



**Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council
Quarter 2, 2025**

19 June 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

Within a volatile geopolitical and economic context, higher education remains vital and catalytic to individual and societal well-being. To this end, Nelson Mandela University strives to liberate human potential through humanising, innovative lifelong learning experiences that prepare graduates to be socially conscious, responsible global citizens who serve the public good. As a comprehensive university, a wide range of academic, psycho-social, and co-curricular support interventions are in place to promote student access and success. The theme for this report will focus on these efforts, while also providing Council with an overview of strategic highlights and challenges for the quarter under review.

2. VISION 2030 STRATEGIC TRAJECTORIES

Given that we are midway through the implementation of our Vision 2030 strategy, our focus in 2025 will be on reviewing our progress over the past five years and ensuring that the University is on track to achieve its 2030 targets.

2.1 Ocean Sciences

In the first semester of 2025, Nelson Mandela University launched the South African Master of Ocean Sciences (SAMOS) qualification with the French Embassy as part of the Erasmus+ capacity-building initiative. This brings together nine South African universities, along with the National Research Foundation (NRF) and four European institutions in a consortium to collaboratively develop a new, multidisciplinary postgraduate programme in ocean sciences.

The Institute for Coastal and Marine Research (CMR) has initiated capacity-building activities to support postgraduate students and early-career researchers. Collectively known as *The Conversation Room*, this intervention reflects a holistic approach to support that extends beyond academic achievement to include personal growth and career readiness.

2.2 Medical School

The MBChB programme has recorded a pass rate of 97% in 2024. Despite this, several persistent and emerging challenges impact on student success and throughput, including financial constraints and historical debt affecting MBChB students (especially in years 2 to 4). Food insecurity, insufficient transport to clinical training sites, and language barriers also influence students' academic performance. The Medical School has appointed two full-time Student Success Coaches dedicated to supporting students experiencing academic, emotional, or social challenges. These coaches work with repeating students to develop individual academic success plans, with ongoing monitoring to track their progress.

2.3 Revitalising the Humanities

The Digital Humanities Hub continues to be one of the flagship programmes for the revitalisation of the humanities, and engages with themes such as indigenous knowledge systems, social justice, and learning and teaching innovation in a digital era. In addition, the Faculty of Humanities convened the annual Curriculum Conversation Symposium with the theme *The Role of Multilingualism in the Diversification of the Academic Canon*. The event provided valuable insights and inspiration for the

diversification, decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum, as well as encouraging language inclusivity. The Raymond Mhlaba Centre for Governance and Leadership hosted the 2025 Archbishop Thabo Makgoba public lecture delivered by Dr Wendy Luhabe, who offered a powerful reflection on the kind of leadership needed to build a better future.

2.4 Transdisciplinary Sustainability Sciences

Mandela Institute for Sustainable Futures (MISF)

From 12–16 May 2025, the Mandela Institute for Sustainable Futures (MISF) led a strategic visit to Utrecht University (UU) to deepen institutional collaboration. Notably, UU's *Pathways to Sustainability* programme was identified as a model aligned with MISF's mission, and a formal link is being explored. Key action points emerging from the visit included drafting and signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and identifying joint funding opportunities.

Climate change and the just energy transition

Professors Syden Mishi and Janet Cherry have been awarded a World Bank-funded project, *Assessment for Developing Socially Owned Renewable Energy Initiatives*, in partnership with European energy consultancy, ECORYS. This project assesses the feasibility of a community-owned renewable energy facility in Komati, Mpumalanga, as part of the Presidential Climate Commission initiative to implement the Just Energy Transition. Professor Cherry is also spearheading the NRF Global Change Social Sciences project, which will establish and test new models of community-owned energy and food production in urban townships and rural villages in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces.

Ndlambe EcoSUN Green Village in Ekuphumleni Township

Researchers from Nelson Mandela University and the University of Potsdam in Germany have been cooperating on a human settlement development project led by our Chair in Human Settlements, Professor Sjekula Mbanga. This project focuses on integrating green building, grey-water purification, and renewable energy systems into the construction of housing in the Ndlambe EcoSUN Green Village.

Hydrogen Energy Projects

The Strategic Resource Mobilisation and Advancement (SRMA) office is facilitating the implementation of several hydrogen projects that seek to position the University's expertise in this area. The first involved developing an Eastern Cape Green Hydrogen Strategy, which was completed in September 2024. Further funding was received for the University to support the Eastern Cape Government to review the proposed strategy and assist with its piloting. A second project centres on a feasibility study for the export of Green Hydrogen from the Eastern Cape and involves multiple partners, including six UK-based organisations. A third project entails the development of a Green Hydrogen Coastal Belt strategic compact, and implementation will commence in the second half of the year.

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

3.1 Graduation

The Autumn graduation season consisted of 16 ceremonies, two of which were held at our refurbished George Campus Auditorium on 4 April 2025, and 14 in the Madibaz Sports Centre on the University's Summerstrand South Campus, in Gqebehra, between 11 and 23 April 2025. The University conferred honorary doctorates on four recipients, namely:

- Ms Letta Nomali Mbulu – Doctor of Music;
- Ms Ntombifuthi Temperance Mtoba – Doctor of Commerce (Accounting);
- Professor Amina Caroline Mama – Doctor of Philosophy; and
- Professor David Richard Boyd – Doctor of Laws.

Through high-quality live streaming, dynamic video production, and professional-grade visuals, media coverage of the University's graduation ceremonies reached a broad audience. User-generated content was reshared multiple times, creating a vibrant, community-driven digital celebration and over 82 articles were published on University platforms.

3.2 Graduate Outputs and Student Success

There was a pleasing increase in graduate outputs with 6 708 graduates in 2025 compared to 5 818 in 2024. Furthermore, the success rate improved from 74% in 2023 to 77% in 2024, although this is slightly below the national average of 79%. Preliminary indications are that this upward trajectory is closely linked to the implementation of targeted academic and psychosocial student support interventions.

3.3 LT Development and Support

Learning Development

Nearly 3 700 students attended the First-Year Success programme, which facilitates the transition to university life. In addition, Learning Development interacted with 11 440 students in the first quarter through different support initiatives, of which 70% are in their first year, indicating that academically vulnerable students are identified early and supported. Student Success Coaches interacted with 593 students across faculties by the end of the first quarter of this year. These coaching sessions empower students with study skills and learning strategies to improve their academic performance. Supplemental Instruction (SI) provides out-of-class academic support and has reached more than 3 000 students across all faculties.

Teaching Development

The Teaching Development (TD) unit piloted the revised Teaching Enhancement Programme (TEP) implementation through the rollout of short learning programmes (SLPs) for academic staff. In March 2025, the SLP on Assessment in Higher Education was offered to support participating academics to enable a more responsive approach to assessment.

3.4 Technology-Rich Learning and Teaching and the Virtual Academy

The LT Collab's Digital Learning Experience Design and Innovation (LxD) cluster has partnered with ICT to migrate 2 545 courses to the Learning Management System (LMS) following an upgrade to Moodle 4, also known as Funda. The LT Collab has procured a data analytics tool that integrates with Funda and leverages the enhanced reporting and analytics capabilities of Moodle 4. In addition, the LxD cluster engages with generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools, strategically aligned with the University's Virtual Academy. Plans are underway to develop an online SLP to upskill academics in using GenAI tools, accompanied by face-to-face workshops.

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

4.1 Postgraduate Student Success

As of 14 May 2025, a total of 974 Honours, Master's, and Doctoral scholarships were awarded through Council, the NRF, and other external sources. Uptake is currently at 79% (767 of 974 awards) comprising 74% Black (African, Coloured, and Indian) students and 65% women, underscoring the University's commitment to equity. An indicator of student success for Master's and doctoral (M&D) graduates is the average number of years graduates take to complete their degree. It is generally acceptable for a Master's graduate to take three years and for a doctoral graduate to take five years to complete. In 2024, the University's coursework Master's graduates took 3.2 years on average to complete, while research Master's graduates took 3.1 years. Doctoral graduates took on average 5.1 years to complete, which was slightly above the norm of five years.

4.2 Postgraduate Student Support

The University has scheduled 72 research development workshops via the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)-funded University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG), 25 of which have already been held. Participation totalled 794 postgraduate students and 267 staff, with 95% of those who attended identifying as Black and 61% as women. The Office of Research Development has expanded training opportunities on research ethics and the use of the Mandela Ethics Online System (MEOS).

4.3 Research support for academic staff

Structured support for transforming the equity profile of academic staff with doctoral degrees is extended through programmes such as Thuthuka awards and the Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP) grants. The total number of recipients in 2025 is 21 NRF Thuthuka and 14 BAAP recipients respectively. In addition, the University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP) is assisting four early-career academics with doctoral completion, while the DHET-funded New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) supports 17 staff members.

The Mandela Imvuselelo Professors Project (MIPP) was launched in April 2025 and aims to provide targeted support to mid-career researchers to bolster postgraduate research supervision and mentorship. The University has also secured a £30 000 (R725 000) grant for *The Madiba Nexus: Advancing Balanced North-South Research Partnerships*, in collaboration with the Universities of

Southampton and Edinburgh in the United Kingdom, and Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology in Kenya to support the researcher pipeline through online and in-person workshops.

4.4 Innovation

Terms have been finalised and approved for licensing the University's patented Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) technology with the prospective commercial partner. This project, which includes international patents in the United States (US), European Union, China, Japan, and Australia, exemplifies the University's capacity to link postgraduate research to high-impact innovation.

Following the Technology and Innovation Agency (TIA) Pre-Seed Funding Call, two student-led research innovations received development funding, namely R350 000 for a green hydrogen and ammonia pilot project, and R800 000 for a project on biodegradable cellulose water-saving mulch film. The fourth annual Postgraduate Innovation Competition, launched on 30 May 2025, to support students to develop research into commercially viable ventures. The grand prize winner will receive R100 000 in seed funding to launch a student-led enterprise.

4.5 Internationalisation

In 2024, the University hosted students from 42 countries and 179 international students graduated. Structured payment plans were introduced in 2024 to enhance international student retention and success, with nearly 200 of the 804 enrolled international students benefiting. Of the 179 international students who graduated, 40 had benefited from these payment arrangements during 2024.

On 13 May 2025, the University hosted a delegation from Zimbabwe's Presidential Scholarships Department to discuss scholarship renewals. Given that many postgraduate students from Africa are self-funded and financially vulnerable, the International Office has re-engaged with international governments to secure external funding mechanisms to assist these students.

4.6 Library and Information Services

A University-wide migration from the Sierra to the Alma Library Services Platform (LSP) is on track for completion by January 2026, which will enhance search capabilities and enable integration with Moodle. Since February, 842 new print books and 94 electronic books have been catalogued and added to the library collection. Nelson Mandela University libraries further support student success and research through 83 electronic database subscriptions.

5. TRANSFORMATIVE INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE THAT PROMOTES DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

5.1 Mandela University Press (MUP)

The Mandela University Press — Inkwazi — held two book launches for their latest publications, namely John Samuel and Vulindlela Nyoni's poetry book *Winged Words*; and Doreen Musson's *Tested by Fire* (a biography of Neville Alexander). These latest launches add to our Press' pedigree of diverse imprints.

5.2 Science Centre

The Science Centre intends to expand its digital exhibitions while strengthening research partnerships with all faculties. These initiatives seek to inspire learners to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM), especially those from marginalised communities. This past quarter saw high-resolution 4K dome content created at the Science Centre, along with interactive digital exhibitions to amplify immersive learning experiences.

5.3 Engagement Office

Through the Career Services Unit, the Engagement Office (EO) is enhancing graduate employability by collaborating with employers, organising sector-specific job fairs, and pursuing global placement partnerships to promote graduate career readiness. Programmes such as *The Hope Revolution Vision* (THR.V) contribute to student wellness and substance abuse awareness through the Student Hubs of Convergence (ShoC). SHO.C fosters civic consciousness through SLP implementation while equipping students with skills for real-world social challenges.

5.4 Transformation Office

Between November 2024 and April 2025, 46 equality-related complaints were reported through various channels. Since January, the University has contracted a mediator to handle cases referred by the Inquiry Panel and staff grievances submitted through the Employee Relations Office. This past quarter saw comprehensive anti-gender-based violence (GBV) programming offered by the Transformation Office (TO) across the University, including the launch of the second season of the Amanda Memeza Series, collectively reaching over 450 students. Among other activities, the TO visited residences for interactive sessions on equality promotion, social inclusion, LGBTQIA+ issues, and positive masculinities. The Safe Haven project is nearing completion and will further enhance GBV victim support infrastructure.

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

The Centre for Women and Gender Studies (CWGS) currently hosts a number of Master's in Gender Studies students who will gain practical experience in gender praxis. The Centre also welcomed the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Programme (CADFP) visitor, Professor SN Nyeck, in May, who will teach and provide mentorship and supervisory support for the MA Gender Studies students until mid-August. The CWGS and Chair worked with the TO and Visiting Professor Zethu Matebeni to provide a detailed and comprehensive review of the new Policy for Inclusive Gender Identities, Expressions and Sexual Orientation.

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

The Chair has seen tangible outcomes in the second quarter through its collaboration with the Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS). Two events were hosted as part of the *[Re] Directions/Ukutshintshwa Kwendlela: Knowledge, Praxes and the African-purposed curriculum* seminar series. These were the launch of Professor Suren Pillay's book, *Predicaments of Knowledge: Decolonisation and Deracialisation in Universities*, and the *Mandela and Science* seminar. The latter

event engaged with the question of what *Mandela* might mean for the natural sciences as part of a call to adopt more grounded, transdisciplinary, and social justice-oriented approaches.

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

Through its research, CIPSET enables the emergence of polyvocal narratives from youth and women in diverse communities of urban food producers, small-scale fishers, TVET students, and unemployed graduates. The process of appointing a CIPSET Board is underway, and steps are being taken to advertise for the Director's position.

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

On Human Rights Day (21 March), CANRAD collaborated with Lovelife to host the Human Rights Day Youth Dialogue. The Youth Dialogue focused on issues like GBV and femicide, connecting young people with human rights education and advocacy. More recently, CANRAD hosted the Africa Month Indaba on 22 May, themed *Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations* in partnership with the Democracy Development Program (DDP). The Indaba served as a platform for reflection on the current state of the African continent and its future, focusing on reparations for the injustices faced by Africans and people of African descent. On 23 May, CANRAD relaunched the #BuaMfundi event, a talk series focusing on reflections on ten years of #FeesMustFall.

5.9 Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS)

This quarter, TIMS focused on deepening conversations around transformation and the meaning of *Mandela* for University staff and students. Central to this is the ongoing Mandela Conversations series exploring the role of the University in social justice and decolonisation. The Mandela institutionalisation resource, *Embedding Mandela*, is nearing completion and will serve as the basis for ongoing conversation.

6. ENHANCING STUDENT LIVING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES

6.1 Student Governance and Development

The University hosted the Mandela-Sobukwe Leadership Camp POP-UP from 20–22 March 2025, which was attended by the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Mr Buti Manamela. Themed *Deepening a Culture of Social Justice and Human Rights*, it was a transformative experience for 50 student leaders from public universities and TVET colleges in the Eastern Cape. The Student Representative Council (SRC) Investiture was held on 25 March 2025, to induct the SRC into office and orient them on the University's values.

6.2 Student Entrepreneurship and Youth Employability

The Minister of Small Business Development, Stella Tembisa Ndabeni, officially launched the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Rapid Incubator (CfERI) on 29 April. CfERI is part of the Mandela University Africa Hub and has already incubated 35 small businesses, creating 85 jobs. Taken together, on-campus businesses have employed 55 students and generated more than R1-million from January to April 2025.

6.3 Student Housing and Transport

Student Housing

Two innovative programmes have been launched to nurture holistic student success within residences, namely, the Mentorship Programme and the Residence Academic Success Tutoring Programme. These initiatives focus on enriching both the academic and personal development of first-year students as they navigate the pivotal transition into university life.

Student Transport

The University's student mobility plan includes providing transport that shuttles students on- and off-campus. The service operates until 22:00 and assists students with safe transportation between campuses and student residences. The demand for this service outstrips supply, but the University is currently streamlining processes to ensure that only bona fide users benefit.

6.4 Student Wellbeing

Emthonjeni Student Wellness (ESW) supports student success by enhancing the ability of students to manage academic pressures and address a wide range of mental health and emotional challenges. Group counselling sessions reached 2 997 students from 1 January to 8 May 2025, and 688 students participated in 1 447 individual counselling sessions. ESW handled 62 crisis interventions, which are structured to ensure that students in severe distress receive timely intervention to stabilise their well-being.

Student Health Services (SHS) conducted 1 624 consultations for acute and chronic medical conditions. During this period, the health counsellors tested 87 students for HIV, consulted 35 students with mental health issues, 259 students are currently receiving ongoing care through the Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) programme, and 14 students are on tuberculosis (TB) treatment. Food insecurity remains a critical barrier to learning, affecting academic focus and well-being. The demand for nutrition packs is significantly higher than the University can meet, but the revival of the agriculture department's nutrition garden makes it possible to supplement student nutrition with fresh produce.

6.5 Madibaz Sport

Madibaz Sport closely monitors academic performance, and minimum academic requirements need to be met to participate in certain tertiary sport tournaments. The LT Collab presents academic support workshops to all sport bursary recipients and provides student success coaching.

A sponsorship (R150 thousand) for 2025 towards the Madibaz Campus Sport League activities by Score Energy Drink represents a significant moment in the development of the University's recreation and social cohesion programme. The Sport League keeps students healthy and engaged while also strengthening social bonds and a sense of belonging. In 2025, 32 teams featuring 800 players will participate in the men's football competition in Gqeberha, while more than 200 female students across 19 teams will participate in netball matches. In George, ten men's football teams will play a total of 50 matches before the competition's conclusion in October.

6.6 Universal Accessibility and Disability Services (UADS)

Students with disabilities are encouraged to apply for reasonable academic accommodations to promote their academic success. UADS launched a residence-wide campaign of interactive workshops and events in the first semester to raise awareness about the diverse range of disabilities and cultivate a culture of inclusion.

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

7.1 Human Resources

Employee Health and Wellbeing

A total of 88 staff consulted the external wellness service provider to access counselling services through on- and off-site sessions. Primary health services remain well subscribed, with 653 employees visiting the North Campus Clinic by the end of April. As part of our communicable disease screening efforts, eight employees were tested for tuberculosis, with six testing positive and referred for appropriate care. Awareness of HIV testing services has increased, with more employees voluntarily accessing testing.

Staff Remuneration and Development

The University's remuneration philosophy and strategy is being reviewed, and the initial phase of the planned transition to the Total Guaranteed Package (TGP) payroll structure affects approximately 120 employees. Executive management resolved that implementation would follow a consultative, cost-neutral approach and would be conducted voluntarily for current staff.

In compliance with the Skills Development Act, the University submitted its Annual Training Report (ATR) and Workplace Skills Plan (WSP). The timely submission ensures the institution remains eligible for a mandatory grant rebate of R3.6-million, along with access to additional discretionary funding opportunities from the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA).

Institutional Culture

Six institutional culture signature programmes are being launched across all faculties and support services portfolios to foster a values-driven and transformative institutional culture. Ambassadors from each faculty and division have been identified and equipped to partner with the HR "Culture Crew" team members throughout the implementation process.

7.2 Information and Communication Technology Services

Through the Student Device Initiative, 2 802 devices have been distributed this year, 76 of which were allocated to the Medical School. Computer laboratories are well utilised, with technology support available on all campuses. The University's network has expanded with increased Wi-Fi coverage across all campus learning and teaching, living and general areas. ICT core infrastructure has maintained 99.8% uptime during this period. As part of the digital transformation journey, the University is ready to introduce e-assessments and proctoring, and a contractor has been appointed to establish an e-assessment centre on North Campus.

7.3 Infrastructure Services and Space Optimisation

Procurement processes are underway to install photovoltaic (PV) solar panels across all campuses to the value of R65-million. Although Nelson Mandela Bay municipal water levels are declining – 69% on 10 June 2025 – the George Municipality seems relatively well stocked with dam levels of 90% reported on the same date.

The DHET has honoured the pledge to grant Nelson Mandela University R100-million to continue with Phase 2 of the Medical School project. With the total outstanding value of R396-million needed to complete the Medical School, critical components were identified for the current funds, and scope documents are being prepared.

7.4 Safety and Security

Efforts towards improved safety and security across all campuses are a priority, with R20-million earmarked for security technologies in 2025. MANCO approved funding from the University's five-year Infrastructure Plan to address the most critical components of the Closed Campus Project. Several of these have already been completed, with the remainder scheduled for completion later this year. In April 2025, there was a decrease in the crime statistics compared to the first quarter on all campuses, which correlates with improved patrol rates over the same period.

7.5 Communication and Marketing

This year's student recruitment programme included an Open Day drawing about 8 000 participants, whereby the full spectrum of student life at Nelson Mandela University was showcased. The student online application system opened on 9 April for the 2026 intake, and more than 53 000 applications have already been received.

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 2025 is to mobilise at least R95-million for bursaries and scholarships to support undergraduate missing middle and postgraduate students. Between January and the start of May 2025, R74.2-million was mobilised, of which R35.7-million has been paid over. To date, 282 students have been awarded bursaries through funds raised by the Nelson Mandela University Trust in 2025, of which more than 92% are Black.

The University has set aside R117-million for the 2025 financial year for student bursaries. Undergraduate students were allocated over R57-million, while nearly R60-million has been allocated to postgraduate students. In addition, the University has budgeted more than R14-million to assist University staff and their direct family with their studies.

8.2 Financial Planning

Budget 3.0 has been tabled, and the appropriation bill aligns with the 2025 allocation letter. The Ministerial Statement and the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement indicate potential increases in block grants for the sector over the medium term, which is positive.

To date, there are 20 924 NSFAS registered students, 6 696 of whom are first-time entering students. Towards the end of April 2025, NSFAS defunded 1 123 students, an ongoing challenge that increases the University's credit risk. However, the financial position of the University reflects a net positive variance due to the subsidy allocation and a detailed financial report will be tabled to Council today.

9. CONCLUSION

In the second quarter of 2025, Nelson Mandela University continued to fulfil its mission of providing a diverse range of life-changing educational experiences, which include creating a supportive environment that empowers students to achieve their full potential. We thank Council for its steadfast guidance as the University continues to focus on improving student access for success.