



**Vice-Chancellor's Quarterly Report  
to Council  
Quarter 4, 2020**

**3 December 2020**

**VICE CHANCELLOR'S REPORT TO COUNCIL  
FOURTH QUARTER, 2020**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of the COVID-19 global pandemic has necessitated wide-ranging interventions to save lives and the academic year. The prevailing circumstances have significantly accelerated the University's digital transformation trajectory and many positive lessons can be taken from this experience going forward. Staff and students have demonstrated incredible resilience, persistence and collaboration in ensuring that we will be able to complete the 2020 academic year without leaving any students behind.

In this final report for 2020, Council will be provided with an overview of the strategic highlights and challenges for this quarter in relation to our six Vision 2020 strategic priorities, while also signaling important next steps as we build readiness for 2021. In alignment with our annual reporting cycle, **sustainability and stewardship** is the theme for quarter four with a focus on efforts to build a solid foundation for meeting operational needs while promoting long-term sustainability.

## 2. VISION 2020: STRATEGIC PLANNING

As Council is aware, we are in the final year of Vision 2020 and we are making good progress in developing our Vision 2030 Strategy. We will seek approval from Council for the Vision 2030 Strategy, with the accompanying institutional risks and opportunities registers, in the first quarter of 2021. This will allow for broad-based stakeholder engagement at all levels to promote ownership and agency in developing and deploying our future-focused strategic priorities and enablers. Plans are afoot to arrange a formal engagement with Council members during January, as we refine the Strategy.

## 3. STRATEGIC GROWTH TRAJECTORIES

### 3.1 Ocean Sciences

The University is pleased to announce that Professor Rose Boswell has been offered a Tier 1 Department of Science and Innovation (DSI)/Mandela SARCHi Chair in Ocean Cultures and Heritage for a period of five years, with a possibility of renewal for up to 15 years depending on satisfactory performance. This is indeed a positive development in our efforts to revitalise the humanities and promote transdisciplinarity.

Professor Mike Roberts, joint NRF/UK-funded Chair in Ocean Science and Food Security, has been announced as the winner of the 2020 Newton Prize featuring research and innovation projects. The Newton Prize valued at £200 000 (ca. R4.2 million) recognises excellent science, research and innovation in support of economic development and social welfare in UK-selected research partner countries. Professor Roberts leads a multidisciplinary research group that focuses on how climate change impacts the ecosystem of Western Indian Ocean (WIO) and how this links to food security in the region.

The United Nations Education for Justice (E4J) initiative seeks to partner with universities to

promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. The call for applications for the E4J Grants Programme yielded 227 applications from universities in 69 countries across the world. We are pleased to inform Council that Nelson Mandela University's Centre for Law in Action was one of four universities selected to receive this grant in support of its work in advancing SDG 16 (Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies) in South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and the Seychelles.

On 23 October 2020, the University hosted a delegation led by the French ambassador in South Africa. The purpose of the visit was to sign a grant agreement, which will provide financial support to Nelson Mandela University totalling 17,195 Euros (R333 000) from the French embassy for the purchase of equipment to support ongoing climate change and shallow water coastal and estuarine research. Through this agreement, Dr Olivier Bousquet, a Senior Researcher in Ocean, Atmospheric and Climate Sciences at the Reunion University, will work at Nelson Mandela University's Institute for Coastal and Marine Research until 2022, funded by the French government.

The University's Shallow Marine and Coastal Research Infrastructure (SMCRI) initiative, funded by the DSI acquired the new fully functional hyperbaric chamber platform to be used primarily for diving emergencies, but also for scientific diver training. Another potential future use of the facility may include Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) if an arrangement can be reached with a medical doctor willing to run the HBOT treatments.

### **3.2 Medical School**

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) has provisionally accredited the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) and the CHE has also approved the programme. We are awaiting SAQA registration of the programme before we can start the student recruitment and admissions process for 2021.

A briefing meeting with the Minister and Deputy Minister of Health was held on 16 October 2020. The DG and VC were tasked with establishing a reference group comprising representatives of the University and the National Department of Health to continue the work and prepare a consolidated report for the next meeting.

The appointment of staff in the first two waves has been completed, bar two appointments, and four positions in wave three have been advertised. The L&T facilities are in the final stages of preparation for operations and most of the facilities are already being used for the Nelson Mandela Fidel Castro Medical Collaboration (NMFCMC) programme students who recently returned from Cuba to complete their clinical training.

The medical programme staff have been relocated to the Missionvale Campus and the Faculty has already witnessed how the sharing of facilities has led to improved efficiencies. Safety and security on the Missionvale Campus is currently being improved as part of the readiness plan in preparation for the launch of the medical programme in 2021. The upgrades include the installation of two additional fences, a new gravel path around the perimeter to allow for security patrols, and new security lighting masts with surveillance and motion sensor cameras.

### **3.3 Revitalising the humanities**

Nelson Mandela University has been awarded a National Research Foundation (NRF) SARCHI Research Chair for *African Feminist Imaginations*, to be occupied by Professor Pumla Dineo Gqola from the Centre for Women and Gender Studies. This is the second Chair to be awarded to Faculty of Humanities over the last two months and it comes at a time when the country is seeking answers to ending gender inequalities. Prof Gqola's role as the incumbent will be to promote interdisciplinary studies, attract high quality postgraduate students from across the continent, and build an African Research Feminist hub in the Eastern Cape.

Scholars in the Faculty of Humanities are actively contributing to the revitalisation of the Humanities and Social Sciences through a commitment to decoloniality with a focus on indigenous knowledges and interrogating western hegemonies. In addition, exciting new areas of study and research are emerging in the faculty such as digital humanities and animation.

At a time when there is a dearth of funding support for the humanities, the Faculty continues to attract bursary support such as those provided by the Department of Arts and Culture to grow and sustain African languages. Furthermore, the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), in partnership with the MICT SETA, has agreed to support a five-year programme of bursary support to black South African Design and Media students, to the value of R4.5m, with 2021 as the first year of the allocation.

## **4. DISTINCTIVE EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE AND PHILOSOPHY THAT CONTRIBUTES TO STUDENT ACCESS FOR SUCCESS**

### **4.1 Completing 2020 Academic Year**

Upon reflection, although the 2020 academic year has been turbulent and challenging, much has been achieved. The second semester is well underway and, despite a slight setback in terms of cluster outbreaks of students who tested positive for COVID-19, we are on track to complete the 2020 academic year on 27 February 2021. We have been harnessing the lessons learnt to craft our LT approach going forward, with a continuing emphasis on human-centred, high quality, supportive approaches to learning delivered through flexible, hybrid modes.

### **4.2 Progress in the digitalisation of LT**

The use of technology in LT has reached new levels with institutional and faculty sites populated with digital resources to assist academics with online learning. The faculties and LT Collab have focused on being human centred in the online LT environment and there has been a strong pivot towards the provision of online academic support such as enhancing academic writing, personal coaching, e-counselling, and connecting with first-year students who are particularly vulnerable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also required reimagined work-integrated learning (WIL) to assess how such activities can be undertaken in alternative ways when students cannot be in real-world work settings or on clinical platforms. Going forward, WIL activities will likely be offered through a

hybrid of online preparation and simulation activities blended with contact, work-based activities. In addition, with the rapid shift to online healthcare services during the pandemic, students in Health Sciences must be equipped with new competencies such as tele-counselling skills and online therapeutic approaches.

### **4.3 Developing the next generation of and current academics**

We prioritise the development of the career trajectories of the next generation of socially diverse academics to enhance the sustainability of the academic project. We are increasing the number of early career academics by focusing on young emerging scholars through the DHET-funded Next Generation of Academics Programme (NGAP). We currently have 12 NGAP posts across faculties and others that are in the recruitment phase. The University also has academics participating in national capacity development initiatives such as the Future Professors programme, the Teaching Advancement at Universities (TAU) Fellowship, and the Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) programme that focuses on leadership development.

## **5. ENGAGED, INNOVATIVE SCHOLARSHIP CULTURE THAT GENERATES KNOWLEDGE RECOGNISED FOR ITS CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABILITY**

The Research, Innovation and Internationalisation (RII) has made significant strides towards achieving sustainability and stewardship.

### **5.1 Postgraduate funding**

The total number of postgraduate students receiving funding from the National Research Foundation (NRF) in the 2020 academic year is 278 comprising 112 Honours, 107 Masters and 59 Doctoral students. In preparation for the 2021 academic year, 238 eligible Honours, 122 Masters and 83 Doctoral applications have been submitted to the NRF.

Of the 974 Council-funded Postgraduate Research Scholarship (PGRS) awards made, 699 (72%) have been taken up comprising 177 Honours, 369 Masters and 153 Doctoral candidates. Some students could not take up the award as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic or due to historic debt from their undergraduate studies. A sectoral challenge from which Mandela University is not exempt concerns the low expenditure of NRF research grants. This is largely due to postgraduate students and researchers not being able to access laboratories, travel to field sites and undertake local and overseas travel. There is a risk that these grants will be forfeited. Individual engagements on each grant are ongoing with the NRF, but a systemic approach at sectoral level would probably be more effective.

### **5.2 Academic staff and postgraduate support**

Over the period April to October 2020, 63 online research capacity development workshops were presented, with 19 additional workshops scheduled for the rest of the academic year. Looking forward, it is apparent that the offerings can take a blended approach to enable more part-time and off-site postgraduate students to be reached, including those located on the George Campus.

The Unit for Statistical Consultation continued offering services through online platforms and a total of 233 postgraduate students and researchers were assisted during 2020. Overall, there are 71 postdoctoral fellows being hosted by 44 senior academics across all faculties and the investment in postdoctoral fellowships during the period under review is R15million.

### **5.3 Sustainability research**

The School of Engineering is engaged in transdisciplinary efforts focused on improving sustainable and renewable energy to mitigate the effects of climate change and promote food security. For many years, the School of Engineering has conducted solar and wind energy research in collaboration with the local community of Riemvasmaak in the Northern Cape. Through a project funded by the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services SETA (merSETA), the School has partnered with a guesthouse owner, Elisa Namases, to install solar panels and wind turbines to supply electricity and pump water to the guesthouse. This aligns well with our intentions to promote engaged scholarship whereby reciprocal and equalising knowledge exchanges between staff, students and community members result in the co-creation of sustainable solutions.

We are also delighted to announce that Professor Danie Hattingh has been selected as one of the 2020 South African Academy for Science and Art prestigious award winners, namely the Honorary Medal of the Faculty of Natural Science and Technology. This Honorary Medal is only awarded in exceptional cases and Professor Hattingh was acknowledged for his contribution to the field of friction welding, which is being used at both Eskom and Sasol to promote energy security.

### **5.4 National Review of Doctoral programmes**

The CHE National Review of Doctoral programmes culminated in a CHE panel visiting the University from 9 to 12 November 2020. The panel engaged in interviews with more than 150 stakeholders, including current doctoral candidates, alumni, supervisors, support staff and external examiners. The CHE will compile a report to outline commendations and areas for improvement in doctoral provision based on the University's Self-Evaluation Report and the findings from the panel interviews.

### **5.5 International Office**

During the lockdown, 75% of international students and scholars at Nelson Mandela University remained in South Africa, while 25% returned home of which 163 were full degree under- and postgraduate students. International students largely followed pathway 1, with a small number of students following pathway 2. The study abroad and exchange students have completed the first semester of 2020 via pathway 1 and are in the process of receiving their results.

### **International student enrolments for 2021**

Despite the inability to engage in international student recruitment in-person during 2020, the University has seen an increase in applications for full degree studies from international students. As at 29 October 2020, the University experienced an overall increase in international student



applications of 9.2%, with the number of international undergraduate acceptances increasing by 22% for the 2021 academic year. Furthermore, there were still 921 applications for international under- and postgraduate studies being processed.

Some partner universities have decided not to send study abroad and exchange students for the first semester of 2021 due to the pandemic. To continue with student mobility, albeit digitally, the International Office is exploring offering some first semester modules via online platforms to interested students. A portfolio of registered Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) offered by faculties will be advertised to international partners and free-moving international students for the 2021 academic year.

### **International partnerships management**

Over the past few months, steps have been taken to ensure effective international institutional partnerships management and the first phase of an international partnership inventory has been completed. To strengthen our systems, a new Partnerships Management Process Document was approved in September 2020. The International Office is also assisting academics and relevant entities with joint degree initiatives as an important aspect of international collaboration and mobility.

### **5.6 Library and information services (LIS)**

The University's campus libraries re-opened on 21 October 2020, under stringent new health and safety protocols. In addition to strict screening processes on entering the buildings, special equipment is in place to sanitise library materials. The new stations, developed by ICT Services, monitor library occupancy levels and keep a record of attendees for the purposes of COVID-19 contact tracing, should the need arise.

## **6. TRANSFORMATIVE INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE THAT PROMOTES DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL COHESION**

As Council is aware, Professor André Keet has been appointed as DVC for the Engagement and Transformation Portfolio (ETP) while he will continue to hold the position of Chair: Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation.

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

As part of a series on Higher Education Transformation by editors Professors Andre Keet and Michael Cross (UJ), CriSHET jointly hosted the launch of Prof Ihron Rensburg's book entitled *Serving higher purposes - University mergers in post-apartheid South Africa* on 11 November 2020. The book presents a captivating account of the transformation of the South African university landscape using the University of Johannesburg as a case study.

CriSHET continues to model a successful strategy for strengthening research with six Honorary Professors, seven Visiting Professors, two Adjunct Professors, 17 Research Associates and two

Professional Associates from a wide range of disciplines from around the globe. This year, *CriSHET* submitted 44 subsidy claims to DHET for 2019 outputs including 27 articles, 16 book chapters, one book and two book series on higher education.

## **6.2 Centre for Women and Gender Studies (CWGS)**

CWGS celebrated its one-year anniversary on 2 October 2020 with an interview by Prof Pumla Gqola of award-winning artist, Thandiswa Mazwai. The CWGS is using collaborations across the sector to sustain its impact and presence while expanding its networks and postgraduate student training.

## **6.3 Hubs of Convergence and social sustainability**

The ETP seeks to build long-term, authentic and sustainable relationships with communities and stakeholders through the practice of engaged scholarship led by the Hubs of Convergence (HoC). The Food and Material Relief project continues to coordinate the disbursement of Convergence Fund donations to communities. They are currently working on the third cycle of funding distribution to community kitchens and a fire-affected community in Mandela Village, New Brighton. In addition, 20 275 litres of sanitiser have been produced by Innoventon and distributed to identified community partners.

In recent months, while the urgent interventions of immediate food relief and provision of masks continue, the Community Convergence Workstream (CCW) has begun to shift its focus towards longer-term projects to respond in a sustainable manner to the continuing challenges. Notable moves include work towards sustainable food systems and a shift in the #MaskUpMandela campaign from distributing masks to assisting community-based mask-making networks.

As part of this drive, CIPSET is hosting a series of webinars relating to the Community Food-Based Systems. The fifth and sixth webinars took place in October 2020 with a focus on food sovereignty and the ways in which community-based groups can establish alternative food systems.

## **6.4 Gender equality**

The Transformation Office continues to provide online training and awareness initiatives relating to GBV, equality and social inclusion, as well as mediation training to ensure a sustainable internal capability exists to conduct alternative dispute resolution for staff and students. The revised Sexual Harassment and Sexual Offences policy has been widely consulted on through the various governance structures and will serve for approval by Council in this meeting.

Emthonjeni Student Wellness (ESW) coordinated training of suitably qualified volunteers to provide tele-psychological services to community members, community workers and clinic healthcare workers who are interfacing with those infected with COVID-19 and who do not have medical aid or access to affordable counselling. Most staff members volunteered and provided support to the identified groups.

In our efforts to curb Gender-Based Violence and other crimes, the University is procuring a mobile phone 'panic button' app with national coverage. The app will enable students and staff living on and off campus to request assistance in an emergency via their GPS-enabled mobile device. When activated, a response will be dispatched by the University Protection Services on-campus and externally through an armed response service and/or SAPS.

## **6.5 Centre for Community Technologies (CCT)**

With the urgent need for digital solutions in the fight of the COVID-19 pandemic, the reliance and role of technology has become more crucial than ever before. As such, CCT has been leading the digital charge as part of the University's response to the pandemic in partnership with the metro and province with examples of projects including the development of Self-Screening Assessment BOTS, COVID-19 Contact Tracing and Monitoring Tool, and the Carebuddy - a screening tool for schools in the Eastern Cape Province.

## **7. ENHANCING STUDENT LIVING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

### **7.1 Student housing**

The residences have developed plans to mitigate the implications of the extended academic year. Central to this endeavour is to ensure that the five-year residence maintenance plan is implemented, and service quality is not compromised. About 97% of the accredited off-campus accommodation service providers have agreed to allow students to stay at the residences at no additional costs for the duration of the extended academic year.

### **7.2 Universal accessibility and disability services**

Through funding received from First Rand Foundation, the University has upgraded the ZoomText and JAWS software in labs and libraries for a period of two years. This will facilitate access for about thirty-nine partially sighted students and three blind students. UADS has also launched a Community of Practice in Uitenhage in partnership with a community-based organisation seeking to empower out of school youth with disabilities.

### **7.3 Student health services**

Nelson Mandela Bay has experienced an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, which has also caused a surge in the number of students contracting the virus. From September to November, the number of students infected increased from ten to ninety. As a response, the University has intensified screening, testing and isolation interventions with the support of the Department of Health.

### **7.4 Student nutrition**

The agreement with Tiger Brands for 2019-2020 has concluded. During this period, Tiger Brands donated nutrition products to the value of over R1.5 million which benefitted a total of 13 200

students. A new agreement for the period October 2020 until September 2021 has been signed.

## **7.5 Student governance and development**

Due to the increase in the number of COVID cases, the University decided to postpone SRC elections to the first quarter of next year. The current SRC will remain in office until the end of the extended academic year. Plans are being put in place to look at alternative platforms for holding SRC elections and these are being discussed with the SRC and student structures.

## **8. EMPLOYER OF FIRST CHOICE BY INVESTING IN TALENTED, HIGH-PERFORMING EMPLOYEES**

During this difficult season of wage and salary negotiations, transparency and a social compact amongst negotiating parties will contribute to long-term sustainability. Salary costs are the largest proportion of the budget, hence the need to maintain a healthy balance between operational continuity, employee health and wellness, and saving jobs.

### **8.1 Appointments, employment equity and transformation**

A total of 30 permanent and long-term contracted employees were appointed from 1 August to October 2020 with 10 Academics and 20 PASS staff. All appointments were from the underrepresented groups with nine being internal candidates. There has been significant increase in the appointment of underrepresented groups at occupational level 4 (PL 7-12) in this quarter.

### **8.2 Senior appointments**

Two of the five senior management vacancies have been filled, namely the DVC for Engagement and Transformation and the Executive Dean of Humanities. The latter incumbent will assume duties on 1 January 2020.

### **8.3 Terminations**

A total of 22 employees, comprising eight academics and 14 PASS staff, terminated their employment at the University during this period. The labour turnover of the University remains below the sectoral average.

### **8.4 Staff development**

The adoption of remote ways of working has required an investment in people development. To this end, a series of courses for managers regarding 'The Art of Managing Remote Teams' was introduced. Furthermore, the University leadership program (LEAP) offered individual coaching to 15 managers in this quarter. Thirty employees are currently busy with formal studies at other universities, while 171 are registered at Nelson Mandela University.

## 8.5 Leveraging technology

In preparing the University for alternative ways of learning, teaching and working, existing systems and technologies are being analysed to assess their efficacy and fitness-for-purpose within the digitalised world of work. Plans are in place to introduce artificial intelligence automation and advanced people analytics with the requisite training of HR employees to empower them to embrace digitalisation.

## 8.6 Occupational health and wellness

The accumulative number of employees returning to work on-site increased during risk alert level 1. HR is assisting line managers with capacity planning to minimise the spread of the virus on campus. The resurgence of the pandemic in this quarter is taking its toll on staff, particularly those on the frontline, who have been working on-site since risk level 5.

There are two counsellors on-site to provide the necessary psycho-social support to employees, although most counselling takes place virtually. A total of 306 employees accessed the Employee Assistance Programme with issues relating to COVID-19, while 43 employees made use of the programme for other forms of support.

## 9. ENABLING SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE THAT PROMOTE AN EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS, EMPLOYEES AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Various strategic interventions have resulted in improved efficiencies and cost savings. Furthermore, a portion of the savings from alternative ways of working have been reallocated to advance technological innovations and some of these are highlighted below.

### 9.1 Student applications

The University is implementing improvements to the online application system where the response to applicants is immediate in some cases. However, more work needs to be done to improve on the response rate where provisional admissions are dependent on faculty and/or departmental processes.

Encouragingly, as at 4 November 2020, the University had accepted more applicants (**15 186**) this year compared to the same date last year (**12 373**). We do, however, note that there were fewer applications compared to the same time last year (**57 588** compared to **77 379**) and this can most likely be attributed to the impact of the pandemic. As a mitigation, the University extended the closing date for 2021 applications to 14 November 2020.

### 9.2 Academic administration and COVID-19

The University received the health protocols from Higher Health in preparation for sit-down examinations in those programmes where these are required. These protocols are being strictly applied to ensure the safety of students and staff.

Virtual graduation ceremonies will take place on 17 and 18 December 2020 for all students who completed their qualifications by the end of November 2020. These ceremonies will include the conferring of Honorary Doctoral degrees to the recipients approved by Council in 2019 and who elected to receive the degree at the virtual graduation ceremony.

The release date of the NSC results has been confirmed and the start of the 2021 academic year was slightly adjusted, to start on 16 March 2021.

### **9.3 People and Operations efficiency framework**

The People and Operations branch has adopted an efficiency framework premised on responsible resource stewardship to deliver better quality services at a lower cost. The framework is underpinned by two key principles, namely investment in human talent and digitalisation to bolster performance and enhance efficiencies.

### **9.4 Investment in ICT as a key enabler**

COVID-19 has demonstrated the need to rapidly ramp up virtual ways of working including the migration of teaching, learning and research activities onto digital platforms. Hybrid learning and teaching has the additional benefit of reducing the University's carbon footprint in that less paper-based systems are being used for learning, teaching, research and support services.

Savings from traditional service delivery approaches have been reprioritised to enable investment in ICT infrastructure and services. The ICT systems development team have worked tirelessly to automate and develop applications including COVID-related systems for those returning to campus.

### **9.5 "Digital First" communication and marketing**

The "digital first" communication and marketing strategy aims to broaden and deepen the reach and profile of the University nationally and internationally. This strategy has seen the increased use of virtual seminars and webinars, supported by web and social media campaigns, in partnership with faculties and entities. The digital student recruitment campaign, which included extensive use of regional and provincial radio stations, netted a 21.3% increase in provisional firm offers for 2021, when compared to 2020. The strategic decision to prioritise digital communication and marketing was recently affirmed with the University receiving the bronze award at the International 2020 Digital Communication Awards (in Germany), for the COVID-19 internal (staff and students) communication campaigns.

### **9.6 Environmental sustainability**

The renewable energy strategy of the University seeks to reduce carbon emissions through the generation of renewable sources of energy, reducing the costs of energy in the long-run, and contributing to energy security challenges in the city and the country. In addition to the photovoltaic panels installed on South Campus, similar installations will take place on the

Missionvale Campus in 2021, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Campus in 2022, and the George Campus in 2023.

A Water Risk Mitigation plan is currently being implemented in direct response to the drought in Nelson Mandela Bay and the province. This includes the roll out of a technology solution through the addition of 64 water meters, the replacement of cisterns, research into aerators/flow restrictors, shower time limiters, and waterless urinals. In addition, the plan also makes provision for water source diversification through the addition of storage capacity at critical buildings, use of return effluent in residences, additional boreholes on South and North campuses, as well as a focus on awareness and educational campaigns. Furthermore, new student residences currently under construction on North and George campuses have been designed to use sources of water other than the potable municipal supply.

The design and construction of new buildings incorporate sustainability principles to ensure the longevity of structures, whilst also reducing the need for extensive annual maintenance. An exciting example of this will be the construction of Cross Laminated Timber (CLT) building on the George Campus, using environmentally sustainable construction materials. The construction of this building has been hamstrung by COVID-19 but is due to commence when international experts overseeing construction are permitted to travel.

### **9.7 Implementation of comprehensive catering solution**

Project management services have been contracted to expedite the implementation of an improved catering service that delivers better quality and affordable meals to staff and students. This comprehensive solution will include sourcing from and empowering new suppliers, stimulating and supporting entrepreneurial activities, and exploring the production fresh produce and aquaculture on the George and Missionvale campuses as initial pilot sites. An emerging George Campus Sustainability and Food Security Strategy seeks to promote food security and develop scalable, sustainable food production to eliminate student hunger.

### **9.8 Integrated transport and fleet management solution**

Extensive engagements and negotiations with the taxi industry (currently providing the bulk of the student and staff shuttle service), as an emerging enterprise, to deliver staff and student transport services is on-going. The purpose of both the interim and the long-term transport service delivery contracts is to provide transport services by empowering taxi operators to formalise their shuttle services. A financing and fleet management tender has been issued to enable the establishment of the transport enterprise.

## **10. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND STEWARDSHIP**

Financial sustainability remains a key strategic priority of the University especially within the context of the many challenges and risks imposed by the pandemic as it relates to the loss of revenue and increased direct and indirect costs. While the University has received an allocation of R15.4m from DHET for the implementation of COVID recovery plans, we also received confirmation of a downwards subsidy adjustment of R13.5m for 2020/21.

The Minister has published directives for a national framework for tuition and accommodation fees for the academic year 2020. Tuition fees for the 2020 academic year should be viewed as a package regardless of its length and NSFAS payments for tuition fees will be made based on the original agreed tuition fees. We have been advised that a process is currently underway to model and plan for any additional costs for NSFAS-funded students, but no funding has been allocated to date for additional allowances in 2020 extending into 2021.

The cost of and NSFAS payments for university-owned and -leased accommodation also remain at the same level for the 2020 academic year, regardless of its length, capped to end March 2021 and with an agreed inflation-linked increase for 2021. Where there are periods of non-occupation, monthly payments can be reduced, but spread out over the extended 2020 academic year. The above principle should apply to university accredited and registered private accommodation as far as possible. NSFAS will continue to be disburse the accommodation allowances up to ten months of the academic year.

The 2021 budget has been approved by MANCO and aims to resource the academic project and core processes while driving strategic initiatives in a sustainable manner. The budget and three-year financial projections have considered the impact of COVID-19 and the completion of the 2020 academic year by the end of February 2021.

The 2021 budget includes a 4.7% increase in tuition fees and 6.7% increase in student accommodation fees. The SRC have been consulted in this regard and the University awaits the final pronouncement by the Minister in line with the sectoral approach in recent years.

A balanced operational budget for 2021 will be presented to Council (R 34.9m surplus after investment income (4% surplus). There is a R0.49m surplus from operations before investment income (0% surplus), which falls short of Council's current performance indicator of reserve accumulation of between 5% and 10%.

A further key financial sustainability indicator is the salary benchmark which was set at 65% up until the reintegration of previously outsourced staff. This indicator then spiked to 67.5% which resulted in finance income being used to balance operations and then declined to 63.5% for 2019 as a result of a windfall in subsidy received in 2018 and above CPI subsidy allocations in 2019. It is apparent from the addendum to the Ministerial Statement and the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement that we cannot expect CPI, let alone real growth increases in the mid-term due to the current strain on the national fiscus.

The detail of the budget and three-year rolling plan with assumptions will be included in the applicable documentation to Council. The proposed salary benchmark remains at 65%, with a deviation request to allow a budgeted overrun up to a maximum of 66.5% for 2021, which would need to include the implementation plan on harmonisation and the organisational redesign. Management would need to reduce this indicator to 65% in the medium-term by managing staffing costs and maximising subsidy returns and tuition fees including the recoverability thereof. A task team has been established by MANCO to consider the impact of COVID-19 on the financial sustainability of the University and to conduct modelling to ensure that in the medium- to long-



term, the recurrent cost structures are financed from recurrent revenue streams excluding finance income.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

The higher education sector, as with the broader national and international economy, will be under significant pressure in the foreseeable future. The global COVID-19 pandemic has created a protracted period of extreme uncertainty and the prevailing operating environment requires that the University acts decisively on what it knows by adapting strategic and operational responses as situations evolve.

As we craft our Vision 2030 Strategy, while simultaneously implementing our academic and service continuity recovery plans, we will continue placing our shared humanity and the pursuit of social justice at the centre of our decisions and actions. This will ensure that we are optimally positioned to navigate the turbulence of our immediate and longer-term future as a collective. We salute the courage and fortitude of our students and employees over the past year and express our sincere appreciation to Council members for their unwavering support, steady oversight and wise stewardship.