Explaining the minimum duration of study

The minimum duration of study refers to the **minimum time** a **student has to be enrolled** in a programme to successfully complete a programme/specified curriculum. The minimum duration for each programme is **formally registered** at the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Students will not be able to complete their qualification if they were not enrolled for the minimum duration.

The minimum full-time duration for study usually refers to the completion of 120 credits (1 200 notional hours) per academic year. Therefore, the minimum full-time duration for a Bachelor's degree would be three (3) years (360 credits) and for an honours programme, one (1) year (120 credits).

As the minimum duration is an indication of the time an average student will need to successfully complete the programme, subsidy for the programme is also linked to the minimum duration. Full subsidy is granted for the reported[1] number of students who successfully complete the qualification in the registered minimum duration of time. The subsidy for students who require more than the registered minimum duration, will be less, and after an additional 2 years no subsidy will be received for these students.

Suggestions:	
Student throughput is therefore an important source of information when considering programme review. Should historical data indicate that the majority of students are/were unable to successfully complete the programme in the registered minimum time, this should be considered as part of the programme re-design process.	

Take note:	
The minimum duration of a programme can be amended through a formal submission to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). A request in this regard must serve at the Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) with a full motivation (which could be a reflection on historical throughput data) and the completion of the DHET "changes to a programme" template.	

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[1] Each registered Higher Education institution have to report on the full enrolments (first report) and number of graduates (2nd report) for the academic year. These HEMIS reports are fully audited by auditors and the DHET and is used to determine the subsidy to be paid to each institution. This is also why subsidy is received two years after students graduated.

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Full time vs part time

As a residential institution, the majority of students at SU (especially in undergraduate programmes) will be registered for full-time study. This means that they are required to complete at least 1200 notional hours, or 120 credits, per academic year. This is further accommodated via the standard academic calendar (approximately 30 weeks) and the standard timetable (Monday to Friday, 08:00 – 17:00 daily).

However, student contexts have shifted and a large number of students continue with further studies while working (also referred to as learn-and-earn students). Therefore, to accommodate these students (widening of access) we often consider offering a postgraduate programme as both a full-time and a part time option.

	For example

Example A:

A structured Master's programme might be registered with a minimum duration of 2 years, expecting students to complete the taught modules in year 1 and the research component in year 2.

If an exceptional student is able to submit his/her thesis earlier, i.e. in time for the second graduation ceremony, he/she will still only be permitted to graduate after the completion of the full minimum required duration of study.

Example B:

A Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) is usually designed to enhance knowledge and skills within a specific profession. These programmes are often preferred by working individuals, who would not be able to take a full year of study leave to complete the programme.

To accommodate students who would prefer to enrol full-time, but also the learn-and-earn students, the programme can be offered as both a full-time and part-time option. The full-time option students will complete the entire programme (120-credits) in one year, whereas the programme design will also allow the part-time students to complete 60 credits per year for 2 years.

Example C:

If a programme is registered with a minimum duration of 1 year, but the majority of the students only graduate after 2 years, the throughput rate of the programme would seem very poor and the Department would receive less than the originally planned subsidy for the academic year.

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Suggestions:

When planning a new programme, two considerations form the foundations of the design – the programme purpose and the expected student profile. Similarly, when considering the duration of the programme, we have to try and pre-empt whether:
- *the majority of the expected students will be able to enrol for studies full-time*
- *the majority (or all) of the expected students will only be able to enrol for studies part-time (possibly due to the field of study)*
- *there is a possibility that*

Take note:

*A programme can only be offered as both a full-time and part-time option if both options are **registered** with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and recorded as such on the SU Programme Qualification Mix (PQM).*

***Two** separate programme codes will be created on the Student Information System (SIS) or SunStudent to accommodate two different enrolments. This is done to ensure that (1) students can enrol for the correct programme offering and (2) enrolment and throughput reporting is accurate.*

Further consultation or contact persons

When considering the minimum duration for a new programme, is advisable to consult with your **faculty administrator** about the minimum duration of similar programmes within the faculty. For historical student data (enrolments, throughput, etc.) either the faculty manager of the **Centre for Information Governance** can be contacted.

The average minimum duration for the different qualification types

Qualification Type	Standard minimum duration
Higher Certificate	1 year full-time
Advanced Certificate	1 year full-time
Diploma (240 credit)	2 years full-time
Diploma (360 credit)	3 years full-time (3rd year to complete WIL requirements)
Advanced Diploma	1 year full-time 2 years part-time
Bachelor's Degree (360-credit)	3 years full-time (4 years full-time for extended curriculum programme)
(Professional) Bachelor's Degree (480-credit)	4 years full-time
Postgraduate Diploma	1 year full-time

	2 years part-time
Honours Degree	1 year full-time 2 years part-time
Master's Degree	1 – 2 years full-time 2 – 3 years part-time (duration will depend on the field of study and the design of the programme)
Professional Master's Degree	2 – 3 years full-time 3 – 4 years part-time
Doctoral	2 – 3 years full-time 3 – 4 years part-time

	Hyperlinks to other sources
Other documents that should be consulted:	

Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF)

DHET template: Changes to a programme

How to indicate minimum duration for a new programme

When submitting a new programme for approval and accreditation, the minimum duration should be indicated as part of the *General Information.*

In the programme specification (Form A) it is indicated as follows:

q	**Minimum duration FULL time** *years/months* The average full-time student should be able to complete 120 credits (1200 notional study hours) per year. Undergraduate students are mostly full-time students.	Indicate the minimum full-time duration. If the programme will not be available for full-time registration, please indicate "*Not applicable*" The minimum duration should preferably be indicated in years.
r	**Minimum duration PART time** *years/months* Part-time students are students who are continuing to work full-time while they study, i.e. learn-and-earn students. To accommodate them the minimum duration of study time is usually increased, i.e. a 120-credit programme is typically offered over two years instead of in one year.	Indicate the minimum part-time duration. If the programme will not be available for part-time registration, please indicate "*Not applicable*" The minimum duration should preferably be indicated in years.

All of the fields in the programme specification (Form A) are required. If a specific aspect is not applicable, it cannot be left blank, but should be indicated as "*Not applicable".*