strategic areas:

(1) Academic Staff Evaluation and Development,

(2) First Year Experience

(3) Academic Support

(4) Blended and ELearning

Focus Areas	Definition of the Focus Area

Academic Staff Evaluation and Development	Staff development as a number of developmental and integrated initiatives within the faculties and departments to ensure effective development of academics within a Community of Practice that is more specialized within the discipline. Academic Staff Evaluation aims to fulfil the following objectives : • Establish a framework of guidelines and procedures for regular student evaluation of teaching. • To ensure that the student evaluation of teaching instrument is used appropriately for developmental purposes. • Assist the faculties to monitor and review the quality of teaching. • Assist lecturers to continuously improve the quality of teaching in order to enhance student learning and success.
First Year Experience (FYE)	The FYE begins at the initial engagement of the first year student with the institution. It involves intentional and holistic academic and non-academic initiatives that create a safe and supportive environment. The FYE strives to achieve academic excellence and mutual respect through creating a sense of belonging and participatory learning experiences (VUT FYE working definition, November 2014).
Academic Support within the field of: • **tutor development** • **language development** • **maths, science, engineering and technology** • **learning communities** • **academic literacies development**	(1) Increasing student-to-student interaction, (2) increasing and maintaining faculty-to-student interaction, especially out of class, (3) increasing student involvement and time on campus (4) linking the curriculum and the co-curriculum, (5) increasing academic expectations and levels of academic engagement

	(6) assisting students who have insufficient academic preparation for university.
Blended Learning	Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through delivery of content and instruction via digital and online media with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace.

ELearning is seen as an important element in helping to create a blended learning environment that will be more supportive, engaging, flexible and accessible for students. It is VUT's goal to draw on an appropriate blend of eLearning tools and traditional methods to support its planned transformation of learning and teaching. For VUT, eLearning is a tool that will help the institution achieve its broader objectives as outlined above and secure success for its students.

To ensure access and retention for success the eLearning unit will develop and implement, quality and visually appealing eLearning material. To support the development and implementation of teaching, learning, assessment and a curricular approach aligned to VUT teaching and learning strategy through technology and high quality graphic media. |

Strategy of the CAD

The CAD follows an integrated strategy with programmes, activities, actions and strategies been implemented at a macro, meso and micro level. It aims to:

- Communicate a vision for teaching and learning appropriate to the needs of all VUT students and staff;
- Ensure that the approach to teaching and learning is relevant, innovative and responsive at a national macro, meso and micro level within the institution driven by best practice;
- Act as a framework for policies and plans related to teaching and learning , including a timeline with clear accountabilities for action through which the strategic goals in learning and teaching can be achieved;
- Guide faculties in the development and implementation of their own teaching and learning plans
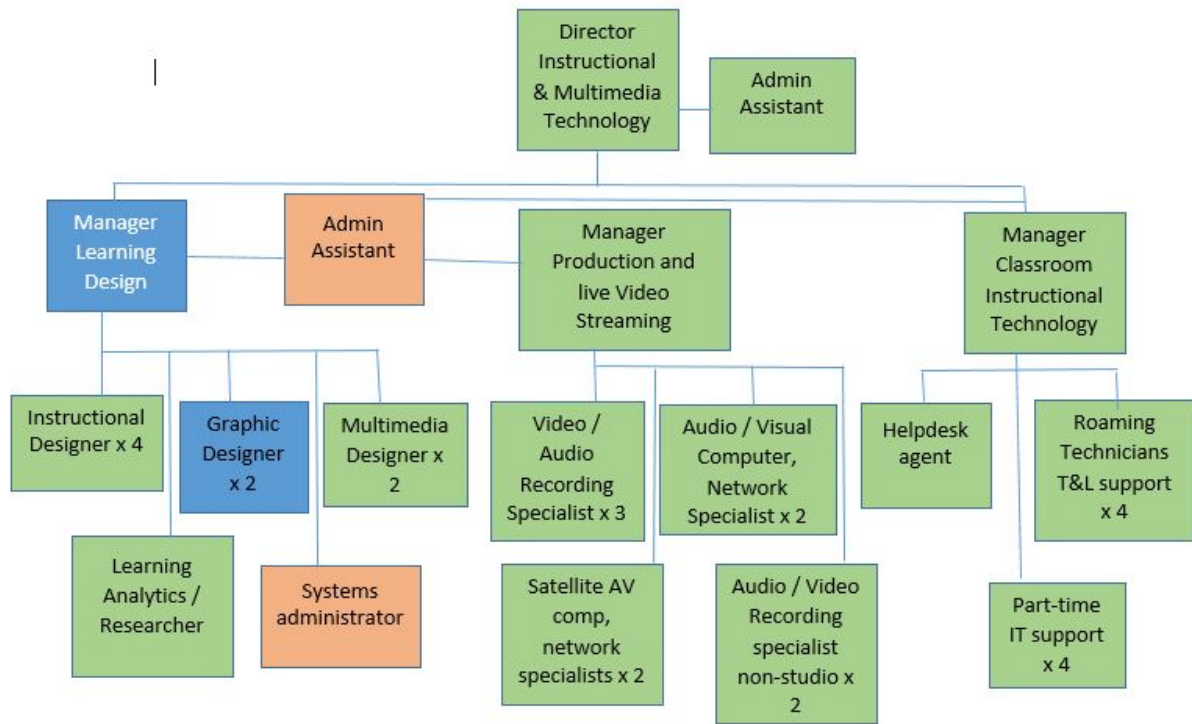
- Ensure the embedding of academic development and support at the coalface by integrating teaching and learning staff specialists within faculties;
- Teaching and learning staff specialists will work with academic lecturers and HoDs in the following focus areas namely academic support, blended and eLearning, academic staff evaluation and development and the first year experience.
- CAD primarily responsible for advocacy, policy and the development of projects, action plans with teaching and learning staff specialist position in faculties.
- Immediate offering of academic development and support policy, action plans and programmes in the faculty;
- The faculties and departments commit to an institution-wide academic development and support plan and process that will enable VUT to embed and secure the benefits of access and success.
- This should involve faculties/departments developing action plans to realize the institution's objectives for academic development and support.
- The faculties/departments identify a manager with responsibility and accountability for delivering and coordinating growth and development who will work with the central service teams to develop and deliver local plans that will enable growth and adoption of academic development and support
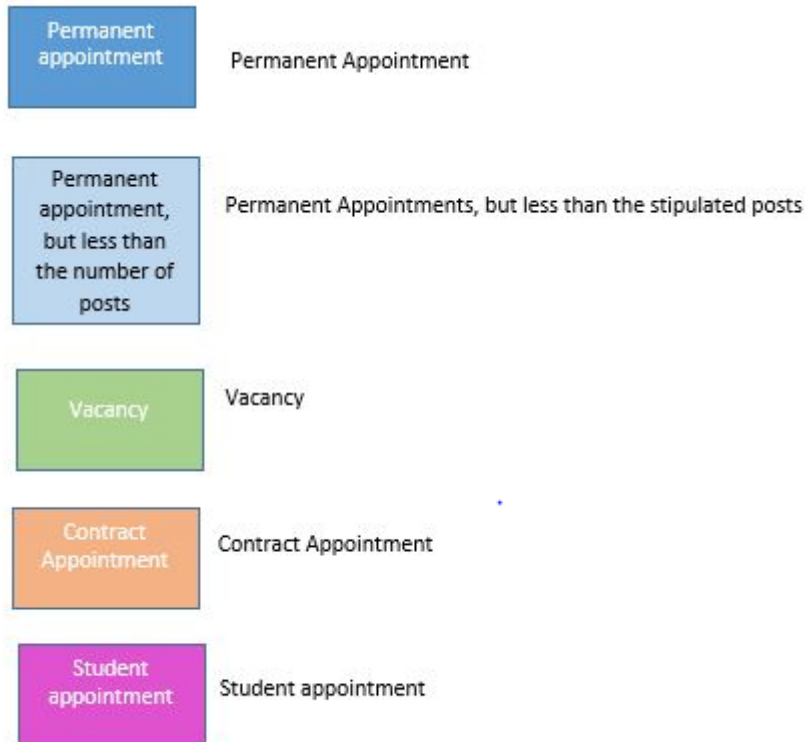
It's in the light of the above-mentioned the CAD and the faculties will require the following structure.

1. An Executive Director of CAD supported by three Directors. These directors are in the following focus areas namely academic support, blended learning, academic staff evaluation and development and the first year experience **(Diagram A).**
2. Academic support portfolio is supported by senior teaching and learning specialist who are called managers within three sub focus areas namely Language Development, Tutor Development and Learning Community Mentors and then Math's, Science, Engineering and Technology Center **(Diagram B)**.
3. Blended Learning is supported by senior teaching and learning specialist who are called managers including sub focus areas in instructional design, instructional technology, animation, graphic design and visualization as well as learning analytics to support the learning management system and other educational technologies **(Diagram C).**
4. Academic staff evaluation, development and first year experience is supported by senior technology and learning specialist by managers and then divided into three sub-focus areas namely evaluation of academic staff, academic staff development and the first year experience **(Diagram D).**

Diagram C

Instructional and Multimedia Technology

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                        ┌──────────────┐
                        │ Director     │
                        │ Instructional│   ┌──────────┐
                        │ & Multimedia │───│ Admin    │
                        │ Technology   │   │ Assistant│
                        └──────────────┘   └──────────┘
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- Director Instructional & Multimedia Technology
  - Admin Assistant
  - Manager Learning Design
    - Instructional Designer x 4
    - Graphic Designer x 2
    - Multimedia Designer x 2
    - Learning Analytics / Researcher
    - Systems administrator
  - Admin Assistant
  - Manager Production and live Video Streaming
    - Video / Audio Recording Specialist x 3
    - Audio / Visual Computer, Network Specialist x 2
    - Satellite AV comp, network specialists x 2
    - Audio / Video Recording specialist non-studio x 2
  - Manager Classroom Instructional Technology
    - Helpdesk agent
    - Roaming Technicians T&L support x 4
    - Part-time IT support x 4

Permanent Appointment

Permanent Appointments, but less than the stipulated posts

Vacancy

Contract Appointment

Student appointment

Diagram D

Academic staff evaluation, development and first year experience

Organisational Chart:

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
→ DIRECTOR: ACADEMIC STAFF EVALUATION, DEVELOPMENT AND FYE
— ADMINISTRATOR

Reporting to the Director:
- FYE MANAGER → FYE CO-ORDINATOR X 2
- STAFF EVALUATION MANAGER → T & L SPECIALIST FACULTY-BASED X 4
- STAFF DEVELOPMENT MANAGER → T & L SPECIALIST FACULTY-BASED X 4
- ACADEMIC STAFF EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCHER

Legend:
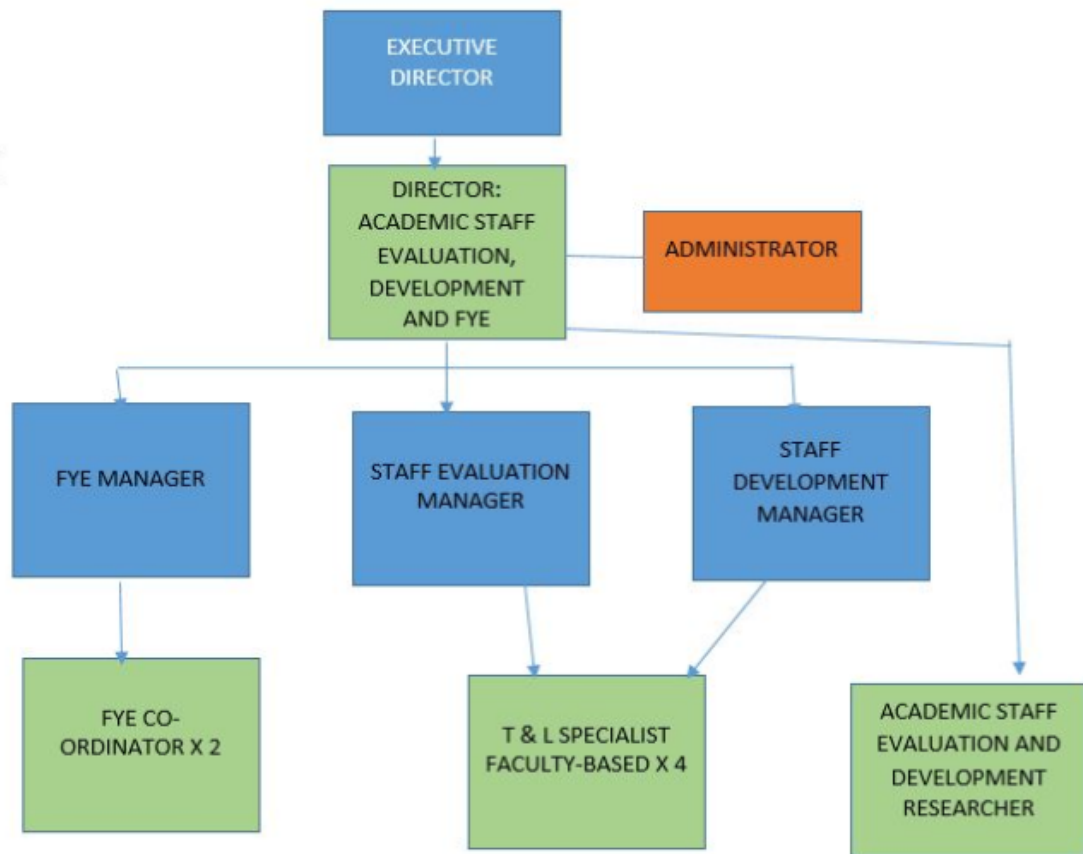
Colour	Meaning
Permanent appointment	Permanent Appointment
Permanent appointment, but less than the number of posts	Permanent Appointments, but less than the stipulated posts
Vacancy	Vacancy
Contract Appointment	Contract Appointment
Student appointment	Student appointment

9