



**Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council
Quarter 1, 2025**

27 March 2025

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1. Introduction

The mission of Nelson Mandela University is to offer a wide range of life-changing educational opportunities for a better world. This Quarter 1 narrative report, which is informed by Council's key performance areas, is hereby presented through the lens of student access for success. In addition, in view of the particular focus the University has received with regard to accounting for our readiness for the 2025 academic year, a pointed summary dedicated to foregrounding access matters, including the challenges faced and our efforts to address these, has been prepared, and will be presented to Council.

2. Vision 2030 Strategic Trajectories

The following strategic trajectories position the University as a distinctive, socially embedded institution.

2.1 Ocean Sciences

The launch of the South African Masters in Ocean Sciences (SAMOS) programme in 2026 is an exciting development for Nelson Mandela University's positioning as a leader in marine studies. As the South African lead of a consortium of 15 universities and institutes, Nelson Mandela University was awarded a three-year funding grant of more than R2 million from the European Union Erasmus Education Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) to develop this programme. Accreditation of the proposed programme is currently with DHET and awaits approvals from CHE and SAQA to enable the first intake to proceed as planned.

2.2 Medical School

The MBChB programme is maintaining a steady presence with 390 students with a first-year intake of 100 students. The impact of NSFAS funding delays has been felt in the senior years, with 22 medical students in years two to five facing uncertainty about their academic future, and 11 HWSETA-funded students grappling with partial funding gaps. While long-standing donors such as the Hillensberg Trust and Patrick Soon Shiong Family Foundation continue their valuable support, there is a need to mobilise additional sources of funding to support our medical students. A comprehensive support framework has been implemented including a new digitised orientation programme, a peer mentoring initiative, and a nutrition support programme to address food insecurity among students.

2.3. Revitalising the Humanities

The Faculty of Humanities is partnering with the Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences to present the new BA in Politics and Economics in 2025. Another highlight is the formal introduction of the course, *Social Consciousness and Sustainable Futures* in the Bachelor of

Arts curriculum offered as a credit-bearing and compulsory module from the second semester in 2025, which will be institutionalised across other faculties.

The Faculty of Humanities is leading the revision of the institutional Language Policy to foreground the role of multilingualism in facilitating epistemic access. The Language Working Group hosted a Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) Monitoring and Evaluation delegation in February and the University was commended for its thorough consultative process in revising the Language Policy to promote ownership. The DHET University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG) allocation of R2.5 million has been received and will fund the implementation of the policy in all faculties.

2.4. Transdisciplinary Sustainability Sciences

The Mandela Institute for Sustainable Futures (MISF) has secured funding and a project manager has been appointed to oversee programme activities in collaboration with all relevant faculties and entities. The first major project of the MISF will be the Sustainability Science Initiative for Transdisciplinary Research, which aims to expand the knowledge base and research capacity of academics and postgraduate students in transdisciplinary research and sustainability science. A joint programme will be developed with Utrecht University's Copernicus Institute for Sustainable Development, starting with the introduction of an Interuniversity Sustainability Course in collaboration with two European partner universities.

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

3.1. Learning and Teaching Development and Support

Student readiness and learning development

To enhance their preparedness for university life, first-year students at Mandela University were introduced to all the necessary facilities and resources to support their academic success. Key elements of the First Year Success (FYS) onboarding included the publication of a comprehensive first-year guide, and campus tours, which reached more than 4 800 students.

Emthonjeni Student Wellness (ESW) provided career guidance for prospective students requiring support in finalising their study choices. Group-based interventions were expanded, offering specialised programmes in career decision-making, psychoeducation, and peer-led support initiatives. Over 1 800 students participated in these group sessions.

Lecturer readiness and teaching development

The recent Beginning Your Journey (BYJ) academic induction programme engaged 39 newly appointed academics across all seven faculties, offering valuable insights into their approach to learning and teaching.

3.2. Technology-rich learning and teaching and the Virtual Academy

Moodle migration

The University successfully migrated the Learning Management System (LMS) to version 4.5 (Funda) at the start of this year. This has resulted in numerous improvements, including enhanced user experience and course delivery, streamlined administration, and integration with Microsoft services. The continued high levels of activity reflect the success of this migration and the ongoing adoption of digital learning resources. Since the start of the 2025 academic year, there have been nearly 777 900 total logins and more than 11 000 000 interactions (views and posts).

Virtual Academy (VA)

Discussions are progressing well regarding establishing the VA Makerspace on the Ocean Sciences Campus in collaboration with the Science Centre (SC) and the Learning Experience Design cluster in the LT Collab. An Artificial Intelligence (AI) Community of Practice (CoP) has been established, led by Prof Darelle van Greunen, with high levels of interest expressed by staff and students in this initiative. One of the six institutional culture signature programmes, *iHuman*, focuses on changing mindsets and enhancing digital competencies among staff and students to enhance readiness for digital transformation.

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

4.1. Research

Research Chairs

The National Research Foundation (NRF) has allocated five Research Chairs to each institution invited to its closed call, including Nelson Mandela University, with applications closing on 31 January 2025. Should all five be allocated, the number of SARChI chairs will increase to 13 at Mandela, and the total number of research chairs will increase to 23 in 2025/26.

Imvuselelo Professors Project

Due to increasing pressure to transform the professoriate, and advance research productivity, recruitment will start in March 2025 for the year-long *Imvuselelo* Professors Project. The programme is expected to launch in April and aims to support mid-career researchers in accessing research funding and grant writing, building research teams, and other relevant areas.

4.2. Postgraduate funding and research support

There were 121 postdoctoral and research fellowships awarded over the review period of whom 81% were Black, 37% were women, and 50% were South African citizens and

permanent residents. The projected investment in postdoctoral and research fellowships from various sources for the 2025 academic year is R20 million.

The University has leveraged funding from the NRF and DHET to ensure that academic staff receive the support and training needed to attain higher degrees. There are 12 new Thuthuka grants awarded for 2025, contributing to a total of 21. There are 10 new Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP) grants, with four existing recipients. In addition, 20 academics are participating in the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP). Nelson Mandela University also provides targeted support to early- and mid-career researchers through various internal research grants.

All research development workshops are presented in a hybrid format to promote accessibility. Of the 72 workshops scheduled for 2025, two have been conducted. The Unit for Statistical Consultation (USC) plans six block courses in 2025 to improve statistical training for postgraduate students and staff. The recent appointment of a dedicated Research Ethics Manager has contributed significantly to improved services across all aspects of the ethics process.

4.3. Internationalisation

International engagement continues to expand, with staff from the Engagement Office and Missionvale Campus visiting the University of Limerick and establishing a partnership with the Thames Estuary Growth Board to address shared societal challenges and promote sustainable, inclusive growth. These interactions offer future possibilities for international student collaborations.

Nelson Mandela University is currently hosting 28 semester-abroad students from Germany, France, Sweden, Norway, the United States, and one from South Korea. In addition, the University hosted six MBA students from Reutlingen University for a week through the teaching rotation partnership programme.

4.4. Library and Information Services

Nelson Mandela University is enhancing digital access for students, and adopting OpenAthens, which is a cloud-based, Single Sign-On (SSO) experience across all library databases and digital platforms. However, it is interesting to note that the demand for print books is still significantly higher than for electronic books, and the request for e-book orders has declined across all disciplines except for the Faculty of Humanities.

The Get to Know Your Library session on 28 January 2025 introduced 46 new staff members to the Library's services and resources. However, student enrolment and registration challenges negatively impacted library usage by students in the first quarter.

5. Transformative institutional culture that promotes diversity and social cohesion

5.1. Institutional Public Lectures

A new Institutional Public Lectures (IPL) Working Group has provided structural support and strategic guidance to faculties and portfolios to promote coordination and consistency in the implementation of IPLs. The IPL guidelines were recently revised and approved by Senate to establish a thematic framework, drawn from key University strategic imperatives.

5.2. Ubuntu Pathways Research Project

Nelson Mandela University has partnered with Ubuntu Pathways in Zwile Township near the Missionvale Campus to document the organisation's community development model. The Ubuntu model offers valuable insights into context-driven community development, international benchmarking, fundraising, governance, and financial management, and significant progress has been made to date with this research. The Raymond Mhlaba Centre for Governance and Leadership is developing the Raymond Mhlaba Leadership Fellowship for Civic Organisations, which will use lessons from Ubuntu Pathways to support social entrepreneurial ventures in the Eastern Cape province.

5.3. Engagement Office

The Hubs of Convergence (HoC) and newly formed Student Hubs of Convergence (SHoC) continue to expand transdisciplinary and international engagement through research partnerships. SHoC is formalising a United Nations (UN) Volunteer Programme, providing students with opportunities to contribute to global development initiatives while enhancing their professional and civic competencies. Other recent activities of SHoC include participation in the First Year Student Orientation programmes to address student hunger in collaboration with the Mandela University Food Systems Programme.

5.4. Transformation Office

Advocacy and training initiatives by the Transformation Office (TO) for January to March 2025 have included workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns, including those focused on positive masculinities. The TO has updated its web pages to feature campus safety information, and is developing pamphlets, posters and other advocacy materials addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and human rights violations. Staff onboarding sessions and ResLife Student Leadership training on GBV and related topics took place in January, while the TO participated in the Vice-Chancellor's welcoming event, First Year Orientation Sessions, and various dialogues and training sessions in February.

5.5. Centre for Women and Gender Studies (CWGS) and the DSI-NRF SARCHI Chair in African Feminist Imagination (AFEMI)

The CWGS collaborated with the Zanele Mbeki Development Trust, supporting the African Women in Dialogue (AfWID) event in January. It will also partner with Professor Kopano Ratele of Stellenbosch University on 26 March in a writing workshop on African-centred masculinities for 25-30 male students.

In collaboration with the CWGS and the SARCHI Chair in AFEMI, the Mandela University Press launched the book *Inyathi Ibuzwa Kwabaphambili: Theorising South African Women's Intellectual Legacies* in February. The book is a collaborative work that explores and theorises the intellectual contributions of South African women. The launch of the Masters in Gender Studies programme in 2025 was a further major achievement for the Centre, attracting five students from South Africa and beyond.

5.6. Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET)

This promises to be a productive year for the Chair's research work, with *Emancipatory Imaginations: Advancing Critical University Studies* edited by Andre Keet and Dina Zoe Belluigi published, and three other edited volumes underway. Current estimations of research outputs from 2024 for subsidy submission include one (1) book, twenty-eight (28) book chapters, and forty-one (41) peer-reviewed journal articles.

5.7. Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training (CIPSET)

CIPSET underwent a restructuring process in 2024 that incorporated the Chair for Youth Unemployment, Employability, and Empowerment (CYUEE) into its operations. Two main work streams emerged from this process which will inform CIPSET's work, namely: promoting and enhancing articulation pathways from technical, vocational and community education and training colleges into higher education institutions in the Eastern Cape Province; and exploring how education and training can support the development of eco-conscious literacies that promote food sovereignty learning and praxes.

5.8. Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD)

CANRAD organised ten events in January and February 2025, both on campus and in communities in Uitenhage, KwaNobuhle, and Durban in partnership with Lovelife, DDP, The Herald newspaper, and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. The Centre's national footprint is expanding, attracting interest from organisations in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal interested in partnering on specific programmes, and senior staff have been invited to serve in national organisations, further enhancing the visibility and influence of the Centre.

5.9. Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS)

In line with its commitment to institutionalising Mandela's values, two TIMS research publications are underway, under the ambit of the Mandela University Press. The first is the *Izibongo Book Project*, exploring Mandela's legacy through praise poetry – in collaboration with Madiba's official praise poet, Zolani Mkiva. The second is a book chapter on TIMS's journey to be included in the forthcoming *CriSHET Book Project*.

A range of *Mandela Conversations* are planned for this year as part of the TIMS Re/Directions series. The first concept note, *Mandela and Science*, is planned for late March in collaboration with the Faculty of Science, where Prof Azwinndini Muronga will be in dialogue with former Vice-Chancellor, Dr Derrick Swartz.

The TIMS website features a Mandela Observatory, which is a digital platform tracking Mandela-related work within the University and beyond. This resource will continue to grow and generate a range of outputs ensuring that the Mandela identity remains central to the University's research and transformation agenda.

5.10. HIV and AIDS Research Unit

The Unit is collaborating with various internal role players to revise the institutional HIV and AIDS Policy. The Unit has also established multi-sectoral partnerships with healthcare institutions, government agencies and NGOs, including discussions with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), NHLS, and the United Nations Sexual and Reproductive Health Agency (UNPF) for external research funding. The Unit continues to contribute towards community impact through adolescent access to healthcare facilities and workshops on sexual reproductive health and rights.

6. Enhancing student living and learning experiences

6.1. Student Governance and Development

Student residence leaders underwent second-tier training on 28-29 January 2025 aimed at equipping them with the knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles effectively. This training was held under the theme *Empowering Future African Leaders – Shaping Residence Communities that Embody African Values*.

The *ResLife First-Year Welcoming Programme 2025* successfully introduced new students to residence life and University support services from 3-8 February 2025, with close to 900 first-year students joining the final session at Kings Beach. Overall, the welcoming programme fostered a sense of belonging and ensured that first-year students were equipped to navigate university life.

6.2. Student Entrepreneurship and Graduate Employability

The establishment of the Mandela University Africa Hub in 2024 reflects the University's commitment to fostering a new generation of youth entrepreneurs who are poised to drive social and economic transformation. The University allocated R2.7 million to support student and community small business development through the Hub and the Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator (CfERI) in December 2024. As a result, the Hub has been able to provide direct support to 110 clients and incubate 35 businesses. The recipients of these grants are local entrepreneurs, most of whom (85%) were students, with the remainder being community-based entrepreneurs who have established small businesses.

6.3. Student Wellness and Nutrition

Student Health Services (SHS) staff engaged with first-year students and parents to showcase its services at the VC's welcoming ceremony. With February being Reproductive Health Month, SHS conducted the First Things First campaign on five campuses, focusing on sexual reproduction, family planning, HIV testing, and monitoring of non-communicable diseases.

Nelson Mandela University has several interventions in place to alleviate student hunger, a challenge impacting student access and success across the South African higher education sector. These include the student nutrition programme, which mainly involves the distribution of food packs to students by SHS. In addition, there are food gardens, the Emergency Student Nutrition Initiative, whereby funds for meals are loaded on students' *Intellimali* cards, and initiatives implemented by faculties to provide food and sanitary products to students in need. The food packages are resourced through donations in kind from the private sector mobilised by the Nelson Mandela University Trust, as well as from the budget of the Dean of Students. In 2024, 11 400 nutrition packs were distributed to students in need at a value of more than R1.4 million.

6.4. Madibaz Sport

The impact of the new admissions process, based on the ranking system, was not a positive one for Madibaz Sport recruitment processes. Firm offers were made too late, compared to competing universities which make offers to student athletes as early as September the previous year. As a result, Madibaz Sport lost potential athletes who could not wait until January for a firm offer, and this will affect the quality of performance, especially with campaigns like Varsity Shield starting as early as February.

6.5. Universal Accessibility and Disability Services (UADS)

This year there are 260 students who have registered and disclosed disabilities, including a student who is totally deaf and relies on a Sign Language Interpreter for communication. UADS services are integrated and available on online digital platforms that include applying for concessions, registering on the database, submitting enquiries, and applying for the use

or loan of assistive technology. Over and above the general orientation for all first-year students, UADS conveys specific information directly to first-year students with disabilities to enhance their transition to university studies.

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

7.1. Communication and Marketing

In January 2025, Student Recruitment continued its ongoing retention efforts through targeted blog and social media posts highlighting why Nelson Mandela University should be the first-choice institution for prospective students. Information shared included relevant contact numbers and emails for enquiries and processes to follow once the matric examination results were released.

7.2. Infrastructure Services and Space Optimisation and Support Services

Infrastructure

Preparation for the 2025 academic year gained momentum in January and February 2025. All service delivery departments conducted walkthroughs to audit campus readiness, leading to corrective action such as the deep cleaning of venues.

The remaining work in refurbishing Claude Qavane and Solomon Mahlangu Annex was completed at the end of January 2025. The new contractor completed the remaining two blocks in the new residences project at North Campus by the end of January 2025. After receiving a Temporary Certificate of Completion, students were permitted to move into residence in the middle of February 2025.

Space management and optimisation remain critical as the University's estate expands. The University has invested DHET funds and successfully installed Archibus, a web-based system that enables space and energy management, as well as preventive and corrective maintenance.

The project to install the centralised power-backup generators, which will work along with the photovoltaic installation, has moved on to procurement, and a five-year water security strategy has been approved.

Safety and security

Protection Services attended various student orientation events, highlighting security, and informing students about the toll-free emergency numbers available. The University is embarking on a three-year implementation plan of the safety and security strategy. In 2025, R20 million was approved to improve security technologies across all campuses in alignment with the closed campus project.

7.3. Information and Communication Technology Services

Mitigation of digital exclusion

Efforts to mitigate digital exclusion have been intensified through the expansion of infrastructure and access to computing devices by students. All general computer labs including teaching labs were fully operational at full capacity across all campuses. In addition, Wi-Fi densification across all living and learning areas has resulted in improved connectivity, coverage and density across lecture venues and public spaces. Additionally, external Wi-Fi access points to extend the Eduroam Wi-Fi network to on-campus outdoor areas have been initiated.

The University student laptop scheme will continue into 2025 and preparatory work to issue laptops to first-time entering students in March 2025 is complete. To date, the scheme has benefited close to 21 000 students, and the average student to PC ratio across all campuses stands at 7:1.

Core ICT infrastructure has been bolstered with a commendable 99% uptime. The institution's energy security strategies include the use of generators, installation of inverters and Uninterrupted Power Supplies (UPS) at core hubs of the University's distributed network.

Increased process automation and online services

Enrolment management processes, including registration, have largely been automated, including the use of a new online application system, the enablement of the new admissions policy via auto-admission ranking, and confirmation and lapse of offer by SMS. In addition, collaboration between HR and ICT has resulted in the automation of various processes to streamline the employee interface. Examples include the replacement of InfoSlips with iEnabler payslips; e-applications for Private Work; and enhancements to the annual e-declarations for conflict of interest.

7.4. Human Resources (HR)

The first quarter has seen work on benchmarking remuneration and consultatively introducing the Total Guaranteed Package (TGP). The University is using Remchannel to access the latest salary data which will assist in make informed decisions relating to talent attraction and retention. HR Benefits, in partnership with AlexForbes Financial Services, is developing a financial education plan for the year to empower employees with the requisite knowledge to improve their financial and overall wellbeing.

Primary health care services were provided to a total of 1 929 employees in 2024 with an additional 127 cases being attended to in January 2025. Musculo-skeletal complaints and vitamin injections were the most utilised services. An integrated wellness plan that caters for staff and students is being refined to improve services.

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

8.1. Strategic Resource Mobilisation and Advancement (SRMA)

The target for bursary fundraising in 2025 is R95 million and by the start of March, slightly more than R16 million had been mobilised and received. The payment was delayed for a 2024 allocation of R15 million through the Eastern Cape Office of the Premier to support students with historical debt in engineering and related fields. This should be paid before the financial year-end on 31 March 2025.

8.2. Short- and long-term financial planning

The subsidy allocation letter from the Minister was embargoed until the budget speech, which had been postponed. This resulted in a 1.97% cut on the 2024 block grant subsidy, which is more favourable than the anticipated cut of 3%.

NSFAS has officially communicated that institutions shall pay NSFAS allowances to students for the first five months of the 2025 Academic Year (February to June 2025) whereafter NSFAS will communicate further.

The 2024 financial year statutory audit is underway according to normal reporting deadlines. The University's cash flow is sound as indicated in both the cash flow report and the analysis of funds. A detailed financial report will be tabled for Council. As with the broader national and global economy, the higher education sector will be under significant pressure and our efforts to maintain or improve our performance against our sustainability targets will continue.

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

As per our strategy, the University is targeting a Level 3 for the 2024 financial year, to be verified in 2025. The main area of improvement is the enhancement of the Skills Development element. A detailed report will be shared with Council through MANCO and the Governance and Ethics Committee.

9. Conclusion

The institution is dedicated to upholding its firm social justice orientation, and prioritising access for all academically deserving students, regardless of their financial circumstances. To this end, a delicate balance is maintained between addressing current operational needs and promoting long-term sustainability at institutional and sectoral levels. We thank Council for its diligent oversight and stewardship as we continue our journey to be a dynamic, African university in the service of society.