

# GHANA TERTIARY EDUCATION COMMISSION



## DISTANCE EDUCATION POLICY AUDIT *Survey among Ghana's Tertiary Education Institutions*

**Committee on Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL)**  
**Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC)**

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## Executive Summary

In Ghana, the importance of social services like education for improving living standards clashed with the introduction of the World Bank and IMF's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in the 1980s. These reforms aimed to stabilise the country's economy through devaluation, trade liberalisation, privatisation, and legal changes, affecting higher education funding. Government spending reductions led to a surge in student numbers against limited resources which has pertained over the years, and now prompting the adoption of Distance Education (DE) to increase access to Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs). Despite challenges, DE is seen as a viable supplement to traditional education. The government's pursuit of accessible and quality education at all levels has driven efforts to alleviate pressures on public universities due to overcrowding.

The Government of Ghana, through the Ministry of Education (MOE), undertook several surveys to evaluate the needs of DE in Ghana between 1991 and 1994. The lack of a policy framework was considered in a national summit on tertiary education in 2016. It was recognised that a policy environment friendly to DE delivery and practice must consist of principles such as assured access, by students and faculty, to a range of services on par with those available to on-campus students.

Recognising fundamental questions on DE that are unsettled in the policy arena, and with the support of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission initiated a survey to be conducted in all tertiary institutions with the aim of undertaking a policy audit of all TEIs that are engaged in DE and online learning. This was achieved through developing a questionnaire (Design, pre-test and finalise same); Identification of institutions with any DE orientation; and undertaking a policy audit of institutions with DE (field exercise).

The study which involved all 304 tertiary education institutions, with a response rate of 14.1 percent, showed that 28 percent (which represents 4 percent of all TEIs in Ghana) of the responding institutions offer DE. The low adoption of DE is partly due to the fact that some institutions such as the 80 Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges and Health training Institutes, 47 public Colleges of Education, the three Colleges of Agriculture, and the 10 technical universities in Ghana, face peculiar limitations in adopting Distance Education (DE).

The study examines the scope and coverage of Distance Education (DE) policies across institutions and highlights specific areas of attention and strength within these policies.

1. The study focuses on DE policies in different areas such as governance, administration, academics, faculty, student support, technical matters, and legal frameworks. Of the 12 institutions utilising partial online teaching for DE, only 8 (67%) possess a specific DE policy.
2. Consortia Contracts and Provider Contact are found to be lacking in most DE policies, while Oversight of DE receives a higher emphasis (88%). All 8 institutions with DE policies cover Governance and Administration comprehensively, excluding these two aspects.

3. All institutions with DE policies address academic faculty matters, including credentials, development, workload, and office hours. However, aspects like staff evaluation, intellectual freedom, and promotions might require more attention. Most institutions (75%) incorporate "Tenure" in their DE policies.
4. Academic policies show strong alignment with 89% of the listed focal areas present in all institutions' DE policy documents. Credit transfer policies are lacking in 12% of the policies, while only 38% have specific statements on academic integrity.
5. Student support policies encompass learning facilities, learner-centered approaches, counseling, and advising. However, aspects like Financial Aid, Access, Equity, Inclusivity, Service Desk/Technical Support, and Academic Support might need more emphasis to create a holistic support framework.
6. The technical aspects of DE, including system reliability, connectivity, and technology use, are well-covered in all 8 institutions' policies.
7. Legal frameworks are partially addressed, with 75% of institutions having policies on student privacy and licensing, and 63% on royalties. However, 88% cover other important aspects like intellectual property, copyright, liability, and legal resources.
8. Some institutions operationalise DE without a dedicated policy through role assignments, academic board guidelines, or utilising existing policies for regular programmes.

In conclusion, while institutions' DE policies generally cover a wide range of areas, some aspects such as consortia contracts, provider contact, credit transfer policies, academic integrity, financial aid, access, equity, inclusivity, and royalties could benefit from more comprehensive attention. Overall, efforts to enhance policies are directed towards creating a more supportive and compliant framework for DE, safeguarding the interests of all stakeholders involved.

## 1.0 Background

The digital revolution through various forms of online and Distance Education has ushered in an era with significant implications for the skill sets required in the modern workplace. Consequently, higher education institutions across the African continent face the challenge of increasing capacity and relevance to accommodate increasing demands for training suited for the digital economy as well as accommodating the working class who seek further education. In areas where expanding higher education access is hindered by physical infrastructure and trained faculty limitations, online instruction, blended and correspondence modes of instruction has the potential to increase capacity (Tadessa & Aalangdong, 2022).

In Ghana, the provision of social services such as education is considered an essential need for ensuring qualitative improvement in people's standards of living. The provision of such a basic need, however, came under stress due to the introduction of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) policy in the 1980s. The SAP policy reform, introduced through the Economic Recovery Program (ERP) between the 1980s and the 1990s, aimed at stabilising developing countries' internal and external balance of payment and enhancing export growth through devaluation, trade liberalisation, privatisation and legal reforms (Tsikata, 2001). Indeed, it has been argued that the SAP emphasised on policies that aimed at reducing government expenditure on unproductive social sectors such as higher education whilst placing more emphasis on primary education. The tertiary education divestment in the 1980s, partially driven by the SAP, was a reversal of the funding patterns of the 1950s and 1960s which supported increased enrolment and training of a large pool of students who went on to acquire professional employment in Ghana (Tsikata, 2001). The ripple effects of governments decreasing budgetary allocation for the higher education sector against the rapid growth of student population called for urgent action to expand university admission (Nichol & Watson, 2003). For instance, only 6,088 (27%) students gained admission to higher education out of a total of 22,477 qualified applicants in 1996 (Kumi-Yeboah, Young & Boadu, 2013).

Consequently, the government identified DE as a tool for providing access to Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs). Through the Ministry of Education, the government created a wide-ranging plan to meet the demand for tertiary education and relieve the public universities of the pressures of overpopulation on campus (Addah, Kpedu, & Frimpong Kwapong, 2012; Aalangdong, 2017). The primary mission was to improve the quality of life and meet the academic needs of Ghanaians by delivering accessible and relevant quality education at all levels (World Bank, 2010). The first attempt by the government at implementing DE was in 1982 with efforts to improve access to tertiary education by way of the distance-learning mode under the Modular Teacher Training Programme (Mintah & Osei, 2014). The programme was aimed at upgrading untrained teachers academically and professionally but did not succeed due to lack of policy and governance structures, and infrastructural and logistical challenges (Mintah & Osei, 2014; Osei, Dontwi & Mensah, 2013). Despite earlier difficulties with DE in Ghana, there remained a stable certainty by the Government of Ghana that DE was a practical supplement to conventional education at the tertiary level (Mintah & Osei, 2014; Aalangdong, 2017).

### 1.1 Rational for a Policy Audit of Distance Education In Ghana

The Government of Ghana, through the Ministry of Education (MOE), undertook several surveys to evaluate the needs of DE in Ghana between 1991 and 1994. These surveys were supported by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2020). Recommendations from the survey report mandated universities to mount DE programmes even though there was no clear policy framework on their regulation (Mintah & Osei, 2014).

In a World Bank report on *Priorities and Strategies for Capacity Building in Tertiary Distance Education for Human Resources Development in Ghana*, emphasis was also placed on providing quality education at all levels through distance and online education (Mensah & Owusu-Mensah, 2002; Osei, Dontwi & Mensah, 2013). A more pressing obstacle to the deployment of online and distance education is linked to the lack of dedicated national policy frameworks and governance structures to regulate online and distance education. This absence is reflected in the lack of consistency, from one institution to the next, in program quality, instructor qualifications, and the very definition of online and distance education. Deployment of online and distance education requires careful planning and consideration, including appropriateness of technology, suitability of discipline and instructional approach, and teaching staff and student safeguards. A policy framework in the aforementioned areas that regulates quality and staffing is an essential component of the deployment of online and distance education (Tadessa & Aalangdong, 2022).

To ensure the accessibility and ensuring relevance of programmes to meet the learning needs of Ghanaians. Three policy areas were recommended to the Ministry of Education for consideration in the implementation of DE. The policy areas were: access and participation; quality of teaching and learning and governance and management.

This lack of a policy framework was considered in a National Summit on Tertiary Education organised by the National Council for Tertiary Education in 2016 (Declaration and Action Plan Report-NCTE, 2016). One of the priority areas identified for implementation by the end of 2017 was the development of a national policy on Open and Distance Education. Other recent efforts at providing a policy framework on DE in Ghana is found in the Ghana Tertiary Education Policy document (Ministry of Education, 2019). The policy document harmonises individual policies at various tertiary regulatory bodies into one policy framework. The aspect that addresses DE in the document is:

*“Government shall ensure that all tertiary education institutions prioritise and promote technology-driven options over physical expansion and establishment of branch campuses as a means of providing equitable access to quality education, including the active promotion and sponsorship of open and Distance Learning (MoE, 2019, p. 27)”.*

In spite of the enthusiasm for DE expressed by the government and international organisations over the last decade, the lack of a policy to guide its smooth implementation continues to remain a challenge. Inadequate staff training on processes and procedures in DE management coupled with inefficient logistics and appropriate technology has hampered the efficient

delivery of DE in Ghana (Biney & Worlanyo, 2015; Alex, 2019; Aalangdong 2017). Only a few of the TEIs in Ghana are equipped with adequate internet and wireless broadband (Asampana, Akanferi & Ami-Narh, 2017; Aalangdong, 2017). Other infrastructural challenges, such as the absence of e-libraries, affect teaching and learning, especially as a negligible number of students own personal computers. These operational, infrastructural and skills deficits pose a significant challenge for students in the distance learning programmes in Ghana and partly account for low enrolment and retention in DE programmes (Yeboah, Young & Boadu, 2013; Oduro, 2015; Aalangdong, 2020).

Universities are duplicating operational structures such as departments, institutes and colleges for DE programmes, without considering suitability. Unfortunately, studies have shown that establishing these units to manage DE is not optimal. For instance, Croft & Belkin (1992), Makoe & Isabirye (2018) and Aalangdong, (2020) have illustrated the challenges conventional universities face when they replicate systems and structures intended to support Regular Education. It is akin to fitting a square peg in a round hole. It is further argued that one of the significant problems in the design of DE is the attempt to apply traditional pedagogical tools into a delivery modality that is expected to function in a technologically-enhanced environment.

A policy environment friendly to DE delivery and practice must consist of principles such as assured access, by students and faculty, to a range of services on par with those available to on-campus students in a case study of a policy framework for DE, denoted fundamental questions on DE that are unsettled in the policy arena. With the support of the Association of Common Worth Universities, the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission initiated a survey to be conducted in all tertiary institutions with the aim of conducting a policy audit of all TEIs that are engaged in DE and online learning through: Development of questionnaire (Design, pre-test and finalise same); Identification of institution with any DE orientation and sample; and Undertake an audit of institutions (field exercise).

## 2.0 The DE Policy Audit Survey

This report pertains to responses gathered from the Distance Education (DE) survey conducted among Tertiary Education Institutions in Ghana. These responses form a crucial part of the ongoing Project on Distance Education titled as Partnership for Enhanced Blended Learning (PEBL), spearheaded by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission.

The primary objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive policy audit of distance education in Ghana's tertiary education institutions. It aims to address a previously identified gap that emerged after the completion of the policy dialogue focused on "Open and Distance Learning in Ghana's University System." As a follow-up to the initial study that did a comparative assessment of the costs associated with Regular/ Full-time studentship and the Distance Education option, and also explored the mainstreaming of the open university concept in Ghana, this current research fills a void by providing valuable insights into the practice of distance education. It encompasses the development of a comprehensive template for DE



practice, covering policy frameworks, guidelines, human resource training, curriculum design, examinations, assessments, teacher/staff interactions, and student interactions.

The study represents a significant step towards bridging these gaps and advancing the understanding and implementation of distance education in Ghana's tertiary education landscape. By focusing on policy, guidelines, and various elements of DE practice, this research endeavors to contribute to the overall enhancement and effectiveness of distance education programmes in the country.

The Ghana Tertiary Education Commission currently has tools – by way of instruments - for the accreditation of programmes. This comprises a self-evaluation questionnaire to be completed by either a prospective or existing institution, specifically assessing their status as a DE university. Also, there is a programme assessment questionnaire, along with an accreditation panel reporting format intended for use by a panel of experts during the accreditation process. Despite the availability of these tools, there is no framework or guidelines for institutional policy development on distance education or blended learning in Ghana.

Some tertiary education institutions that have embraced elements of Distance Education (DE) initially adopted a distributed learning strategy. This involved establishing campuses or centres in various locations outside the main university campus, where tutors were employed to facilitate teaching and learning. In this setup, students have access to the online library system and the approach leveraged on social media in transmitting information and e-mail communication, particularly assignment submissions and sharing learning materials. Lectures were typically scheduled on weekends to accommodate the needs of working students or those with other commitments.

Over time, some institutions recognized the potential of holding classes online to offer the kind of quality teaching that could be provided by university lecturers rather than tutors scattered across the country. This integration of online teaching and learning was introduced on a fortnightly basis for the programmes offered by these universities. This transition aimed to enhance the educational experience and leverage the expertise of university faculty members, while still retaining the flexibility and accessibility of DE programmes. As a result, these institutions have gradually evolved their DE approaches, incorporating live online classes with the aim to provide a well-rounded and effective learning experience for their distance education students.

There are about over 300 recognised tertiary education institutions in Ghana. Ghanaian education has mainly been face-to-face with comparatively minimal adoption of technologies, especially in teaching and learning. Not until recently, many tertiary education institutions did not have a well-integrated Learning Management System (LMS), which is a critical component to the operationalisation of a distance education programme. Many Ghanaian universities employ the LMS system to cover an e-library system, semester and course registrations, electronic access to transcripts, webmail, calendar, financial accounts and aid, and noticeboard, among others. They help in tracking, and reporting educational courses and outcomes, rather than delivering actual synchronous teaching and learning experiences.

## 2.1 Purpose and objectives

The main objective of the survey was to conduct a policy audit through the collection of data to help formulate supportive policies and strategies for the development of distance education and blended learning in Ghana.

## 3.0 Methods

### *The study design*

The research on DE policy was explored using a survey approach. There was a complete enumeration of all recognised tertiary education institutions in Ghana. Whereas the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) is aware of those institutions that have accredited programmes under the Distance Education platform, it was considered that, on the back of COVID-19, there was the possibility of some institutions continuing with online teaching and learning infused into their regular programmes, or were at least, considering adopting some online practices following the COVID education experiences. Therefore, all tertiary education institutions were included.

### *The population and sample*

Tertiary education institutions in Ghana, numbering 304 are either public (state-owned) or privately owned. GTEC has various categorisations of these institutions, which spans University, University Colleges, Nursing and Midwifery Training College/ Health Training Institutions, Technical Universities, Colleges of Education, Regionally-Owned Tertiary Education institutions, Tutorial Colleges, Distance Education Institutions and Professional Institutions. There are, however, some overlapping elements that make distinguishing between the various categories challenging. For instance, some professional institutions also run academic programmes, and some universities and university colleges also run professional programmes. Typically, dual mode institutions sometimes run programmes concurrently - on regular and distance mode.

### *Instrumentation*

The instrument for the policy audit covered all the focal areas for a successful DE programme. The development of this instrument involved gleaning information from literature on elements critical to DE,- followed by a review of the identified DE focus areas by the Committee and a pretest. The Instrument covered the areas detailed in Appendix 1.

- Academic
- Governance including fiscal regulations
- Faculty (Teaching staff)
- Student support
- Technical/ Technology
- Legal

Other items on background information in the questionnaire included the name of the institution, institutional category as defined above and public-private status, location and designation of the respondent.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection for the survey involved multiple modes of data collection. These included email, telephone-assisted personal interviews (CAPI), post mail, computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI), as well as in-person.

GTEC requested institutions to be open and honest in responding to the questionnaire, to paint an accurate picture of the current situation of distance education in tertiary education in Ghana.

Institutions were assured of complete confidentiality of their data. An online system - the kobo toolbox - was used to collect the data and formed the basis of the computer-assisted interviews.

### *Response rate*

The response rate from those who completed the questionnaire for the study was low, at 14.1 percent. Nonetheless, many institutions sent emails upon reading the letter, to inform the Commission that they were not offering DE, while others also indicated in follow-up calls on the study that they did not offer blended or distance learning.

Further, it was observed that several institutions' adoption of distance education technologies was impacted by their type and how their programmes are developed and approved. For instance, Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges and Health training Institutes, while having a significant degree of autonomy, largely follow the same curriculum and pedagogical approach prescribed from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) as approved by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission. The approved curricula for these institutions are designed for face-to-face teaching methods. Due to their affiliation with the NMC and adherence to a common curriculum, these institutions face limitations in adopting Distance Education (DE) unless explicitly approved by the NMC and GTEC. Consequently, more than 80 NMTCs/HTIs in the country do not offer DE programmes. A similar situation can be observed with the 47 public Colleges of Education, the three Colleges of Agriculture, and the 10 technical universities in Ghana. These institutions, which are also guided by specific professional and institutional bodies, follow established curricula and pedagogy, which are primarily tailored for traditional face-to-face instructional settings.

## 4.0 Results

The study results cover the status of institutions, the adoption of DE or partial online teaching, and the scope of coverage of DE policy. Further, responses from institutions undertaking online teaching without a policy on operationalising DE were collected.

### 4.1 Institution type

Institutions can be categorised based on their private and public ownership status (Table 1) as well as GTEC's institutional categories.

### Public – Private Status of responding institutions

Of the 43 institutions that formerly responded to the survey, slightly more than half (51%) of them were privately owned and the rest were public institutions (see Table 1).

Table 1: Institutional Status by ownership

Type of Institution	Count	Percentage
Private	22	51.0
Public	21	49.0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>43</b>	

### Institutional Categorisation

The majority of respondents came from Universities and University Colleges. Figure 1 illustrates that there was at least one response from each of the different institutional categorizations within GTEC.

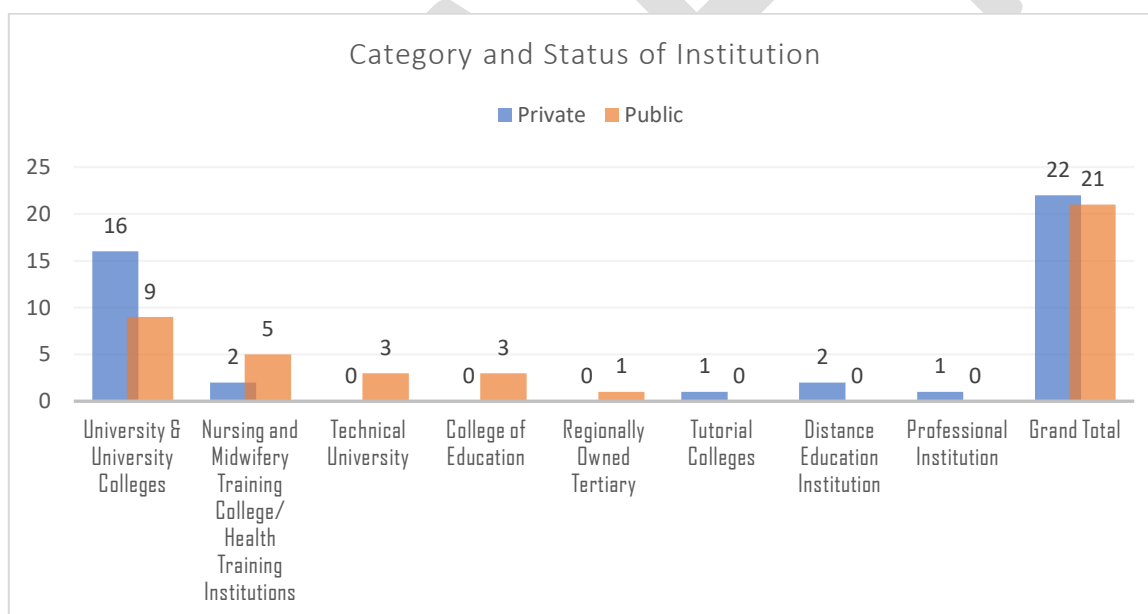


Figure 1: Category and Status of responding Institutions

Regarding the distribution based on public or private ownership, none in the responding institutions were private technical universities, private colleges of education and private Regionally-owned tertiary institutions. On the other hand, all the responding tutorial colleges, distance education only institutions and professional institutions were private institutions.

#### 4.2 Institutions running Distance Education

Institutions running distance education encompass two categories: those running fully-fledged distance programmes characterised by a substantial degree of online teaching and learning, which qualifies as a complete distance programme. Additionally, there are institutions that

employ a blend of online and face-to-face teaching, commonly known as Blended or flexible learning.

### *Institutions indicating Distance Education programmes*

Twelve (12) institutions, accounting for 28% of the respondents, stated that they were actively running distance education (DE) programmes. They are made up of two private universities, three private university colleges of which two run DE only, and five public universities. These institutions reported incorporating partial online delivery for their programmes, indicating a mix of online and traditional teaching methods in their educational offerings.

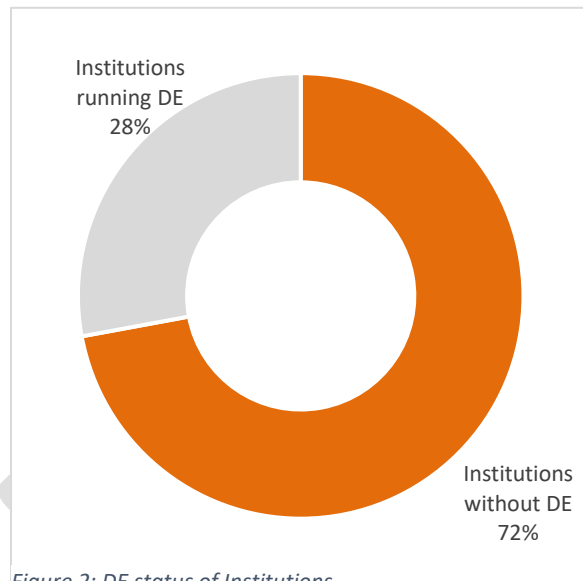


Figure 2: DE status of Institutions

It can be inferred that approximately 4 percent of institutions in Ghana currently run DE programmes. This estimation is derived from the fact that all known institutions running DE gave their responses after repeated contacting, and the data collected revealed that only a small fraction of institutions in Ghana have implemented DE programmes. Further, certain institutional categorisations currently do not run DE programmes due to an absence of provisions from their professional regulators on DE, thus limiting the number of institutions that can participate in distance education initiatives.

### *Online adoption and type of institution*

The analysis further shows that there were proportionally more public institutions (29%) involved in online education as compared to private institutions (27%). About comparable proportions of private institutions and public institutions did not operate DE.

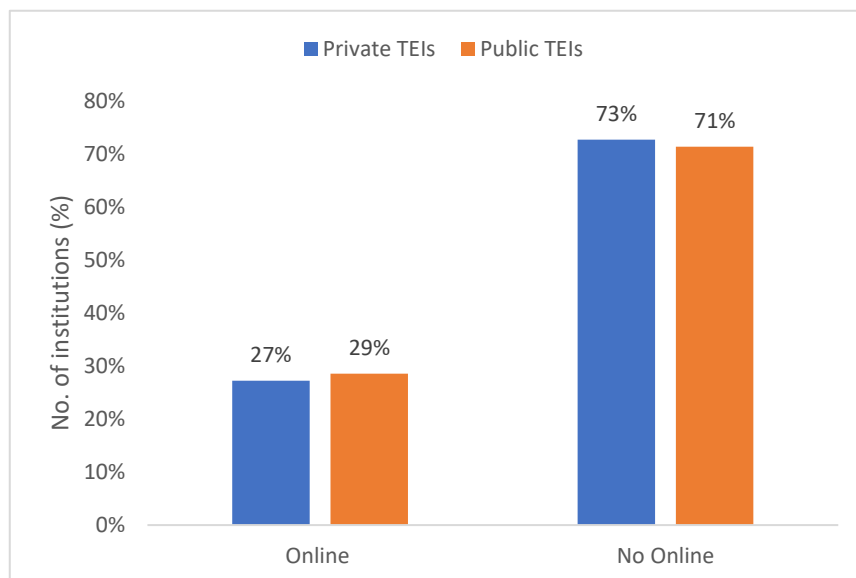


Figure 3: DE Status among Public & Private Institutions

#### 4.3 Scope of DE Policy by Institutions

The scope of Distance Education Policy implemented by institutions covers a range of areas, including governance and administrative matters, academics, academic staff, student support, as well as technical and legal issues. However, not every DE institution have a dedicated policy. For the analysis presented in Sections 4.3.1 – 4.3.6, the focus is exclusively on the eight institutions that do have a formal Distance Education policy.

Out of the 12 institutions that engage in distance education and utilise partial online teaching for their programmes, eight of them (67%) reported having a specific policy in place (See Table 2).

Table 2: Institutions with DE policy

Institutions:	No. of Institutions (%)
With policy	8 (67%)
Without policy	4 (33%)

### 4.3.1 Policy availability for Governance & Administration

The analysis reveals that two specific areas, namely Consortia Contracts and Provider Contact, were lacking in the Distance Education policies of the institutions. Only a limited number of institutions (63%) with a DE policy had provisions addressing these aspects.

In contrast, a higher percentage of institutions (88%) had a statement or guidelines that covered the Oversight of Distance Education. This indicates a greater focus and attention to the oversight and management of distance education programmes among the surveyed institutions.

On a positive note, all eight institutions with a Distance Education policy indicated that their policies covered all other areas under the Governance and Administration of Distance Education. This implies that the majority of institutions appear to have comprehensive policies in place, addressing various aspects related to governance and administration, apart from the two mentioned areas that need further attention

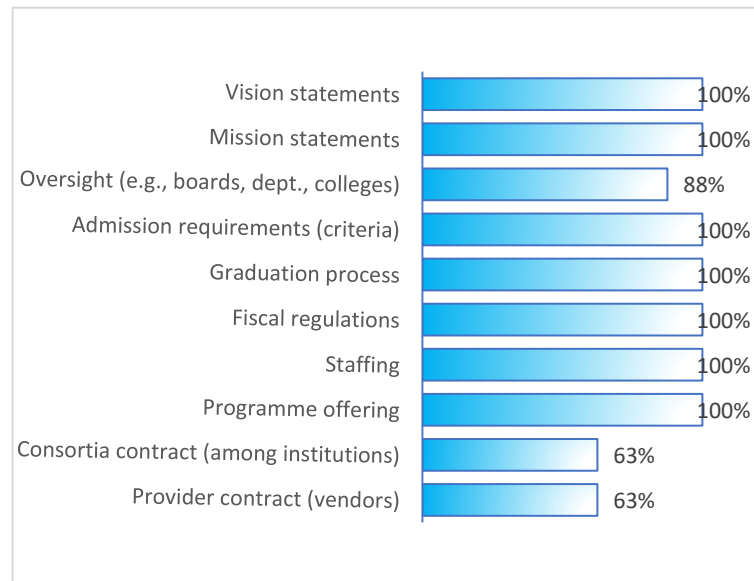


Figure 4: Institutions with DE policy on Governance and Administration

### 4.3.2 Policy availability for Academic Faculty

It is noteworthy that all the institutions with a Distance Education policy had specific policies addressing academic faculty matters. These policies covered various aspects, including credentials, professional development, workload, compensation, and office hours, ensuring a comprehensive approach to faculty management in the context of distance education.

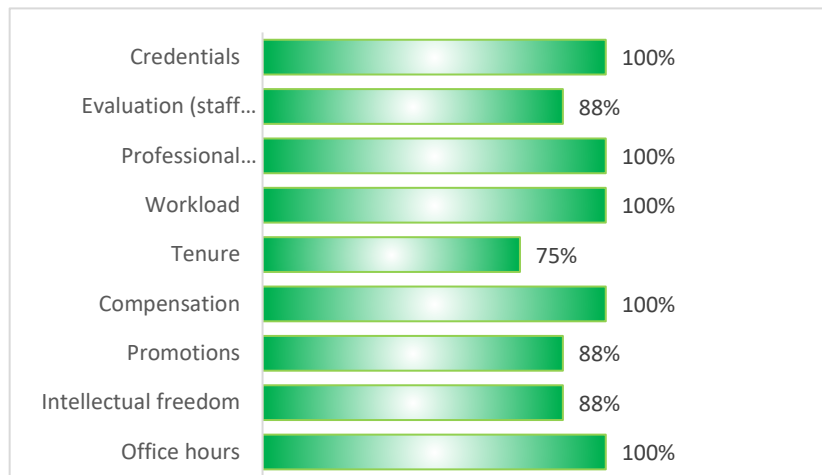


Figure 5: Institutions with DE Policy on Academic Faculty

However, a small portion of the institutions (12%) did not include stipulations on the Evaluation of staff, as well as Intellectual Freedom, and Promotions in their policies.

On the other hand, a significant majority of the institutions (75%) did have a statement in their Distance Education policies regarding Tenure, indicating a focus on ensuring faculty members' job security and academic freedom within the distance education framework.



### 4.3.3 Policy availability for Academics

In the domain of Academic policies, an impressive 89 percent (16 out of 18 focal areas) of the listed policy areas were present in all the Distance Education policy documents of the institutions. This indicates a strong alignment and coverage of various academic aspects across the surveyed institutions' policies.

However, it was observed that 12 percent of the institutional Distance Education policies were lacking policies related to credit transfer. This result suggests a potential area for improvement.

Furthermore, only 38 percent of the institutions indicated having a specific statement on academic integrity in their Distance Education policies.

Academic integrity is a critical aspect of education, and its inclusion in policies helps maintain high ethical standards and ensures fair academic practices. Therefore, there is room for enhancement in this area as well to strengthen academic integrity measures within distance education institutions.

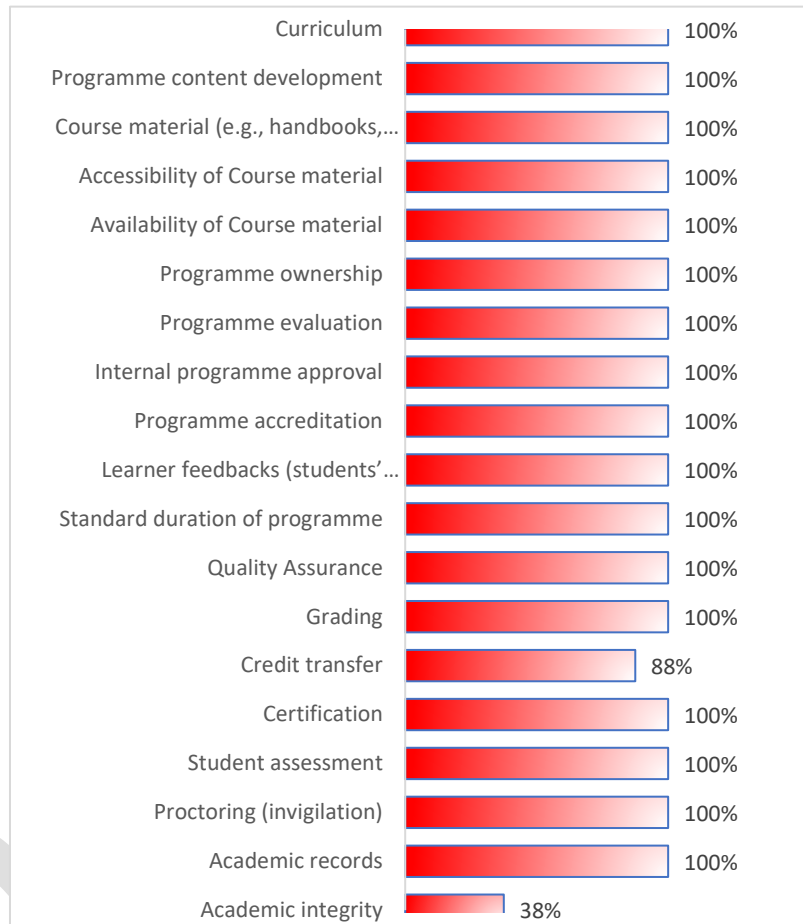


Figure 6: Institutions with DE policy on Academics

#### 4.3.4 Policy availability for Student support system

In the area of student support all institutions with policies addressed Learning facilities, a learner-centred approach, and counselling and advising/guidance. These policies likely focus on creating conducive learning environments and providing support services to enhance the overall learning experience for students in distance education programmes.

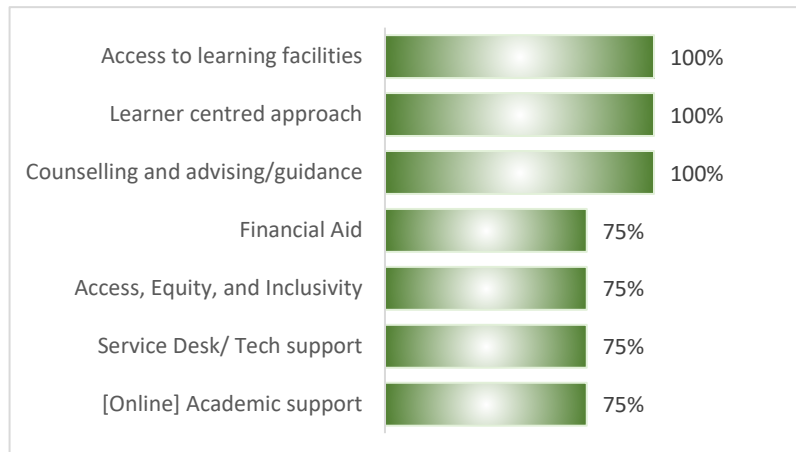


Figure 7: Institutions with DE policy on Student support

A smaller proportion of the policies (75%) covered additional critical areas, including Financial Aid; Access, Equity, Inclusivity; Service desk/Technical support, and Academic support.

While the majority of institutions have embraced various aspects of DE policy, the findings highlight the importance of further efforts to include and emphasize key elements like Financial Aid, Access, Equity, Inclusivity, and academic support, to create a more comprehensive and supportive framework for all students engaged in distance education programmes.

#### 4.3.5 Policy availability for Technical Infrastructure

The eight institutions had a policy that addressed all technical matters such as system reliability, physical delivery network, access and connectivity, equipment and maintenance, use of appropriate technology, among others.

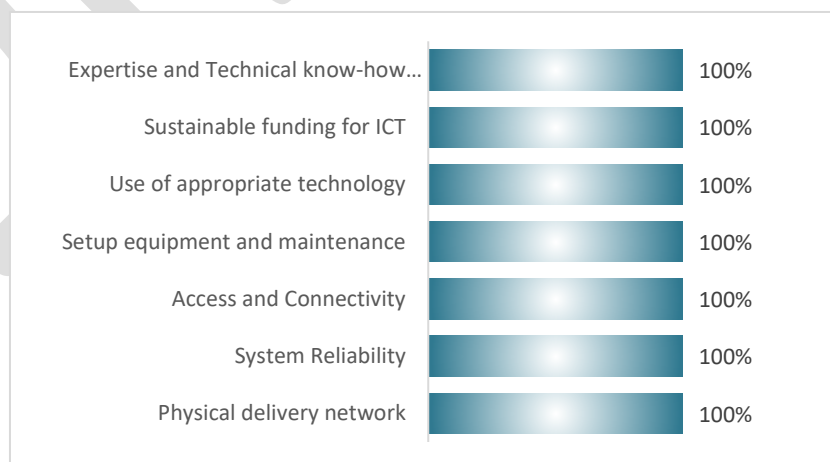


Figure 8: Institutions with DE Policy on Technology

#### 4.3.6 Policy availability for Legal Framework

The analysis indicates that the policy on the legal framework covering the Distance Education (DE) programmes was not comprehensive in all institutions. Only 75 percent of institutions with a DE policy had specific policies on student privacy and licensing, and an even smaller proportion (63%) had policies related to royalties.

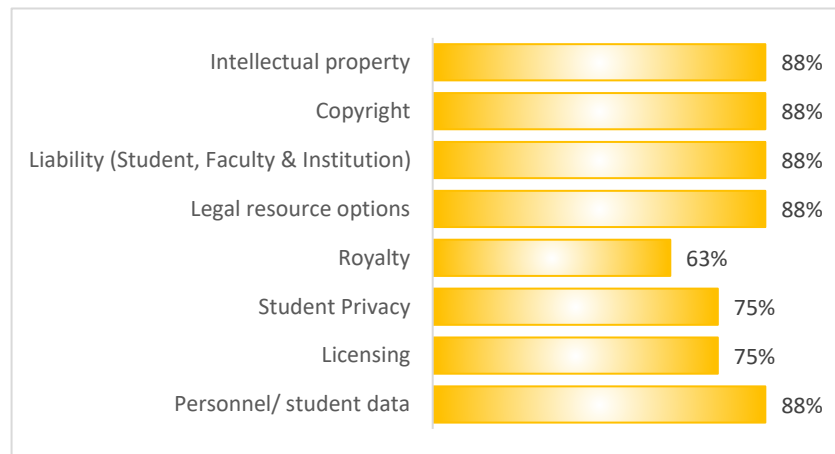


Figure 9: Institutions with DE policy on Legal

A more encouraging finding, however, is that 88 percent of the institutions had a policy that covered several other essential legal aspects, including intellectual property, copyright, liability, and legal resource options. Additionally, these policies addressed the use of personnel and/or Student data, indicating a higher level of consideration for legal matters in these areas.

While there is room for enhancement in certain aspects of the legal framework, the majority of institutions have taken steps to incorporate important legal considerations into their DE policies, which is crucial for ensuring compliance and protecting the rights and interests of all stakeholders involved in distance education.

#### 4.4 Operationalisation of Distance Education in Institutions with no policy

##### *What some institutions do without a policy*

Institutions were asked what they used to operationalise DE in the absence of a policy. One institution indicated that “Roles have been assigned to some officers to ensure that the e-learning platform runs effectively”. Another indicated that the “Institution’s academic board outlines the guidelines and modalities for the operationalisation of the blended mode of teaching and learning for the semester”. This was an ad-hoc operation. Other institution used the existing policies governing regular students.

##### *How some institutions operationalise distance education*

Institutions varied in their response orientations, rather than offering a holistic view of their operations. Some institution responses concentrate on assessments; other responses concentrate on teaching; and others, on student support.

**Assessment:** Two institutions employ proctoring software which was integrated into a Learning Management System (LMS) to ensure the integrity and verify the identity of students taking the test, whereas some institutions would rather hold examinations face-to-face with invigilation by staff. The Safe Exams Browser (SEB) which has similar functionalities to the software used for SAT and GRE examinations was used by one institution.

**Approach:** Most of the institutions responding to this question offer blended learning – a fusion of face-to-face and online teaching and learning. Some institutions will not allow online contact hours for any course in the semester to exceed 50%.

**Online Platform:** Many institutions mentioned that they have a stable IT system. Others additionally have a 24hr service desk to assist students on all platforms.

Some of the platforms employed by institutions include Google Workspace Learning designed for educational use. This infrastructure includes Google Classroom and Google Meet Apps for interactive face-to-face instructional delivery. Another institution elaborated on its blended learning strategy. This entailed lecturers posting instructional materials on the eLearning platform every week and holding a live session for at least 2 hours a week. Others use MOODLE software for online learning.

**Personnel and training:** For some institutions, before the beginning of each semester, all lecturers are trained and re-trained on online teaching across the campuses at different times. There is also an officer in charge of e-learning and monitoring the operations of online teaching. Heads of Department have been made course managers in the system to have direct oversight of all courses in their department. One institution indicated that it has adopted an online education strategy that requires that all programme content is designed for teaching and learning by respective course lecturers on the VLE. To execute this, comprehensive training on online pedagogy usage on the VLE is regularly organised by the Planning and Quality Assurance Unit and ICT Unit for all lecturers to aid in the effective deployment of the VLE platform.

**Monitoring:** monitoring system to monitor on-line lecture sessions just as it does for in-person sessions. Director of Total Quality Management conducts periodic evaluation exercises and challenges identified are incorporated into subsequent training exercises.

## 5.0 Policy Recommendations

### Use of Policy

The finding indicating that a third of institutions implementing distance education do not have a dedicated policy in place raises concerns about the potential implications for the quality and integrity of their distance education programmes. Having a clear and comprehensive policy is crucial for guiding the operations of distance education and ensuring that it aligns with best practices, legal requirements, and ethical standards.

It is highly recommended that all institutions intending to offer distance education programmes establish a well-defined DE policy before launching such an initiative. This policy should cover various aspects, including governance, academics, faculty, student support, legal considerations, and more, as highlighted in the report. During the accreditation process, accrediting bodies should demand proof of the institution's DE policy to ensure that the institution is adequately prepared to meet the challenges and responsibilities of delivering quality distance education. Requiring a DE policy as part of the accreditation process can also promote transparency and accountability, as institutions will be held accountable for adhering to the policies they have set forth.

### Governance & Administration

The results showed that only a limited number of institutions (63%) with a DE policy had provisions addressing Consortia Contracts and Provider Contacts. The lack of attention may be due to a lack of such arrangements in the Distance education space in Ghana. However, the results point to the fact that these areas need further attention.

### Academic Faculty

A number of institutions, though few, did not include stipulations on the Evaluation of staff, as well as Intellectual Freedom, and Promotions in their policies. This implies that these particular areas may require further consideration and inclusion to ensure a more comprehensive and equitable approach to faculty evaluation and professional growth in distance education settings.

There will also be the need for a statement on Tenure since a specific policy will ensure a faculty member's job security and academic freedom within the distance education framework.

## **Academics**

It was observed that only 38 percent of the institutions indicated having a specific statement on academic integrity in their Distance Education policies and 12 percent of the institutional DE policies were lacking policies related to credit transfer. While there are no national provisions for credit transfer, this result suggests a potential area for improvement, as credit transfer policies are crucial for facilitating the smooth transfer of credits between institutions and supporting students in their academic journeys.

Academic integrity is a fundamental aspect of education, regardless of whether it is delivered through traditional in-person settings or distance education platforms. Upholding academic integrity ensures fairness, honesty, and trust within the educational system, promoting a level playing field for all students.

In distance education, there are unique challenges that can potentially impact academic integrity, such as remote proctoring, online assessments, and the use of digital resources. While some issues that impinge on academic integrity may have been separately addressed by institutions from their responses, it is essential for institutions to have well-defined policies and procedures to address these challenges and must outline prohibited behaviours and specify the consequences of academic misconduct. Such a statement must also express the institution's interest in educating students on academic integrity, plagiarism, proper citation practices, use of plagiarism detection software, faculty training and support to detect and address academic misconduct and reporting mechanisms. By focusing on these measures, distance education institutions can create an environment that upholds academic integrity and promotes a fair and equitable learning experience for all students.

## **Student support**

The results showed that a proportion of policies did not cover critical areas such as Financial Aid; Access, Equity, and Inclusivity; Service desk/Technical support. and Academic support. The presence of these policies in any DE policy framework portrays institutions' commitment to addressing financial barriers, promoting accessibility and inclusivity, and providing academic support services to ensure that all students have equal opportunities and resources to succeed in their distance education endeavours.

## **Technical provisions**

While institutions have made efforts and couched policy statements on the various technical issues that may border on DE, there may be yet still the need to define minimum thresholds and parameters on access and connectivity, equipment and maintenance, use of appropriate technology, sustainable funding, and expertise.

## **Legal Framework**

Some 25 percent of the DE policies, according to the institutional responses, did not have specific policies on student privacy and licensing.

There is room for improvement in the area of policy in ensuring that legal aspects, particularly those related to student privacy and licensing issues, are adequately addressed in every DE policy of these institutions.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

The Government of Ghana aims to shift focus of tertiary education institutions towards technology-driven approaches, considering DE as a vehicle to enhance access to quality education in a more equitable manner. This aligns with recommendations from the World bank report and the national summit on tertiary education in 2016 made to the Ministry of Education on DE implementation, encompassing access, teaching quality and governance. The project which constitutes two major activities, a policy audit and stakeholder engagement will address these facets. The study's findings on this policy audit address some aspect of access and participation by examining TEIs adoption of DE, as well as a scan of policy provisions for teaching, learning, governance and administration, to help gauge the intent and commitment of Ghanaian tertiary institutions in utilizing DE to enhance access and educational quality. The findings provide context, as would critical talks with key persons into the operationalization of DE and DE policy area descriptors (see Appendix 1), for stakeholder consultative engagement that will aid in the development of a DE policy framework for Ghana.

The audit policy results acknowledges the existence of both dual mode universities, which offer both regular and distance learning programmes, and exclusively distance education (DE) institutions, all of which are currently under private ownership. The study also highlights that, certain categories of institutions in the country face institutional constraints when it comes to adopting DE. Specifically, NMTCs/HTI, Colleges of Education, Agricultural colleges, and Technical Universities share a common challenge: their strict adherence to established regulatory frameworks and standardised curricula poses immediate limitations on incorporating DE methods by individual institutions.

The national accreditation body, GTEC, is amenable to the introduction of DE programmes in all institutions. However, the introduction of DE in the specified institutions would necessitate a careful reevaluation and approval process by the respective oversight professional bodies, which could require a considerable amount of time and meticulous planning.

In terms of policy formulation, there will be a need to understand the intricacies of policy implementation within various institutions, along with the obstacles they have faced and the effective measures they have employed to overcome these hurdles. This will significantly contribute to shaping and refining the parameters and trajectory of the policies. To this end, some institutions will be engaged accordingly prior to developing the major discussion points for stakeholder engagement. .



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## Appendix 1: Policy areas of Distance Education

Policy Area	Description	Focal points
<p><b>Academic:</b> Academic calendar, course integrity, transferability, transcripts, evaluation process, admission standards, curriculum approval process, accreditation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course integrity: measured by campus curricular committees, accrediting agencies, learners, and other educational institutions (peers).</li> <li>• Transferability: measured via consortia arrangement between two or more institutions.</li> <li>• Evaluation process: evaluation of learners and the instructor.</li> <li>• Admission standards: Admission requirements-entry-level assessment based on local regulations</li> <li>• Curriculum approval process: One-time only or involve a reassessment; whether approvals differentiate delivery systems or all delivery systems</li> <li>• Accreditation: Policies that ensure assessment processes to improve distance education. It should determine whether it is a Holistic accreditation (instruments for conventional and distance education) or Separate accreditation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course integrity includes the existence and work of curricular committees, the role of accrediting agencies, the incorporation of learner feedback, and other educational institutions (peers). Course design (to include [adequate] learner feedback; effective instructional design; selection of appropriate media based on instructional needs; basic evaluation; programmatic research; documentation of hidden curricula; adoption of visuals-film, video, still photography for course materials (McIsaac &amp; Gunawardena, 1996)</li> <li>• Flexibility with transferability of credits; uniformity in the start and end of semesters or quarters.</li> <li>• Differentiation (if necessary) of standards for admission requirements into the DL programme and regular programmes consideration of individual cognitive styles in response to programmes with mediated communications and limited personal contact (Nelson, 1998)</li> <li>• Compliance with state policy on seeking approval for DE program versions of regular programmes that have already been approved by the state.</li> <li>• Evaluation for continuous improvement of the curriculum and the delivery method.</li> <li>• Learner evaluation dynamics in light of testing, proctoring (invigilation), and making sure students are honest.</li> <li>• Policies on needs assessment or review of the programme</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congruence of conventional programmes evaluation formats and DE programme requirements</li> <li>• Differentiation of student transcripts in terms of grades and course outcomes from non-conventional instructional delivery methods</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fiscal:</b></p> <p>Tuition rate, technology fee, FTEs, consortia contracts, state fiscal regulations</p>	<p>Tuition rate: How much will the courses cost?</p> <p>Technology fee: Will there be a technology fee?</p> <p>Consortia contracts: If more than one institution participates in a distance learning consortium, do policies cover revenue sharing? To whom does the student send the tuition?</p> <p>FTE: Who owns the full-time equivalent student</p> <p>State Fiscal Regulations: Policies establishing costs and fair distribution of revenue among participating institutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of a given course,</li> <li>• Cost of technology,</li> <li>• In terms of revenue sharing, if there's more than one institution running the programme, a cost-sharing approach between faculties or campuses and the central management/main university (especially when the programme was funded by faculty)</li> <li>• Office responsible for the collection of student tuition</li> <li>• Custodian of the full-time equivalent students</li> <li>• State regulation of fees? For instance, according to the work of Feisel et al. (1998), tuition for the DL program in NY should not be greater than New York state resident tuition, but campuses have the flexibility to set reasonable, competitive fees for distance learning courses.</li> <li>• Arrangements with receiving sites (e.g., campuses offering computer laboratories to learners) and all other partners—only contractual or as has been provided for in the policy and clarified in advance of programme offerings.<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>Geographic:</b></p> <p>Service Area Regional limitations, local versus out-of-state tuition consortia agreements</p>	<p>Service Area Regional limitations: Cyberspace respect no borders.</p> <p>Policy to define service areas</p> <p>Local versus out-of-state tuition consortia agreements: Will “out of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrictions on geographical service areas imposed by the regulator</li> <li>• Variations in tuition fees given where the student is joining a class from within the country or outside of the country; or based</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Gellman- Danley & Fetzner (1998) advised that arrangements with receiving sites should also be provided for in the policy and should be clarified in advance of programme offering.

	country” rates still apply? Policy to define tuition rates and service area restrictions.	<p>on nationality irrespective of whether the student is in-country?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreements with other universities to agree on services to students because of "catchment" areas</li> </ul>
<p><b>Governance:</b> Single versus multiple board oversight, staffing, existing structure versus shadow colleges or enclaves</p>	<p>Single versus multiple board oversight: Will the College or university’s board of trustees or regents oversee distance learning? Staffing: Same staff strength at the traditional or shadow enclave that provides opportunities for revenue and the hiring of faculty not necessary on the current staff Existing structure versus shadow colleges or enclaves: Traditional institutional structure to oversee the distance learning programme or new division with responsibility for oversight.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance arrangements when there are consortia</li> <li>• Responsibility of oversight of DE programmes – a separate university board, the traditional department or a new one, or an entire "shadow college".</li> </ul>
<p><b>Labour-management:</b> Compensation and workload, development incentives, intellectual property, faculty training, congruence with existing union contracts</p>	<p>There should be a policy to specify compensation and workload, development incentives, intellectual property, faculty training, and congruence with existing union contracts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operation of the DE programme under the existing labour-management agreements</li> <li>• Staff recognition for their development and instructional expertise in working with distance learning initiatives</li> <li>• Indicators (so developed) for the assurance of high academic integrity and ease of transferability among students</li> <li>• Provisions to foster educational accountability</li> <li>• Provisions to foster fiscal stability</li> <li>• Policies or norms governing class sizes, compensation, Policies or norms governing class sizes, compensation, the fair use and</li> </ul>

		<p>intellectual property, full-time or adjunct faculty, "master teachers" shared between institutions, office hours, training for faculty and workload</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility with the policies on the above.</li> <li>• Susceptibility of agreements or otherwise to processes and policies (This helps determine how the programme would be susceptible to distractors)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Legal:</b></p> <p>Fair use, copyright, faculty, student, and institutional liability</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair use, copyright, faculty, student, and institutional liability (for inappropriate electronic messages, for example) are all legal issues covered.</li> <li>• Legal resource provision for legal policy issues or knowledge of appropriate counsel</li> </ul>
<p><b>Student support services:</b></p> <p>Advisement, counselling, library access, materials delivery, student training, test proctoring</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality advice and counselling, library access, course materials delivery, student training, and test proctoring are all available.</li> <li>• Strategies and structures to make for a student-centred focus in DL</li> <li>• System for handling students' questions (e.g., computer-related connection problems, registration glitches, undelivered textbooks, advisement options, etc.) Is such a service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week?</li> <li>• Guidelines on proctor staffing requirements, test material delivery, and test retrieval?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Technology:</b></p> <p>Systems reliability, Connectivity/access; Hardware/software; infrastructure; technical support.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requirements and selection of two-way, real-time interaction (audio teleconferencing, audio graphics conferencing, and videoconferencing). Adoption of cooperative learning between groups of learners (e.g., technology tools like the Surface Hub can make that possible),</li> <li>• Requirements and selection of time-delayed interaction; group work/collaborative learning; print correspondence (may be used as</li> </ul>

		<p>supplementation in modern times); virtual reality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How the factors (Delivery &amp; Access, Control, Interaction, Symbolic characteristics, social presence, human-machine interface) influence the selection and use of DE technologies, as well as their strategies (McIsaac &amp; Gunawardena (1996)</li></ul>
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