



**Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council  
Quarter 3, 2025**

**30 September 2025**

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## 1. Introduction

This report will provide Council with a narrative overview of strategic highlights and challenges for the third quarter, with specific reference to the theme of transformation. Through our institutional values, Nelson Mandela University strives to expand and consolidate our strategic aspirations and intentions to be in the service of society. We gather today against a volatile global macro-environment characterised by profound geopolitical shifts and tensions, all of which have an impact on how universities execute their core academic missions and support services.

## 2. Vision 2030 and strategic trajectories

We cannot ignore the erosion of democratic norms and the rise of authoritarianism around the world. Our challenge is clear, namely, to defend higher education as a space for free thought, critical engagement, and contestation of ideas. In so doing, we will ensure that Nelson Mandela University remains socially embedded and true to its mission to offer a diverse range of life-changing educational experiences for a better world. This is reflected in the University's strategic trajectories, which seek to differentiate the University within the national and global higher education landscape.

### 2.1. Ocean Sciences

Nelson Mandela University pays tribute to Dr Monde Mayekiso, a member of the Nelson Mandela University Council and a noted marine scientist, who sadly passed away in July. Dr Mayekiso was a national and international figure in ocean governance, and his legacy lives on in important environmental policy frameworks.

The 2025 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings placed Nelson Mandela University second in South Africa for United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14: Life Below Water. This cements the University's positioning as a leading destination of choice for ocean sciences nationally.

The South African International Maritime Institute (SAIMI) is playing an instrumental role in developing the Ocean Economy Masterplan for South Africa. As part of broadening its impact, SAIMI has launched a short learning programme (SLP), *An Introduction to Ocean Matters*, and its national Maritime Research Repository went live in June 2025. SAIMI hosted a Women's Month event, with the Minister for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Lydia Chikunga, as the keynote speaker. The Minister emphasised the persistent inequalities women face in maritime industries and called for practical steps to address these.

With over 370 members, the Institute for Coastal and Marine Research (CMR) advances transformation imperatives through equity-driven human resource development, decolonial and transdisciplinary research, and societal engagement. To date, CMR members have produced 61 publications this year, of which nearly a third directly address social equity, inclusion, and policy imperatives. Ongoing engagement projects seek to co-create solutions

with small-scale fishing communities. CMR hosted the World Environment Day Seminar focusing on waste minimisation and management in collaboration with Helenvale Recyclers and the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. In celebration of National Women's Month and World Indigenous Peoples Day, a further seminar was held on 26 August entitled *Voices that Matter: A Perspective from Indigenous Women*.

In other developments, the Faculty of Engineering, the Built Environment and Technology (EBET) has extended its footprint through collaboration with Plymouth University in the UK, where Emeritus Professor Rossouw von Solms is engaged in maritime cybersecurity research. In addition, the NRF Chair in Ocean Cultures and Heritage, Professor Rose Boswell, recently hosted a series of documentary films entitled *Ecotones* at the University's Science Centre, exploring ocean and coastal cultural heritage across five southern African countries.

## **2.2. Medical School**

As it approaches its sixth year, the Medical School is at a challenging growth stage. Key issues include limited student funding and bursaries, uncertain future government funding for infrastructure and staffing, Eastern Cape Department of Health (ECDoH) staffing shortfalls, and concerns over the clinical training platform.

Going forward, the Vice-Chancellors from Nelson Mandela University and Walter Sisulu University will engage with the Premier of the Eastern Cape and the ECDoH in pursuit of a comprehensive funding framework to support the two medical schools and the clinical training platform. This is important given that MBChB sixth-year students are to be placed in groups in three district hospitals (Graaff Reinet, Makhandla and Somerset East) from January 2026. The Medical School is also planning for at least 20 new medical specialist trainee (registrar) posts per year from 2027 to 2030.

## **2.3. Revitalising the Humanities**

Language is emerging as both a barrier and a bridge in shaping access, justice and transformation. This took centre stage at the 2025 Southern African Linguistics and Applied Linguistics Society (SALALS) Conference, held from 25 to 27 June, to interrogate how linguistic practices and policies can better reflect African realities.

Humanities lecturers, Drs Johannes Sibeko and Paulette Coetzee, were recently appointed to the Eastern Cape Provincial Language Committee, one of the provincial bodies under the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB). This statutory board promotes the development and use of all official languages, including the Khoe, Nama, and San languages, as well as South African Sign Language.

The Digital Humanities hub is conceptualising the intersections of the humanities and technology, and critically examining Artificial Intelligence (AI), data, bias, algorithms and people in digitised spaces. A further transformative innovation is the soon-to-be compulsory *Academic and Digital Literacies* module for BA students, designed to build on students' existing literacies rather than remediate perceived deficits.

## **2.4. Transdisciplinary Sustainability Sciences**

The *Social Consciousness for Sustainable Futures* (SCSF) course, launched in July 2025, embeds social transformation within the University's curricula across disciplines. The course is now offered as a foundational, credit-bearing module within the faculties of Humanities, Law and Education. The aim is to extend the module across all faculties by 2027.

On 8 July 2025, the Mandela Institute for Sustainable Futures (MISF) hosted its inaugural webinar, *Framing Sustainability in Africa*, attended by more than 85 participants. At Research Week in September, MISF invited a panel of speakers to further explore this theme. The George Campus Sustainability Research Unit is at the forefront of sustainability research, positioning the George Campus as an active innovation hub within the MISF.

The University's C-Vive Cervical Cancer project is a leading example of transdisciplinary research that advances sustainability by equitably tackling long-term public health challenges in under-resourced communities. This project is undertaken through a partnership between EBET's Centre for Community Technologies (CCT), the Faculty of Health Sciences, government, and community organisations.

## **3. Distinctive educational purpose and philosophy that contributes to student access for success**

### **3.1 Enabling Student Access for Success**

#### ***Enrolment Management***

Nelson Mandela University and its partner higher education institutions in the Eastern Cape hosted the inaugural Regional Student Enrolment Management Conference on 17 and 18 July 2025. The theme was *Defining Enrolment Management Strategies for Sustainable Universities*, and the deliberations underscored the urgent need for a coherent approach to student enrolment management across the Eastern Cape.

#### ***Language Policy***

Following an extensive consultation process, Senate approved the revised University Language Policy. The policy recognises the significance of multilingualism as a key dimension of transformation. The fundamental policy statement is the recognition of English, isiXhosa and Afrikaans as the official languages of the University, with English as the primary language of instruction, complemented by isiXhosa and Afrikaans as languages of learning and teaching. It also promotes the use of South African Sign Language in all University communication, including public events and ceremonies.

#### ***Learning and Teaching Week 2025***

Learning and Teaching Week 2025 took place from 27 to 29 August, with the theme *Reimagining Learning: Transformation, Technology and Teaching for a New Era*. The week-long event featured discussions, conversations, and the showcasing of new ideas focused on technology, transformation, and teaching methods to shape the future of education and humanise the learning experience for students.

### ***Digital Learning Experience and the Virtual Academy***

The University has been piloting Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in the form of tutor bots (chatbots trained on specific course content and materials) in the classroom. Tutor bots are multilingual, which allows students to engage with the course material in their first language.

The Digital Learning Experience Design and Innovation (LxD) team has been applying GenAI in digital learning within the Funda Learning Management System (LMS), including image and video production. These tools have enabled the LxD Studio to translate more traditional learning material to the digital space in a shorter time.

EBET is advancing digital transformation through the Mindjoy Pilot Project, which deploys AI tools as tutors, marking assistants, and simulation facilitators across three modules. More than 180 students engaged with the platform, generating over 28 000 AI-facilitated interactions. Building on this success, the platform will expand to fifteen modules in the second semester.

As part of developments towards the establishment of the Virtual Academy, the Business School is currently developing five tailored online MBA programmes and the anticipated commencement date is 2027. In addition, the Business School is designing a suite of executive education training courses aimed at enhancing management and leadership competencies in an AI-driven professional landscape.

### **3.2 LT Collab**

The LT Collab is at the centre of ensuring a transformative learning and teaching experience that supports the development of African and digitalised curricula.

#### ***Learning Development (LD)***

The First Year Success (FYS) Indaba was a two-day collaborative engagement between students, FYS Buddies, staff and SRC members organised to reimagine the FYS programme. This allowed for the student voice to be central in designing a transformative FYS experience for 2026. Additionally, the first phase of a peer-led coaching programme to enhance student success will commence in September 2025. LD support initiatives are transitioning from one-on-one to group and peer-led coaching to improve reach and participation across campuses.

#### ***Teaching Development (TD)***

Through the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG), TD contributed to funding two transformative initiatives, namely, the Africanisation of the Science Faculty Curriculum Workshop and the Health Sciences Learning and Teaching Colloquium. In addition, the Teaching Development and Innovation Fund (TDIF) is supporting 25 academics and professional staff to implement projects that advance transformation through multilingualism, digital literacies, and scholarly outputs rooted in transformative methodologies and transdisciplinarity. Academic Planning and Quality Advancement (APQA), in conjunction with TD, have co-facilitated numerous training sessions to support faculties with curriculum transformation.

## **4. Engaged, innovative scholarship culture that generates knowledge recognised for its contribution to sustainability**

### **4.1. Research**

#### ***Research Support Management (RSM)***

The University's 20 research entities contribute significantly to research outputs, postgraduate training and external income generation. Of the entity leaders, half are female-led, and 30% are Black, which points to the need for succession planning and transformation in collaboration with the faculties.

The University currently has 93 NRF-rated researchers (female 43%, male 57%; Black 27%, White 73%). Diversifying the demographic profile of mid-career to established researchers, including rated researchers, remains a priority. RSM is developing a capacity-building programme to increase support for rating submissions.

Launched on 27 June, the Mandela Imvuselelo Professors Programme (MIPP) is a strategic intervention to support mid-career academics to accelerate research outputs and strengthen research leadership. This is essential amid an anticipated retirement of around 90 academics from now until 2030, including 26 professors and eleven associate professors.

#### ***Symposium on Quantum Science and Technology***

To elevate the University's research profile, the Faculty of Science hosted a two-day Symposium on Quantum Science and Technology entitled *Schrödinger's Cat WANTED: Dead and Alive*. This celebrated the International Year of Quantum Science and Technology in 2025 and convened scientists, policymakers and educators to explore the evolving relationship between science and society.

#### ***Research Week 2025***

The University's fourth annual Research Week, themed *Transforming Knowledge for a Just, Sustainable and Innovative Africa*, was held from 8 to 12 September. This event featured groundbreaking research, collaboration, and innovation designed to address three key themes, namely, transcending disciplinary boundaries, centring African agency and ensuring inclusivity.

#### ***Research Excellence***

The Centre for Community Technologies Centre (CCT), led by Distinguished Professor Darelle van Greunen, received the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) Science Diplomacy Award for Africa for exceptional efforts in fostering cross-border scientific collaboration, innovation and empowerment across the continent. Emeritus Professor Andre Calitz (Computing Sciences) received the 2025 Association of Information Systems, Southern Africa Chapter, Life Achievement Award in recognition of his significant role in the Information Systems community in South Africa.

Postgraduate student Ruby Davies is one of seven Master's degree students countrywide who received the South African Women in Science Awards DSTI–Dr Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri Fellowship for academic excellence and research potential.

## **4.2. Research support for postgraduate students and early career academics**

The University Council approved R49.7-million for postgraduate scholarships in 2025, with 93% of this funding already disbursed. Together with R32.2-million from external funders, this reflects a substantial investment in postgraduate access. Overall, 266 Honours, 628 Master's, and 334 Doctoral scholarships were awarded from Council and other external funders as of 28 August 2025. Of these awards, 84% of the beneficiaries were Black, 60% were women, and 89% South African citizens and permanent residents. Uptake is ongoing.

A Master's and Doctoral Conference Travel Grant call supports full-time Master's and Doctoral candidates presenting at local or international conferences. To date, 20 grants have been awarded (12 international, 8 local): 81% Black, 55% women, and 81% South African citizens. A total of nearly R910 000 was awarded in Internal Research Grants to 29 early career researchers for research running costs, teaching relief, and conference participation, 90% of whom are Black and 62% women.

Nelson Mandela University has also leveraged funding from the NRF and DHET to provide the support and training needed for academic staff to attain higher degrees. There are 17 active Thuthuka grant holders (R1.4-million awarded), of whom 94% are Black and 47% are women. The DHET-funded New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) cohort comprises 15 academics (with R3.3-million awarded), of which 95% are Black and 53% are women, while the Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP) currently funds 11 academics (R2.9-million awarded). The University Staff Doctoral Programme saw four awards in 2025 to Black researchers, 50% of whom were women (R2.3-million awarded by DHET).

During the reporting period, 126 postdoctoral and research fellowships were awarded, of which 109 (87%) have been taken up (of these, 82% are Black scholars, and 30% are women). While a diverse international cohort enriches the research environment, the proportion of South African fellows remains at 37%, well below the target of 70%. This presents a strategic opportunity for host researchers to recruit and support South African PhD graduates and emerging scholars.

## **4.3. Internationalisation and Expansion of African Footprint**

### ***International Student Recruitment***

As of 9 September 2025, Nelson Mandela University hosted 779 international students from 45 nations, representing 2.2% of total enrolments. SADC countries contributed 67% of international students (516), with Zimbabwe leading (333), followed by Lesotho (48), Malawi (29), and Zambia (21).

Undergraduate international applications declined year-on-year from 2 324 to 1 946. Postgraduate applications increased overall, but acceptances decreased slightly, highlighting

the need for improved attention to postgraduate enrolment processes and supervisory capacity. The Office for International Education has advanced a digital system for automated acceptance letter generation for 2026, which is expected to reduce processing delays and enhance the applicant experience.

### ***International Partnerships***

The University maintains over 49 active institutional MoUs, in Asia, North and South America, Europe and the rest of the African continent, with the highest concentrations in Europe and Africa. Key partnerships expanded across continents with participation in the Association of African Universities' 16th General Conference in Morocco, securing new collaborations. The visit of the Zhejiang Normal University delegation strengthened BRICS-linked initiatives in African Studies and sustainability. Nelson Mandela University joined the BRICS+ Network University in 2025, committing to the themes of Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security.

## **4.4. Innovation**

During the third quarter, the Innovation Office (IO) focused on intellectual property awareness, student entrepreneurship, green innovation and external partnerships. A Cleantech information session was held on 10 June 2025 in collaboration with Propella Business Incubator to guide researchers in accessing funding and incubation opportunities in sustainable technology sectors. Two further workshops were hosted in August 2025 as part of the Postgraduate Innovation Competition to assist students in developing and pitching business cases.

The University achieved a major milestone with the licensing of its Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) technology. Licence terms were finalised and approved by Innovolve and a commercial partner, with the National Intellectual Property Management Office (NIPMO) confirming assignment. The patent portfolio includes filings in the European Union, United States of America, China, Japan and Australia, positioning the University favourably in applied aerospace technologies.

## **4.5. Library and Information Services**

By August 2025, 94.7% of University publications were open access, saving an estimated R3.1-million in article processing charges. Print subscriptions were further reduced, with savings redirected to expand the e-book collection, now totalling more than 378 700 titles. In July 2025, the library introduced Single Sign-On (OpenAthens), enabling seamless off-campus access to 99% of resources.

## **5. Transformative institutional culture that promotes diversity and social cohesion**

### ***Solidarity with Palestine***

On 13 August 2025, the Council of Nelson Mandela University issued a statement on Gaza, calling for a ceasefire and justice. This followed the Senate resolution taken on 6 May 2024 on the Israel-Palestine conflict and Council's earlier statement issued in December 2023. An ad hoc committee has been established by executive management to review the University's activities and relationships to ensure these align with the intentions of Council and Senate.

### ***Mandela University Press***

Following the launch of the INKwazi community imprint of the Mandela University Press in May, the Press launched the publication of two titles: *Origins: KhoiSan Heritage Sites and Sense of Belonging in the Eastern Cape, South Africa* by Professor Magda Minguzzi (EBET) and *Pan-African Integration from Below: Language, Publics, Culture* by Mandela University research associates, Prof Finex Ndhlovu and Dr Jesta Masuku.

### ***Institutional Public Lectures***

Three Institutional Public Lectures (IPLs) took place in this quarter. The Griffiths and Victoria Mxenge Memorial public lecture, *Holding out for the Long Arm of the Law*, was held on 24 July 2025 with the Chair of Council, Justice Nambitha Dambuza, as the keynote speaker. The Faculty of Humanities, the Centre for Women and Gender Studies (CWGS), and the Bam Foundation hosted the Dr Brigalia Bam public lecture *When Hens Begin to Crow: Preparing Women to Govern*, on 29 August 2025. The speakers were Ambassador Bridgitte Mabandla, former Minister of Justice, and COSATU President Zingiswa Losi. The 15<sup>th</sup> Steve Bantu Biko IPL, *Power and Activism for Total Liberation and Justice in South Africa*, was held on 12 September with Advocate Dr Muzi Sikhakhane as the keynote speaker.

### **5.1 Engagement Office (EO)**

A key highlight of the Hubs of Convergence (HoC) strategic project this quarter was the University's Mandela Day programme held at the Gelvandale High School. Under the theme *Continuing towards Dignity and Growing Hope*, efforts by students and staff from across the University, together with the local community, resulted in the restoration of hostel dormitories and food gardens, and the realisation of mobile legal clinics and wellness workshops for elders and persons living with disabilities. The Govan Mbeki Mathematics Development Centre also donated tablets and workbooks to empower learners through digital learning resources.

Co-curricular activities were implemented across the Humanities, Health Sciences and Education faculties, alongside collaboration with The Hope Revolution Vision. The George Campus hosted a two-day Short Learning Programme in Smutsville, Sedgfield, partnering with local youth and community groups.

## **5.2. Transformation Office**

There were 53 complaints lodged with the Transformation Office from 1 January to 31 July 2025, representing a 21% decline from 2024. Student-on-student incidents constituted 68% of cases (down from 85% in 2024). Sex-related offences decreased from 56.5% in 2024 to 32% in 2025, while unfair discrimination-related incidents persist.

First-responder training for all Residence Managers was conducted on 12 and 13 August to equip them with trauma response skills. The operationalisation of the University's Safe Haven is underway. Consultations for the development of the next five-year Institutional Transformation Plan (2028-2032), including targets, will commence in 2026.

## **5.3. Centre for Women and Gender Studies**

Professor SN Nyeck, of the University of Colorado Boulder, was hosted through the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Programme, presenting masterclasses in August on extreme responsibility and intersectionality. This was co-hosted with CriSHET and included shared sessions with Rhodes University on African Diplomacy. From 9 to 11 July, the Centre hosted the 6th Annual African Feminisms (Afems) Conference with the theme *A Conspiracy of Women: Institutions, Humour and Imagination*. The event foregrounded experimental and affective dimensions of feminist knowledge as a space to challenge institutional orthodoxy.

## **5.4. Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET)**

CriSHET organised an Advancing Critical University Studies Across Africa (ACUSAfrica) network retreat and is planning a 2026 Winter School for postgraduates and emerging academics. The Madibaz Reading Group launched an *"In Conversation With..."* series where students discuss work with book authors. Key collaborations included the lecture by Rev Dr Allan Boesak on 6 August to commemorate the 1990 Northern Areas uprising and the Faculty of Science workshop on Africanising the curriculum.

## **5.5. Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training (CIPSET)**

CIPSET's public engagement expanded through Community Education and Training College leadership capacity-building, preparation for the launch of the Assembly of Community Farmers, and climate justice webinars. CIPSET recently initiated the development of an archive of multilingual agroecological materials for community farmers and continued its support for small-scale fishers in the Eastern Cape through both digital platforms and face-to-face engagement. A Memorandum of Agreement has been signed with the Public Servants Association to co-develop educational content on socio-political and ecological themes.

## **5.6. Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD)**

Collaborations have included land question dialogues with The Herald and youth dialogues with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, reflecting on ten years since #FeesMustFall. The Director

participated in over 100 media interviews while contributing to Trans-Atlantic Platform research and national projects with the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection.

## **5.7. Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS)**

TIMS hosted the Mandela Indaba entitled *From Dalibhunga to Rolihlahla: Making Trouble with Mandela* on 14 and 15 August 2025 in collaboration with CriSHET. The event reflected on existing work around the Mandela name while collectively examining the responsibility of carrying that legacy. Artist Zama Spellman's exhibition "made trouble" by challenging conventional Mandela representations in branding.

## **6. Enhancing student living and learning experiences**

### **6.1. Student Governance and Development**

The Department of Student Governance and Development presented Women's Day celebrations on 8 August 2025 at the North Campus Conference Centre, in collaboration with Lead Her and Ebuhlanti programmes. The Ebuhlanti and Singamadoda Programmes are transformative initiatives designed to foster a safe space for men to exchange ideas and challenge ways of thinking about masculinity, gender equality and inclusion through dialogue.

### **6.2. Student Housing**

The Student Housing Department is revitalising and transforming student life by fostering a vibrant residence community that encourages students to thrive both academically and socially. Check-ins were held in August with House Committees, Mentors, and Residence Student Assistants across various clusters to provide a supportive environment for student leaders to reflect on their roles, discuss challenges, and collaborate on strategies for improvement.

### **6.2. Student entrepreneurship and graduate employability**

The University has been awarded R26-million by the Female Academic Leadership Fellowship (FALF) NPC and the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation (FEF) for a Research Chair in Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion. The Chair will be hosted in the Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences and will foster interdisciplinary collaboration with other entrepreneurship and employability initiatives.

Since 2024, the Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator (CfERI) has successfully created 15 new jobs and sustained 89 existing businesses. Additionally, it provided critical support to twelve new Small-, Micro-, and Medium-Sized Enterprises and cooperatives. Notably, three of these enterprises experienced a 5% increase in their turnover, reflecting the effectiveness of the support provided in driving business growth and sustainability.

In August, the Mandela University Africa Hub (MUAH) organised student market days where 37 student entrepreneurs showcased and sold their products. In addition, the annual Careers

Fair on 30 and 31 July attracted over 1 500 students daily, connecting them with leading industry employers.

On 4 September, MUAH partnered with Google.org to launch the Digital Ubuntu Cybersecurity/AI Seminars for students. The two-year initiative funded by Google.org will train 100 students in cybersecurity and AI to provide essential digital skills and career pathways.

#### **6.4. Student Wellness**

Emthonjeni Student Wellness (ESW) has partnered with faculties, residences and SRC structures to provide integrated psychosocial support as part of the broader transformation agenda, with each faculty now having a liaison counsellor. This integrated model is proving to be impactful with residence-based mental health workshops increasing by over 50% within six months, while the usage of peer-led and faculty-supported services surged, particularly among first-year students.

Student Health Services is expanding awareness efforts following a rise in student pregnancies (96 this year compared to 80 in 2024) and has intensified its HIV AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), and Tuberculosis programme.

This quarter, Tiger Brands' supplies of 500 packs were depleted before reaching all students, highlighting the urgency of a more sustainable system for nutritional support. To this end, a partnership with Food Forward South Africa (FFSA) has been established to provide monthly food packs to at least 1 000 students. The Strategic Resource Mobilisation and Advancement (SRMA) Office has also launched the 2025 Giving Campaign with the theme *Empower Futures: Nourish Minds, Fund Dreams*. The campaign aims to assist deserving students who are forced to skip daily meals because they cannot afford food.

#### **6.5. Madibaz Sport**

This year, 271 students were allocated sport bursaries. Sixty-six (24%) of the bursaries are funded by NSFAS, indicating the ever-increasing importance of this funding stream for Madibaz Sport. The most notable sporting achievement during the last quarter was the gold medal won at the University Sport South Africa (USSA) Karate Championships. Other notable USSA A-section performances are Hockey Men (fourth), Netball Women (sixth), and Squash (sixth – combined men and women). Madibaz Sport created opportunities for seven sports codes and more than 180 students to participate in various USSA tournaments across the country.

#### **6.6. Universal Accessibility and Disability Services (UADS)**

Of the University's 34 617 enrolled students, only 343 (1%) have reported a disability. The 2025 UADS Colloquium on 21 and 22 August marked a significant milestone in advancing the transformation agenda through dialogue between students, academics, government and civil society. The event foregrounded disability inclusion as a critical measure of institutional integrity and social justice.

## **7. Enabling systems and infrastructure that promote an exceptional experience for students, employees and key stakeholders**

### **7.1. Human Resources**

#### ***Senior management appointments***

Nelson Mandela University welcomes Dr Sibusiso Mchunu as the new Dean of Students and Professor Christa Grobler as the new Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science. Both joined us from the Vaal University of Technology where Prof Grobler was Executive Dean of the Faculty of Applied and Computer Sciences, while Dr Mchunu was Executive Director of Student Support Services.

#### ***Employment Equity***

The new Employment Equity Plan (2025–2030) has been drafted in alignment with the gazetted five-year sectoral numerical targets. The Plan is currently undergoing internal stakeholder consultations and governance approval processes. As of 1 July 2025, the University's permanent workforce stood at 2 421 employees, with the proportion of People with Disabilities (PWD) exceeding the newly gazetted sectoral target of 3%.

#### ***Enhancement of a transformative institutional culture***

The first of six Institutional Culture signature programmes, *The Mandela In Us*, rolled out in July across all campuses. This culminated in an exhibition of 20 insightful artefacts, created by various faculties and divisions, displayed at the Science Centre. An exhibition was also successfully hosted at the George Campus in August. This intervention seeks to enhance a transformative and values-driven institutional culture by giving expression to the lived experiences of students and staff.

#### ***Harmonisation of Remuneration Project***

Phase 1 of the Total Guaranteed Package (TGP) implementation was completed with the May 2025 pay run. Phase 2 Implementation is underway and will apply to all new employees joining the University from 1 September 2025 onwards. Internal parity adjustments for PASS employees from Post Level 5 to 16 seek to align employees with the midpoint of their scale, thereby promoting greater pay equity. MANCO recommended a four-year phased implementation approach, subject to funding availability, to manage the cost implications for the salary bill.

### **7.2. Information and Communication Technology Services**

The University's digital platforms have significantly widened access, with 169 039 applicants for the 2026 academic year as of 16 September 2025. The University is implementing InSpera, a new eAssessment and Proctoring tool, to uphold online examination integrity. Infrastructure at North Campus is also being refurbished as an e-assessment centre.

The University continues to narrow the digital divide through 142 computer labs with more than 4 289 computers across campuses, achieving a 1:8 PC-to-student ratio. In 2025, 2 650 laptops were issued to students through the Student Device Initiative, and Wi-Fi has been upgraded and expanded to cover more indoor and outdoor spaces.

### **7.3. Infrastructure Services and Space Optimisation**

#### ***Energy Security***

A project to install 4.4MW of photovoltaic infrastructure and other alternative energy sources is underway, aiming to save the University between R8- to R10-million per annum in electricity costs. Construction is due to begin in October 2025. Running parallel to this is a planned reconfiguration of generator infrastructure to reduce its load and the amount of fuel required.

#### ***Water Security***

As of mid-September 2025, the combined dam levels for the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro, stood at 65%. While still at a moderate level, continued monitoring, demand management and contingency planning are needed. The George Campus has achieved a major infrastructure milestone with the installation of a 600-kilolitre prefabricated steel water reservoir in addition to the existing, recently installed 1 Megalitre reservoir.

#### ***Waste Management***

There is commendable work, led by students, across campuses on waste management measures, including recycling. George Campus has been exemplary, while Gqeberha-based campuses have also hosted clean-up campaigns to promote a culture of environmental stewardship.

#### ***Safety and Security Infrastructure***

The University has started a five-year security technologies upgrade project. In 2025, investments in new surveillance technologies and related infrastructure will be realised once procurement processes are completed.

#### ***Student Mobility***

A Student Transport Indaba was held in July to solicit the perspectives of diverse stakeholders in guiding the development of a sustainable student transport service. This led to the co-creation of solutions in the student transport funding model, enhancing efficiencies in student mobility and University student transport infrastructure. The long-term solution is to build more residences closer to the campus.

### **7.4. Communication and Marketing**

Working with civil society structures, a targeted recruitment drive reached out to learners in rural towns such as Bedford, Adelaide, Cookhouse, Somerset East and Lusikisiki. A winter school hosted at the University for learners from disadvantaged communities was another

example of targeted recruitment intervention in support of social justice. In August, the Faculty of Science, in collaboration with the OR Tambo Coastal District Education Office, hosted a two-day National Science Week event in Lusikisiki, which was attended by more than 1 100 students from 38 schools.

The Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy for the University has been drafted and is under discussion. On the George Campus, a project funded by the National Heritage Council, *Mandela: Our Living Heritage*, is facilitating dialogues among staff and students around heritage, transformation and decolonisation.

## **8. Enhance long-term financial sustainability through effective resource mobilisation and responsible resource stewardship**

### **8.1. Strategic Resource Mobilisation and Advancement (SRMA)**

As a key dimension of transformation, the SRMA aims to mobilise at least R95-million for bursaries and scholarships to support undergraduate missing middle and postgraduate students. By the end of August 2025, R73.25 million was received, with R40-million still to be paid.

Of the 614 Nelson Mandela University Trust bursary recipients, the majority are Black students (94.6% of the total), and female students outnumber male students. Almost 9.6% of the funding mobilised has been allocated to postgraduate students. In August, the Trust also deployed just over R1.5-million to assist 33 students who were facing eviction by landlords after losing NSFAS funding.

The target for engagement projects in 2025 is R20-million. As at the end of August 2025, just under R14-million had been received, and an additional R2.7-million had been secured, but payment was still to be made.

### **8.2. Financial planning**

The Ministerial Statement and the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement indicate potential increases in block grants for the sector in the medium term, after stagnant allocations over the past three years. The institutional mid-year budget review has enabled the reprioritisation of funds to top up the contingency fund for urgent once-off interventions and strategic initiatives. MANCO also approved the 2026 Budget Directives, which were noted by FFC.

This year, the institution was able to grant staff a 5.3% salary increase, which is above the 2024 CPI of 4.4% for 2025. However, management must be mindful that the salary benchmark will need to be reduced to 65% in the 2027 budget.

To date, there are 20 509 registered NSFAS recipients, slightly higher than 19 133 for 2024. As of 3 September, there were 10 285 concession applications, of which 3 542 have been awarded. The latest total number of defunded NSFAS students is 717, and the University

currently has around 1 100 students whose registration templates are still to be submitted to NSFAS. MANCO has established a working group to investigate this perennial challenge.

### **8.3. Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE)**

The University is targeting a Level 3 for the 2025 financial year end, to be verified in 2026. A plan is in place to ensure that a revised B-BBEE certificate is issued on or before the expiry date of the current certificate, which is 10 November 2025.

## **9. Conclusion**

Transformation is a complex, multi-faceted and integrated process of continuous institutional renewal and redress. Nelson Mandela University continues to advance its Vision 2030 and transformation goals through strategic investment in strengthening its position as a leading, socially embedded and globally connected institution, equipping students and staff to contribute meaningfully to a just, sustainable future for all. We extend our appreciation to Council for its ongoing judicious oversight of the work of the University.