



**Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council
Quarter 1, 2024**

28 March 2024

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1. Introduction

Nelson Mandela University remains committed to providing a transformative educational experience for students, with inclusive access for success constituting a golden thread that runs through Vision 2030. This first quarterly report for 2024 provides an overview of institutional initiatives aimed at achieving this, inclusive of both challenges and highlights faced by the University at the start of this academic year.

2. Vision 2030 and strategic trajectories

As outlined in Vision 2030 and the Vice-Chancellor's *Advancing Mandela University* address, the following strategic trajectories position the University as a distinctive, socially embedded institution.

2.1. Medical School

The Nelson Mandela University Medical School programme, which is now in its fourth year, continues to achieve excellent pass rates of between 98% and 100%. The initial intake of medical students in 2021 is now a cohort of 45 students who have started their fourth-year clinical rotations on the training platform at the Dora Nginza and Livingstone Hospitals. Feedback on their experiences has been mostly positive. The third-year class has 77 students, the second-year class 100, while the first-year class is still registering to reach the threshold of the expected intake of 100 students.

2.2. Ocean Sciences

Projects of the Institute for Coastal and Marine Research (CMR), housed on this campus, offer postgraduate study opportunities where students are supervised, mentored, and hosted by leading researchers. Dr Denise Schael has been appointed as the Director of the CMR for a five-year period, starting 1 March 2024. Professor Janine Adams, the Deputy Director of CMR, achieved the South African Woman in Science Award 2023 in the Natural and Engineering Sciences category.

In 2023, the DSI-NRF SARCHI Chair in the Law of the Sea and Development in Africa was upgraded to Tier 1, which is reserved for established researchers who are recognised internationally as leaders in their fields. The incumbent, Professor Patrick Vrancken, has received funding for an additional five years and will commence his next cycle in June 2024.

Nelson Mandela University's engagement institute, eNtsa, marked a significant milestone with the launch of its new engagement and innovation facility on 15 March 2024. Located at the Ocean Sciences Campus, this new facility is set to provide product and material testing to the automotive and marine manufacturing industries. The Automotive Industry Development Centre - Eastern Cape (AIDC – EC) provided the initial funding for the establishment of the facility, supported by Mr Mlungisi Mvoko, the Eastern Cape Member of Executive Council for Finance and Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs, and Tourism.

2.3. Revitalising the Humanities

The Faculty of Humanities continues to advance life-changing, liberatory knowledge encounters aimed at revitalising this area of scholarship. This includes reawakening African knowledges, values and world views that have been devalued and marginalised in the past. The Faculty of Humanities is working hard on stakeholder consultations, as well as national and international benchmarking, to ensure that all curricula are responsive to the world of work and the needs of 21st century. As part of the Faculty's revitalisation project, most of the programmes are under review, with a focus on Africanisation, indigenous knowledge systems, transdisciplinary collaborations, social justice, digitisation and the Digital Humanities.

2.4. Transdisciplinary Sustainability Science

Transdisciplinary sustainability science extends across the boundaries of disciplines and faculties, fostering collaboration and innovation. The Mandela Institute for Sustainability Futures (MISF) is a new entity, currently only virtual, that will focus on leveraging our strength in transdisciplinary sustainability science. The first project underway is the establishment of the Sustainability Science Initiative for Transdisciplinary Research, which will aim to broaden the knowledge base and capacities of academics and postgraduate students in transdisciplinary research.

Currently, a joint programme is being developed with Utrecht University's (UU) Copernicus Institute for Sustainable Development with the intention to introduce the Interuniversity Sustainability course with participants from Nelson Mandela University and two European partner universities. A formal launch event is scheduled for the annual Research Week in September 2024.

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

3.1. Readiness for the 2024 Academic Year

Online registration opened on 11 January 2024. Student financial challenges remain a perennial concern for the successful start of the academic year, especially for first-time entrants of which 68% come from quintile 1-3 schools. We have made substantive strides with concessions to exempt students from the usual down payment requirement for registration. More than 9 500 students applied for concessions by mid-February, of which 5 053 were cleared to register. This is more than double the number of students who received such support last year.

The slow release of student allowances by NSFAS has impacted negatively on registration, accommodation, and student hunger and this led to disruptions nationally, inclusive of Nelson Mandela University. As far as possible, the University engages directly with NSFAS to address most of the concerns raised by the students.

There has been a marked improvement in 2024 enrolment and registration processes due to combined efforts institutionally led by the multi-stakeholder Enrolment Management Committee

(EMC). The EMC meets weekly during the registration period to ensure seamless enrolment for new and returning students. This has resulted in many students preferring to make use of the opportunity to register online and to reach out via online support services to assist with enquiries. The processing of applications improved by 41% for 2024 compared to 2023. Admissions were processed at a much faster rate and admission numbers were significantly higher than at the same time last year.

The first-time entering (FTEN) student target for 2024 of 7 270 has been exceeded and was just under 8 000 enrolments as of 11 March 2024. The University has also exceeded its overall student headcount enrolment target for 2024 (31 905) with 31 990 enrolments.

3.2. Learning and Teaching Collaborative (LT Collab)

Student readiness

The First Year Success (FYS) team prepared to welcome and integrate FTEN students into on-campus university life by training more than 300 senior student First-Year Success (FYS) Buddies. The FYS programme for 2024 in Gqeberha and George will conclude at the end of the first semester to accommodate late registrations.

Student orientation started through Pre-Uni Connect with information available via the Telegram channel, FYS Facebook page and website, which has a chatbot that connects students directly with the FYS team. The FYS Thrive face-to-face sessions started on 1 February, with information and support also shared online.

The VC's Welcoming Ceremony was held on 3 February and served the purpose of creating an affirming and welcoming atmosphere for our new students and their families. The faculty-based Meet-and-Greet sessions were hosted on the same day, including at the George Campus.

Siyaphumelela: Student success

The University received a special 20th-anniversary Siyaphumelela Network Award on 21 February at the annual Achieving the Dream (ATD) conference in Orlando, Florida. Nelson Mandela University is one of the original partner institutions in the Kresge-funded Siyaphumelela Network, which has been working with ATD for 10 years.

Lecturer readiness

The Beginning Your Journey @ Nelson Mandela University programme aims to empower newly appointed academics to facilitate student success. The Teaching Development team facilitated staff capacitation sessions in February with 33 new academics from all seven faculties.

3.3. Virtual Academy

The Virtual Academy (VA) at Nelson Mandela University is a network that traverses the University, with ICT Services providing the digital backbone. As part of catalysing Phase 1 of the VA, the University

is currently identifying thematic areas through which to initiate digital innovation communities of practice. The development of online qualifications and short learning programmes has been prioritised as an initial project to enhance access opportunities for adult learners.

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

4.1. Research outputs

The University's research outputs have been on an upward trajectory since the implementation of the online Research Publication Management System (RPMS) in October 2022. Approximately 900 research outputs are expected to be submitted by Nelson Mandela University in the 2024 cycle.

4.2. Postgraduate enrolments and funding

While postgraduate enrolments are continuing, they remain low at 2 704 (compared to the target of 3 222 for 2024). The Enrolment Management Indaba scheduled to take place in March will focus on developing a comprehensive, research-informed strategy to enhance postgraduate and international student enrolments.

The new postgraduate funding policy implemented in 2023 seeks to advance social justice and inclusion by funding postgraduate students continuously from honours to doctoral level, subject to satisfactory academic performance at each consecutive level. Overall, 217 Honours, 240 Masters and 138 Doctoral scholarships were awarded as of 29 February 2024 and the uptake of the awards is ongoing. In addition, 114 postdoctoral and research fellowships were awarded over the review period, with a projected investment of R30m for the 2024 academic year.

4.3. Postgraduate support

The Postgraduate Orientation Programme took place on 18-20 March. A significant addition to this year's programme was the introduction of a Futures Literacy Laboratory (FLL), which is part of the University's efforts to position itself as a global hub for sustainability science.

The inaugural Masters and Doctoral Travel Grant programme was piloted in 2023, with 24 applications received. After a rigorous evaluation process, 17 travel awards were granted.

The University continues to leverage funding to support academic staff in obtaining higher degrees. There are 15 active Thuthuka grant holders and the Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP) currently funds four academics. The DHET-funded New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) consists of 18 academics who have collectively published 30 journal articles and currently supervise 5 PhD, 15 Masters and 8 Honours students.

4.4. Internationalisation and expansion of our African footprint

International student enrolments

The University has experienced a decrease in international student enrolments (630 international enrolments as of 11 March), and it is unlikely that the 2024 enrolment target of 970 international enrolments will be reached. This trend, observed at universities across South Africa, is cause for concern and is partially caused by significant delays in the processing of visa applications by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA). The DHA recently approved a dispensation for students who are currently in South Africa and whose visas require renewal. This dispensation allows the students to enrol at universities whilst their visa renewal is being considered. However, it does not apply to international students who are still in their home countries.

International partnerships and research networks, alliances, and associations

In the last quarter of 2023, Nelson Mandela University students took part in Global Challenges University Alliance's (GCUA) online postgraduate courses. Ms Olwethu Poswayo, a doctoral student in the Chemistry department, was announced the winner of the 2023 GCUA 2030 PhD thesis award.

A week-long EU-funded workshop on Problem-Based Teaching was held in January 2024 with academic staff from the Science Faculty's School of Natural Resource Management at the George Campus in collaboration with five Scandinavian and five South African universities, as well as the forestry sector.

On 2 February 2024, Nelson Mandela University hosted a Research Day with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) from Sweden. Potential future collaborative projects include Ocean Sciences, the Centre for African Conservation Ecology, and the Mandela Institute for Sustainable Futures.

Cooperation between St Paul's University in the United States (US) is ongoing, with project agreements being drafted. Project Leader, Dr Nehemiah Latolla, was selected as one of 25 participants from around the world to attend the prestigious UNILEAD 2024 Programme. The International Office also welcomed a delegation from St Cloud State University (SCSU), US, in March 2024.

4.5. Innovation

The Innovation Office is continuously looking to expand commercialisation efforts and outputs with the Vertical Take-off and Landing (VTOL) drone showing potential. Discussions are underway with Autonosky (Pty) Ltd to license the patented technology.

To date, over 200 patent applications have been filed, and the University commercialisation company, Innovolve Pty Ltd, is currently managing three active license agreements. The Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) seed funding programme provides support for three early-stage technology development projects at the University with a combined value of R1.9m.

4.6. Library and Information Services (LIS)

Library and Information Services noted a sharp increase in the number of students attending library orientation sessions this year. Through these sessions, LIS empowers students to leverage electronic catalogues, online databases, and other programmes effectively to support their learning. To proactively address the rising costs of academic textbooks, LIS is transitioning away from the traditional Web Access Management (WAM) system to implement a Single Sign-On System (SSO) for seamless access to educational materials.

5. Transformative institutional culture that promotes diversity and social cohesion

5.1. Engagement Office

The Institutional Stakeholder-Community Engagement Framework (ISCEF), adopted in November 2023, guides the initiatives of the Engagement Office (EO) in alignment with Vision 2030. The EO has embraced a three-tier agreement framework, including the Joint Development Agreement (JDA), Partnership Agreement (PA), and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) models in fostering relationships with various stakeholder communities. Highlights over this period include piloting the HOC concept with Moi University in Kenya, receiving an NRF grant with global collaborators, and planning a three-day International Scientific Seminar with São Paulo State University. Building on the success of Hubs of Convergence (HOC), the conceptualisation of Student Hubs of Convergence (SHOC) aims to share best practices and engage across faculties.

5.2. Transformation Office

The Transformation Office (TO) hosted Day 1 of the biennial Transformation Indaba on 31 January, with the live-streamed panel sessions witnessing robust engagement by the attendees. Day 2 of the Transformation Indaba will take place on 8 April 2024 and will focus on the monitoring and evaluation of transformation. Advocacy and awareness are integral to the TO's strategy and approach which include training (student) house committee members, newly appointed staff, student health services staff, and residence managers on equality policies and the effective reporting of equality-related incidents.

Equality-related complaints and gender-based violence

During 2023, the number of discrimination and harassment complaints increased from 41 in 2022 to 50 in 2023. GBV-related complaints decreased from 57% in 2022 to 42% in 2023. The proportion of complaints relating to student-on-student incidents increased from 72% in 2022 to 77% in 2023. In 2023, the proportion of incidents happening off-campus increased to 49%, up from 42% in 2022. The proportion of incidents that occurred on-campus remained relatively stable at 34% and 35% in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

5.3. Centre for Women and Gender Studies (CWGS)

The Centre for Women and Gender Studies (CWGS) and the DSI-NRF SARChI Chair for African Feminist Imaginations (AFEMI) are finalising the Gender Curriculum Mapping Project, which aims to institutionalise gender studies through postgraduate degrees. Collaborations extend globally, with engagements at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg and plans for the 2024 Summer School. Earlier this year, Professor Pumla Gqola travelled to Germany to participate as a fellow in the New Institute's pioneering programme titled *Black Feminism and the Polycrisis: Configuring a Novel Solution Space Through Intersectional Methodology*, which runs until June 2024.

5.4. Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET) and Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS)

The Research Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET) organised the highly successful Africanisation-Decolonisation Indaba, which took place on 7-8 March 2024. All seven faculties showcased their work in this domain thereby creating a platform for collaboration.

The Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS) is compiling a report, with completion anticipated by the end of the first quarter, to present a cross-sectional analysis of the perception, embodiment, and application of the Mandela identity at the University as a record of self-reflection. TIMS has also initiated the development of an institutional guidebook and resource to articulate the vision, institutional culture, and service through the Mandela framework.

5.5. Chair for Youth Unemployment, Employability, and Empowerment (CYUEE) and the Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training (CIPSET)

The Research Chair for Youth Unemployment, Employability, and Empowerment (CYUEE) and the Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training (CIPSET) are currently undergoing reconfiguration. Key tasks for this quarter include aligning with the strategic focus areas related to the social and solidarity economy, youth unemployment, and eco-conscious development.

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

The activities of the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD) over this period have included seminars, book launches, and the Dennis Brutus public lecture, showcasing diverse academic initiatives. Collaborations with the Democracy Development Programme and Fruits of Democracy are progressing, along with conceptualised book projects.

5.8. HIV and AIDS Research Unit

The HIV and AIDS Research Unit co-hosted a UNICEF adolescent healthcare event in February, emphasising youth-friendly healthcare services. Discussions covered sexual and reproductive health rights, gender-based violence and HIV.

6. Enhancing student living and learning experiences

6.1. Student governance and development

Members of the new Student Representative Council (SRC) were inducted on 19 and 20 January 2024, setting the tone for a robust but cordial relationship with student leaders. In February, SRC members who serve on institutional committees were provided with additional training offered by the Registrar's office. The Beyond the Classroom (BtC), Leaders for Change (LfC), LeadHer women's leadership programme, and Ebuhlanti men's leadership programme have enrolled approximately 1 000 students.

6.2. Student entrepreneurship and graduate employability

The conceptualisation of the Mandela African Hub for Youth Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation makes provision for a strategic coordinative and collaborative mechanism aimed at bolstering the impact of our entrepreneurship development and social innovation interventions. The mandate of the Hub will be to catalyse and co-shape Afrocentric entrepreneurs and social innovators.

6.4. Student wellness

Student health services (SHS)

As part of Reproductive Health Month in February, Student Health Services (SHS) conducted a "First Things First" campaign on five of the University campuses to build awareness on sexual reproduction and related issues. The campaign was a collaborative effort with the Nelson Mandela Bay District Department of Health and supported by *Higher Health*.

Emthonjeni Student Wellness

Emthonjeni Student Wellness (ESW) has introduced *Masincokole* ("Let's Chat") sessions as part of efforts to expand access to psychological services. In January and February, twenty group sessions were facilitated, with four sessions held virtually. These interactive discussions create a safe space for open expression, while empowering students to gain insights into various topics that affect their mental health and overall well-being.

6.5. Madibaz Sport

A growing interest in men's netball was noted at the netball trials held in February, reflecting a transformative ideology that sport transcends gender stereotypes. The male team selected intends to represent the University at the University Sport South Africa (USSA) tournament in July 2024.

6.6. Universal Accessibility and Disability Services (UADS)

Universal Accessibility and Disability Services (UADS) outlined their services during the orientation of first-year students, highlighting programmes that the University has in place to consistently support students living with disabilities. These sessions also serve to raise awareness for staff and students who interface with students that live with disabilities.

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

7.1. Human Resources

In actions that were widely reported on, the National Education and Health Workers Union (NEHAWU) led protests over the 2023-24 salary adjustments in February and March. While Nelson Mandela University supports the right of workers to strike within the parameters of the law, it does not condone unlawful acts that do not align with our core values.

On February 29, the Labour Court granted the University an interim interdict ordering NEHAWU and its leadership to conduct the strike within the relevant legal parameters and to refrain from any lawless conduct on all campuses. At all stages of the negotiations and strike processes, Nelson Mandela University has adhered to the letter and spirit of the rules and prescripts. Regrettably, however, the strike action has had a disruptive impact on the start of the academic year.

The 13-day strike concluded with a settlement agreement between the parties and workers returning to work on the 14 March 2024. The agreement included the payment of a 0.55% increase in addition to the 6.9% for post levels 12-16. Next steps include determining the modalities of the implementation of the no work no pay principle, joint benchmarking of medical and housing allowances, relationship building, and addressing misconduct arising out of the strike will be dealt within the ambit the University Disciplinary Code.

7.2. Information and Communication Technology Services

Digital Transformation

As part of the drive towards digital transformation, the University is stepping up the densification and expansion of wireless connectivity across campuses and in accredited off-campus residences. In addition, the University continues to support NSFAS-funded first-time entering students to access suitable mobile devices through a scheme that has issued over 17 000 laptops to students since 2019. In 2024, over 2 500 students have elected to participate in the scheme and shall be receiving their laptops in the first quarter.

The new online application system will be implemented on 1 April 2024, in readiness for the 2025 application cycle, and student housing will be integrated into this system. Benefits of the new system include improved user experience and more secure authentication. The student housing system

enables the digital accreditation of residences and a total of 374 accommodation providers have been onboarded as users of the system.

The University's ICT strategy entails a phased shift to utilising cloud services and cybersecurity enhancements and mitigation measures are ongoing.

7.3. Infrastructure Services and Space Optimisation

Infrastructure

The R86m Science Centre project on the Ocean Sciences Campus is complete with only minor snags still being addressed. On 15 March 2024 the Minister of HESI officially launched this state-of-the-art infrastructure.

Grinaker-LTA announced in April 2023 that it was unable to secure funding from shareholders to complete the third phase of building Residences Blocks 7 and 8. Work ceased as sub-contractors withdrew due to non-payment. The process to complete the work has started, while the refurbishment of Solomon Mahlangu residence has almost been completed.

Energy security

Photovoltaic installations with an estimated value of R65m and generators valued at R46m are examples of sustainability efforts, and to enhance resilience amid load shedding. Core ICT infrastructure has been bolstered to minimise the impact of load shedding, resulting in a commendable 99% uptime. Installing inverters and Uninterrupted Power Supplies (UPS) at core hubs of the University's distributed network remains a priority.

7.4. Safety and security

The Protection Services team has enhanced access control and security measures on campuses, in residences, and surrounding areas. Cameras and surveillance towers have been improved and "green routes" extended to enhance the safety and security of students. As an extra layer of security at Missionvale Campus, an armed response team patrols campus surroundings from 6am to 10pm on weekdays. Security has also been enhanced at, and in the vicinity of Bird Street Campus. This area of our support efforts for students remains of primary concern.

7.5. Communication and Marketing

The Communication and Marketing team has provided ongoing content relating to registration, accommodation, NSFAS, change of programmes, concessions, appeals and shuttle services to current and prospective students. Between 1 January and 15 February, 55 social media posts were disseminated on various platforms and reached nearly half a million followers. The signs and symbols initiative is in full swing, and is being extended to all our campuses.

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

8.1. Strategic Resource Mobilisation and Advancement (SRMA)

Through the Nelson Mandela University Trust, more than R82m has been mobilised and received for bursaries and scholarships for students over the past year (compared to the target of at least R94m). A total of 1 266 students received bursaries from the income mobilised through the Trust in 2023 and more than 93% of the beneficiaries were Black students as defined in the B-BBEE codes.

The SRMA is increasing its focus on mobilising funding for postgraduate diplomas and Honours degrees in 2024. Of the bursary funding mobilised by the SRMA in 2023, 15% (just over R12.4m) was allocated to postgraduate bursaries, supporting 216 students in total. A further R1.2m was mobilised through the Nelson Mandela University Giving Campaign and these funds are currently being disbursed to identified postgraduate students. The 2024 target for bursary fundraising is R95m, of which R7.6m has been mobilised and received to date.

8.2. Short-term financial planning

Resourcing continues to depend largely on government subsidy and fees, and the University had to make significant interventions to balance the 2024 budget. The government-initiated fee compact was approved by Council, finalised as a 4.5% increase in tuition fees and 6.5% increase in student accommodation fees. It is anticipated there will be a 0.4% increase in the block grant subsidy of 2023. The University's financial position at the end of January reflects a net positive variance due to subsidy allocation. The cash flow is sound as indicated in both the cash flow report as well as the analysis of funds. A detailed financial report will be tabled.

Salary benchmark

The salary benchmark, set at 65%, is a key sustainability indicator. A deviation was approved for 2022-2024 to allow the budgeted indicator to be increased to 66% to fund critical posts. Due to stagnant subsidy, capping of fees and an increase in bad debts, the Council allowed an increase in the sustainability indicator to 66.5% (2024-2026). However, this would need to be reduced to 65% in the 2027 budget.

National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)

Direct payments of allowances for the 2024 academic year will start in April 2024 by direct payment NSFAS service providers. As of 1 March, 23 812 applicants had National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) statuses. 17 027 have registered, of which 5 375 are first-time entering (FTEN) students.

NSFAS has changed the accommodation cap of R45 000 to R50 000 per annum for students in a metropolitan area. It also has been confirmed that universities may pay the book allowances, which is good news for our student laptop scheme. In addition, NSFAS has suspended the 60-credit rule

which was applicable in 2023. The N+1 rule for NSFAS bursary students will be an area to monitor for the cohorts of NSFAS bursary students funded from 2018. This may see increased pressure on concession requests and resulting credit risk.

8.3. Long-term financial planning

Several members of the Finance Executive Forum of Universities South Africa (USAf) have taken the view that universities will need to reshape their operations quite radically over the next five years to remain within sustainability parameters. This will require that we expedite the interventions underway through the Sustainability and Institutional Viability Task Team (SIVTT), which include reviewing our Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM), improving efficiencies, and enhancing strategy-aligned resource mobilisation and budgeting.

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

The outcome of the B-BBEE 2023 verification (based on 2022 financial statements) was a Level 4 outcome, discounted to a Level 5. The level achieved is in line with the targeted score communicated to Council in 2023.

9. Conclusion

We have navigated a difficult start to the academic year with various cost pressures and funding policy instability, as well as protest actions disrupting the academic project. As we move ahead, however, we are confident that the institution will continue to uphold its reputation in all priority and niche academic areas, and its transformative posture, as articulated in Vision 2030. We thank the Council for its unwavering support and guidance as we traverse these complex times.