



**Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council
Quarter 2, 2026**

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1. Introduction

Nelson Mandela University strives to liberate human potential through humanising educational opportunities that prepare graduates to be socially conscious, responsible citizens who contribute to the public good. As a comprehensive university, a wide range of academic, psycho-social, and co-curricular support interventions are in place to promote student success. The theme of this report focuses on these efforts, while also providing Council with an overview of strategic highlights and challenges for the quarter under review.

2. Vision 2030 Strategic Trajectories

With the first phase of the Vision 2030 implementation (2021-2025) concluded, a mid-term review is being conducted as part of a reflective process to inform the second planning cycle from 2026 to 2030. The outcomes of this review will be shared with executive management and Council in the third quarter. Simultaneously, the Vision 2030 Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning (MERL) Framework is being updated to refine the indicators, baselines, and targets that will be used for the purposes of quarterly and annual reporting from 2027 onwards.

The University's strategic trajectories continue to position Nelson Mandela University as a distinctive, socially embedded institution in the service of society.

2.1. Ocean Sciences

Through the combined efforts of the relevant entities, faculties, research chairs, researchers, postgraduate students, and external partners, the University continues to strengthen its national and international profile in Ocean Sciences.

A highlight was the hosting of the Transdisciplinary Ocean Sciences and Ocean Sustainability Activism Symposium on 27-28 May 2026 in collaboration with the Centre for Black Planetary Studies at UNISA. The gathering brought together scholars, postgraduate students, community activists, and practitioners in an engaged and collaborative space to critically reflect on the intersections between transdisciplinary ocean sciences, indigenous knowledge systems, and ocean activism in confronting planetary sustainability challenges.

Another development is the University's participation in the MESCAL project ("Multiscale connectivity at species and community levels to achieve conservation goals under climate change in the Western Indian Ocean") led by Prof Mike Roberts and funded by Sustained Indian Ocean Biogeochemical and Physical Observations and Modelling for Prediction and Assessment (SIOMPA). The project brings together partners from across the Western Indian Ocean region and Europe to focus on fisheries sustainability, climate adaptation, and marine spatial planning.

2.2. Medical School

This is a milestone year for the Medical School as the first cohort of Mandela Doctors advances towards graduation at the end of 2026. The placement of the first cohort of final-year students into district hospitals in the Sarah Baartman District marks a significant step in consolidating

the University's mission to produce socially responsive medical doctors. Student feedback reflects growing clinical confidence and meaningful engagement with district-based training. The MBChB programme continues to demonstrate strong academic performance, with pass rates ranging between 88% and 99% and an overall average of approximately 95%.

The appointment of all nine Academic Clinical Heads of Department during the reporting period has significantly enhanced academic leadership and clinical supervision across the programme. Curriculum review processes continued to improve integration in preparation for ongoing quality assurance linked to the requirements of the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

2.3. Revitalising the Humanities

The University has adopted a revised Language Policy, publicly launched as part of a three-day Multilingualism Indaba co-hosted with Rhodes University and aligned with International Multilingualism Day on 27 March. The policy positions isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English as languages of learning, teaching, research and engagement, while retaining English as the primary language of instruction. In doing so, it directly confronts the dominance of English in higher education, committing the University to multilingual learning, teaching and support.

In April, the Faculty of Humanities officially launched the Humanities Creative Media Lab, a student-driven creative media agency designed to provide graduates with real-world industry experience under academic mentorship. Sponsored by the Media, Diversity and Development Agency (MDDA), the studio offers a consolidated space in which students can meet with clients, practice the specialist skills that form part of their formal training, and produce collaborative content.

2.4. Transdisciplinary Sustainability Sciences

The University's research profile demonstrates a strong and growing alignment with sustainability science and challenge-led research. A seed fund for Catalysing Inter- and Transdisciplinary Research has been established as a strategic institutional investment aimed at strengthening a collaborative research culture and positioning the University as a leading institution advancing sustainable futures.

An analysis of the 2025 Web of Science and Scopus publication landscape reveals substantial scholarly activity across sustainability, biodiversity, ocean and coastal systems, climate resilience, engineering innovation and smart systems, health and wellbeing, education transformation, inclusive development, and socially responsive scholarship. Importantly, these research areas are increasingly interconnected, creating opportunities for transdisciplinary knowledge production and societal impact.

The Mandela Institute for Sustainable Futures has been engaging with the Nelson Mandela Bay municipality around the localisation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This partnership seeks to promote more formalised collaborative structures, which includes a forthcoming virtual Sweden-South Africa University Forum Academic Industry Meeting, for which the municipality has submitted three local challenges to be addressed through collaborative research.

3. Distinctive Educational Purpose and Philosophy that Contributes to Student Access for Success

3.1. Chancellor's Investiture

Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor was officially installed as the fourth Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University on 8 April 2026, succeeding outgoing Chancellor Dr Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi. Dr Pandor assumed her four-year term effective from 1 April 2026 and presided over the Autumn Graduation Ceremonies in Gqeberha. Dr Pandor's long record of public service and lifelong commitment to social justice resonates strongly with the University's ambition to promote the public good in a fragmented and unequal society. In her installation address, Pandor anchored her vision in Mandela's legacy of making "good trouble" for positive change and urged the University to firmly assert its commitment to free expression and untrammelled scientific inquiry.

3.2. Autumn Graduation Ceremonies and Graduate Outputs

Twenty-one graduation ceremonies were held during the Autumn Graduation period on the George and Gqeberha campuses, from 30 March to 22 April 2026. Honorary doctorates were conferred on Justice Cecil Mpho Somyalo (Doctor of Laws) and Professor Gabeba Baderoon (Doctor of Literature).

Graduate output increased by 12.4%, with a total of 7 545 graduates in April 2026 compared to 6 708 last year. Among the qualifications conferred were 364 Master's and 106 doctoral degrees, reflecting the University's continued contribution to advanced scholarship and research.

3.3. Learning and Teaching Development and Support

Disruptions caused by severe weather in May resulted in the loss of eight teaching days at the George Campus and four in Gqeberha, requiring adjustments to the June assessment period. Prior to the inclement weather, emergency preparedness and contingency measures were activated, and the University community mobilised collectively to ensure academic and operational continuity.

Learning Development

It is pleasing to note that the success rate improved from 77% in 2024 to 80% for all modules in 2025, which is slightly below the national average of 81%. This upward trajectory is closely linked to the implementation of targeted wraparound academic and psycho-social student support interventions to promote student well-being and academic progression, including the First-Year Success Programme, Student Success Coaching, peer-assisted learning, academic literacies and writing support.

Teaching Development

Teaching Development continued to strengthen academic practice through the Beginning Your Journey induction programme, multilingual curriculum support, and capacity-building in

assessment design. The Teaching and Module Evaluation Framework was approved, introducing a developmental approach through student feedback, peer engagement and structured reflection.

Academic Planning and Quality Advancement (APQA)

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of a Themed Review on Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision was submitted to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) on 31 March 2026, with permission granted to continue distance provision. The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework re-registration process is nearing completion, with over 95% of qualifications submitted. The revised quality improvement plan to address the recommendations of the CHE Institutional Audit will be submitted to the CHE following approval by Council.

3.4. Technology-Rich Learning and Teaching and the Virtual Academy

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education has prompted the development of a GenAI framework aligned to institutional values to guide ethical and appropriate use. The LT Collab's Digital Learning Experience Design and Innovation (LxD) team is offering capacity-building opportunities to enhance the digital competence of academics. Furthermore, a multilingual AI-powered learning support app, developed by Dr Ismail in the Faculty of Education, is loaded on all FUNDA sites to support students in their preferred language through self-directed learning on any topic within any field.

The operationalisation of the Virtual Academy is proceeding, albeit at a slower pace than anticipated. Several priority actions have been identified to support the continued implementation of the Virtual Academy during 2026. These include finalising the governance review and clarifying reporting and coordination structures that will guide the initiative moving forward. Efforts are also focusing on integrating AI learning resources from different partner organisations into the Community of Practice platform and ensuring that these materials are accessible to the University community; and engaging with faculties to confirm course offerings and support the development of online short learning programmes. In parallel, learning resources and course materials will be uploaded to the Virtual Academy environment to activate the online platform and expand participation in the AI Community of Practice.

The Virtual Academy's alignment with the Science Centre's AI and Future Talent learning facilities, together with the activities of the AI Community of Practice and a partnership with Odin Education, contribute to an integrated ecosystem supporting digital literacy across disciplines.

4. Engaged, Innovative Scholarship Culture that Generates Knowledge Recognised for its Contribution to Sustainability

4.1 Research

The award of two new SARCHI Chairs under the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation/National Research Foundation (NRF) Decadal Plan for Historically Disadvantaged Institutions reinforces the University's commitment to sustainability through impactful research. These two Chairs are as follows: Professor Alastair Potts' Tier 2 Chair in Thicket

Ecosystem Services for Climate and Community, and Professor Moses Basitere's Chair in Sustainable Water and Environmental Engineering for Industrial Use, co-funded by the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation.

The University's research outputs are on an upward trajectory, with the 2025 outputs submitted to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) totalling 564 units, compared to 489 in 2024. There was also an increase in the weighted research output units per permanent academic staff member from 1.3 in 2024 to 1.6 in 2025.

4.2 Postgraduate Student Success and Support

The University Council approved an investment of R49.2-million for postgraduate scholarships in 2026, the full amount of which has been committed, with R21.8-million (44%) already disbursed. Together with R30.3-million secured to date from external funders for Master's and Doctoral scholarships, this reflects the University's substantial and sustained investment in advancing equitable postgraduate access and success.

As of 30 April 2026, 971 postgraduate scholarships had been awarded, comprising 226 Honours, 433 Master's and 312 Doctoral awards. Uptake is at 80% (773 of 971), of which 83% are Black students and 57% are women.

The Mandela Undergraduate Research Academy (MURA) was established as a strategic initiative to strengthen undergraduate student success and progression into postgraduate study. The MURA Orientation Programme was convened on 21 April 2026 to induct 20 scholarship recipients into the University's research ecosystem and equip them with the foundational skills, mindset, and professional expectations required for successful participation in research.

The postdoctoral and research fellowship programme continues to strengthen supervisory capacity, with 105 fellowships awarded during the period, 70% to Black researchers and 38% to women. These fellows collectively contributed to the co-supervision and academic support of approximately 203 postgraduate students across faculties.

Research capacity development programmes are demonstrating strong momentum. The Thuthuka cohort stands at 29 in 2026, a more than threefold increase over five years, of which 86% are Black academics. The Black Academics Advancement Programme has 17 recipients, a 70% increase compared to 2025, supported by R4.6-million from the NRF. Three University Employees Doctoral Programme grants totalling approximately R1.4-million were awarded to support early-career academics in completing doctoral qualifications, and 17 New Generation of Academics scholars are collectively supervising 53 postgraduate students. Two scholars in Engineering and Education are benefitting from the DHET-funded Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme.

Nelson Mandela University provides targeted support to early- and mid-career researchers through a suite of Internal Research Grants, including the Research Development Fund (RDF), Teaching Relief Grant (TRG), and Conference Travel Fund (CTF). During the reporting period, a total of R600 000 was awarded to 20 researchers through three RDF awards, six TRG awards, and 11 CTF awards.

Twenty-two of the 74 University Capacity Development Grant-funded research development workshops planned for 2026 have been delivered, reaching over 600 participants, of whom 96% were Black and 61% women. Both the Human and Animal Research Ethics Committees maintained their National Health Research Ethics Council accreditation during the quarter, with 112 and 16 approvals, respectively, reflecting a maturing culture of ethical research governance.

4.3 Innovation

The Innovation Office secured a R4-million Technology Innovation Agency funding commitment, with priority thematic areas spanning advanced manufacturing, agricultural innovation, health innovation, energy sustainability and the digital economy. The VTOL technology project has progressed to pre-phase contracting with the commercial partner AutonoSky, with the prototype's engineering history being curated into a traceable handover documentation pack. Five new intellectual property disclosures were received during the quarter. An Innovation Strategy Steering Committee has been established to guide the development of a forward-looking institutional innovation strategy aligned with Vision 2030.

4.4 Internationalisation

The University is hosting 597 international students from 40 countries in 2026, compared to 784 in 2025. The International Office launched a strategy in April 2026 to increase international enrolments, including a targeted digital recruitment campaign across government-sponsored student markets in ten SADC countries.

Under- and postgraduate international graduate outputs have increased, indicating improved student success and academic progression. Of the 215 international graduates for 2025, 60 (28%) were supported through concession arrangements, which demonstrates the importance of flexible financial support mechanisms in improving the retention and graduation outcomes of financially vulnerable international students.

Nine employees participated in Erasmus+ outbound mobility to Estonia, Turkey and Poland. The University continues to prioritise the expansion of Erasmus+ partnerships, particularly with institutions in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, where mobility funding opportunities remain available. Growing engagement with Collaborative Online International Learning initiatives, including the "Leadership for Peace" programme in development with the University of Tübingen, offers a complementary internationalisation-at-home pathway.

A University delegation visited China in May, with engagements at the China University of Petroleum and Hubei University of Technology. This delegation attended the World Digital Education Conference in Hangzhou, at which a trilateral cooperation agreement was formally signed.

4.5 Library and Information Services

During this quarter, the DSpace Current Research Information System (CRIS) Institutional Repository was successfully launched, making over 9 500 theses, dissertations and research outputs globally discoverable through platforms including Google Scholar and ProQuest. The

Open Journal Finder, launched in May 2026, enables researchers and postgraduate students to identify credible, open-access publications, directly reducing the risk of predatory publishing. Open-access agreements delivered institutional savings of approximately R1.24-million in publication fees. A total of 2 077 students received information literacy and research support training during the quarter, while 2 532 first-year students participated in Buddy Library orientation visits to support their transition into academic life.

5. Transformative Institutional Culture that Promotes Diversity and Social Cohesion

5.1. Institutional Public Lectures

The Govan Mbeki Institutional Public Lecture, themed "Government of National Unity: An Asset or Liability for South Africa?", on 23 April 2026, showcased the University's contribution to critical national discourse. Dr Vincent Maphai delivered the address, with Dr Ongama Mtimka, Acting Director of the Raymond Mhlaba Centre for Governance and Leadership, as respondent.

5.2. Mandela University Press

The Mandela University Press continued to affirm the University's scholarly identity with two publications during the quarter, namely, *Building Bridges: Reflecting on Learning and Teaching, Research, and Engagement*, edited by Noluthando Toni, Viwe Ndayi and Willie Chinyamurindi, and *#FeesMustFall – Ten Years On: A Critical Examination of the History, Significance, and Legacy of the 2015/16 Student Movement in South Africa*, edited by Anye-Nkwenti Nyamnjoh and colleagues.

5.3. Science Centre

The Science Centre's growing role as a community-facing hub for experiential and technology-enriched learning drew 539 visitors during the quarter. Activities included AI interactive demonstrations and digital skills development through the Samsung Innovation Campus coding courses. The Future Talent Centre is deepening its digital and AI-focused offerings as part of the University's broader commitment to graduate readiness in an increasingly technology-driven economy. Further infrastructure improvements included the installation of two new interactive screens, which will expand digital engagement opportunities for teaching, exhibitions and public interaction. Content development for these installations is currently underway.

5.4. Engagement Office

As an outcome of the institution-wide Engagement Advancement Retreat convened earlier this year, the Engagement Office continued developing an institutional engagement mapping framework, and further refined the Engagement Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting, and Learning (E-MERL) framework and Impact Matrix. These aim to support more integrated, evidence-based approaches to reporting on engagement impact.

Through the Hubs of Convergence, learner incubation with schools such as Westville High School supported Grade 12 learners navigating university access, while the Student Hubs of Convergence led initiatives that addressed student hunger, safety, and social wellbeing through collaborative partnerships. Collaborations with traditional leadership, medicinal knowledge practitioners, and academic departments advanced dialogue on indigenous medicinal knowledge and culturally responsive knowledge co-construction.

5.5. Transformation Office

Advancing a culture of equality and safety across the institution remains a priority. The 42 equality-related complaints recorded year-to-date up to 30 April 2026 reflect both the University's commitment to surfacing these concerns and the ongoing challenges that require institutional attention, particularly the doubling of third party-on-student incidents and the increasing prevalence of incidents in off-campus locations compared to the corresponding period in 2025. Gender-based violence (GBV) prevention, consent literacy and LGBTQIA+ inclusion remained central to the Transformation Office's programming, with the GBV Student Indaba on 16 April 2026 a notable intervention.

5.6. Centre for Women and Gender Studies and the South African Research Chair in African Feminist Imagination

The Centre and Chair generated exceptional scholarly momentum during the quarter through engagements that advanced feminist thought across research, teaching and public discourse. Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela launched the "Feminist Focus on Violence" series on 23 April 2026, followed by the Centre's hosting of Malaika wa Azania's conversation on youth, power and democracy on 24 April. The visiting presence of Professors Yolande Bouka and Darlene Miller strengthened the MA in Gender Studies curriculum and broadened public dialogue on global feminisms. Monthly feminist columns launched in the *Daily Maverick* extend this work into public discourse.

5.7. Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy

CANRAD's work during the quarter reflected the enduring importance of democracy education, civic engagement and non-racialism as foundations of the University's transformative identity. The Youth Dialogue on ethical leadership, the Bua Mfundi Imbizo giving students a platform on their own concerns, and the Freedom Day Panel Discussion marking the 30th anniversary of the Constitution collectively demonstrate CANRAD's commitment to grounding scholarship in lived democratic experience. Research momentum is sustained through journal articles, book chapters and three forthcoming edited volumes addressing electoral processes, regional integration and human security in Africa.

5.8. Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training

The extension of the Articulation Hub partnership between CIPSET and the Durban University of Technology to 2028, as well as ongoing work with Lovedale TVET College on a College-University Collaboration Model, reflect a long-term investment in enhancing post-school access and articulation pathways. At the community level, participatory mapping with six coastal communities between the Tyolomnqa and Sundays Rivers aims to co-develop a

“Fishers’ Plan for People and the Planet” for climate adaptation. Community learning for food sovereignty remains central, with agroecological training, social media knowledge-sharing, and fisheries-based livelihood support strengthening local resilience.

5.9. Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation

The Chair’s work this quarter reflects a deliberate broadening of the forms through which critical scholarship engages with transformation. The publication of *Racism’s Knowledge: Disciplines, Decolonisation, and the Renewal of the Academy*, edited by Professors André Keet and Shirley Anne Tate, advances the scholarly field. A community poetry workshop and the “De/Constructing the University” book project, whose first workshop was held on 18 April 2026, affirm the Chair’s commitment to creative and collaborative engagement as legitimate forms of knowledge production and institutional critique.

6. Enhancing Student Living and Learning Experiences

The University’s student life and development ecosystem demonstrate that structured co-curricular and support programmes are integral to student success and graduate readiness.

6.1 Student Governance and Development

This past quarter was characterised by active co-curricular programming designed to develop students as leaders and responsible citizens. The Emerge Leadership Programme supports first-year students in building self-awareness and ethical leadership before they take on formal student governance roles, while LeadHER provides women-focused empowerment with an emphasis on confidence, leadership identity and professional presence. The Beyond the Classroom (BtC) programme, which equips students with life skills and professional readiness through blended in-person, virtual and self-paced learning, was migrated from Moodle to a dedicated mobile application to improve accessibility, engagement and scalability.

The Autumn Student Connection Event, held on 25 April 2026, created an inclusive space for students to reinforce a sense of belonging that underpins academic engagement and persistence. The Student Leadership Capacity Building Programme took place on 17 April, while the Student Leadership Appreciation Dinner on 21 April celebrated the academic achievements of graduating student leaders. GBV prevention continued through the Ebuhlanti programme for positive masculinity and the Mandela Societies Outreach Programme fostered active citizenship and community engagement.

6.2 Student Entrepreneurship and Graduate Employability

The Mandela University Africa Hub for Youth Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation continues to create structured pathways from academic study into entrepreneurial practice, supporting students and community-based entrepreneurs to establish and grow sustainable small businesses. During the quarter, the Hub’s reach extended significantly beyond the campus through mentoring, training and stakeholder engagement, while its digital presence amplified the University’s entrepreneurship brand to a wide national and international audience. The two annual international BIWA Conferences on Business Innovation and Incubation have advanced academic and practitioner dialogue on business innovation.

The Career Services Unit participated in the First Year Success Expo to advance student employability. Additional initiatives included work-readiness programmes and employer engagement processes to enhance access to career guidance and placement opportunities. The Youth Employment Service (YES) Programme placed interns across University departments, while strategic partnerships with Woolworths and Nedbank expanded exposure to workplace environments, financial wellness, and skills development.

CIPSET supports youth employability through initiatives linking vocational education, sustainability skills, and cooperative development, including the Tracing the Real-World Applications and Career Enhancement of Work Integrated Learning (TRACEWIL) project. Human Resource Development (HRD) also plays a strategic role in expanding access to internships, which provide students with valuable workplace learning experience, while also offering financial support through stipends to assist with living and educational costs. Eight interns appointed in collaboration with the ETDP SETA are expected to complete their year-long contracts in June 2026.

6.3 Student Housing

Residence Tutor Training strengthened the capacity of student leaders to support peer academic development in residences. This complemented the broader Res Peer Academic Circle, and the new Study Buddy Programme, developed in collaboration with the LT Collab, which enables senior students to join study groups online to support academic performance.

Beyond academic support, residence life programming included a Debate League excursion to observe the State of the Province Address debate in the Eastern Cape Legislature, a Residence Book Club delegation to the National Libraries Week celebration at Kwazakhele Library, and an Invasive Species Removal Day during the Easter recess.

In George, the quarter was productive with strong student engagement across academic, wellness, and social development initiatives in the residences. Student leadership programmes developed essential skills through career workshops, while wellness programmes, fundraising, and Freedom Day celebrations continued fostering community spirit.

Work is underway on the transition from the current Meal Management System (MMS) to a hybrid model that will allow students to opt out of catered meals and receive a food allowance to purchase and prepare their own food. Infrastructure and safety upgrades are being addressed in partnership with Infrastructure Services and Space Optimisation (ISSO), to ensure the residence facilities are ready for increased self-catering activities.

6.4 Student Well-being

During the quarter, Student Health Services (SHS) launched a pilot eye health screening programme in collaboration with the Department of Health's Optometry Department, and students were included in the annual influenza vaccination programme at no cost.

Recognising that food insecurity impedes student success, the distribution of 500 nutrition packs monthly to unfunded students across five campuses continues, though demand

substantially exceeds this capacity. On 29 May 2025, the Mandela Walk for Student Hunger, organised by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching, created awareness of the reality of student hunger at the University. The Walk provided an opportunity for employees, students and alumni to contribute donations in the form of sanitary towels, non-perishable foods, and toiletries.

Through SRMA, a series of new partnerships to address student food insecurity have been secured during the quarter. Ongoing support from Tiger Brands will be bolstered by new partnerships with Shoprite, the Professional Provident Society, FoodForward South Africa, and the Gift of the Givers Foundation all of whom have committed to support the University's nutrition initiatives.

Emthonjeni Student Wellness supported 3 056 students through psychosocial services up to 18 May 2026, with 757 students receiving individual counselling sessions and 2 299 reached during 48 group sessions. The presenting concerns included relationship difficulties, anxiety, depressive symptoms, bereavement, trauma, GBV-related issues and suicidal ideation.

6.5 Madibaz Sport

The successful graduation of more than 50 student-athletes during the 2026 Autumn graduation ceremonies was a key highlight. These graduates represented various sporting codes and reflected the University's ongoing commitment to developing well-rounded graduates who excel both academically and athletically. Swimmer Katie Horne brought national distinction to the University, winning four freestyle medals at the Africa Aquatics Swimming Championships in Algeria in May. The Campus League commenced at the George Campus on 24 April, providing structured weekly competitive sport and strengthening social cohesion.

6.6 Universal Accessibility and Disability Services

UADS hosted the Dialogue@Mandela/Kindness@Mandela event at the George Campus on 10 April, which drew 50 students into dialogue on human rights, dignity and inclusion. The newly established Gender Marshal Programme has recruited 32 Gender Marshals who will receive training to champion gender issues and contribute to safe, inclusive environments across the institution.

7. Enabling Systems and Infrastructure that Promote an Exceptional Experience for Students, Employees and Key Stakeholders

7.1. Human Resources

It was pleasing to witness the graduation of 20 employees at the Autumn ceremonies, with six receiving doctorates, three Master's degrees, and eleven honours degrees and postgraduate diplomas. The University continues to provide financial support to employees pursuing formal qualifications, assisting 241 who are studying at Nelson Mandela University and 48 at other institutions during 2026. Six employees were nominated to participate in the HERS-SA Emerging Women Leaders Programme in May 2026, contributing to the pipeline of women in institutional leadership.

Thirty-four appointments were concluded between February and May 2026, with 91% from underrepresented groups and 38% female, sustaining the trajectory towards a more diverse workforce. An Integrated Talent Management Framework is being developed to shift workforce planning from reactive recruitment to proactive succession management.

The 2026/2027 salary and wage settlement has been finalised and implemented in the May payroll cycle, backdated to 1 March 2026. The 3.2% consumer price index increase, and a 1.8% across-the-board increase was made possible by a favourable subsidy variance and approved contingency funding.

During the quarter under review, there has been a notable increase in the demand for employee primary health services, with over 500 consultations having taken place.

7.2. Information and Communication Technology Services

The opening of the Online Application System in April 2026 for the 2027 intake was a significant milestone, with more than 140 000 applicants accessing the system and approximately 72 000 final submissions recorded. Reliable connectivity, accessible digital platforms and secure systems constitute core conditions for student learning and academic progression. To this end, sustained investment will be required to protect service stability and advance digital transformation while managing the pressures of ageing infrastructure and rising demand.

7.3. Infrastructure Services and Space Optimisation

The refurbishment of Heinz Betz Hall into a modern e-Assessment Centre, at a cost of R40-million, was completed in April 2026 with the occupancy certificate issued by the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality ahead of the projected June 2026 completion date. The cricket clubhouse was also completed in April. Preparations for Phase 2 of the Medical School, supported by the DHET's R100-million allocation, are underway.

A comprehensive generator solution will extend emergency power backup to student residences previously excluded from coverage. This marks a significant step in energy resilience, with completion targeted for November 2027. The heavy rain in May substantially reduced the immediate risk of water shortages in Gqeberha and George, although risks associated with ageing municipal infrastructure persist.

A significant highlight in this reporting period was the hosting of an Infrastructure and Investment Indaba on 1 and 2 June. This innovative initiative to address the infrastructure needs of Mandela University, including student housing, brought together representatives of key state-owned enterprises and public entities, a range of private sector institutions and corporates, national and provincial government, as well as local government representatives from George Municipality and the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. The Indaba created an opportunity to present Mandela University's investment case; engage with key stakeholders including funders and government; align funding models and partnerships; and identify bankable infrastructure projects.

7.4. Safety and Security

The University continues to prioritise integrated security interventions to strengthen campus safety and improve operational responsiveness. As from 16 March 2026, 175 Protection Services employees were transferred to Fidelity Security, with a Joint Management Team and associated governance structures in place to oversee post-transfer implementation and operational integration. Progress has been achieved in modernising and stabilising the institutional CCTV environment and monitoring capability has been enhanced through upgraded workstations, display systems, and integrated monitoring platforms. Implementation of a 375 TB enterprise-grade CCTV management platform has significantly improved footage retention capability and institutional investigative capacity. The Closed Campus Project has received renewed in-principle commitment for funding from the DHET, with formal confirmation awaited.

7.5. Catering Services

Accessible, affordable, and quality catering services play an important role in supporting student and employee well-being and a vibrant campus experience. The Catering Turnaround Programme seeks to strengthen service quality, operational sustainability, and customer satisfaction. Ongoing work includes enhancing menu diversity, affordability, and value offerings.

7.6 Communication and Marketing

Regional recruitment roadshows were launched in April 2026 across KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State and the Western Cape, with a concentrated focus on rural and metropolitan areas in the Eastern Cape to facilitate inclusive access. These roadshows sought to ensure that Grade 12 learners are prepared for the digital application landscape and the 2027 enrolment cycle. A targeted “Postgraduate Pathways” campaign was implemented to encourage current students to consider postgraduate studies, which generated high student interest, averaging 60 queries per day.

8. Enhance Long-term Financial Sustainability through Effective Resource Mobilisation and Responsible Resource Stewardship

8.1. Strategic Resource Mobilisation and Advancement

The target for 2026 is to mobilise at least R110-million for bursaries and scholarships to support undergraduate missing middle and postgraduate students. From January to early May 2026, R96.2-million was mobilised, of which R62.6-million had been paid over. To date 618 students have been awarded bursaries, of whom over 96% are Black and the majority are female. Over and above this, the University has set aside R119.7-million for the 2026 financial year for student bursaries. Undergraduate students were allocated R57-million, while R62.7-million has been allocated to postgraduate students.

8.2. Financial Planning

The contingency fund was fully drawn down by the end of April and a mid-year budget review will be used to replenish it. With the transfer of Protection Services staff now complete, the reclassification of the relevant costs from salaries to goods and services is expected to restore the salary sustainability benchmark to 65% in the 2027 budget.

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) close-out for the 2017–2022 period has been completed, resulting in a net R31-million payable to the Scheme following reconciliation at student level. The 2023–2025 close-out remains underway.

Cohort tracking data indicates that N+1 achievement rates for NSFAS-funded students in three- and four-year qualifications range from 40% to 57%, a trend that will intensify pressure on concession applications and institutional credit risk as successive cohorts reach their funding ceiling. Total concession applications, as of 15 May 2026, totalled 7640, of which 4276 have been awarded.

The Sustainability and Institutional Viability Task Team continues its work on academic optimisation, improved efficiencies and strategy-aligned budgeting, with its outcomes to inform the 2027 budgeting process. This is being complemented by the recommendations from employees for cost-saving and revenue-generation through the Masonge Siphuhlise institutional culture signature programme.

The overall financial position of the University is sound, and a detailed financial report will be tabled for Council.

9. Conclusion

Nelson Mandela University is advancing Vision 2030 by creating an enabling and supportive learning and working environment that promote student access and success. We are grateful for Council's continued guidance and oversight as we continue to fulfil our noble mission to offer a wide range of life-changing educational opportunities that contribute to a sustainable future.