



**Vice-Chancellor's Quarterly Report to Council
Quarter 1, 2021**

12 March 2020

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT TO COUNCIL FIRST QUARTER, 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. VISION 2030: STRATEGIC PLANNING.....	1
Ocean Sciences.....	1
Medical School.....	2
Revitalising the Humanities.....	3
3. DISTINCTIVE EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE AND PHILOSOPHY THAT CONTRIBUTES TO STUDENT ACCESS FOR SUCCESS.....	4
Registration for 2021	4
Welcoming Ceremony	4
Learning and Teaching.....	5
Digital Learning	5
LT Collab Development and Support.....	5
4. ENGAGED, INNOVATIVE SCHOLARSHIP CULTURE THAT GENERATES KNOWLEDGE RECOGNISED FOR ITS CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABILITY.....	6
Distinguished Professors.....	6
Postgraduate and Postdoctoral Funding	6
Research Capacity Development.....	6
International Office (IO).....	6
Library and Information Services (LIS)	7
5. TRANSFORMATIVE INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE THAT PROMOTES DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL COHESION	7
COVID-19 Coordinating Committee (CCC).....	7
Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.....	8
Vibrant Intellectual Culture	8
Gender Equity	8
International Mother Tongue Day Celebrations.....	8
6. ENHANCING STUDENT LIVING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES	8
Student Life and Development	8
Student Governance and Development	9
Student Housing.....	9

Universal Accessibility and Disability Services (UADS).....	9
Student Health Services	9
7. EMPLOYER OF FIRST CHOICE BY INVESTING IN TALENTED, HIGH REFORMING EMPLOYEES.....	10
Appointments and terminations	10
Wellness and Occupational Health.....	10
8. ENABLING SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE THAT PROMOTE AN EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS, EMPLOYEES AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS.....	10
Digitalisation.....	10
Communication and Marketing	11
9. ENHANCE LONG-TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH EFFECTIVE RESOURCE MOBILISATION AND RESPONSIBLE RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP	11
10. CONCLUSION	13

1. INTRODUCTION

We present this report to Council at an extremely challenging time, not only for the University, but also for the nation due to the ongoing impact of the global coronavirus pandemic. The immense disruption caused to academic activities and events has called for a different approach to the start of the 2021 academic year (AY2021). While we usually report on student access and enrolments in the first quarter each year, the later start to AY2021 has impacted on the availability of registration data since these processes are still underway.

The focus of this report is twofold: an overview of strategic highlights and challenges since the last Council meeting in December 2020, particularly relating to the development of our Vision 2030 strategy and other noteworthy milestones; and readiness for AY2021 and the wide-ranging measures the University has put in place to support prospective and current students during these uncertain times.

2. VISION 2030: STRATEGIC PLANNING

As Council is aware, we have held extensive stakeholder engagements over the past two quarters to finalise our Vision 2030 Strategy. This included the Council strategic retreat on 25 January 2021. This has culminated in the consideration of the strategy for approval by Council during this meeting. The University's Vision 2030 strategy is an articulation of our strategic intentions and aspirations as we seek to embody the soul of Mandela through living our core values and pursuing our academic missions as a university in the service of society. In so doing, the University will strive to promote the public good through the expansion of human understanding, pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge, and cultivating socially conscious graduates who make a positive impact on society as responsible global citizens and leaders.

Ocean Sciences

The Faculty of Humanities and the Research Chair in Ocean Cultures and Heritage, held by Prof. Rose Boswell, are processing an MOU for coastal field research and scholar exchange with the Institute of Anthropology, Gender and African Studies in Kenya. The University is also partnering with Rhodes University for an NRF Community of Practice led by Prof. Rosie Dorrington. One of the sub-projects on biocultural heritage is funded by NRF and led by Prof. Boswell.

The Centre for Coastal and Marine Research (CMR) manages the South African component of the international One Ocean Hub (OOH) project. As part of this project, Prof. Boswell and a team of six emerging multidisciplinary researchers from the Faculty of Humanities completed their first comprehensive field report on the socio-cultural impacts of forced removals and limited access to the Marine Protected Area in Tsitsikamma. Prof. Boswell

participated in the UK UNESCO Commission global conference entitled *Heritage and Our Sustainable Future: Research, Practice, Policy and Impact*.

During 2021, the CMR is hosting Dr Olivier Bousquet who serves as a Research and Project Manager for the French Embassy and will facilitate the development of transdisciplinary oceans climate change research. From 9-10 March, the CMR and partners hosted an online symposium for *Shared Visions for Marine Planning: Insights from Israel, South Africa and the United Kingdom*.

The establishment of the Marine Robotics Centre at Nelson Mandela University is progressing. The primary objective of the Centre is to build the capability to support both academic and industrial researchers and other stakeholders in the areas of robotics, artificial intelligence, modelling, underwater systems and oceanography.

The South African International Maritime Institute (SAIMI) has embarked on an exciting journey to promote, support and create awareness amongst South Africans about the wide variety of study and career opportunities in and around the oceans under the banner *Dive In! Maritime Career Exploration*. SAIMI has also supported the development of online modules in Nautical Sciences for Grade 10-12 learners (see <https://maritimesa.org/>). These online modules are zero-rated to provide maritime skills and knowledge to a broader audience including home schools, learners in maritime schools, as well as schools not currently offering these subjects. These initiatives will serve us well as we seek to advance our agenda of promoting science for society.

Medical School

The official approval and accreditation of the MBChB programme was followed by a successful student recruitment campaign at the end of 2020 and into 2021. This generated more than 5 000 applications for 50 places for the first cohort medical students. The medical programme selection committee processed the applications by following the approved admissions and selection process.

Nine academics and five support staff have been permanently appointed in the Medical School since 2019. Additional staff have been appointed on contract to assist with further curriculum development work for the senior years. Further recruitment processes are currently underway. Relevant training sessions for staff have included BioPac training for Physiology, Anatomage training for Anatomy, Medical Communication and Assessment workshops, and training on utilising high-fidelity manikins.

The Nelson Mandela Fidel Castro Medical Collaboration (NMFCMC) programme students have now successfully completed their first semester with Nelson Mandela University and are in their sixth year of study. They have completed a 12-week academic and clinical rotation programme and wrote their end of semester examinations in February 2021. We joined hands with Walter Sisulu University in co-creating a unified final year medical programme to rotate on the Nelson Mandela Metro clinical platform. The final-year Cuban-trained medical students assigned to our University will start their clinical rotations as

Student Interns on the clinical platform on 29 March 2021 to provide them with "hands-on" clinical training.

Revitalising the Humanities

Since February, and under the leadership of the new Executive Dean, Professor Pamela Maseko, the Faculty of Humanities has started a process of critical engagement with what it means to revitalise the humanities. Whilst developing a vision and strategic plan to articulate what this may mean over the next five years, the Faculty is already undertaking various activities to start realising this vision.

The Faculty Management Committee resolved that each School would host a Public Curriculum Conversation webinar. Key issues for critical engagement include decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum, (un)-representativeness, inaccessibility and privileging in the curriculum. The themes of the conversations are:

- Decolonising the creative and performing arts (VAPA);
- Language, knowledge and power (Languages); and
- Diversification of the academic canon and its value in the academy (Governmental and Social Sciences).

The Faculty appointed Professor Nokuzola Mndende as an Adjunct Professor in the School of Governmental and Social Sciences. Her expertise is in Africa-Centred Knowledge Systems, specifically in African Culture, Feminist/Womanist Theology, African Spirituality, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems. The Faculty has also identified scholars with similar profiles to be attached to each School in the Faculty to ramp up intellectual leadership at more senior levels in key disciplines.

The Faculty appointed an interim Director of the Raymond Mhlaba Centre for Leadership and Governance to offer multidisciplinary research which foregrounds the values embodied by this stalwart and comrade of Nelson Mandela. To date, the University has submitted partnership proposals to the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the National School of Government (NSG) for funding of capacity enhancement training in the public sector.

The Faculty has forged a strategic relationship with the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, the main funder of humanities research in South Africa. We were awarded a two-year research grant for a research project on *Maternal Legacies of Knowledge Production* (from the Department of Sociology). Four additional research projects, at least one from each School, on *COVID-19: Insights from the Humanities and Social Sciences* have been shortlisted for funding. The outcome will be communicated during March.

3. DISTINCTIVE EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE AND PHILOSOPHY THAT CONTRIBUTES TO STUDENT ACCESS FOR SUCCESS

Registration for 2021

With safety of staff and students and adherence to the COVID-19 protocols being the overriding considerations, there have been no mass mask-to-mask registration sessions for students on the University's campuses this year. While online registration is not new to the University, various supporting mechanisms were implemented to assist first-year students. Virtual tutorials and other special arrangements to help those without access to a device or the internet are in place while registration is underway until 5 April. After this, registration will continue until 16 April but there will be a late registration fee. The University is also endeavouring to manage the challenges of the late allocation of NSFAS funding to qualifying students who are unable to register.

All students have been urged to register as soon as possible, given that the academic year started on 15 March. In a bid to speed up processes and enable students waiting on the reserve lists to be afforded the opportunity of studying at Mandela University, first-years have been given five working days to confirm their acceptance offer. Students are able to meet virtually with relevant staff to discuss curriculum and registration matters. In addition, Registration Guides and the Orientation Guide have been published and circulated electronically.

ICT Services Department has developed systems to assist with online registrations such as: a Virtual Registration Readiness portal; online information sessions for orientation and first year registration; MS Booking system for students needing faculty assistance (this will also be set up for financial aid queries); online information sessions via webinars and MS Teams; ad hoc timetables online; and an online iEnabler registration system to provide for qualification and module registration, timetable, AD password, opt-in for laptops and residence registration online.

Welcoming Ceremony

The Vice-Chancellor virtually welcomed all new first-year students and their families to the University in an address that was aired live on 6 March on the University's YouTube channel. This was complemented by eight virtual faculty welcome events in Gqeberha, including the VC's address, and one in George for new students and their parents.

As many as 6 000 new first-year students are expected to register at Mandela University this year. New first year students will be oriented to university life and studies along with how to learn effectively online. The 2021 orientation is a comprehensive online programme which includes WhatsApp groups of How2Buddies, social media platforms and online meetings to help new students transition into University life amid the COVID-19 pandemic. We are devoting special attention to readying students for digital learning through online, multilingual resources and virtual or mask-to-mask sessions facilitated by senior IT students.

Learning and Teaching

COVID-19 has had a profound impact on the area of learning and teaching, adding unexpected demands to our efforts to complete the 2020 academic year and prepare for 2021. We remain responsive to all emerging issues as we begin this historic year with a fully online first year cohort.

By going to great lengths, more than 98 percent of our students were provided with learning opportunities to enable them to complete AY2020. Our first semester success rate across modules and programmes was more than 81 percent, while second semester success rates are in the process of being finalised and will be reported on in the next quarter. There is no evident difference in student success compared to the same period in the previous years. It is unclear at this stage whether this can be attributed to the learning and teaching, or assessment approaches.

Digital Learning

Faculty staff are making excellent progress with implementing the multi-layered, staggered blended learning approach. The change to online and continuous assessment was challenging for many staff as they grappled with the social and emotional challenges of the virus, as well as adapting to working remotely. In addition, load-shedding and connectivity continue to hamper learning and teaching. We have attempted proctored online examinations, but barriers include the technology available to students, unequal access to data and the bandwidth required. Faculties have been sensitive to the circumstances of students and have adopted "data lite" approaches wherever possible.

We have bridged the physical divide by converting our courses to online and implementing measures to provide students with data and mobile devices. As there is a need to limit the number of on-campus activities for students and staff, only a limited number of students will return to campuses in the first semester. We will decide at the beginning of June whether more students can return for academic activities in the second semester commencing on 1 August.

LT Collab Development and Support

Looking ahead, we have developed a set of principles to guide learning and teaching during these trying times. These include committing to making learning opportunities available for all our students; being agile, adaptable and flexible; and giving effect to our values.

The Teaching Development (TD) cluster's primary focus in 2021 is to improve and add to the available resources on online and hybrid teaching and assessment to enhance the pedagogical repertoire of academic staff. The Learning Development (LD) cluster focused on placing all learning materials on Moodle and extending deadlines so that students could complete assessments. Many personal interventions and follow ups of individual students occurred using digital platforms. Emthonjeni Student Wellness has moved all student wellness services to virtual platforms, except for requests requiring emergency interventions, and will continue this in 2021.

Together, we are learning new lessons every day that give us further insights into how to customise online and hybrid learning, teaching and assessment to cater for the diverse needs of our students. We are grateful to our faculties and support staff for the flexible approaches they have embraced to respond to the pandemic in a manner that is student-centric and humanising.

4. ENGAGED, INNOVATIVE SCHOLARSHIP CULTURE THAT GENERATES KNOWLEDGE RECOGNISED FOR ITS CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABILITY

Distinguished Professors

Five professors at Nelson Mandela University, recognised as leading national and international scholars in their fields, have received the prestigious title of Distinguished Professor in recognition of their dedication and commitment. They are Professors Paul Watts, Darelle van Greunen, Ilse Truter, Andre Calitz and Janine Adams. They join current Distinguished Professors at the University, namely, Professors Danie Hattingh and Graham Kerley.

Postgraduate and Postdoctoral Funding

Council has allocated R40 million to the Office of Research Development for Postgraduate Research Scholarships and R9.2 million for postdoctoral fellows in 2021. Over the review period, 109 postdoctoral fellowships were awarded, of which 71% recipients are Black and 33% female. In line with our transformation agenda, it is important to continue to increase the proportion of women.

Research Capacity Development

Research capacity development workshops moved online and, of the 88 workshops presented for the 2020 academic year, 16 were face-to-face and 72 virtual, with 16 additional workshops convened during the period under review. The Master's and Doctoral assessment processes were streamlined, and by the due date, 269 masters and 51 doctoral students had submitted their dissertations and theses for examination in time for graduation in April.

The New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) cohort at Nelson Mandela University consists of 12 Black academics, of whom seven are female and five are male. The total investment amounts to R2.1 million and 55 academics have been funded through this programme to date.

International Office (IO)

The IO has produced several reports and updates dealing with the challenges confronting international students as a result of COVID-19 government regulations and restrictions on international travel. Despite these restrictions, international undergraduate student admissions are 487 for the 2021 academic year, up nearly 20% from 406 in 2020. However, postgraduate international student admissions so far have declined sharply by nearly 30% from 234 in 2020 to 164 to date in 2021.

There is a need to extend the central communication efforts of the University to international students and this will be championed by the IO in 2021. The IO is also designing an online orientation schedule for study abroad and exchange students.

International students whose visas expired during the lockdown have had their visas extended until 31 March 2021. Although 20 study abroad and exchange students have been accepted to study at the University for the first semester, it is unclear whether they will be able to arrive under the current COVID-19 regulations.

Library and Information Services (LIS)

The University's six campus libraries reopened on 4 January. Library resources such as online journals, theses, and dissertations, databases and e-books are provided via the Library Webpage. LIS specialists assist students and staff with online searches and training via electronic platforms. Staff are constantly updating links to virtual information and online databases, enabling ease of e-access and maintaining the integrity of LIS Digital Commons platforms.

5. TRANSFORMATIVE INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE THAT PROMOTES DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

COVID-19 Coordinating Committee (CCC)

Through the CCC, Nelson Mandela University engages with government and other external stakeholders at national, provincial and local levels. The University has identified areas where it has expertise, research and engagement skills to offer in combatting the pandemic. The Hubs of Convergence (HOC) have acted as coordinators, along with CIPSET, of the Community Convergence Workstream (CCW). Its specific focus is marginalised community-based workers, people affected by GBV, vulnerable groups experiencing hunger, education stakeholders, farmworkers, casual workers and unemployed youth, among others. This workstream includes tele-counselling, material relief and community food gardens, and works closely with the Mandela University Convergence Fund.

The Convergence Fund builds on the University's existing commitment to partner with civil society and communities to assist in resolving pressing societal issues. This includes food and other material relief through the CCW, as well as funding longer-term, sustainable initiatives, such as a university-wide food systems project.

The Food Systems Working Group (FSWG) was established on 27 January to explore the potential of connecting the various food systems programmes and projects active within the University. A steering committee representing relevant faculties and units was constituted to better coordinate these initiatives. The work coordinated through the CCC points to fertile ground upon which the University can build its strategic reorientation to engagement.

Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

A further highlight for the period under review includes workshops to craft a stakeholder engagement strategy for the University. A cross-section of stakeholders from across the University participated in this initiative and a draft strategy will be ready by the end of March.

Vibrant Intellectual Culture

Under the broader rubric of decolonisation and Africanisation, *CriSHET* convened various initiatives to advance social justice and foster a vibrant intellectual culture. In collaboration with the Centre for Philosophy in Africa, the Faculty of Humanities and the Emengini Institute, *CriSHET* co-hosted the second seminar in the Africa and Knowledge series on 28 January. The Chair was also the primary organiser of the colloquium on Critical University Studies and the Battle Against Global Racism in February under the banner of the ACUSAfrica network, in collaboration with Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ghana.

In addition, CANRAD hosted the Dennis Brutus Memorial Institutional Public Lecture in the *Herald/Nelson Mandela University Community Dialogue Book Launch* on 24 February 2021 in collaboration with the Faculty of Humanities. Furthermore, the Chair for Youth Unemployment, Employability and Empowerment successfully hosted the first Nelson Mandela University TVET Convergence Workshop on 4 February 2021 in partnership with the Faculty of Education and CIPSET.

Gender Equity

The training of members of inquiry panels relating to GBV and equality-related complaints commenced on 15 February, with six further sessions from 22 February to 11 March. GBV support groups for female, male and LGBTIQ+ survivors continue to be held online. The Centre for Women and Gender Studies assisted with the implementation of the operational programmes of the Ministerial Task Team on Sexual Harassment and GBV.

International Mother Tongue Day Celebrations

The University hosted a series of events to celebrate International Mother Tongue Day. This was headlined by the virtual launch of a children's *Virus Fighters* book series on 25 February 2021 in five languages and featuring storyteller, Dr Gcina Mhlophe. This series has seen the University work across the continent with the University of Dar-Es-Salaam in Tanzania to translate the books in kiSwahili. The University also released a digital anthology of poetry, *Moments in Mother Tongue*, in three languages; and hosted a series of bite-sized lessons using pre-recorded videos in isiXhosa, isiZulu, French and Afrikaans.

6. ENHANCING STUDENT LIVING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Student Life and Development

The ongoing impact of COVID-19 and extension of the academic year to the end of February 2021 has complicated reporting for this period. Student Life and Development has forged internal partnerships in the form of task teams which meet weekly to discuss

student housing, admissions and registration, student financial aid, student engagement and communication, and a rapid response team. This assists in enabling an agile and effective response to challenges that arise.

Student Governance and Development

We have continued to hold meetings with the SRC and student organisations as part of information dissemination, consultation, co-creation and collective journeying with our students. As previously reported, the term of office of the SRC was extended for three months from January to March 2021. The 2021 SRC Elections will be conducted by means of an online platform on 24-25 March.

Student Housing

Residences opened on 10 January for students who still had to complete the 2020 academic year. They opened on 5 March for first year students, as well as senior students who have mask-to-mask programmes at the start of their academic classes. All other students returned on 12 March. All students are placed in quarantine for ten days as per COVID-19 protocols.

Student housing completed about 90 percent of the 2020 capital maintenance works as part of the University's five-year maintenance plan. The new residence at the George Campus is complete and, in late 2020, students from other residences which were due to undergo major maintenance were placed in the new residence.

Universal Accessibility and Disability Services (UADS)

UADS issued students with laptops and other assistive technologies to help them participate in online learning, including loans for non-NSFAS students. Verification of disability continues for provisionally accepted students to ensure that they are registered on the UADS database and can be given appropriate support. In 2021, this also includes a virtual orientation for students with disabilities, particularly those transitioning from high school to university.

Student Health Services

The number of COVID-19 positive students increased during the second wave at the end of 2020. A cumulative total of 223 students tested positive for COVID-19 and, sadly, one student passed away in December 2020. The work of Student Health Services (SHS) continues to be guided by established standard operating procedures and additional measures taken to contain the coronavirus include ongoing staff training and setting up a "rapid response room" to manage all COVID-19 related matters. All campus clinics have been activated to screen, refer and contact-trace, as well as manage cluster outbreaks and ensure infected students receive psychological support.

Primary healthcare and student nutrition programmes will be offered at the North and South Campus clinics. Preparations for the vaccine roll-out programme are progressing and the vaccine hub for SHS will be at the North and George Campus clinics. Professional nurses have been trained in the administration of vaccination procedures.

7. EMPLOYER OF FIRST CHOICE BY INVESTING IN TALENTED, HIGH REFORMING EMPLOYEES

The University management is cognisant of the importance of resource stewardship during these unprecedented times and the fine balance between the financial sustainability of the University and the wellbeing of employees. This includes the ongoing wage/salary negotiations for 2021/22. The difficulties imposed by COVID-19 have led to budget constraints which, in turn, have also affected institution-wide projects such as the Organisational Redesign and Harmonisation of Remuneration and Benefits.

More employees will return to campuses under Level 1 of lockdown and alternative ways of working will be reviewed. To support hybrid learning, teaching and research, the Human Resources Department has embarked on the automation and digitalisation of work practices to increasingly enable remote working.

Appointments and terminations

In the period under review, 52 employees were appointed, comprising 20 academics and 32 PASS employees. Of these, 48 (92%) are from the under-represented (A, C, I) groups, while 3 (6%) are non-designated and 1 (2%) is a foreign national. This trend of appointments augurs well for closing the employment equity gap, with a positive curve towards demographic diversification of the workforce to ensure that it reflects the national economically active population.

Due to retirements, termination of long-term contracts, resignations, dismissal, and death the employee status of 46 employees ended during the period under review. Under-represented groups constituted 25 (54%) of these terminations. The terminations represent 1.9 percent of the total number of University employees. There was an increase in death-related exits, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wellness and Occupational Health

The first quarter has seen a focus on preparations for the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out programme. Employee vaccination is likely to run over 2-3 months, whereas for students it is likely to be over a period of 8-9 months. As many employees continue to work remotely, counselling sessions are continuing to take place virtually and face to face.

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

Digitalisation

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic translated into an opportunity to advance the digital transformation agenda. ICT Services was called upon to lead in innovatively harnessing the power and ubiquity of technology in support of the academic project and to enable remote work and learning.

More than a dozen systems have been developed in response to COVID-19 to enable students and staff to book various services online. This includes a vaccine booking system which will allow just-in-time distribution and scheduling of vaccine rollouts in three hubs identified at Nelson Mandela University. The same system has been made available for use by the wider public through the Centre for Community Technologies (CCT).

ICT Services availed systems to assist with online examinations and e-assessments to enable completion of the academic year as alternatives to invigilated assessment. In addition, there are other ongoing projects which are at various stages of development over this reporting period: a dashboard to monitor applications and their conversion to registration; permits for students returning to campus in 2021; a 24-hour ICT helpdesk; and a student interface system modelled along the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) model. A ChatBot functionality is also being added to the University's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system which will provide answers to students' frequently asked questions.

Communication and Marketing

Apart from updates and specific information on new developments pertinent to the 2020 and 2021 academic years, lists of key contacts and links are provided to students, employees and external stakeholders to make it more convenient to navigate the ever-changing campus landscape. This includes information on the self-screening tool, meal and computer lab bookings and the like, as part of a strategy to keep on-campus numbers at a minimum. The University's coronavirus website continues to carry updated resources including all memos, return-to-campus protocols and information relating to learning and teaching. A collaborative, integrated approach has led to more streamlined communication with consistent messaging.

Given present anxieties and fake vaccination news, an extensive information sharing and education programme is underway to offer staff and students credible information about vaccines and vaccination. Vaccine booklets, posters, FAQs and a weekly VAX FAX series form part of these education efforts, and most of the information has been translated into isiXhosa and Afrikaans in order to be more inclusive. A series of educational vaccine-related webinars started in February, again positioning the University as a caring and credible institution that is in the service of society.

9. ENHANCE LONG-TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH EFFECTIVE RESOURCE MOBILISATION AND RESPONSIBLE RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

Council approved the 2021 budget that provides for the completion of the 2020 academic year and a R10 million contingency for COVID-19 related costs which could not be reprioritised or funded from existing budgets. There will be pressure on this fund and the budget reprioritisation process continues in 2021 for the virement of budgets to address new and reprioritised needs due to COVID-19. This will be a continuous process for 2021 as future savings and additional costs become known. Savings on institutional overheads and earmarked accounts, if realised, are to be transferred on a quarterly basis to the COVID-19 Contingency Fund.

A task team has been established to consider the impact of COVID-19 on the financial sustainability of the University. This will help to ensure that in the medium- to long-term, recurrent cost structures are financed from recurrent revenue streams excluding finance income, and that earmarked reserves for funding five-year capital maintenance, replacement of teaching and research equipment and IT infrastructure plans are maintained.

Our institutional mobile learning device programme for students will continue in 2021 for NSFAS funded students. The USAf Finance Executives Forum (FEF) met with NSFAS on 26 January to engage on the laptop scheme. The FEF will submit comments and recommendations on current process guidelines.

Recently, NSFAS communicated around qualifications that will no longer be funded. These include all legacy qualifications that are not aligned with the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) and which should have been phased out, such as BTech programmes, some education and nursing degrees, and any course with the word "National" in the title.

The allowances for NSFAS students were paid for the extended period of three months of the 2020 academic year which stretched into 2021 and claims for this submitted to NSFAS. The guidelines for the 2021 academic year have not yet been completed by DHET and the NSFAS-funded list for first year students is still incomplete at the time of compilation of this report.

The national budget tabled by the Minister of Finance on 24 February provides estimates for the university sector, which show that despite an increase on the original 2020 subsidy allocation, there is an actual decrease in real terms. Cabinet has approved reductions to the Department's budget, affecting university subsidies, and this will likely lead to a decrease in the number of first-year enrolments at universities as it is necessary to ensure that institutions remain sustainable and are able to offer quality education. The cut in NSFAS funding will also result in fewer students being able to access financial support for university studies in 2021.

Besides bursary and NSFAS funding, the University applies concessions that have been approved by MANCO and consulted with the SRC. The sustainability of the concessions is reliant on the University ensuring that only academically deserving and financially needy students are considered and that the conditions of the concessions are honoured. The concessions cater for registration and deferment of university fees and this again will be a pressing issue, especially with off campus accommodation.

A key sustainability indicator is the salary benchmark which is set at 65 percent. A deviation of 66.5 percent was approved by Council based on a zero percent increase in subsidy for 2021. Management will need to reduce this indicator to 65 percent in the medium-term by managing staffing costs, maximising subsidy returns and tuition fees, including recoverability.

The country is on the edge of a fiscal cliff and a review of the national budget implies that our financial position as a University, in turn, will be inhibited from providing any adjustments above inflation. This fact cannot be ignored, as it could have serious ramifications for our central theme of saving jobs. Our most significant streams of funding will be limited, which requires careful consideration with regards to resource allocation and maintaining the salary benchmark.

B-BBEE remains a high priority on the MANCO and Council agenda and the University is preparing for an early verification based on the 2020 financial year. Various workshops, commencing with senior management, will be rolled out to better understand the spirit, purpose and technicalities of B-BBEE, so that the University system responds appropriately.

The 2020 financial year statutory audit and grant audits are underway according to normal reporting deadlines. The auditors are on site and adhering to COVID-19 protocols.

As the resourcing envelope is largely dependent on subsidy and fees, any material variances on the current assumptions will have a significant impact on the financial projections. Performance will be closely monitored and reported on, with the University confronting any challenges by means of its strategic approach to financial planning and management.

10.CONCLUSION

Although the full extent of the implications of the global COVID-19 pandemic for the University remains to be seen, it is clear that no part of our institution has been left untouched. In addition to the material financial and sustainability risks, there has been an inevitable impact on planning for the 2021 academic year. We are experiencing an unprecedented period of extreme uncertainty, which calls for the University to be agile as it swiftly adopts various strategic and operational responses to remain fit-for-purpose. This principle has shaped the development of our Vision 2030 Strategy and we will continue to advance the pursuit of social justice and our other core values as we implement measures to provide life-changing educational opportunities for our students.

We express our gratitude to all our academic and support employees for their unwavering commitment to embracing student-centric approaches that facilitate student access for success. We are also deeply grateful for the compassionate oversight and wise stewardship of our Council as we traverse this turbulent terrain.
