

Navigating Academic Administration in a Decentralised Environment

Insights from the
UFS Business School

AAA Conference 2025

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be worth more



1. Introduction

- Changes in HEI
 - Student Needs
 - Funding Constraints
 - Policy Development
- Decentralisation – own challenges
- Institution vs Programme Specific Needs
- UFS Business School – BML Programme
- Challenges and Successes

2. Background: Decentralisation and the BML Programme at the UFS

- UFS Business School – Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences
 - Formal qualifications and SLP (Exec Ed)
- BML: working adult
 - Founded in 1990
 - School of New Learning, Du Paul University, Chicago
 - Curriculum – 3 domains
 - Duration: 4 Years
 - Modular and Online
 - Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

3. Administrative Processes in the BML Programme

3.1 Recruitment and Marketing

- Targeted adult learners and professionals
- Dedicated marketing team
 - Alumni referrals and Word of Mouth
 - Internal Staff Recommendations
 - Social Media
 - Educational Path @UFS Business School
- Budget constraints
- Longstanding reputation

3.2 Applications and Admissions

- Online applications
 - Customisation → Labour-intensive
 - 2nd Intake (2nd Semester)
- ★ Feedback – Timely and specific
- Collaboration: UFS Business School + Faculty + Institution → develop targeted filters

3.3 Registration

- Transformation to fully online – 2025
- Complications
 - Manual verification
 - BML curriculum complexity
 - Prerequisites
 - Progression rules
- Sponsors – Student accounts
- System improvements

3.4 Class Scheduling and Timetables

- Complexity – Personalised timetables
- Academic staff @ UFS Business School
- Different:
 - Modes of delivery
 - Modules
 - 2 Annual intakes

3.5 Assessment and Moderation

- Assessment administration:
 - Overlaps
 - Extensive workload
 - Notional hours
- Moderation of modules
 - Extensive and labour-intensive
- ★ **Quality and consistency**
- Student evaluations / feedback
 - Decision making
 - Lecturer performance

3.6 Graduation and Certification

- The final step in the BML progression of students
- BML Office:
 - Checking
 - Calculation
 - Distinctions
- Vantage point: Familiarity of students

4. Challenges in a Decentralised Environment

4.1 Resource Allocation and Service Delivery

- BML – own revenue and operational funding
- Budgeting constraints:
 - Marketing strategies
 - Resources for students
 - Staff development and support

4.2 Limited Stakeholder Engagement in Decision-Making

- Excluded from central strategic sessions
- Programme Director – academic aspects
- Decisions made at an institutional level
 - Consideration of needs
 - Realities of decentralised unit

4.3 Difficulties with Coordination with Central Units

- Bound by institutional policies
- Gap between BML and centralised units
(processes applicable to traditional undergraduate students)

4.4 Student Diversity Customisation

- Different demographics: BML students
- Support = tailor-made administrative processes
- Strain on limited admin staff

4.5 Limited Career Development and Recognition

- Fully hybrid administration
- Lack of awareness by other departments
- Acknowledgement
- Career Pathways
- Promotion Structures

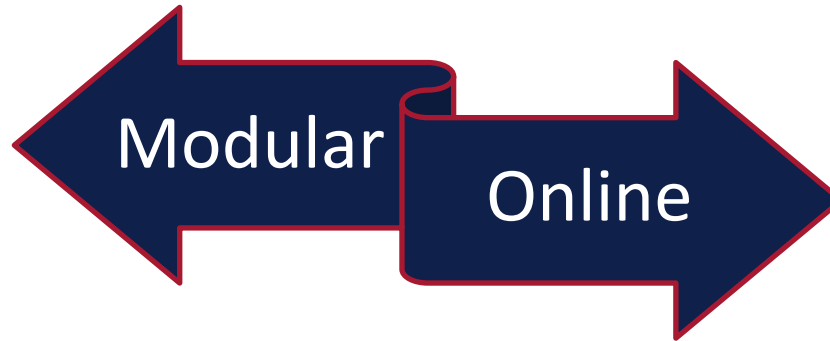
- Burnout and staff turnover

5. Successes and Innovations

5.1 Personalised Student Support

- Standout achievement
 - Personal support throughout academic journey
 - Advice
 - Assistance
 - Knowing the student / needs

5.2 Flexibility in Programme Delivery



- Balance: work, family life, studies
- Flexibility → Wider access to Higher Education
- Continuous assessment model

5.3 Internal Quality Assurance

- Checks and progress monitoring
- Accuracy and consistency

 Integrity of the qualification

5.4 Strong Alumni and Word of Mouth Reputation

- Important marketing tool
- High regard for the programme
- Reputation
 - Capable workplace-ready graduates

5.5 Responsive Administrative Culture

- Continuously refining internal systems
- Adapting to changes – solution-oriented
- Continuous improvement

6. Lessons Learned and Future Considerations

6.1 Embracing the Strengths of Decentralisation

- Responsiveness
- Innovation
- Customisation

6.2 Investment in System Integration and Administrative Tools

- Alignment with institutional systems
- Platform to accommodate specific needs

6.3 Professional Development and Recognition for Administrative Staff

- Career development pathway
- Formal acknowledgement

6.4 Support Cross-Institutional Communities of Practice

- Dialogue between different
 - Departments
 - Institutions
- Share best practices
- Collective problem solving

6.5 Fostering Institutional Inclusion and Strategic Dialogue

- Representation in decision making
- Institutional inclusion

6.6 Re-Emphasising Foundational Administrative Practices

- Foundational principles
- Back to Basics
 - Digitalisation innovation
 - Structures become more complex

7. Conclusion

- Decentralisation fosters innovation
- Small staff + limited resources
 - High quality
 - Flexible
 - Education local and globally
- Commitment and capabilities of staff
- Institutional support is essential