



# WNF Technology Enhanced Education

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# Technology-Enhanced Education



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This initiative was led by the WNF Educational Committee co-chaired by Dr. Iva Lloyd, Naturopathic Doctor (Canada), President of the WNF and Tina Hausser, Heilpraktiker, Naturopath (Spain) and 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of the WNF.

This document has been reviewed by WNF full and educational members and was approved by the WNF Executive on March 20, 2021.

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One of the missions of the World Naturopathic Federation (WNF) is to support and promote accreditation and the highest educational standards for the global naturopathic profession.

## 2021 Naturopathic Educational Statistics [1]

- 131 naturopathic educational programs globally (Asia n=50, Europe n=36, Latin America n=19, Western Pacific n=12, North America n=9, and Africa n=5)
- 53% of the naturopathic programs have been started in the last 20 years, another 34% between 1980 and 1999.
- 52% of naturopathic programs are over 4000 hours in length, 16% between 3000-3999 hours, 23% between 2000-2999 hours and only 9% are under 2000 hours.
- The WHO *Benchmarks for Training in Naturopathy* date back to 2010 and include 1500 hours, of which 400 hours are supervised clinical practice [2].
- The WNF's aim is to update the benchmarks for naturopathic training to include recognition of the naturopathic doctor program (4000+ hours) and to increase the minimum standard to 2500 hours, including the supervised clinical practice.

## Naturopathic Knowledge

Naturopathic knowledge includes the following aspects [1].

- Naturopathic history, philosophy, principles, and theories;
- Naturopathic medical knowledge including biosciences, clinical science, clinical reasoning, acute and emergency care, and other aspects of medical knowledge;
- Supervised clinical practice;
- Naturopathic modalities and therapeutics;
- Ethics and business practices; and
- Research.

## Technology Enhanced Education

The WNF recognizes that technology enhanced education is part of the future of higher education. The WNF does not accredit or approve naturopathic educational programs. The aim of this document is to provide guidelines for naturopathic educational programs from around the world and to support the accreditation of naturopathic educational programs.

The WNF Naturopathic Educational Programs Report provides further details on the naturopathic educational programs from around the world [1].

## Definitions

### Technology-Enhanced Education

Technology-enhanced education refers to the use of technologies to support education whether the education is local (face-to-face, on campus) or remote (virtual). It can be used in both synchronous or asynchronous delivery and in the same or different geographical locations. Technology enhanced education provides an opportunity for hybrid courses which incorporate both face-to-face and virtual components for individual subjects.

The advantages and disadvantages of each style of education depends on a number of factors including, but not limited to, the number of students, the aspect of the program being taught, the skill level of instructors both for the subject matter and the technology used and the degree of technology available.

### Face-to-Face

Face-to-Face refers to live two-way interaction between the learner and the instructor with both being in the same physical space.

- The WNF recommends that face-to-face education be the preferred method of delivery for the main aspects of naturopathic educational programs encompassing a minimum of 60% of the total naturopathic program hours.

### Potential Advantages to the Learner:

- **Less distractions** and ability to focus on their education.
- **Higher completion rate** in academic programs.
- **Greater access** to resources such as library, peers, teachers.
- **Greater interaction** with teachers and peers with more time to problem-solve and network with others.
- **Less time “on-screen”**. An important consideration for anyone that is sensitive to wireless technology or electric devices.

### Potential Disadvantages to the Learner:

- **Increased cost** for accommodations and living away from home.
- **Less flexibility** for other commitments in a student’s life as face-to-face education requires students to be in a specific location at a specific time.
- **Less responsiveness** to an individual student’s learning style or pace.

### Institutional Considerations:

- Many aspects of the naturopathic program require face-to-face education.
- Cost and time commitment for institutions, students and teachers.
- Continuous improvement and responsiveness to advances in technology.
- Meeting the expectations of varying levels of technological literacy among students and instructors.

## Virtual Education

Virtual education is defined as any distance education conducted in a virtual environment with electronic study content designed for self-paced (asynchronous) or live web-conferencing (synchronous) online teaching and tutoring. With virtual education teachers and learners are physically separated in terms of either place, time, or both. *Note: virtual education is distinct from self-directed learning.*

- The WNF recommends that virtual education is no more than 40% of the total naturopathic program hours.

### Potential Advantages to the Learner:

- **Accessible:** Available to anyone with the required technology (computer).
- **Location:** Education materials can be accessed in any location where the necessary technology is available.
- **Flexible:** Asynchronous sessions can take place at a time that is convenient to the learner.
- **Affordable:** Decreases travel and accommodation costs to attend on-campus classes.
- **Engaged:** Enhanced opportunity for students to engage with other naturopathic students from other campuses or naturopathic programs and for students and teachers to engage through different platforms.

### Potential Disadvantages to the Learner:

- **Self-Discipline** – Requires self-motivation and discipline. Not ideal for those challenged by poor attention or prone to procrastination.
- **Isolation** – Virtual environment can be lonely and isolating for some. It is important to ensure that there is adequate interaction between students and faculty and amongst students, particularly for those social learners (i.e. individuals who learn through group interactions). Virtual education can also impede the organic mentorship and role modelling that occurs between students of different years and amongst students. The campus life and culture that accompanies naturopathic education may be a challenge.
- **Unsupported education** – There may be a tendency for learners to feel unsupported if they do not have ready access to their teachers, especially if there is often a delay between asking a question and receiving an answer from the teacher.
- **Technology Issues** – Technology problems are always frustrating and can be extremely disruptive. A virtual classroom is only as good as the technology behind it and the access to reliable internet connection. Recognizing the limitations of adequate technology and access to wireless technology is critical.

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- **Sensitivity to Wireless Technology** – Understanding of the impact of virtual education on personal health is an emerging area and needs to be taken into account.

## Considerations for Institutions

- Virtual education requires the same level of competency as face-to-face education including structured curriculum outline, learning activities, planned teacher-student interactions and group activities.
- There are aspects of the naturopathic program that are not suitable to virtual education such as physical exams, aspects of naturopathic assessment, naturopathic diagnosis, acupuncture, developing communication skills with patients, compounding, etc.
- Although tele-health is an important skill for naturopathic practitioners, it is important that the weighting of supervised clinical practice be face-to-face.
- Ensure experiential education in all aspects of naturopathic programming.
- Ensuring adequate student learning support to ensure adequate completion rate.
- Technology considerations to address diversity in student skill set, comfort level and learning styles and socio-economical status.
- Carefully monitor and track success rates of new graduates to determine impact of virtual education.

## Self-Directed Education

Self-directed Education is the process where individuals take responsibility for their education. Each person determines what they want to learn, sets goals, identifies a process by which they will reach their goals and evaluate their outcomes.

- Includes preparation for exams, work on assignments (individual and group-based) undertaken outside of curriculum structure.
- Not part of the total hours for naturopathic programs.

## Potential Advantages to the Learner:

- Provides students an opportunity to develop deeper skills on aspects of the core program for which they have a special interest.
- Individualized learning varies between students.

## References

1. WNF Naturopathic Educational Programs Report. World Naturopathic Federation. March 2021
2. World Health Organization (WHO) Benchmarks for Training in Naturopathy: <https://www.who.int/medicines/areas/traditional/BenchmarksforTraininginNaturopathy.pdf>