

Adapt IT (Pty) Limited

Reg: 1996/006272/07

Adapt IT Building, 50 Bushbuck Lane, Monument Park

Pretoria, South Africa

Tel: +27 12 425 5600

www.adaptit.co.za



**Best practice guide for Student Administration at Technical & Vocational
Education and Training (TVET) Colleges in South Africa**

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Terminology and abbreviations

The following terms and abbreviations are not presented as a comprehensive list of terminology used at colleges in South Africa, but rather an attempt to describe the general terms used in the compilation of this best practice document and as commonly used during the best practice workshop.

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| DHET | Department of Higher Education and Training |
| ERP | Enterprise Resource Planning |
| HOD | Head of Department |
| QCTO | Quality Council for Trades and Occupations |
| Registration | The process whereby a student submits a registration form to the college in hard copy or electronic copy which is then recorded and the student becomes a registered student of the college. The terms 'enrolment' and 'registration' are used synonymously in this document. |
| SAQA | South African Qualifications Authority |
| Student | This refers to an individual who enrolled at a college and is therefore deemed a registered student. For the purpose of this document it is used synonymously with the term "learner" |
| Student administration | This is the function within a college that provides administrative support for processes and procedures that take place in the student life cycle. For the purpose of this document it is used synonymously with the term "academic administration" |
| TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |

Preamble

Background to this document

Adapt IT (Pty) Ltd.'s Education Division has been a supplier of an integrated ERP software system to higher education institutions since 1986. In 2001 the company started an initiative within its higher education institutional clients to define and formulate best practices for various administrative functions at institutions that are supported by the software system. However, by the definition of the best practice concept, it focusses on practices and procedures, whereas a software system is merely a tool that should support these practices and procedures. Therefore, other institutions that were not using the ITS Integrator software, were also invited to the best practice workshops and permanent forums that were established since 2001 as an extension of the initiative of Adapt IT.

The first TVET College (previously FET College) became an ITS Integrator system user in 2004. The public TVET Colleges were moved to the Department of Higher Education and Training in 2009. Since then the TVET Colleges' administrative staff were also invited to the various established best practice forums and there has been good participation by the Colleges. From the onset it became evident that the Colleges' administration practices were materially different from that of universities. It was for this reason that Adapt IT Training & Development then initiated the first workshop to define and formulate best practice for student administration at TVET Colleges. This workshop was held on 10 March 2017 in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng.

The workshop was attended by 25 delegates representing 7 public TVET Colleges. Although this was a very small group to be deemed representative of the sector, the work done at this workshop that is represented in this document, should be seen as an important first initiative to formulate and document administrative best practices within the TVET College sector. The group expressed their vision that other colleges will realise the importance of this initiative and will buy in to grow it in the interest of defining best practices that will contribute to an efficient and effective college administration countrywide.

Scope of this document

This document will reflect what was defined at the above mentioned workshop as best practice for student administration at a college.

Firstly, the concept of **best practice** was defined as follows:

The formulation of key process steps and / or events (strategies and tactics) and sub-steps in an organized, structured and chronological order as they take place in practice. The description of the events is clear and simple to understand by all levels of staff working in the particular function.

Defined and formulated 'best practice' must adhere to the following requirements:

- It must set benchmarks which institutions strive to accomplish.
- It is about implemented practices that work, rather than theoretical models and prescribed text.
- It is about the leading practice that best works for a particular individual process, rather than an overall performance at one institution.
- It is dynamic and must be reviewed from time to time to incorporate the latest implemented 'best practices'.

Note: The 'best practice' defined in this publication serves as a guideline to institutions, but there will always be some institutions that deviate from these guidelines for justifiable reasons.

The structure of the workshop was based on the administration of the student lifecycle at a college, from the point of deciding to enrol at a college till completion of the qualification and graduating. Therefore the areas of focus were discussed in the following sequence:

- Organizational structure of a college's student administration function.
- Policies governing the student administration function.
- Administrative procedures applicable to a student's life cycle at a college:
 - from application, admission, registration, attendance of lectures, information reporting, assessment and examinations up to and including the award of the qualification
- Integration with other functions, e.g. supply chain, finances, human resources management and information systems.
- Effective student management information systems.
- Key performance areas (KPA's), roles and responsibilities in the student administration function.

Role of Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)

In the process of defining best practice for student administration at colleges, it is imperative to recognise the important role of the DHET as a very important stakeholder.

The overseeing and controlling role of DHET and its prescriptive procedures in relation to student administration, together with centralised functions, e.g. national examinations, restrict colleges to a large extent to formulate their own best practice. Therefore the workshop was not focusing on prescriptive rules, regulations and procedures formulated by DHET, but rather on formulating best practice on how to best implement these procedures at colleges and on improving on it. The objective should be to use this formulated best practices to give feedback to the DHET and by doing that obtain their inputs and cooperation towards efficient college administration.

Recognition

The following colleges are recognised for their participation in this first best practice workshop:

- Boland College, Western Cape
- Ekurhuleni East College, Gauteng
- Elangeni College, KwaZulu-Natal
- Ingwe College, Eastern Cape
- Majuba College, KwaZulu-Natal
- Northlink College, Western Cape
- Tshwane North College, Gauteng

Focus area 1: Organizational structure of a college's student administration function

- 1.1 It is common practice at most colleges that the overall responsibility of the student administration function resorts under the executive management of the Deputy Principal: Corporate Services within the college's central office. This executive is then responsible for the optimal organizational structuring of the student administration function according to the needs of the college. He/she is also responsible to ensure that there is effective interaction between this function and other functions, namely academic, financial and human resources functions on executive level.
- 1.2 It is deemed **best practice** that there is a position of Manager: Student Administration who takes responsibility for the centralised operational management of the function that includes student enrolment, registration, timetabling and examinations administration. The size of a college and/or its number of campuses may justify more operational managers on this level to take responsibility for these separate mentioned functions.
- 1.3 The student administration function will then have supporting staff on an operational level, which are commonly instituted at campus level. Although the control and management of the function is centralised, it is **best practice** that the operational staff on the different campuses report on a day-to-day basis to the campus manager, especially where the campuses of a college are situated relatively far from the main campus.

Focus area 2: Policies governing student administration

The policies and underlying procedures that govern student administration at public TVET colleges are largely prescribed by the DHET in various forms, including legislature, gazetted policies and procedures, published directives such as the Management Administration Plan, as well as other means. There are also policies and procedures prescribed by other related governing bodies, such as Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA's), and other Quality Assurance Bodies, e.g. Umalusi, QCTO, SAQA, etc.

- 2.1 It is not only best practice to adhere to the various prescribed policies, but simply good corporate governance to ensure that these policies are implemented and executed within a college.
Note: It is common that government policies are followed by published regulations supporting the implementation and execution of a policy. Regulations could also form part of statutory requirements.
- 2.2 Although colleges are not allowed to deviate from these prescribed policies, there are instances where a policy prescribes the minimum requirements or merely provides guidelines, and then it will be deemed **best practice** that the college then interrogate these minimum requirements and improve on it and then formulate it into institutional policy. Clearly the institutional policies must be based on, and aligned with, the prescribed policies, and cannot be contradicting or overruling the prescribed policies.
- 2.3 It is **best practice** that where an institutional policy or supplements to prescribed policies are formulated, that all stakeholders affected, e.g. academic staff, management and student representative body are included in the process. It is indeed necessary that a college take the initiative that where there is no prescribed policy from DHET on a particular area of governance, and there definitely are such cases, institutional policy is formulated and approved by the applicable structures.
- 2.4 It is **best practice** that all policies and underlying procedures are freely accessible to all stakeholders through the appropriate media channel such as the internet, publications, institutional calendars, etc. This will include the consequences for non-adherence to a particular policy and/or procedure.

Note: It is not within the scope of this document to provide a comprehensive list of policies governing student administration, whether prescribed by DHET or other external bodies, or whether formulated by the college. However, in the formulation of best practice for student administration, this document will refer to particular policies that should be in place and be adhered to.

Focus area 3: Administrative procedures applicable to a student's life cycle at a college

3.1 Making enquiry

- 3.1.1 The life cycle commences when a prospective student makes an enquiry at a college or during a school visit by the college's marketing staff. As this will be the first point of contact between the prospective student and the college, it is **best practice** that the college handles the

enquiry in an efficient and professional manner and that the staff dealing with the enquiry are knowledgeable enough to answer all the basic questions in the case of a telephonic or face-to-face enquiry.

- 3.1.2 Alternatively, the college website should contain sufficient information that can be easily navigated to provide sufficient information to the prospective student.
- 3.1.3 Ideally a call center facility should fulfil the enquiry function to deal with generic enquiries, not only for prospective students, but also to deal with all enquiries from existing students. This however requires funding and most colleges cannot as yet afford such a call center even though there was consensus that it works very well at colleges that have such a facility.
- 3.1.4 It is deemed **best practice** that where a prospective student needs career advice or more in-depth advice on a particular qualification that he/she plans to study, the student is referred to an academic HOD or to a qualified career counselor / student advisor.
- 3.1.5 Where the campuses of a college are far from the main campus, it is **best practice** that there are designated knowledgeable staff on each campus to deal with prospective students making an enquiry.

3.2 Applications

- 3.2.1 It is the long term objective of colleges and the DHET that all students that want to pursue their studies at a college, submit an application in the year preceding the year of study either electronically or in hard copy. However at the moment it is not yet fully implemented at many colleges, and therefore it is current **best practice** that a college provides both a pre-application procedure within a pre-specified period, as well as a walk-in procedure during the registration period. For walk-in students the same career advice as referred to in par. 3.1.4 should be available.
- 3.2.2 It is **best practice** that the college has a formulated application policy in place to govern the process and procedures for applications.
- 3.2.3 It is **best practice** that the college ensures that the application process, closing dates for pre-applications, registration dates and all relevant information is communicated timeously and as effectively as possible to the target market.
- 3.2.4 There is consensus that an on-line application process is **best practice**. However, for many rural colleges their prospective students might have limited access to the internet, and they therefore have to provide for the alternative application procedures as mentioned in par. 3.2.1
- 3.2.5 In cases of over subscription for a particular qualification, the applications policy should provide for a waiting list procedure.
- 3.2.6 The application policy should also provide for procedures applicable to late applications.
- 3.2.7 The applications policy should determine a procedure on how to deal with students transferring from one college to another between semesters, whereas this will normally require such a student to apply at the next college. However if a student transfers during a semester, the transfer must be recorded by DHET for examination purposes.

3.3 Admission

- 3.3.1 After consideration of an application the applicant must be informed of admission, whether successful or unsuccessful. It is **best practice** that successful applicants receive clear information of the registration process, and that unsuccessful applicants be provided with a reason why their application was unsuccessful.
- 3.3.2 It is **best practice** that a college has a published admissions policy which is fully aligned with the minimum entrance requirements as stipulated for all the study programs that are under the control of the DHET, and subject to any other statutory regulations applicable for admission to a TVET College.
- 3.3.3 Although colleges are not allowed to refuse admission of an applicant that meets the minimum entrance requirements set by DHET, a college may stipulate additional requirements for particular programs, which could include a minimum subject mark, an interview or a prescribed entrance test, e.g. literacy or numeracy. The college may set its own admission requirements for skills programs or learnerships.

3.4 Registration / Enrollment

- 3.4.1 With reference to par. 3.2.3 it is again **best practice** that dates and all other relevant information is communicated timeously and as effectively as possible to the target market.
- 3.4.2 It is **best practice** that the registration process is subject to thorough planning beforehand that should cover every aspect of the registration flow, including but not limited to,
- registration forms and additional documentation required,
 - a one pager instruction to students with a step-by-step sequence,
 - points of contact at registration,
 - information to be disseminated to students, e.g. timetable,
 - sufficient infrastructure such as photocopiers and student card facilities,
 - payments procedures,
 - residence registration procedures,
 - capturing of registration data, and
 - printing and issue of proof of registration.
- 3.4.3 To ensure that 3.4.1 is executed effectively, it is **best practice** to have a registration planning committee that plans the process and ensures a smooth execution. This should include the involvement of trained staff making use of a registration procedures manual.
- 3.4.4 It is deemed **best practice** that certain key members of the academic staff are available during registration to assist students with program or subject specific enquiries.
- 3.4.5 It is **best practice** and in the interest of a smooth registration process that students report at a registration entry point where a staff member checks that they have all the required documents and signatories with them before they are allowed to proceed. In cases where a student does not have all the required documents, he/she should be advised what to get before commencing with the registration.
- 3.4.6 It is **best practice** that a college should have a registration policy with specified underlying procedures, but it could be combined with the admissions policy. Such a policy must then make provision for dealing with late registrations, especially to make provision for students that did not obtain admission to university. It should also make provision for a window period after registration that students can change their program of study or subjects and what procedure they should then follow.
- 3.4.7 The registration policy must contain the stipulations and requirements for de-registration or cancellation of registration, and the procedures that such a student should follow.

3.5 Attendance of lectures

- 3.5.1 It is **best practice** to have a student code of conduct in place that was formulated with the full cooperation of the student representative body, and although not the responsibility of student administration, this department should ensure that the code is distributed to all students.
- 3.5.2 It is a strategic objective of all colleges to improve their retention and throughput rate. Although the responsibility for this objective is not within the space of student administration, but rather lies with student support services, the student administration function must render administrative support in this regard. Although not the only measure to reach this objective, monitoring students' attendance of lectures and practicals are deemed very important. It is with this process that student administration should provide the necessary administrative support and attendance register systems to record attendance.
- 3.5.3 It is **best practice** that student administration ensures that the DHET policies on attendance requirements are published and communicated to all parties involved, i.e. students and lecturers.
- 3.5.4 The required submissions to the DHET on attendance records is the responsibility of student administration where the information is gathered and collated in the required format.
- 3.5.5 The scheduling of lectures is driven by a timetable. Although there is consensus that it is deemed best practice to have a centralized lecture timetable which is part of the student administration function, in practice, and also as a result of most public TVET colleges that have multiple campuses, the timetable is compiled by the senior academic staff at campus

level. It must be aligned to the requirements of DHET in terms of number of lectures per academic period.

3.6 Assessments and marks

3.6.1 It is **best practice** that the college has a comprehensive assessment policy in place that is fully aligned with the statutory regulations and prescriptions of external examination and quality assurance bodies, and especially with any regulations specified by the DHET. Such a policy should not only provide procedures for all forms of assessments, moderation and verification that apply for academic staff, but also the supporting administrative procedures that are conducted by student administration (Ref. par. 3.6.3).

3.6.2 It is **best practice** that there is a comprehensive standard operating procedure (SOP) document for examinations that provides a sequential activity list, indicating the personnel responsible for the activity, when it needs to be done, and the documents that apply to the activity.

3.6.3 Formative and summative assessments are conducted in accordance with the assessment policy and procedures (Ref. par. 3.6.1) and according to the prescribed examinations schedule and timetable. Although the conducting of assessments is deemed an academic function, the student administration function should render all the necessary administrative support in this regard, which include:

- receipt of examination papers at a central point of delivery,
- checking, packaging and distribution of examination papers to campuses,
- ensuring sufficient security measures to prevent any leakages before the examination session,
- arranging the venues for the summative assessments,
- draw up invigilator schedules,
- courier of scripts to DHET or examiners for marking.

Note: In cases where campuses are far from the main campus, some of the abovementioned actions will be performed at campus level by the chief invigilator, and overseen by the campus manager.

3.6.4 For assessments on skills programs offered by the college, the same actions as in par. 3.6.1 will be performed, however the marking is done by the college's lecturers and once captured and signed off it is processed and released by the student administration. It is therefore **best practice** that the marks remain within the ownership of the lecturers until it is captured and signed off. Administrative staff should not be allowed to capture or amend any mark and this must be controlled by restricted accessibility to the student information system.

Note: The question of who is responsible for the capturing of marks on the student information system between the lecturers and student administration remains an issue of contention. However, as lecturers have to insert the marks on a mark sheet anyway, it could just as well be captured directly on the student information system, provided that they have ease of access to do it and in a user-friendly way.

3.6.5 Regarding all the external national examinations that are conducted by the DHET, the college's student administration is bounded by the processes and procedures prescribed by the DHET, and there is therefore little room for the application of best practices. The student administration merely has to ensure that the results, when received from DHET, are recorded on their student records system and then communicated to the college's students in an effective and efficient procedure. How the results are communicated depends on a particular college that knows best how to communicate with its students. The various processes followed could be by:

- printed result statements which student can obtain on campus,
- result statements e-mailed to students,
- published on the college's website and students can obtain it with their password.

Note: There is consensus that it is **best practice** to release results to students electronically which will spare them a physical visit to campus just to obtain their results.

- 3.6.6 It is **best practice** that student administration has a procedure in place to provide students with their result statements when applied for, and where students have queries on their result statements to assist them in taking it up with the DHET.
- 3.6.7 The assessment policy must make provision for an appeals procedure where a student feels that he or she has been unfairly assessed. It is **best practice** that this procedure is coordinated by student administration with the necessary inputs from academic staff.
- 3.6.8 It is **best practice** that the college's assessment policy makes provision for a disciplinary procedure for any examination irregularity as directed by the DHET and that this procedure is coordinated by student administration with the necessary inputs from invigilators, academic staff and management.

3.7 Certification and graduation

The process of the certification of a student, i.e. successful completion of the qualification, is dependent on the accurate information in the student's record, which is coordinated by student administration.

- 3.7.1 It is **best practice** that student administration collate all information on the statement of results and the certificate issued by DHET in the case of the national qualifications, as well as for internal skills programs, and once all requirements and required experiential training are met for the qualification to be awarded, provide a graduation list to college marketing.
- 3.7.2 It is **best practice** that the college's marketing function takes responsibility to organise and conduct the various certification ceremonies based on the information supplied by student administration.

Focus area 4: Interaction with other functions

- 4.1 Student administration as a function, has an essential interaction with other institutional functions to ensure an efficient and effective student administration. It is therefore **best practice** that these interactions are recognized and managed to the benefit of a smooth student administration:
 - 4.1.1 Interaction with the college's supply chain function to ensure the timeous supply and delivery of printed forms and all other printed material used in student administration.
 - 4.1.2 Interaction with the college's financial function to maintain the study fees structure on the student information system and to get their input on policies for payment of study fees.
 - 4.1.3 Interaction with the college's human resources management as it is very important to recruit suitably qualified staff for student administration and to facilitate their continuous development. Also to rely on accurate personnel data for deployment of staff and academic staff for various student administrative functions, e.g. examination invigilation, assessments, etc. The effective communication channels between student administration and academic staff are indeed a requirement for **best practice**.
 - 4.1.4 The constant and effective interaction between student administration and management information systems (MIS) is indeed **best practice**. Student administration relies very much on accurate and timeous information for reporting purposes both internally and to external bodies, especially for the TVETMIS (Technical & Vocational Education & Training Management Information System) reporting to DHET. Although the latter function resorts under MIS, student administration as the data owners of student records, plays a very important role in the accuracy and clean student data for TVETMIS reporting.

Focus area 5: Student management information system

The information system deployed at a college and the management of information systems, do not resort under the function of student administration. However, student administration relies to a large extent on an effective and efficient student management information system to fulfil its mandate.

- 5.1 The student management information system in use at a college is merely a tool to promote best practice in student administration. It is therefore **best practice** that the college deploys a student management information system that enables student administration to supply timeous information to college management and other stakeholders for decision making.

- 5.2 Student administration is the owners of student registration data and it is therefore **best practice** that all measures available to the system users must be taken to ensure the good and clean quality of the data on the system. Ref. par. 4.1.4.

Focus area 6: Key performance areas of student administration

In order to identify the key performance areas (KPA's) of student administration, it is firstly important to identify what are the responsibilities of the student administration function. This has largely already been identified in the focus area 3 on administrative procedures applicable to a student's life cycle at a college.

- 6.1 It is **best practice** to define measureable indicators for each KPA in order to measure the performance of the student administration as a function. As these indicators could differ from college to college depending on performance management systems in place and due to a lack of practical cases, it is not within the scope of this document to provide such indicators.
- 6.2 It is **best practice** that the parties that are supported by the performance of student administration give their feedback, whereas these parties are executive and campus managers, academic staff and students.
- 6.3 It is **best practice** that the performance management indicators of individual staff members within student administration are aligned with the KPA's of the functions and responsibilities of student administration.

Note: In practice, according to feedback from the workshop delegates, they were not aware of a college where an integrated performance management system has been implemented for student administration, and therefore the abovementioned best practices are rather references to the principles on which such a system should be based.