



# **Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council Quarter 2, 2023**

**22 June 2023**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In line with our institutional reporting framework, this report will focus on the wide-ranging interventions which are in place to support student success, while also providing an overview of strategic highlights and challenges experienced during the first half of this year.

## **2. VISION 2030 AND STRATEGIC TRAJECTORIES**

Vision 2030 continues to guide our strategic trajectories and the next three years will focus on consolidating our gains in key areas such as ocean sciences, the medical school, and revitalising the humanities. This will be complemented by the deepening of excellence in intellectual niches that define our character as a university in service of society, such as transdisciplinary sustainability sciences, transformative engagement, women and gender studies, and critical Mandela studies, to name a few.

Following the Vice-Chancellor's *Advancing Mandela University* address at the end of March 2023, we will also provide Council with an outline of priority projects that we will be focusing on going forward, including digitalisation and the establishment of the Virtual Academy, food security, as well as student entrepreneurship and youth employability. Each of these key focus areas will be elaborated on in the various sections of this report.

### **2.1. Ocean Sciences**

The Institute for Coastal and Marine Research (CMR) provides excellent training and development opportunities in critical ocean sciences fields where knowledge gaps are addressed. Ocean sciences exchange programmes that contribute towards student success include ongoing engagement with the University of Oldenburg's Helmholtz Institute for Functional Marine Biodiversity (HIFMB) in Germany. The Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture in Germany is funding an exchange programme for Doctoral candidates that continues until December 2023.

The construction of the Science Centre is progressing well. The specialised installation of the digital dome screen has begun, with completion scheduled for June 2023. Due to the delicate nature of the projection equipment, it will not be installed until the screen is finished and all interior finishes are approved. We have also commenced with the process to appoint the Director of Ocean Sciences to provide transversal intellectual and strategic leadership of this important transdisciplinary imperative.

### **2.2. Medical School**

The student success rates of our medical programme remain high with 2022's first-year class of 81 students achieving a 97.5% pass rate and the second-year class of 47 a 100% pass rate. This is enabled through the holistic support medical students receive from the weekly

Med-Club series, which provides students with the opportunity to interact with various professionals who offer additional input to their curriculum including mental well-being.

The Faculty of Health Sciences has received a letter of endorsement from the HPCSA and PQM clearance from the CHE to proceed with the MMed (Psychiatry and Paediatrics) programmes once we have received the SAQA ID. The curriculum refinement of the other five MMed programmes can now proceed, based on the successful formula employed in the first two. A further noteworthy highlight was the pledge of bursaries, with seven bursaries awarded by the Chan Soon-Shiong Family Foundation and a further four from the Eastern Cape Office of the Premier.

The slow pace with which the Eastern Cape Department of Health has moved with the plan to advertise the seven academic heads of departments to oversee the preparation of the clinical training platform in anticipation of the clinical years from 2024, has been a challenge. However, on a positive note, the interviews for the director of the Medical School have now successfully been concluded.

### **2.3. Revitalising the Humanities**

The Faculty of Humanities is repositioning learning and teaching around key areas of an Africa-purposed curriculum, transdisciplinarity, digital humanities, entrepreneurship, and social justice. To this end, several curriculum changes were approved in 2022 for implementation in 2023 and beyond. New modules have been introduced to provide access to indigenous knowledge, including African globalisation and the making of the modern world order, the history of technology, and medical anthropology. In addition, the School of Governmental and Social Sciences is collaborating with the Department of Economics to explore the introduction of a distinctly Mandela bachelor's degree in politics, philosophy and economics (PPE).

This quarter, the Faculty of Humanities hosted two public lectures focused on the historicisation of the disciplines and ethical, values-based leadership respectively. To this end, the faculty co-hosted Prof Barney Pityana and Prof Ngcukaitobi who engaged on *African Indigenous Jurisprudence*. This was preceded by a Masterclass on *History in Law, and Law in History* attended by over 300 students from all faculties. This year, the annual Archbishop Thabo Makgoba Development Trust Lecture on Value-based Leadership was presented by Prof Somadoda Fikeni with a focus on *Values, Principles and Character: The missing link in the South African architecture of Constitutional Democracy*.

The faculty collaborated with the Centre for Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD) and the International Relations division of the Department of Arts, Culture and Sport in celebrating the Africa month. The event brought together students from various African countries and backgrounds. With a focus on the theme *Our Africa, Our Future*, the event aimed to foster unity, promote African identity, and honour the legacy of icons like Nelson Mandela.

## **2.4. Transdisciplinary Sustainability Sciences**

Transdisciplinary sustainability science is an expanding niche and differentiator for Nelson Mandela University. To this end, our DVC Research, Innovation and Internationalisation (RII) will be announcing the launch of a Transdisciplinary Institute for Sustainable Futures at Mandela University at the upcoming Sustainability Research and Innovation Congress 2023 (SRI2023) Africa satellite event to be held in Gqeberha from 20 to 22 June 2023.

The University has confirmed its position as an up-and-coming leader in sustainability sciences on the African continent with exceptional ratings in the Times Higher Education (THE) 2023 Impact Rankings. For the third year since we started participating in these rankings, *Life Below Water* (SDG 14) continued to be our flagship, with Mandela University rated the best in South Africa for this SDG. The University also performed well in *Life on Land* (SDG 15), ranking second in South Africa. However, perhaps the most impressive achievement, is that we received the second highest ranking out of five South African institutions competing in SDG 4, which focuses on *Quality Education*.

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

### **3.1. Graduation**

In April, Nelson Mandela University hosted the Autumn Graduation ceremonies in George and Gqeberha using a hybrid format of in-person attendance and online streaming. More than 7 300 students, including 83 doctoral recipients, were capped over 19 ceremonies in Gqeberha, while more than 460 students graduated on the George Campus. It is worth noting that 90 students with disabilities graduated.

### **3.2. Student success**

The student success rate for 2022 was 81% compared to the institutional target of 82% and a national average of 78% in 2021. When considering student success in 2023, we must bear in mind that our current first years were in Grade 10 at the start of the pandemic in 2020 and therefore have some gaps in their knowledge. Similarly, our senior undergraduate students spent their first two to three years at university learning online and need support in navigating the transition back to class, as well as the change from continuous assessment to examinations. Academic staff have observed the slow pace of students transitioning from online to hands-on practical work, coupled with difficulties with report writing and understanding certain concepts through online learning.

The increased number of unfunded students and the rapidly changing profile of our students calls for a rethink of the systems in place to support student success. To this end, we have implemented various humanising pedagogical interventions to ensure that no student is left behind. Across all faculties, Success Coaches continue to provide students with emotional and academic support to improve their academic performance. In addition,

there is a renewed focus on the development and use of multilingual glossaries to promote epistemic access and develop an inclusive pedagogical culture.

### **3.3. Teaching Development (TD)**

By May 2023, seven workshops had been conducted on aspects such as curriculum renewal processes, assessment practices, and re-curriculation. In April, the second leg of Beginning Your Journey (BYJ) @Mandela programme emphasised the importance of academics reflecting on their practice to explore how they can enable access for success. Another focus area of TD is the evaluation of teaching and courses, which draws heavily on student feedback to enhance learning and teaching.

### **3.4. Technology-rich learning and teaching and the Virtual Academy**

As part of our digitalisation strategy, venues are being transformed into new teaching spaces for both in-person and online learning. In 2022, 12 venues were upgraded, and 22 so far this year across all campuses to offer students a hybrid mode of delivery and address overcrowding challenges.

Students can access lectures from any place with WiFi connectivity and the new technology has built-in cameras, microphones, and speakers to enable hybrid scenarios. To date, more than 100 lecturers have undergone training to confidently operate the new technology, with online user guides and pre-recorded training videos also available.

From the lessons learnt regarding technology-rich learning and working during the pandemic, a broad institution-wide consultation process was initiated in April 2023 to conceptualise the Virtual Academy. This will be constituted as a transversal space to foster institution-wide synergy, coordination, and efficiencies in respect of digital innovations across all university structures. The overarching rationale of the Virtual Academy will be to prepare Nelson Mandela University students, graduates, and staff by developing the necessary digital competencies and citizenship required to function effectively in the future world of work. Council will be kept informed of progress as this exciting initiative unfolds.

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

### **4.1. Research development**

Nelson Mandela University staff, postdoctoral fellows, and registered postgraduate students can access more than 90 training workshops offered by the Office of Research Development. The Office also continues to support the work of the research ethics committees. The customisation of the Mandela Ethics Online System (MEOS) has been completed and a phased approach to introduce and test this system with the University's research community is underway.

## **4.2. Postgraduate support**

Nelson Mandela University is implementing a new postgraduate funding policy in 2023, which seeks to address the challenges of inequity of access, success, and throughput. Overall, 186 Honours, 275 Masters' and 218 Doctoral scholarships were awarded as of 19 May 2023. The number of Honours awards taken up will increase over the next quarter when the NRF is expected to release funds for these students.

## **4.3. Internationalisation and the African footprint**

### **International students**

As of the beginning of June, 796 international students had finalised their registration, compared to the target of 1 121 for 2023, while 88 study abroad and exchange students had been accepted. The registration of international students is progressing slowly, with a significant number of international students either unable to pay fees or experiencing challenges with visa applications. The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has committed to finalising all pending visa applications by 31 December 2023.

### **African footprint**

There has been a substantive increase in the number of partnerships that Nelson Mandela University has fostered on the African continent through the Africa Internationalisation Programme. Work is ongoing to finalise a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to facilitate collaboration in indigenous knowledge systems among five African universities, including Mandela University, namely: Great Zimbabwe University, National University of Lesotho, University of Kwazulu Natal, and Walter Sisulu University.

At the *Open Science, Open Africa* event hosted by Future Africa at the University of Pretoria from 22 to 26 May 2023, DVC: RII Dr Thandi Mgwebi urged scientists to take ownership and responsibility as Africans to advance the practice of science diplomacy on the continent. The Africa Day event engaged leadership working in global scientific networks and international transdisciplinary initiatives.

### **International partnerships**

Mandela University is collaborating with the University of Utrecht and Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) on sustainable futures. To this end, we are jointly designing an Erasmus+ funded student exchange programme that will facilitate participation by eight students from each institution.

The Centre for Women and Gender Studies (CWGS) facilitated a visit by representatives from Michigan State University, paving the way for potential collaboration and an invitation for Prof Magoqwana to present a seminar in Michigan later this year.

It is pleasing to note that, PhD Physiology student Itumeleng Zosela, is one of four South African students who have been accepted to join the Next Generation Scientist Internship

Programme in Switzerland from June to August 2023. Furthermore, Professor Ronney Ncwadi from the Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences together with two professors from Sweden and Dr Palesa Makhetha-Kosi from the University of Fort Hare, were recently awarded the South African Sweden University Forum (SASUF) Virtual Exchange Grant.

#### **4.4. Library and Information Services**

Extended library hours during the mid-year exam periods have provided users with access quiet and secure study spaces, ensuring the success of the academic endeavour. However, space in the libraries is a challenge as on-campus student numbers have risen and an online booking system, LibCal, has been identified to address this.

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

#### **5.1. Transformation Office**

The Transformation Office continues to conduct advocacy events and interventions covering topics such as gender identity and expression, gender-based violence, and positive masculinity. The launch of the Alumni-in-Action@Mandela Initiative in the first quarter has expanded the provision of advanced psychosocial support to GBV survivors, with up to eight sessions being provided by professionals with the relevant GBV-trauma clinical experience. In addition, the Safe Haven project is also making progress, with renovations to the facility nearing completion. A separate report on discrimination related and GBV complaints will serve at Council.

#### **5.2. Centre for Women and Gender Studies**

The Centre for Women and Gender Studies (CWGS) received the HSRC-USAF Team Award on Social Justice in April, surpassing competitors from the University of Johannesburg and Rhodes University. During this quarter, the DSI-NRF SARChI Chair for African Feminist Imaginations, Prof Pumla Gqola, facilitated the discussion of Prof Kopano Ratele's *Why Men Hurt Women and Other Reflections on Love, Violence and Masculinity* (2022). CWGS invited respondents Amuzweni Ngoma and Dr Sandla Nomvete to critique Prof Natasha Erlank's book *Convening Black Intimacy: Christianity, Gender, and Tradition in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa*. Several publications were released with Tumi Mampane publishing a book titled *Pentecostal Charismatic Women: Constructions of Femininity in Alexandra Township*.

#### **5.3. Engagement Office**

The Engagement Office (EO) and the Hubs of Convergence continue to deepen partnerships between the University and the broader community. The EO conducted workshops ahead of the launch of the community-based addiction rehabilitation project,



*Creating Cycles of Hope*, in the first week of June. The End Period Poverty project launched its 2023 student activation in the same week. The EO is currently processing 26 applications for the Engagement Fund, as well as nine applications for Engagement Excellence Awards for work conducted in 2022.

#### **5.4. Food security**

The Food Systems Programme secures seed funding for three signature projects in collaboration with the Nelson Mandela Foundation, including the Greenhouse Project, Community Kitchens project, and Student Hunger. Various activities are planned under the theme of *Climate, Food and Solidarity* for Mandela Day 2023 in July.

#### **5.5. CriSHET and TIMS**

During this quarter, the Chair in Critical Studies and Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET) hosted Prof Shirley Anne Tate from the University of Alberta, Prof Sharon Stein from the University of British Columbia, Prof Su-Ming Khoo from the University of Galway, and Prof Jess Auerbach from UCT. In addition, the Madibaz Reading Group relaunched on 26 May and has held five productive reading discussions this quarter.

Two anchors guide the programmatic work of Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS), namely, continuing the work of Mandela in practical ways and assuming the responsibility of understanding the true meaning behind his name. To this end, TIMS seeks to establish a Mandela Observatory to track Mandela-related activities and identify areas for further development.

#### **5.6. CYUEE and CIPSET**

Strategic highlights for the quarter under review include the inaugural Mandela University TVET convergence workshop hosted by the Chair for Youth Unemployment, Employability and Empowerment (CYUEE). This culminated in the formation of an interdisciplinary working group focusing on TVET research from various disciplines. In addition, the participation of Mr Khaya Matiso and Mr Ivor Baatjes in the Ministerial Task Team on Community Education and Training (CET) positions the University nationally in this important domain. The University will also lead the establishment of an articulation hub in the Eastern Cape, aiming to create pathways for TVET college graduates into universities.

#### **5.7. CANRAD**

On 31 May, the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD) launched *Decolonising African University Knowledges: Volumes 1 and 2* thereby actively contributing to Mandela University's decolonisation imperatives. The Director, Prof Mngomezulu, has been invited by Perth University, Australia, to deliver a keynote address at a Mandela Day event, co-convened with the United Nations.

### **5.8. HIV and AIDS Research Unit**

The HIV and AIDS Research Unit has revived the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro AIDS Council and strengthened its relationship with the Office of the Premier. Additionally, the Unit's engagement with the BRICS countries has enhanced collaborative efforts on a global scale.

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

### **6.1. Student governance and development**

The LeadHER Women in Leadership Programme has been introduced to promote the development of young women. It has attracted about 60 young women who are in formal leadership positions. In May, the Dean of Students facilitated a session of the Ebuhlanti Men's Leadership Programme, themed *Ubuntu and Social Consciousness*. Four sessions were held, focusing on liberating male students to be active and responsible citizens.

It is gratifying that a vibrant student life is beginning to take shape with the introduction of residence leagues, student-led initiatives in residences, as well as SRC-led activities including the celebration of Africa month. A series of dialogues with the SRC, student societies and organisations, and a combined session with all student leaders on 1 June 2023 focused on the needs of students and their role in addressing these. A report from these dialogues will be submitted to various structures of the University.

### **6.2. Student entrepreneurship and youth employability**

The Madibaz Youth Entrepreneurship Lab and Prof Shelley Farrington from the Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences are implementing an annual student entrepreneurship assessment tool. This will evaluate institutional performance in respect of encouraging an awareness of and creating an ecosystem of support for student entrepreneurship.

The University's Career Service Unit (CSU) recently organised a successful in-person Computing Sciences and IT Fair with participation from five companies. CSU also partnered with the Businesswomen's Association in Gqeberha on the Working Wardrobe project, supporting graduate students by helping them present their best selves during job interviews.

### **6.3. Student housing**

Mandela University strives to provide safe and affordable housing to as many students as possible. As of 26 May 2023, 16 117 students had been admitted and registered in various types of on- and off-campus accommodation. It is of concern that NSFAS has not agreed to remove the accommodation cap of R45 000 which is presenting funding challenges across the sector. This has a potential impact of R13m on our University, mainly for new residences commissioned.

## **6.4. Student wellness**

A working group has been established under the leadership of DVC: Learning and Teaching to map and better co-ordinate efforts to address deepening poverty amongst our students. Student hunger is a major challenge and Student Health Services (SHS) has been issuing nutrition packs to 1 100 students, which doubled to 2 200 in May. Similarly, the demand for health care is on the increase, with our clinics treating approximately 4 900 students between January and May. There seems to be an increase in the use of family planning services, with 174 students testing positive for pregnancy in one month (April).

Emthonjeni Student Wellness (ESW) has also observed a noticeable increase in the number of students in need of pharmacological and psychiatric interventions. In response, ESW has introduced a new triage system, with medium- to low-risk clients booked for their first counselling session within three working days, and high-risk clients or emergencies within 24 hours.

## **6.5. Madibaz Sport**

The inaugural Madibaz Campus Sport leagues, launched in May, involve four sporting code competitions, 59 student teams, 403 matches, 911 players, 65 referees, 54 linesman and technical assistants, 52 coaches, and 53 team managers. Notable sporting highlights include: Madibaz Rugby achieving 2<sup>nd</sup> place at the Varsity Shield rugby competition; Madibaz Cricket won the Eastern Province Cricket Premier League; 11 Spar Madibaz Netball Players were selected for Netball Eastern Cape teams; and Mr Cheslyn Gie (Madibaz hockey coach) was selected to coach the national hockey team from 2023 to 2026.

## **6.6. Universal Accessibility and Disability Services (UADS)**

By the end of April 2023, Mandela University had 290 students who reported disabilities, but only 13 of these were first-time entering students. UADS hosted a workshop themed, *Maximise your potential - accelerate to success*, with 51 students from Gqeberha and George attending. The workshop provided practical tools and strategies to improve students' learning and study habits, as well as techniques for managing stress and anxiety.

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

## **7.1. Digital transformation**

The continued provision of devices to students remains a priority and, in the first quarter of 2023, a total of 2 456 NSFAS-funded, first-time entering students received laptops. While this is commendable, there are concerns over the continued financial viability of this scheme once NSFAS starts paying allowances directly to students.

The University Mandela App has been enhanced to aggregate and consolidate online services to students. A new platform for online applications was opened in April for 2024 academic and residential applications. The system can be used by accommodation providers to apply for accreditation and manage accommodation applications, while students can search for available housing and file complaints. Furthermore, the Postgraduate Research Funding Application System has enabled Research Development to manage all funding applications electronically.

## **7.2. Energy and water**

### **Energy management**

The current frequency of loadshedding, which is expected to increase, has had a negative impact on the academic and operational activities and costs. This has catalysed the development of a proposal to introduce a centralised generator-photovoltaic loadshedding mitigation and energy security system. If approved, the new plan will replace the smaller sets of decentralised generators with fewer, but larger, generators to supply energy to all campus buildings, including residences and perimeter lighting.

### **Water security**

Rains in May have raised the Metro's combined dam levels and pushed out Day Zero to 2024. The water capacity of the University has been further boosted by sinking three boreholes on the South Campus, with initial reports indicating that the water is of excellent quality. At present, three of the University's campuses can switch from the municipal supply to the alternative borehole option, if necessary. Efforts are being made to secure the long-term water supply of the George Campus, including sinking a borehole, installing tanks to store 60 000 litres of water, and contracting with the George Municipality to replace the old water supply line.

## **7.3. Infrastructure**

Old and unused venues are being modified and outfitted with appropriate technology to serve as lecture venues. With a R40m grant, there are plans to upgrade, modernise, and digitise Heinz Betz into a large multi-purpose venue that will also serve as an assessment centre.

## **7.4. Human Resources**

The Harmonisation Project has been a key initiative this quarter, with a focus on the implementation of a Total Guaranteed Package (TGP). After protracted salary negotiations, Management and NTEU have signed the wage agreement for 2023/2024. The agreed increase of 6.9%, for all qualifying employees in the bargaining unit, effective from 1 March 2023. NEHAWU and Management have deadlocked and NEHAWU will advise Management of their next step in the process.

Mental well-being remains a deep concern with a steady increase in the numbers and frequency of staff requiring counselling. Notably, there has also been a spike in cases of misconduct that have led to dismissals, particularly within the Support Services division. Turnaround interventions will be put in place to address this, including a code of conduct to clearly indicate what is expected of staff.

### **7.5. Communication and Marketing**

Autumn graduation season sessions received extensive regional and national media coverage across print and online media platforms. Graduation posts were viewed by 15.5 million users, an annual increase of 122%, while social media engagements (likes, comments, shares, and clicks) increased by 378% to over 1.9 million.

## **8. ENHANCE LONG-TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH EFFECTIVE RESOURCE MOBILISATION AND RESPONSIBLE RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP**

### **8.1. Strategic Resource Mobilisation and Advancement (SRMA)**

The Nelson Mandela University Trust mobilises funding to complement the expanded NSFAS scheme. Compared to the target of R94m for 2023, more than R61.7m was mobilised up to May 2023, of which nearly R32m has been paid to assist 486 under- and postgraduate “missing middle” students. Of these, 441 were Black (African, Coloured and Indian), and 260 females.

### **8.2. Short- and long-term financial planning**

The year had a difficult start with cost pressures, funding policy instability, and unforeseen short-term resource requirements. As a result, management has committed to undertake a budget review at the end of June. The 2022 consolidated financial statements will be shared with Council along with a detailed financial report.

South Africa’s higher education sector faces a variety of funding concerns, chiefly manifesting in the form of: the lack of a comprehensive funding model covering all students in need of funding; NSFAS policy instability, inconsistency and shifts almost every financial year; and an increased number of students who are dropped from NSFAS funding. All these factors call for judicious financial planning and strategy-led budgeting, both of which are ongoing priorities.

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

B-BBEE verification for 2021 was concluded after an appeal. The re-evaluation was completed and led to the 2021 verification improving to a Level 6 discounted to a level 7 due to subminimum points for Enterprise Development not being met. The GEC considered a status report including the five-year B-BBEE strategy and gave inputs. Going forward, a separate report will be tabled at Council from the GEC.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

The political and economic landscape of the first half of the 2023 academic year has been unsettled, compounding a myriad of challenges facing Nelson Mandela University. We remain committed to cultivating an affirming, inclusive and values-driven institutional culture which liberates the full potential of our students and staff. Our ethos of care is a cornerstone of our efforts to promote student success, while also remaining committed to long-term sustainability. We therefore thank Council for its guidance and support as we plan for the successful deployment of our academic core missions and support services in the second half of this year.