



HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE

**Audit Report
on the
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University**

Executive Summary

October 2009

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Acronyms

AP	Audit Portfolio
ASC	Audit Steering Committee
CE	Community Engagement
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CPID	Centre for Planning and Institutional Development
CTLM	Centre for Teaching, Learning & Media
DoE	Department of Education
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
HEADS	Higher Education Access and Development Services
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IF	Institutional Forum
IT	Information Technology
LibQual	Library Services Quality
NMMU	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
NRF	National Research Foundation
PE Tech	Port Elizabeth Technikon
QMU	Quality Management Unit
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RTI	Research, Technology and Innovation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SET	Science, Engineering & Technology
SI	Supplemental Instruction
SIPU	Strategic and Institutional Planning Unit
SLP	Short Learning Programme
SRC	Student Representative Council
UPE	University of Port Elizabeth
Vista PE	Port Elizabeth campus of the former Vista University

Overview of the Audit

Introduction

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) has statutory responsibility to conduct institutional audits as indicated in the Higher Education Act of 1997. This responsibility of the HEQC is also recognised by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in the accreditation of the CHE as the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) for the higher education band.

The Audit of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) was conducted by the HEQC in terms of its mandate. This document reports on the audit process and findings based on the Audit Portfolio and documentary appendices provided by NMMU, supplementary documentation requested from the institution, and interviews and observations made during the audit visit that took place from 15 to 19 September 2008.

This report¹ comprises an overview of the audit visit, the findings of the Panel in relation to the audit criteria set by the HEQC, and a list of commendations and recommendations that are based on the findings of the Audit Panel.

The Audit Process

In November 2005 the Executive Director of the HEQC secured the consent of the Vice Chancellor and the executive management team at NMMU that the University would participate in an institutional audit from 15 to 19 September 2008.

NMMU consequently conducted its institutional self-evaluation in the agreed time and produced an Audit Portfolio for review by the Audit Panel. The University appointed its Centre for Planning and Institutional Development (CPID) to facilitate the preparation for the audit. An Audit Steering Committee (ASC), chaired by the Senior Director of the CPID, was also appointed and met regularly to oversee the audit preparation process. In addition, six task teams were set up, each of which was charged with the responsibility of undertaking a self-evaluation of specific sets of audit criteria. The institution has acknowledged that students did not participate in the work of the Task Teams at the outset (AP: 2). However, the ASC was expanded in February 2008 to include two members of the Student Representative Council (SRC), as well as a member from each of the two staff unions. In January 2008 the institution convened a

¹ The report includes four appendices: Appendix A lists the objectives of HEQC audits; Appendix B provides the names of the members of the Audit Panel, Appendix C lists the documents submitted by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and Appendix D contains the audit visit schedule.

working group which included the newly-appointed Vice Chancellor as Chairperson, to address the open-ended questions.

The Audit Portfolio (AP) makes passing references to instances of ‘consultative approaches’ that the various task teams used in the development of their reports. For example, the second draft of the consolidated self-evaluation report was made available for comment to all staff, students and members of the public in both Nelson Mandela Metropole and Eden District Municipality for a three-week period during March and April 2008, after which a revised draft was submitted to the Institutional Forum (IF), Senate and Council for formal approval (AP: 3). Notwithstanding the aforementioned the Panel is of the view that there was limited systematic and concerted effort to involve the general staff and student body in the self-evaluation process. The Audit Portfolio (which included a Self-Evaluation Report, Audit Portfolio Guide and supporting documentation) was submitted to the HEQC on 20 June 2008.

The HEQC constituted an Audit Panel consisting of senior academics and academic administrators from the higher education community, all of whom had taken part in auditor preparation workshops run by the HEQC. An Audit Portfolio meeting was convened in Pretoria on 30 and 31 July 2008 at which the Audit Panel considered the Audit Portfolio in preparation for the audit visit. During this meeting, the Audit Panel identified additional documents to be requested from the institution prior to the audit visit.

The Interim Director of the Institutional Audits Directorate of the HEQC, accompanied by the Audit Officer and the Audit Administrator, undertook a preparatory visit to the institution in August 2008. During that visit, the format and programme for the audit visit and other details of the audit were discussed and generally agreed to by the senior management of NMMU.

A sub-panel consisting of Professor Renuka Vithal, Dr Oswald Franks, Professor Vivienne Bozalek, and supported by Mr Frempong Acheampong (Audit Officer) and Mr Luyanda Ndabankulu from the HEQC, carried out pre-audit site visits to the George and Missionvale campuses of the university during August 2008.

The audit visit took place from 14 to 19 September 2008. The Audit Panel undertook a tour of the library, IT (Information Technology), lecture facilities and residences at the South Campus on 14 May, and conducted interviews with the Council, senior management and committee members, and community representatives on 15 and 16 September. On 17 and 18 September, the Audit Panel split into three groups and interviewed a wide range of NMMU’s staff members and students as well as some external examiners. Interviews were completed on 18 September, and verbal feedback was given to the Vice Chancellor and the executive team on 19 September.

Open sessions were also available for any staff members, students or members of the community to meet the Audit Panel and make submissions. Some staff members made use of the opportunity to address the Panel.

In all, the Audit Panel interviewed about 360 people in 59 interview sessions during the audit visit, including

- Council members;
- The Vice Chancellor and members of his executive management team;
- Members of Senate and other Senate committees;
- Executive Deans of Faculty and Heads of Department;
- Academic and academic support staff;
- Professional and administrative staff;
- Full-time and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate students;
- Representatives of staff unions;
- Representatives of the SRC;
- Civic and community representatives;
- External examiners;
- Alumni.

This report reflects the audit process and findings based on the Audit Portfolio provided by NMMU, supplementary documentation requested from the institution, and interviews and observations made during the audit visit. Every effort has been made to understand the quality arrangements at the institution at the time of the audit visit, and to base the Panel's conclusions on the documentation submitted, the interviews held and the observations made.

It is expected that NMMU will use these findings to strengthen its internal quality management systems and thereby facilitate the improvement of the quality of its core academic activities. Decisions about the manner in which this is done, and the priority accorded to the various recommendations, is the prerogative of the institution. The HEQC expects NMMU to submit an improvement plan based on the Audit Report within five months of the publication of the Audit Report.

The HEQC would like to thank Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for the highly co-operative manner in which it has participated in the audit process. The HEQC also wishes to express appreciation for the openness and confidence demonstrated by the Vice Chancellor and management in allowing the Audit Panel to conduct its work. Efficient preparation by NMMU resulted in a smooth audit that enabled the auditors to focus their attention on the main purposes of the audit. The hospitality and assistance of the NMMU staff is greatly appreciated. The HEQC would like to thank Professor Martin Oosthuizen, Mr Piet Roodt and their team in particular for the preparation of the documentation, as well as for their co-operation and helpfulness throughout the process.

Executive Summary

Brief Overview of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

1. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University is a medium-sized, predominantly contact institution spread across six campuses in the main urban and economic hub of the Eastern Cape. The campuses are: Summerstrand North, Summerstrand South, Missionvale, Bird Street, Second Avenue, and George, which is located in the Western Cape.
2. NMMU was formally established on 1 January 2005. It came into being through a two-fold process, firstly, the incorporation of the Port Elizabeth Campus of Vista University (Vista PE) into the University of Port Elizabeth (UPE) in January 2004, and secondly the merger of UPE and Port Elizabeth Technikon (PE Tech) in January 2005. In the context of the government-led restructuring of higher education in South Africa, NMMU was designated as one of six comprehensive universities with a mission to provide vocational and formative education at undergraduate and postgraduate level.
3. NMMU is organized into 7 faculties and offers a range of programme qualifications from undergraduate certificates through to doctoral degrees. The majority of students are enrolled at undergraduate level with significant numbers being enrolled for diplomas. In 2007 the institution had a student enrolment of 23688, of which 915 students were enrolled at the George Campus (AP: 5). Master's and doctoral headcount enrolments constituted 7% of the total NMMU enrolment. In 2007 NMMU had a complement of 1 490 permanent staff which comprised 527 (35%) instruction/research staff and 963 (65%) administrative and professional support staff (AP: 15).

Institutional Mission

4. During interviews with both Council and senior management, the Panel heard that NMMU focused most of its institutional energies on the operational aspects of the merger during the first two years of its existence. The main focus was on the alignment of systems and operations between the component parts of the merging institutions. The greater focus on the merger operational requirement than on academic matters seems to have generated some level of demoralisation and disaffection among staff, which, in turn seem to have had some impact on the quality of academic offerings. The university is aware of the toll of the merger in this regard. Given this, the Panel was interested in

hearing that most staff commended the institution on the swiftness with which the process took place.

5. The Panel wishes to congratulate NMMU for the success it has achieved in dealing with its merger-related systemic issues, and urges management to continue to engage the university community in a way that would take advantage of opportunities created by the merger. Furthermore, the Panel agrees with the sentiments expressed by both Council and senior management that NMMU now needs to focus on its academic project, and therefore needs to place the academic agenda at the forefront of institutional preoccupations (AP: 7).

Commendation 1

The HEQC commends Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for the speed and effectiveness with which it has dealt with the operational aspects of the merger, and particularly for the success it has achieved in establishing stable institutional governance and management structures.

6. NMMU as a new university comes from two academic traditions which in their distinctive ways have made contributions to the education of graduates whose knowledge, skills and competencies support South Africa's development. The Panel is aware that these traditions are in some instances still operating separately at the institution. In this sense, the Panel is of the view that it is urgent to develop a new academic identity which could find expression in the content and organisation of the three core functions and the manner in which resources are allocated.
7. The Panel noted that, as a comprehensive university, NMMU responds to other national imperatives – including the supply of scarce skills in the areas of science and technology – by bringing together a range of career-focused, professional and general formative qualifications. The Panel concurs with the institution that these strategic priorities and academic focus areas ensure alignment of NMMU's activities with its vision and mission (AP: 28).

Commendation 2

The HEQC commends Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for being an engaged and responsive institution to national imperatives through its broad range of engagement initiatives and projects.

8. The Panel agrees with both Council and senior management that there is a need to instil an integrated and distinct institutional ethos and culture for the merged institution that will enable it to achieve its vision and mission and that this needs to be communicated to

staff and students so that they can be aware of, and feel included in the achievement of the institution's strategic priorities.

Recommendation 1

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University establishes appropriate mechanisms to support the development of a distinct institutional ethos and culture for the merged institution. This needs to include a clear communication strategy to increase awareness among all stakeholders of the strategic thrusts of the institution.

9. With respect to the characterisation and identity of NMMU, the Panel found during interviews with a range of staff and students across the campuses that there is an uneven understanding of what it means firstly, to be 'an engaged university', and secondly, what the implications of this notion of a 'university' would be for the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Furthermore, the Panel heard from various groups of staff and students that the characterization of NMMU as a comprehensive university is not clearly understood, and even less so is the recent characterization of the institution as a 'new generation university'. The Panel encourages the institution to develop through discussions a shared understanding across the institution of, firstly, what it means to be a 'comprehensive university' and secondly, of what it means to be an 'engaged university'.

Recommendation 2

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University engages in institution-wide debates firstly, about, the different meanings of 'comprehensive university', and 'engaged university'; and secondly, on how these meanings should be given expression in the three core functions of the university.

Transformation at NMMU: Equity, redress and institutional culture

10. The Panel heard during interviews with both council members and senior management that the institution is conscious of the need to broaden its definition of transformation to transcend the notions of equity and diversity. Other dimensions of transformation being considered include (i) transformation of the curriculum to incorporate local knowledge and aim at 'recognising various bodies of knowledge; (ii) developing a progressive institutional culture; and (iii) creating 'rounded citizens' that could play a multiplicity of roles in society as a whole. The Panel supports this initiative and would like to encourage the institution to go ahead with this process in a sufficiently inclusive manner.

11. In respect of student diversity, NMMU's student enrolment is predominantly African at 60.7% in 2007. The Panel suggests, however, that the institution might want to look into the distribution of enrolments with a view to both equity and its overall academic profile as a comprehensive university. In terms of gender, as is the case with other higher education institutions in South Africa, there are more female than male students registered at NMMU. In accordance with traditional stereotypical patterns, female students are concentrated in Education (71.8%) and the Humanities (60.5%). The Panel encourages the institution to develop mechanisms to attract and retain more female and African students in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET).
12. The Panel was concerned to note that the institution's data show that African students have the least success rates across all major fields of study at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This trend also applies to graduation rates. While the Panel understands that poor performance at university level is related to structural deficiencies in the schooling system, this is not the only reason. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to look into the effectiveness of its foundation programmes, academic support systems and the quality of the training of their lecturers and develop appropriate interventions to ensure that success accompanies access to university education for all students enrolled at NMMU.
13. Since its inception, approximately 8% of NMMU's annual enrolment has consisted of international students, mostly from the SADC region. The Panel learned that the institution has plans to grow its international student numbers to 15% of total headcount enrolment by 2010. However, during interviews with staff and students, the Panel heard that the International Office is not playing a helpful role in the necessary integration of international students into institutional life. Some students complained of poor quality administrative and support services and lack of 'a culture of service' at the International Office. The institution is encouraged to investigate as a matter of urgency the nature, causes and extent of these complaints, and design appropriate intervention mechanisms to improve the quality of service of the International Office. The Panel also suggests that the institution establishes more systematic and integrated relationships between the International Office and other student support services within the institution.

Recommendation 3

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, firstly, investigates the nature, extent and causes of disaffection within the ranks of its international students and designs appropriate intervention mechanisms to ensure that the institution's aspiration towards internationalisation is not undermined, and secondly, ensures that the International Office improves on the quality of its service delivery and seek ways to integrate international students into the general student body.

14. The Panel heard of some cases of xenophobia in relation to international students, particularly students from other African countries, which seem to have taken place in residences. In the context of the recent xenophobic attacks in the country, it is important that the university investigate this issue and acts on its findings promptly. In relation to international students, the Panel found evidence of a sense of isolation among these students. This does not seem to originate only from their physical location in the residence system but also seems to be related to the lack of a culture of service in the International Office.

Recommendation 4

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University tackles issues of institutional culture in a systematic manner.

Recommendation 5

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University establishes the nature and extent of cases of racism and xenophobia among students and between students and staff, and develops appropriate interventions in order to create an institutional culture based on the values underpinning its mission and vision.

15. During the site visits and in interviews with staff and students, the Panel learned that the residences generally do not provide an environment conducive to quality learning. Students complained about 'high noise levels in the residences' and a general unwelcoming attitude on the part of the residence staff. Further criticisms focused on cleanliness, levels of hygiene, and insufficient self-catering facilities. An important tool to support the development of the residences is access to the internet. NMMU is urged to do its utmost to increase the internet bandwidth. The Panel encourages the institution to address these issues so that residential students have a quality learning experience at NMMU.

Recommendation 6

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University investigates student life in the residences in order to establish the extent to which the residence environment supports the achievement of the institution's goals in the area of teaching and learning, and respond to its broader notion of transformation. This should help the institution to ensure that its project to make residences into living-learning environments addresses existing residence problems.

16. The institution has made very slow progress in changing its staff profile, particularly with regard to the instruction/research and executive/managerial categories. In 2007, 80.8% of instructional/research staff and 74.7% of executive/managerial staff were white

employees. The majority of female staff are employed in the non-professional administrative category. During interviews with senior management, the Panel was made aware of the many challenges faced by the institution in attracting and retaining qualified black and female staff, especially in fields characterised by labour market scarcity. While the Panel is aware that this is a challenge across the higher education sector it would like to encourage NMMU to investigate the nature and extent of the internal obstacles that might hinder the retention of black academic staff and prevent the institution from diversifying its staff profile. The Panel is of the opinion that the lack of clear faculty, school and departmental equity plans and targets could be one of the major contributing factors to the slow progress made so far.

Recommendation 7

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University establishes employment equity plans with clear targets at faculty, school and departmental levels at the same time that it introduces appropriate support mechanisms and resources for these structures to be able to meet those targets.

17. Another major contributor to retaining qualified black and female staff at critical levels of the organisational hierarchy rests with the establishment of an 'affirming organisational culture'. The Panel heard during interviews with a range of staff across the campuses of NMMU's 'unwelcoming institutional culture'. It also heard from the senior management that NMMU continually seeks to create an institutional climate in which diversity is tolerated and respected. The Panel was pleased to hear about the determination of the newly appointed Vice Chancellor to set up an 'agency for multi-cultural diversity' to help create a more welcoming environment for staff and students.

Institutional Planning, Resource Allocation and Quality Management

18. The Panel received confirmation during interviews with members of the Institutional Forum (IF) that it has been actively involved in issues of transformation and equity. The Panel also learned that the IF is now trying to redefine its role in the merged institution and, during the next two years, will be focusing on NMMU's institutional culture. The Panel views the granting of membership on Council to the chairperson of the IF as a positive development that will help improve communication between Council and the IF.
19. NMMU has succeeded in integrating the SRC structures of the pre-merger institutions. During interviews with members of the SRC, the Panel heard that there is an induction programme for the incoming SRC. However, it also learned that this programme is inadequate in preparing members for leadership roles. The Panel suggests that the institution considers developing and implementing a leadership programme for each new

SRC. Furthermore, the Panel noted with some concern that the composition of the SRC does not reflect the multiracial enrolment of the institution and would like to encourage the institution to investigate why this is the case.

20. The Panel was pleased to hear that NMMU has an active Senate and that academics are taking part in discussions about the future of the institution which are informed by the need to develop an educational and intellectual project to build NMMU's identity. This, however, is clearly in its initial phase and much more needs to be done for Senate to develop its role as the engine of intellectual debate at the institution. In relation to Senate, the Panel would like to encourage the institution to look into rapidly setting up key committees, such as an institutional Teaching and Learning Committee.

21. NMMU has adopted a 'hybrid multi-campus management model' that is based on a matrix reporting structure with central support provided by 'specialists who are located in close proximity to executive management on the Summerstrand North and South Campuses' (AP: 12). The Panel heard from both Council and senior management that the model is effective in empowering campuses to establish their own structures and systems. The Panel agrees that it will be necessary to fine-tune and streamline the application of the management model to ensure a stronger academic presence on all campuses, and avoid the risk of devolution leading to a silo effect, especially at the George Campus. The Panel wishes to congratulate NMMU for the successes it has achieved in re-organising its post-merger campus structure, and for taking decisions to integrate and consolidate the activities of the pre-merger institutions in a manner that would avoid overlap and duplication.

Commendation 3

The HEQC commends Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for the manner in which it has sought to integrate and rationalise the academic activities of the pre-merger institutions.

22. In the 2008 academic year there were only 650 full-time students (excluding 'pipeline' students from the former Vista PE) enrolled at the Missionvale Campus. The Panel heard, during a range of interviews with staff and students, of concerns about its long-term future as well as the negative perceptions and stereotypes attached to the campus. The Panel encourages the institution to identify and implement appropriate strategic interventions to ensure the viability and sustainability of Missionvale.

Recommendation 8

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University develops and expeditiously implements strategic interventions to ensure the long-term sustainability and viability of its Missionvale Campus.

23. With regard to institutional planning, NMMU has a Centre for Planning and Institutional Development (CPID), which is currently located within the portfolio of the DVC (Research, Technology and Planning), and which comprises Strategic and Institutional Planning (SIPU), Quality Management (QMU), and Management Information (AP: 51). The Panel would like to congratulate CPID on the systematic and careful manner in which institutional research is being carried out and used in relation to planning, quality and resource allocation.

Commendation 4

The HEQC commends Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for the structural arrangements it has put in place to ensure that quality management and institutional research are integrated with its planning activities and the role of the Centre for Planning and Institutional Development in directing institutional planning.

24. The Panel is not persuaded that the current location of CPID in the management structure is to the best advantage of the institution or the unit itself. Given the crosscutting and underpinning role that institutional research, planning and quality assurance have at any institution, and particularly at an institution in the process of developing an academic identity, the Panel strongly recommends that NMMU reconsiders the location, level and resourcing of CPID from a strategic perspective.

Recommendation 9

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University reconsiders the location, level and resourcing of the Centre for Planning and Institutional Development from a strategic perspective.

25. The Panel learned from senior management and Executive Deans that the application of the Resource Allocation Model has succeeded in empowering budget holders in general, and Executive Deans together with their Faculty Management Committees in particular, to take increasing responsibility for financial management. The Panel would like to encourage NMMU to ensure that Executive Deans and other budget holders are provided with the necessary financial skills that will enable them to function effectively in this regard. As Executive Deans have to deal with issues of cross-subsidisation amongst faculties, the Panel would also like NMMU to consider developing an institutional model to assist faculties in decision-making pertaining to the cross-subsidisation of academic teaching units and other strategic interventions at faculty, school and departmental level.

26. The Panel was impressed by the openness and commitment of the Executive Deans. The Panel would like to remind the institution of the importance of the Deans as the articulation point between management and academic processes in the context of the disciplines. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to ensure that the Executive Deans are empowered to participate actively in providing academic leadership, management and strategic direction both to their faculties and to the institution.
27. NMMU has not had much success in raising third-stream income, and consequently relies heavily on government subsidy and student fees as the main sources of income. The Panel is of the opinion that this poses a considerable constraint on the institution, and would like to urge management to develop a strategy to address the situation.
28. The Panel heard during interviews with staff across the campuses that the institution has not yet critically engaged the different stakeholders on its conceptualisation of 'quality', and the implications of the institution's mission for the definition of quality. The Panel would like to urge NMMU to enter into this dialogue as soon as possible in order to ensure that quality assurance practices do not operate in isolation from the core functions of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. The institution also needs to ensure that academic support services are integrated into the institution's quality management systems.
29. The Panel found from interviews with staff that a key challenge facing the Quality Management Unit (QMU) is its insufficient human resources. The Panel concurs with the institution that this unit needs to be further resourced. Despite poor staffing levels, QMU provides systematic support to faculties, particularly in relation to programme design, approval and reviews.

Benchmarking and Surveys

30. The Panel noted that NMMU uses a number of mechanisms to benchmark itself. Student and staff satisfaction surveys have been undertaken since 2006. The Panel noted that the findings of these surveys are not always consistently acted upon across the faculties. Graduate Employability Surveys have also been instituted. However, the response to these has been poor. The Panel agrees with the institution that mechanisms need to be developed to ensure that these important stakeholders participate in the surveys.
31. Given that the unit responsible for benchmarking and institutional research at NMMU only comprises of a Director and one other contract institutional researcher, this seriously limits its capacity to develop and implement more regular interventions with regard to benchmarking and surveys. The Panel encourages the institution to resource this unit so that it can fulfil its function.

Teaching and Learning

32. NMMU is dealing with teaching and learning issues without a policy at an institutional level which could provide general conceptual direction for the contextualisation of this core function in terms of engagement and the character of the institution as a comprehensive university. While the Panel understands that the adoption of the principles of teaching and learning constitutes a point of departure for the development of an understanding of teaching and learning which is intellectually informed and research-based, it is not persuaded that senior management is providing the required intellectual leadership in this area.
33. The Panel is particularly concerned about the lack of conceptual engagement with issues fundamental to the identity of this institution, such as work integrated learning, e-learning, and curriculum. In a context of insufficient intellectual leadership in this area the work of specialised units, such as HEADS, might not be able to realise their potential impact on the quality of the teaching and learning core function. The Panel would like to encourage NMMU to investigate the mechanisms at its disposal to deepen the conceptual rigour with which discussions and practices in teaching and learning take place at the institution. This should include an overarching Teaching and Learning Policy which will provide direction for the contextualisation of teaching and learning.

Recommendation 10

The HEQC recommends that, in the context of the development of a new strategy for the institution, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University develops an overarching Teaching and Learning Policy and sets up appropriate mechanisms for its implementation and monitoring across faculties.

34. During interviews with both academic staff and students, the Panel heard of numerous challenges in relation to the adequacy and suitability of NMMU's lecture venues. Furthermore, campuses have different timetabling which makes it difficult for students who have classes in more than one campus to be in time for the start of classes. The Panel urges NMMU to ensure that it develops and implements an appropriate timetabling system to address the issues of travelling between campuses and overcrowding in lecture venues.

Recommendation 11

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University develops and implements an appropriate timetabling system to address travelling between campuses and overcrowding in lecture venues.

35. NMMU does not yet have an institutional e-learning strategy (AP: 77). The Panel learned, however, from a perusal of documentation and interviews with staff that e-learning has been successfully used in a number of departments. The Panel encourages the institution to develop and implement an institutional e-learning strategy that could support and enhance teaching and learning for a diverse student body spread over multiple campuses. Such a strategy would need to be accompanied by measures to address the present constraint of limited IT bandwidth.
36. English is the predominant language of teaching and assessment at NMMU. During interviews with both the IF and students, the Panel heard of peculiar difficulties with regard to the application of the institution's Language Policy. The Panel would like to urge NMMU to develop and implement mechanisms to give practical effect to the principle of 'functional multilingualism' as the main driving force of the Language Policy, and in particular, the implications that the adoption of English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa as the institution's official languages would have for teaching and learning.
37. The Panel heard during interviews with management that some 70% of students have English as their second or even third language. To meet this challenge a number of interventions have been made, which includes the setting up of a Writing Centre on each campus to assist students to write their assignments and research papers. The Panel understands the difficulties of implementing a language policy which actively promotes multilingualism in the classroom, such as the lack of language experts and staff proficient in isiXhosa. This, notwithstanding, the Panel would like to encourage the institution to focus its efforts more clearly in understanding the links between the language of instruction and barriers to knowledge acquisition among different groups of students, in order to design appropriate interventions.

Recommendation 12

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University looks at its language policy from a pedagogic perspective and supports its development, implementation and review with monitoring mechanisms focused on student learning.

38. NMMU has an active Senate and Executive Committee of Senate (ECS) which oversee the development and implementation of academic policies. The Panel found from perusal of minutes of committee meetings, and heard during interviews with a range of academic staff and management, that the various academic structures function effectively in maintaining the quality of teaching and learning. There is, however, no structure that has as its role the integration of information on teaching and learning as well as the monitoring of the achievements in this area at the institutional level. The Panel would

like to encourage the institution to investigate whether there is a need to create such a structure.

39. **Academic Development.** Academic development at NMMU falls within the jurisdiction of the Higher Education Access and Development Services (HEADS). The five centres constituting HEADS focus on the more direct academic aspects of support and development, while Student Affairs focuses on personal support, including equipping students to play their part more generally in university governance and leadership. In particular, the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Media (CTLM) is responsible for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and assessment practices. The Panel heard during interviews with staff that CTLM runs workshops and seminars aimed at training Heads of Departments and programme coordinators in the compilation of self-evaluation reports. CTLM is also involved in the Thuthuka project of the School of Accounting (a South African Institute of Chartered Accountants initiative) designed to address equity imbalances in the accounting profession. The Panel compliments HEADS for the dynamic role it plays in improving the quality of teaching and learning.
40. NMMU has instituted a Supplemental Instruction (SI) programme. The Panel heard during interviews with staff that there have been substantial improvements in pass rates in those modules offering SI. Students who met the Panel confirmed the value of SI, not only for those receiving support but also for those providing SI as it helps to develop their facilitation and leadership skills. Another feature of academic development is the provision of Writing Centres which develop and support students writing and literacy skills. The Panel heard from both staff and students that the Writing Centres are acutely understaffed and urges the University to ensure that this is appropriately addressed so that students are adequately supported in their learning.
41. **Library.** There are a number of concerns about the NMMU Library. These include, firstly, the 2007 budget allocation for library services which was 3.86% of the total institutional budget, a figure that is considered well below the international benchmark of 5-6% (AP: 127). Secondly, there are low levels of library usage by students (54%). The Panel encourages the university to develop strategies to increase student usage. Thirdly, the recent LibQual surveys highlighted the lack of 'library space' as a source of student dissatisfaction. The Panel was pleased to learn during interviews with the library staff that there are plans in place to address this. Lastly, the Panel encourages the institution to finalise the project to merge the three different library systems that were inherited from UPE, PE Tech and Vista PE as soon as possible so that there may be equivalence of library provision across the campuses.

42. **Information and Communication Technology (ICT).** The Panel heard during interviews with staff of the use of 'SharePoint' for document management and learning content distribution, and 'Blogs' for discussion groups. The ICT Help Desk is the key mechanism for ensuring service efficiency and effective support to both academic and administrative staff. The Panel was pleased to learn from documentation that ICT services received consistently high ratings for efficiency of services, helpfulness of staff and response time in the Staff Satisfaction Surveys. Many staff and students commended the ICT staff 'for delivering an outstanding service'.

Commendation 5

The HEQC commends Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for the high quality of support that Information Technology and Communication Services provides to support teaching and learning.

43. Staffing remains a challenge within ICT services. There are 57 ICT Services staff members across the institution with a resultant ratio of users to ICT support staff at an unfavourable 400:1. Another pressing challenge is the network bandwidth which is insufficient to meet all teaching and learning requirements. The Panel was pleased to learn during interviews with management that an ICT staffing plan, which forms part of the ICT strategic plan, has been drawn up to be presented to the Executive Management Committee. ICT Services has also begun with the implementation of Service Level Agreements with academic and administrative units. The Panel encourages the institution to finalise these initiatives as soon as possible as implementation will enhance the quality of ICT Services across the campuses.

44. **Certification.** The Panel was generally pleased with the arrangements that NMMU has put in place to ensure the integrity of the certification process. However it would like to encourage faculty boards to play a more pivotal role in the identification and approval of candidates, as failure to do so constitute a risk to the institution.

Recommendation 13

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University ensures that Faculty Boards play a more pivotal role in the identification and approval of candidates for degree awards.

45. **Short Courses.** While there is a Senate-approved Policy on Short Learning Programmes (SLPs), the approval process of SLPs depends on whether the SLP is credit-bearing or not. All non-credit-bearing SLPs are approved by the relevant Faculty Management Committee, whereas the Academic Planning & Quality Committee is responsible for the approval of SLPs that are credit-bearing. The Panel found a number of shortcomings with regard to the way and manner in which SLPs are managed at the institution. The Panel

would like to urge NMMU to consider implementing a quality review system that would evaluate the impact of the full range of SLPs, and the extent to which they fit into the vision and mission of the university. This activity should be carefully considered in the process of developing Vision 2020.

Recommendation 14

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University conducts a careful assessment of the full range of short learning programmes offered by the institution, their role in the overall institution's strategy and focus, and the appropriateness of the current arrangements for ensuring the quality of these courses.

46. **Programme Development and Approval.** NMMU has a draft Programme Approval Policy and a set of procedures, templates and associated flow charts to assist staff in the development and approval of new learning programmes and modules (AP: 80). To ensure that programme development is linked to financial planning, applications to offer a new programme have to be accompanied by a detailed financial plan as well as resource implication documents. The Panel appreciates the link between programme development and resource allocation. However, it was not convinced that the involvement of so many committees can add significant value to the programme approval process. The Panel recommends that, for speed and efficiency, the university should streamline the process.

Recommendation 15

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University reviews its approach to programme approval in order to ensure that the process is streamlined and meaningful for the different academic departments.

47. **Programme Review.** Programme reviews have been conducted in three cycles between 2006 and 2008. The Panel heard during interviews with Deans that these cycles of reviews highlighted the lack of a systematic use of moderators' reports to improve the quality of teaching and learning. It found from a range of interviews that there are varying degrees of awareness regarding the use of moderators' reports as a developmental tool to inform and enhance programme renewal. The Panel would like to urge NMMU to develop mechanisms to ensure that moderators' reports are used to enhance the quality of programmes and to ensure that students are formally involved in the review process.

Recommendation 16

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University develops the necessary mechanisms to ensure that moderators' reports are used to improve the quality of programmes.

48. After examining the materials of a number of different modules across faculties the Panel is concerned at the uneven standards of modules and programmes offered by NMMU. Evidence provided by the institution as well as interviews with internal moderators and external examiners and students provided worrying examples of poor quality of content and standards in modules when these are not subject to the external scrutiny of professional bodies. The Panel understands that improving quality is a developmental process which requires buy-in from academics and that the institution has started this process by focusing on teaching and learning as an important practice. However, the Panel would like to urge the institution to include promptly a discipline-based external perspective in all its programme reviews. This is an area in which the institution might otherwise be facing considerable reputational risk.

Recommendation 17

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University gives equal consideration to teaching and learning and disciplinary content in the programme review process and that, particularly in areas that do not depend on professional councils, appropriate academic standards are observed.

49. **Staff Development.** During interviews with both academic and non-academic staff, the Panel heard of numerous problems regarding staff development. Particular reference was made of the haphazard manner in which staff induction is conducted. It also heard that the system of 'mentoring' which existed in the former PE Tech has been discontinued. There is a lack of clarity on the roles of the different units that are responsible for staff development, particularly between CTLM and the HR division. The Panel would like to encourage NMMU to ensure that the approaches and practices of its HR function are suitably aligned with its mission and ethos.

Recommendation 18

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University clarifies the role of the Human Resource Department in staff development and training and ensures the integration and coordination of staff development and training activities of the Centre for Teaching, Learning & Media, the Unit for Research Capacity Development and the Training and Development Division of the Human Resource Department.

50. The Panel was pleased to learn that Council has demonstrated its commitment to staff development and training by increasing the staff training and development budget to an amount equal to 1.5% of the total payroll for the years 2008-2010.
51. **Assessment.** NMMU does not have an overarching institutional assessment policy, although a draft policy is currently being discussed by the various Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees (AP: 103). Given the importance of assessment in the academic project, the Panel urges the university to finalise its institutional assessment policy to include aspects such as plagiarism.
52. The Panel found no evidence of a policy on the appointment of external moderators. Furthermore, some external moderators who met the Panel indicated that they had served in the same capacity for five to fifteen years. There are also cases of reciprocal arrangements between departments at NMMU and a cognate department at another university. The Panel suggests that NMMU consider limiting the period of appointment of external examiners and moderators.
53. The Panel found evidence provided by the institution, such as examiners' and moderators' reports, and heard during interviews with examiners, moderators and students of worrying examples of poor quality of standards in the assessment process. The Department of Computer Science and Information Systems and the Faculty of Law have programmes for training student assistants to undertake marking. The Panel is, however, not convinced that the training of student assistants adequately prepares them to deal with the range and needs of students that NMMU enrolls. It suggests that this practice be revisited.

Recommendation 19

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University finalises its assessment policy and implements a policy for the appointment of external moderators that will address, among other things, a maximum period of appointment.

54. The University stresses the importance of providing timely feedback on students' performance in its Policy on the Underpinning Principles of Learning Experience Provision. The Panel heard from students, however, that in many cases, academic staff either do not provide constructive feedback, or provide such feedback too late. The Panel urges NMMU to put a system in place to address this anomaly so that the quality of the student learning experience is enhanced.
55. NMMU is yet to finalise its Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy (AP: 67). The Panel heard that the RPL process is not applied consistently, and is generally lacking in quality. Besides, the criteria used to reach decisions are not transparent and seem to vary

widely across departments and faculties. The Panel is of the opinion that the policy needs to be revisited to ensure that it will achieve its aims.

Recommendation 20

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University finalises the development of a Recognition of Prior Learning Policy that will contribute to the objective of enhancing access, and develops mechanisms to track and monitor the performance of Recognition of Prior Learning students.

Research

56. NMMU has adopted a *Research, Technology and Innovation (RTI) Strategy* which was approved by Council in 2007. In line with the institution's vision and mission, the strategy positions NMMU to be 'the leader in optimising the potential of its communities towards sustainable development in Africa'. Due to its newness the Panel was unable to assess its effectiveness.
57. The *RTI Committee* has four sub-committees, viz. a *Research Committee*, separate *Research Ethics Committees* for human and animal research, and a *Publications Committee*. The Panel understands that these committees are operating within parameters of good practice, but without an approved Ethics Policy. The Panel urges NMMU to develop an appropriate policy framework for the ethical clearance of research projects in the natural sciences as well as the social sciences and humanities.

Recommendation 21

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University develops an appropriate policy for the ethical clearance of research projects in the natural sciences as well as the social sciences and humanities.

58. At Faculty level, *Faculty RTI Committees* have been established as sub-committees of the Faculty Boards to direct research activities and to ensure that the faculty plans are aligned with NMMU's vision and mission. The Panel is of the view that this committee system has the potential to support the growth of research at the institution.
59. Early in 2006 the institution established a *Department for Research Capacity Development* and a *Department of Research Management* to focus on the needs of established researchers and manage National Research Foundation (NRF) grants. There are also development programmes to support emerging researchers. The Panel was pleased to, learn, in a range of interviews with staff, of the number of staff development support mechanisms that would enable academics to gain higher degrees.

Commendation 6

The HEQC commends Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for the initiatives aimed at developing research capacity, among young black and female academics, and in particular, for its investment in staff development to enable academics to acquire higher qualifications.

60. NMMU's research output in respect of journal articles, books and conference proceedings have been declining steadily since 2005. The Panel learned with concern that the 2006 research publication outputs were generated by less than 30% of academic staff members, with the Faculty of Science producing approximately a third of the publications, followed by the Faculties of Arts and then Law (AP: 118). The number of subsidised research publications in some faculties was found to be very low. The Panel would like to encourage NMMU to find ways to address this imbalance. In order to increase the impact of its publications, the university might like to encourage staff by means of incentives and institutional support to identify and publish in the leading international journals in its main research focus areas.
61. There are currently 54 NRF-rated researchers at NMMU, the majority of whom (53%) are from the Faculty of Science. The Panel heard during interviews with management that NMMU was rated among the top ten universities in South Africa in terms of the percentage of staff with NRF ratings in 2006. A disturbing aspect, however, is that rated researchers are overwhelmingly white (92%) and male (70%). While the Panel was pleased to learn that there were six new applications for NRF rating in 2008, it urges the university to develop an institutional plan to support black and female academics to develop a research profile which would enable them to apply successfully for NRF rating.

Postgraduate Education

62. Headcount enrolment at the master's and doctoral level has declined by 4.4% since the merger, and stood at 11% of the total enrolment in 2006. However, this compares favourably to the institution's approved enrolment plan for the period from 2006 to 2010 as set out in the *Institutional Operating Plan* which envisages postgraduate enrolment of 11% (AP: 119). Approximately 17% of the postgraduate students in 2008 are international students, which are a 177% increase from 2005 (AP: 119). The Panel acknowledges the growth of international postgraduate students and the contribution this makes to knowledge production in Africa, and in particular Kenya and Uganda.
63. The Panel heard during interviews with management of NMMU's desire to increase the numbers of South African-born African students at the postgraduate level. A number of strategies have been developed to achieve this. The Panel also noted that NMMU has a marketing and corporate relations section, with an office, that was established in 2008,

which focuses on mature and postgraduate markets. A budget has been allocated for these activities. The Panel is pleased with these initiatives.

64. The 2005 and 2006 NMMU graduation rates for masters' students were well below the national benchmarks, with the rates varying widely across faculties. The Panel heard during interviews with supervisors that one reason for the low the graduation rate is that students have poor English language skills. However, from interviews with postgraduate students, it heard of poor quality supervision practices, such as supervisors being inaccessible and comments from drafts of work being sparse and often occurring after long delays. The Panel is particularly concerned about the uneven quality and practices of supervision and urges the institution to develop and implement mechanisms to ensure that its students have a quality postgraduate learning experience.
65. NMMU has a policy entitled *Policy, Procedures and Rules for Postgraduate Research Degrees*. However, the Panel found, during a range of interviews with academics and students, that its provisions are unevenly implemented across faculties. Furthermore the Panel found instances where supervisors also perform the function of 'external' examiners. This practice weakens the integrity of the examination process. The Panel urges the institution to ensure that this practice is discontinued in order to ensure the quality of assessment of postgraduate theses and dissertations. It also urges the institution to revise its policy on the examination of theses and implement appropriate strategies to improve the quality of postgraduate education, including the roles and responsibilities of supervisors.

Recommendation 22

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University revises its policy on postgraduate research degrees, including the roles and responsibilities of supervisors, and ensures that the practice of supervisors having an examining role in the assessment of theses is discontinued.

Community Engagement

66. The Panel heard during interviews with management that one of the strategic priorities of NMMU is to 'promote engagement through academic programmes, research and innovation that responds to local, regional, national and global needs'. This has led the institution to include 'engagement' in its mission. NMMU does not have an institutional policy on engagement (AP: 36). Academic Engagement is primarily managed by the relevant Faculty Management Committees. A Centre for Academic Engagement and Collaboration Centre for Academic Engagement and Collaboration has been established within the Higher Education Access and Development Services (HEADS) to provide support for community engagement activities. There is currently no central institutional committee which coordinates and monitors community engagement activities.

Recommendation 23

The HEQC recommends that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University reviews the organisational arrangements for community engagement to reflect the strategic importance it attaches to this core function, and puts in place appropriate policies, systems and structures to coordinate and monitor the quality of community engagement activities.

67. The Panel learned that current initiatives at NMMU range from high-level research and consultancy through professional services provided *pro bono* (e.g. in law and architecture) to artistic and cultural links with the metropole. In addition, there is an institutional HIV/AIDS Unit, and an Advanced Furniture Technologies Unit at the George campus. The Panel was impressed with the existence of a plethora of centres and units, and the broad range of community engagement initiatives and projects at NMMU.

Conclusion

68. In conclusion, NMMU has come out of a difficult and complex merger process which took its toll in terms of staff morale and public confidence in the institution. This process, although painful, set up the operational bases and the systems on which to build a new organisation.
69. The notion of the 'engaged university' in the context of the institution's academic profile as a comprehensive institution can provide the basis on which to develop an institutional identity which will enable NMMU to be recognised as a new university in the national higher education system by students, academics, employers and society at large. This will require the development of a compelling, well thought through and galvanising academic project which focuses on the relative weight that each core function has in forging NMMU as a comprehensive university capable of providing graduates and research in areas which respond to regional and national needs.
70. However, innovation at a high conceptual level will not suffice to turn NMMU into what its 2020 Vision promises. The institution needs a leadership team able to engage and give effect to this project, an organisational structure which is sufficiently supportive of the new strategic goals, and enormous commitment from the academics on the ground to improve the quality of programmes. This will create the conditions for NMMU's graduates across the board to be sought after because their skills, knowledge and competences are recognised in the world of work.