



**Audit Report  
on  
North-West University**

**Report of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)  
to the North-West University**

**Executive Summary**

**September 2010**

**1 Quintin Brand Street, Perseus Technopark, Brummeria, Pretoria, 0002,  
P O Box 94, Perseuspark, 0020  
Telephone: +27 12 349 3853, Fax +27 12 349 3927, E-mail: lange.l@che.ac.za  
Visit our website at <http://www.che.ac.za>**

HEQC Audit Report Number 27

© 2010 Council on Higher Education

1 Quintin Brand Street  
Perseuor Technopark  
Brummeria  
Pretoria  
0002

P O Box 94  
Perseuorpark  
0020  
South Africa

Tel: +27 12 349 3853

Fax: +27 12 349 3927

Website: <http://www.che.ac.za>

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ADS</b>	Academic Development and Support
<b>AP</b>	Audit Portfolio
<b>BP</b>	Bibliometric Profile of Research at NWU in IP
<b>CARS</b>	Coordination, Alignment and Rationalisation system
<b>CHE</b>	Council on Higher Education
<b>CHEPS</b>	Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies
<b>Doc</b>	Document
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Education
<b>ETQA</b>	Education and Training Quality Assurer
<b>HEQC</b>	Higher Education Quality Committee
<b>HEQF</b>	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
<b>ICAS</b>	Institutional Committee on Academic Standards
<b>ICRI</b>	Institutional Committee for Research and Innovation
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>IF</b>	Institutional Forum
<b>IOP</b>	Institutional Operational Plan
<b>IP</b>	Institutional Profile of NWU
<b>IPE/EPE</b>	Internal and External Programme Evaluation
<b>IPMS</b>	Institutional Performance Management System
<b>ISRC</b>	Institutional Student Representative Council
<b>ITC</b>	Information Technology Central
<b>ITEA</b>	Institutional Teaching Excellence Award
<b>LAN</b>	Local Area Network
<b>MIS</b>	Management Information System
<b>MR</b>	Ministerial Report
<b>NPDE</b>	National Professional Diploma in Education
<b>NRF</b>	National Research Foundation
<b>NSFAS</b>	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
<b>NWU</b>	North-West University
<b>OBE</b>	Outcomes Based Education
<b>OHS</b>	Occupational Health and Safety
<b>PANSALB</b>	Pan-South African Language Board
<b>PQM</b>	Programme and Qualification Mix
<b>PUCHE</b>	Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SAICA</b>	South African Institute of Chartered Accountants
<b>SAQA</b>	South African Qualifications Authority
<b>SAS</b>	Student Administration System
<b>SER</b>	Self-Evaluation Report
<b>SI</b>	Supplemental Instruction
<b>SR</b>	Stumpf Report
<b>SRC</b>	Student Representative Council
<b>TLF</b>	Teaching and Learning Framework

# **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 National Qualifications Framework Act of 2008 in recognising the CHE as a Quality Council for the higher education and training band.

The audit of North-West University (hereinafter referred to as NWU) was conducted by the HEQC in terms of its mandate. This document reports on the audit process and findings based on the Audit Portfolio (AP) and documentary appendices provided by North-West University, supplementary documentation requested from the institution, and interviews and observations made during the audit visit that took place in March 2009.

This report contains 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 the commendations and recommendations made by the HEQC.

## **The audit process**

In 2007 the Executive Director of the HEQC secured the consent of the Vice-Chancellor and the senior management team at NWU that the University would participate in an institutional audit between 16 and 20 March 2009. NWU conducted its institutional self-evaluation in the agreed time and produced an Audit Portfolio for review by the Audit Panel. The University established an Institutional Committee to coordinate and facilitate the preparation of the Audit Portfolio. The Institutional Committee consisted of a variety of stakeholders that set the principles and goals regarding the audit preparation process, and developed a plan, timeline and budget. The Audit Portfolio, which included a Self-Evaluation Report (SER), appendices and supporting documentation, as well as an electronic version, were submitted to the HEQC in December 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 and whose names were approved by the Vice-Chancellor. An Audit Portfolio meeting was convened in Pretoria on 3 and 4 February 2009 during 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 NWU prior to the audit visit.

The Director and a manager of the Institutional Audits Directorate undertook a preparatory visit to NWU in February 2009. During this visit, the format and programme for the visit and other details of the audit were discussed and generally agreed upon with the audit steering committee of NWU.

Six members of the Audit Panel, namely Professor Niek Grové (chairperson), Professor Wendy Kilfoil, Professor Beatrys Lacquet, Dr Denyse Webbstock, Professor Larry Obi, Dr Kenneth Netshiombo, as well as Dr Lalendle, Ms Wort and Mr Ndabankulu of the HEQC, carried out three campus visits on 16, 17 and 19 February 2009 prior to the audit. These visits were at the Potchefstroom campus, the Vaal Triangle campus and the Mafikeng campus.

During the audit visit, the Audit Panel conducted interviews with senior management and committee members on 16 and 17 March. On 18 and 19 March, the Audit Panel split into three groups and interviewed a wide range of NWU staff members and students. Interviews were completed on 20 March and verbal feedback was given to the Vice-Chancellor and members of the University community.

Open sessions were also available for any staff or student member of the institution as well as any members of the community to meet the Audit Panel and make a submission.

In total, the Audit Panel interviewed more than 408 people in 36 interview sessions during the audit visit, including:

- Council members
- The Vice-Chancellor and members of his executive team
- Academic and academic support staff members
- Administrative staff members
- Full-time and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate students
- Civic and community representatives
- Alumni

This report reflects the audit process and findings based on the Institutional Audit Portfolio provided by NWU, 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 conducted and the observations made.

It is expected that NWU 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, are the prerogative of NWU. It is expected that, five months after the publication of the Audit Report, the University will submit to the HEQC an improvement plan based on the HEQC Audit Report.

The HEQC would like to thank NWU for the co-operative manner in which it participated in the audit process. The HEQC also wishes to express its appreciation for the openness and confidence shown by the Vice-Chancellor and management in allowing the Audit Panel to conduct its work. Efficient preparation by NWU resulted in a trouble-free audit that allowed the auditors to focus their attention on the main purposes of the audit. The hospitality and assistance of NWU staff is appreciated. Dr Jannie Jacobsz, Dr Maarten Venter and their teams are thanked in particular for the preparation of the documentation, as well as for their cooperation and helpfulness throughout the process.

## **Executive Summary**

### **A Brief Overview of North-West University**

1. North-West University (NWU) as a single institution is the product of a government-mandated merger between the former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PUCHE), including its satellite campus at Vanderbijlpark (Vaal Triangle campus), and the University of the North-West (with its Mankwe campus). The merger also included the incorporation of the staff and students of the Sebokeng campus of the former Vista University into the Vaal Triangle campus. The new University officially came into being on 1 January 2004. The merger was part of a larger restructuring of the South African higher education landscape to further the goals of transformation for a more equitable, responsive and sustainable higher education system and to overcome the legacies of apartheid in the sector. Each of the separate merging institutions now forms one of the campuses of the new merged University.
2. The three campuses are located at a considerable distance from each other – over 300 kms between Mafikeng and the Vaal Triangle campus, and over 200 between Mafikeng and Potchefstroom – and span two provinces, North-West and Gauteng. In addition, the environments in which they are located differ, between a historic university town, a rural environment and a nature reserve within an industrial heartland.
3. North-West University currently has some 49 000 students mostly at undergraduate level, up from the 40 145 of 2004. The Potchefstroom campus profile differs from the others in that it has a sizeable distance enrolment (53%), largely in the areas of teacher education and nursing. The majority (68.4%) of these students are black, while only (48%) of contact students are black, thus creating a picture of racial skewness on that campus. On the other hand, there are very few (2.7 %) white students on the Mafikeng campus. The Vaal Triangle campus displays a healthy student profile in terms of race.

## **Institutional Mission**

### **Institutional mission and identity**

4. The merged institution embraced an ambitious mission and vision, that is, to become a balanced teaching-learning and research university that is pre-eminent in Africa and which implements its expertise in an innovative manner. There are four so-called “do-values” that underlie the institutional mission, these being integrity, commitment, accountability and respect.
5. The panel found that NWU’s vision, mission and strategic direction are articulated and well-aligned to South African national educational and societal priorities. The mission and vision appeared to be broadly shared by staff members interviewed. The needs of the region and the imperatives of the local communities are recognised in the development of specific programmes, for instance those in Agriculture on the Mafikeng campus, and the short courses component on the Vaal Triangle campus.

6. In NWU's own assessment it has achieved a number of merger-related goals, including establishing the institutional legislative and policy infrastructure (the Statute, mission and vision statement, policies), establishing uniform conditions of service, finalising the Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM), improving research outputs, achieving financial surpluses, redressing capital infrastructure for the two previously disadvantaged campuses, implementing a new branding exercise, installing an integrated IT system for HR and Finance, building a sense of unity among staff and students on the three campuses and keeping the core business on course. The panel noted that the institution has made important strides in achieving the merger objectives. However, there are specific areas identified by NWU itself that still require concerted attention, among these are issues of student and staff profile, institutional culture and programme alignment. In addition, the vast disparities between the campuses, for instance in infrastructure, resources and staffing, continue to exist. These issues should constitute the focus of the institution's activities as it moves forward.
7. The merger cannot be regarded as having been fully accomplished until the process of programme alignment embarked upon is complete, and until more significant progress has been made towards the achievement of the transformational objectives. That the students receive the comparable levels and quality of programmes on all three campuses, is the crucial hallmark of an integrated institution. These are issues requiring urgent and decisive actions.
8. Nevertheless, the panel regarded the institution as entering a new phase in which much of the groundwork for the new institution had been laid, often through strong executive decision-making, and in which more forums for debate and the inclusion of consultative processes were beginning to be built. An example of the latter is the suggestion of setting up a Deans' Forum that will assist in achieving greater coherence and alignment of programmes, and suggestions during interviews that management groups be extended to include more representation. In terms of executive decision-making, the realisation of merger objectives has been underpinned by a senior management structure that provides clear allocation of responsibilities for implementation, monitoring and responsive action for the core functions of the University.
9. From an organisational point of view, NWU acknowledges the challenges associated with horizontal integration of management functions and has made good progress in developing University-wide policies. Interviews with staff and students during the audit visit revealed variable embedding of these policies (for example the RPL policy). This can, to a large extent, be explained because of the newness of the policies. However, the panel would like to encourage the institution to make the monitoring of the consistent buy-in and application of new policies an important objective as it consolidates its merger.
10. The unitary multi-campus management model adopted by the institution is a pragmatic model that the panel believed has worked to enable a continuing focus on the core business of the University during the merger. The model entails a centralised level of policy-making and university administration, with separate campus operations. In terms of university structures such as Senate for instance, there exists one institutional Senate and three campus Senates. The model thus allows for semi-autonomous campuses within a broad North-West

University identity and has allowed for the development of a sense of identity on the different campuses as well as movement towards the development of a unified set of policies and systems at University level. This model has facilitated the building of a greater sense of a single institutional focus. Interviews with staff and students suggest that among many members of the University community there is an increasing sense of belonging to the wider institution as opposed to a particular campus alone. This augurs well for the progress towards the unification of, and cooperative interaction between, the diverse campuses. The flipside of the model has been, however, that the programme alignment process is protracted and that disparities between campuses may be perpetuated, undermining the attempt to build a single integrated university, and that uniform quality in academic offerings across the various campuses may be more difficult to achieve.

### **Transformation, equity and institutional culture**

11. With regard to NWU's achievement of the objectives of the merger focusing on equity and overcoming the apartheid legacy, the panel found that while the overall student enrolment of the University shows progress in the area of access, a disaggregated analysis of enrolments clearly indicates that although some progress has been made in changing the student profile on the Potchefstroom campus, much more needs to be done for that campus to reflect more closely the demography of the North-West Province. The Institutional Profile prepared by the CHE for the institution notes that in 2004 African enrolments were approximately 62% of the total enrolments at NWU overall, but decreased to 58% in 2006, apparently as a result of a decrease in the number of distance enrolments.
12. In 2006 there were more females (61.8%) than males (39.2%) studying at North-West University. On the other hand black students (i.e. Africans, coloureds and Indians) constituted 57.9% of the student population at the University while white student constituted 36.9% of the overall population and the rest are unknown. These statistics indicate that the majority of North- West students overall were African, and that of 18 642 distance students overall, almost all studying in that mode were black students (18 012, i.e. 98%) and only 2% of students in distance education were white.
13. The implication of these numbers is that the demography of students on the Potchefstroom campus in particular is skewed towards white students in the contact mode and black students in the distance component. With the Mafikeng campus having a predominantly African student body (89.7% of undergraduates and 95.9% of postgraduates) and the Vaal Triangle a very diverse student body (58.3% African students at undergraduate level and 56.1% at postgraduate level) the disparities in terms of student demography across the campuses is obvious and a challenge with which the University still needs to grapple.
14. The panel probed the reasons for the relatively slow pace of demographic transformation of the student body on the Potchefstroom campus. Having interviewed a number of African students who appeared to be quite comfortable on the Potchefstroom campus, the panel concluded that a combination of a number of factors accounts for Potchefstroom campus not attracting a greater number of African students. Some of these factors include the following:
  - There are insufficient access programmes of scale offered on the Potchefstroom campus.

- The language policy, while encouraging multilingualism, does not sufficiently include the use of English on the Potchefstroom campus to serve the needs of students who prefer English as the medium of instruction.
- Specific aspects of the institutional and town culture are perceived as not welcoming for African students.

In terms of the first of these, the panel found it surprising that the strategies to increase access as outlined in the Institutional Plan and elucidated in the SER did not include a large-scale access programme on the Potchefstroom campus. The panel recognises that the campus is currently fully utilised and that such a recommendation would have significant resource implications, but the panel urges the institution, and specifically the Council of the institution, to make a deliberate and strategic commitment to rectify this.

### **Recommendation 1**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University urgently addresses the racial imbalances in its student profile, given the propensity for black students on the Potchefstroom campus to be studying in the distance mode, and the lack of diversity on the Mafikeng campus.**

15. NWU's strategies to improve access should include large-scale access programmes on the Potchefstroom campus. This would imply entering into discussions with the Department of Education to assist with resources to increase physical capacity on the Potchefstroom campus. It will be important to ensure that the considerable academic expertise in a large number of disciplines that exists at the Potchefstroom campus be accessible to all South Africans.
16. The fact that Afrikaans remains the predominant medium of instruction at Potchefstroom may be a further obstacle to achieving greater demographic transformation. The panel recognises the work done by the institution in developing a multilingualism policy and in providing simultaneous interpretation services. It also heard from students that the simultaneous interpretation is easy to use and that it facilitates their learning processes. Nevertheless, not all courses are provided with simultaneous interpretation and Afrikaans, as the dominant language of social engagement on the campus and in the town of Potchefstroom, still appears to act as a potential barrier to widening participation.
17. The third of these factors influencing the low number of African students on the Potchefstroom campus lies beyond the immediate control of the University, but the panel would like to encourage the institution to use its influence on the town council to help create an environment that responds more appropriately to the demands of a diverse country.
18. On the issue of institutional culture, the panel learnt of initiatives of the Student Representative Council (SRC) on the Potchefstroom campus, such as the running of language and culture weeks. Despite this and other initiatives, the panel found that the institution's engagement with diversity was still in its initial stages and much more work is needed to ensure that the Potchefstroom campus becomes a welcoming environment in which African students can feel truly integrated.

19. The panel also learnt from interviews with members of the Vaal Triangle campus that diversity workshops for new lecturers were being run and the panel would like to suggest that these be extended to all campuses. The panel was pleased to learn that after the student unrest in Mafikeng in 2008, focus group interviews were conducted between executive management and students in which it became clear that diverse groups require different communication strategies. A deeper institutional understanding of diversity issues will assist in developing strategies to accelerate the process of demographic transformation on the Potchefstroom campus.
20. A second area of concern in relation to transformation and equity is the staff profile, in which very slow transformation is observed. This is a problem experienced by most South African universities, but which appears to be very poor in this instance. Institutional Operational Plans show a shifting set of equity targets that indicate the severity of the problem. Initial targets showing a 2006 baseline of 42% black staff members, a 2007 target of 38% and a 2010 target of 48%, were adjusted in the succeeding Institutional Operational Plan to 38% in 2007, 36% in 2008 and 40% by 2010. Again, a disaggregated analysis reveals a larger concern on the Potchefstroom campus where the percentage of black staff overall is 24.85% with a projection of a 3% growth by 2010, while the percentage of black academic staff in 2008 was 6%.
21. The University attributes the adjustment of targets to the restructuring of certain service divisions that resulted in the retrenchment of some black staff members, and the lack of progress in achieving greater equity to the change in retirement age from 60 to 65. It acknowledges that “much remains to be done” to achieve progress in terms of equity in the staff profile. The panel concurs with this last statement, since the fact that there are only a small number of black academics at Potchefstroom undermines the University’s ability to create a diverse environment that appropriately mirrors South African society. A lack of black academics will be an obstacle to attracting more black students to the Potchefstroom campus. A lack of both black staff and students also has an impact on the degree of readiness with which Potchefstroom graduates enter the work environment. The panel heard from a number of employers that some graduates are insufficiently prepared to deal with diversity in the workplace.
22. The panel heard that the transformation of the staff and student profile in terms of equity is constantly on the Council agenda and that it is linked to institutional targets which in turn are reflected in individual managers’ performance agreements. The opinion was expressed that it was the climate on the Potchefstroom campus rather than the language policy (although there are perceived to be tacit language expectations), coupled with the expense of housing in Potchefstroom that kept black academics from applying for positions at that campus. The diversity of the staff body in Mafikeng was hindered by the municipal environment and the availability and quality of accommodation which had allegedly led to appointed lecturers leaving.
23. NWU has taken certain measures to monitor equity. From interviews it was ascertained that while equity profiles are not specified in the general recruitment and advertising process, deliberate searches for staff to improve the equity profile of the institution are undertaken by the institution. In addition, there is a system of accountability in relation to appointments as the Equity Office monitors appointments, studies exit interview data and interviews newly appointed staff members in designated categories to ensure that they are supported and that

their needs are met. The University reports that it has an internal programme to nurture black academic staff, but that this is hampered by competition from business and other universities, as well as the lack of sufficient permanent posts in which to employ them, given the need to maintain the proportion of the budget spent on staff compensation. However, the panel notes the number of impending retirements and recommends that the University use this opportunity to significantly increase the diversity of the staff profile.

## **Recommendation 2**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University makes an urgent and concerted effort to increase the diversity of the Potchefstroom campus, particularly through the increased employment of staff from the designated groups. Increasing diversity should also include developing academic offerings that provide increased access to previously disadvantaged students who do not speak Afrikaans and engaging critically and proactively in the transformation of the campus culture.**

24. The panel learnt through interviews that there are many staff vacancies at the Mafikeng campus, which have been difficult to fill given its location and immediate environment. The University is urged to enter into discussions with the local government and the Department of Education to find means to attract potential staff members to take up residence in Mafikeng.
25. The development of niche research areas at this campus is a step in the right direction to attract academics, which the panel wishes to encourage. The panel is of the view that the transformation of the academic and social environment of the Mafikeng campus needs to be accelerated in order to restore the cosmopolitan and multiracial outlook it had two decades ago.

## **Recommendation 3**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University addresses the filling of staff vacancies at the Mafikeng campus in particular as a matter of priority. This should include the identification of obstacles for the creation of a vibrant academic and social culture on this campus and the development of a strategy to address these obstacles with the participation of staff and students.**

26. A related aspect of transformation and equity is the quality of the student learning experience and its equivalence across campuses. This was acknowledged by the Council as an issue requiring further attention. The quality of student experience is generally also an indicator of the extent of transformation and it was quite clear to the panel from documentation, interviews and site visits, that the Potchefstroom students have the richest cultural and social experience. The panel noted the extent of the investment in physical infrastructure at the Mafikeng campus and appreciates the institution's commitment in this regard. While the building of a Student Centre on the Mafikeng campus will assist in increasing the quality of student life on that campus, it still remains comparatively disadvantaged not only in terms of facilities, but also in relation to teaching and learning.

27. The campus visits conducted by the panel included visits to the student residences on the different campuses. Despite many improvements, the Mafikeng residences still require urgent attention. Lack of facilities to cook (in the process of being addressed), poor quality food in the cafeteria and lack of computer cabling were among the issues observed by the panel and reported by students. Mafikeng students indicated that, given the characteristics of the area in which the campus is located, they do not feel safe to leave the campus. In this context, the lack of sufficient amenities and social activities make students feel confined to a campus that has little to offer besides academic infrastructure. The University is urged to accelerate the process of upgrading facilities at Mafikeng and to provide more opportunities for social and cultural activity to take place.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University urgently addresses the issue of improving the student academic, social, cultural and residential experience at the Mafikeng campus.**

#### **Institutional Planning, Resource Allocation and Quality Management**

28. Faced with a merger that involved distant and profoundly diverse campuses, the new institution chose to respond to the management challenge with a model that was unusual and pragmatic. The management model was underpinned by the notion of unity and diversity, and was designed to create a single, integrated institution with three campuses and an Institutional Office responsible for strategic planning, process design and resource allocation, freeing the campuses during the merger to focus on their core business.
29. The model is not a matrix one, in that campus operations report to campus management rather than to the relevant executive member at the Institutional Office but some aspects are centralised largely to facilitate the rapid decision-making necessary to effect a successful merger, such as the approval and implementation of new conditions of service. The model is not without its problems and the panel heard that there are tensions about possible confused reporting lines, whose directives take priority, and the lack of ease with which policy matters and implementation can be separated.
30. A necessary precondition for the success of the model is a sufficient level of management, administrative and human resource capacity on each of the campuses to conduct its core business. Leadership on the Mafikeng campus is crucial in this regard. The panel is of the view that should this not be the case, it will lead to, or exacerbate, poor communication between the parts, increase alienation, and accentuate the sense of a takeover. Interviews with different layers of staff from the Mafikeng campus highlighted some of these problems. Despite the very substantive investment in infrastructure made on the Mafikeng campus, it continues to operate below capacity owing to too many unfilled positions in relation to the size, level and expertise of its academic workforce. It also appears, from interview data, to be under-resourced in relation to administrative and managerial expertise owing to the difficulty experienced in filling available positions. The panel believes that urgent attention needs to be paid to an apparent lack of buy-in on the part of some of the Mafikeng staff.

31. The panel has heard of efforts made by the Mafikeng campus management and the Institutional Office to deal with some of these problems. However, the panel is not persuaded that there is a sufficient sense of urgency around the issue. The panel believes that the sustainability of North-West University depends on both the sustainability of the Mafikeng campus and on the ability of all campuses and institutional leadership to galvanise staff and students into action behind a common goal. This must be done with the understanding that no amount of infrastructural development can make up for the lack of a sense of intellectual purpose and worth.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University acts decisively through a comprehensive intervention to guarantee the sustainability of the academic activity at the Mafikeng campus and of the administrative and management operations that underpin it.**

32. The panel agreed that the management model adopted was a pragmatic one, but noted the potential cost to an academic institution of an overly business-like orientation to management that tends to locate decision-making further from the academic community than in less complex management models that generally benefit single-campus institutions. To avoid this, the institution will have to pay continued attention to the monitoring, review and adaptation of the model and its application on the different campuses. The success of the model is dependent on building capacity on the Mafikeng campus.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University develops appropriate mechanisms to monitor, review and adapt the particular management model adopted and its application on the different campuses to guard against the possible over-centralising and over-bureaucratising of the institution and its potential burden on staff in a multi-campus environment.**

33. In relation to management overall, rather than to the particular model, NWU prides itself on being well managed, as noted by several interviewees. The panel noted NWU's effective employment of a systems approach in managing its core activities of teaching and learning, research and the implementation of expertise and the manner in which planning and resource allocation are integrated.
34. The structures set up to govern the institution appear to be working well. Council appears to be well-informed and supportive of the institution, while taking care to establish processes of further investigation or task teams where necessary. The Senate appears to be working well and there was some evidence that processes and structures allowed for staff discussion at the lowest possible level before ideas were submitted to Senate. This triangulated with views expressed in other interviews that there exists a bottom-up process of academic involvement and renewal in conjunction with policy formulation at institutional level.

35. The SRC as a governance structure is established on each campus and, as elucidated in interviews, each has its own distinct concerns and programmes. The panel was pleased to hear that the Institutional Student Representative Council (ISRC) has been functioning amicably over the past two years after an apparently difficult start. The articulation between grassroots activity, the campus SRCs and the ISRC is regarded as an ongoing challenge. An overarching role of all SRCs appears to be that of oversight of registration and the provision of advice and assistance in the solution of student difficulties.
36. The Institutional Forum (IF) as a governance structure reportedly only started to function adequately from 2007. It notes as one of its successes the establishment of a permanent Human Rights Committee as one of its subcommittees. The equity report serves at the IF. The IF does not however appear to be playing a major role in advising Council.
37. Owing to repeated student unrest on the Mafikeng campus in 2008, the Minister of Education appointed a Task Team to investigate ongoing problems at NWU. The resultant report (Feb 2009) outlined a series of difficulties perceived on the Mafikeng campus that contributed to a prevailing sense of alienation and suspicion on that campus, the so-called “decline of the academic project, and a perceived lack of academic cooperation between NWU campuses. The report places some responsibility for the situation with management and Council. The panel was pleased to note that the institution’s leadership is looking seriously into some of the issues that emerged from the report. Campuses have each been asked to identify five areas where the report is insightful and which issues need to be addressed. The Council has also appointed a task team to look into the issues raised.
38. The panel found that NWU is particularly strong in the area of planning. Institutional level and campus plans exist that are aligned to the mission and vision of the institution, and which contain measurable targets and milestones. The Institutional Operational Plan, which is in its third iteration (IOP 2009-2011), was identified by interviewees as the most important document for achieving a unified institutional culture. There is a strong link between the plan and action. The panel heard that the plan and its targets are embedded and monitored throughout the University through performance agreements and evaluation of staff at all levels.
39. The panel found it pleasing that Council displays on-going interest in the performance management of the Vice-Chancellor, in succession planning and the appropriate replacement of retirees through a regular item on the Council agenda. All these items are indicative of an emerging culture of planning and budgeting to meet specific identified needs.
40. The panel acknowledges the strong planning and budget framework that underlies NWU’s approach to managing its activities and strongly encourages the move from only short-term operational plans to the development of longer-term strategic planning processes that include short-term objectives in an integrated manner.
41. In the area of planning and quality assurance the panel found that the institution has made important progress in linking quality assurance and planning. NWU’s approach to quality management hinges strongly on the quality management of human resources through a performance management system. The institution’s approach is underpinned by a view that, in order to produce successful graduates, the process of teaching and learning, research and

the implementation of expertise require heavy investment in the recruitment and development of successful academic staff and the provision of appropriate facilities; that is, on ensuring the quality of the input side of the equation. This notion interfaces eloquently with the institutional mission and vision.

42. The panel notes the institution's work in the area of quality assurance of academic programmes, particularly the implementation of Internal and External Programme Evaluation. The panel noted that many academic programmes have already undergone internal reviews where members of the Academic Development and Support services formed part of the team that evaluates study guides and examination papers. Some of these programmes have also been externally evaluated with both internal stakeholders and external peers forming part of the team.

### **Commendation 1**

**The HEQC commends North-West University on the development and implementation of a rigorous external programme evaluation system that supports quality improvement across the institution.**

43. Documentary scrutiny of some of the external evaluation reports available revealed a system that is generic, functional and fit for purpose, although perhaps not offering as much detail as a tailor-made peer review system might. The tools and system are well designed, and relating budgets to improvement plans is a clear incentive to participation. The panel was unable to find evidence that the feedback resulting from these reviews has been acted on. In this sense, the panel would like to urge the institution to ensure that the recommendations of external reviews are followed up timeously and thoroughly.

### **Recommendation 7**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University follows up on the implementation of the feedback resulting from the external reviews of the academic and support functions of the institution. Part of this effort should include better resourcing for the Quality Office and a review of the position of this function in the organisation of the University.**

44. The panel notes that NWU is moving towards the rationalisation and horizontal alignment of academic programmes through the Coordination, Alignment and Rationalisation system (CARS) that has been established for this purpose. The panel urges the institution to ensure that there are adequate resources for the implementation of the internal and external programme evaluation processes as well as to support department review systems, to undertake research into the results thereof and to monitor improvement.
45. The panel learnt that the University's plans include ensuring that the infrastructure and facilities on each campus are at the same level. The Potchefstroom campus has little room to expand so its infrastructural plans revolve mostly around maintenance. The upgrading of residences and cooking facilities on the Mafikeng campus is an urgent matter and the panel was pleased to hear that the University is giving attention to this. The panel recognises the infrastructural upgrading and expansion plans on each campus and the way in which NWU

is allocating a significant proportion of these funds to the Mafikeng campus to realise its intention to ensure equitable provision on all campuses within the next three years. It will be important to monitor how these plans are effected to ensure that facilities on all campuses adhere to the same standards.

## **Commendation 2**

**The HEQC commends North-West University on its responsible financial management linked to planning and monitoring, and its infrastructural upgrading and expansion plans that take into account the imperatives to attain equivalence of provision across all three campuses.**

## **Benchmarking and surveys**

46. The University lists a number of benchmarking activities, such as membership of benchmarking group of South African universities, and the development of a set of numerically-based faculty management performance indicators. External opinion on the teaching programmes is sought through the regular external evaluation processes. The panel was pleased to note that NWU has regularly undertaken a biennial Culture and Climate Survey and, partly in response to the unrest on the Mafikeng campus, a Social Cohesion Audit. All of these sources of benchmarking and feedback, and the way in which the SER was prepared are indicative of an institutional culture that is open to analysis and re-examination for the sake of improvement. It will be particularly important for NWU to continue to develop benchmarking processes and respond to survey feedback in the pursuit of creating a unified institution that fulfils its mission.

## **Teaching and Learning**

47. NWU has a well-articulated Teaching and Learning Framework that encapsulates the main policies and procedures for the management of teaching and learning in the University. Evidence from the audit visit suggested that the Framework is as yet variably embedded and perhaps at the initial stages of embedding on the Mafikeng campus, and undergoing continual improvement. The approach is pragmatic and methodically implemented with study guides to support teaching and learning being implemented across the institution. From interview data with students it was evident to the panel that study guides are considered a useful learning aid by the students although, as the institution acknowledges, the programme of developing common study guides for all courses across the institution is not yet complete.
48. From interviews with stakeholders, there was some evidence that the conversation on teaching and learning is quite advanced at NWU, perhaps reflecting its roots in strong tuition-based higher education. Certainly a comprehensive policy framework exists that espouses appropriate principles and strategies to foster student learning, and outlines what is expected in terms of student assessment. Evidence from some of the EPE reports indicated that such frameworks, especially the assessment policy, were not always being adhered to

on all campuses, which suggests the need for more information dissemination and a process of embedding policy.

49. A key quality improvement priority for NWU is the alignment of programmes across the three campuses, as articulated in the Institutional Plan. The institution has taken the view that the alignment of programmes should be carried out in a comprehensive and holistic manner, since this process will determine the nature and quality of execution of the core business of NWU. Furthermore, the programme alignment process is key to the development of a single institution with a unified identity. Many staff members reported collegial and cooperative activity in terms of programme alignment that enhanced curriculum development, while others reported some contestation and tension during the process. The contested nature of curriculum transformation and the requisite development of study guides make this process particularly slow and difficult.
50. Interviews with a range of staff members and managers on all campuses suggest that there has recently been considerable acceleration in the process of aligning programmes. The panel also learnt that in many cases academics have managed to create new programmes incorporating different areas of strength and focus across campuses. The programme alignment process at undergraduate level is reportedly well under way. It was confirmed in interviews that 100% of the undergraduate programmes will be completed soon for approval by the Institutional Committee on Academic Standards (ICAS) and implementation in 2010.
51. Programme alignment appears to be happening within the context of an overall vision. The so-called five basic knowledge areas are offered on all campuses, but programmes are not duplicated and specialisations are encouraged so that the University does not compete against itself. The panel heard that the goal for the next three to five years is to work on optimising the distinguishing features of each campus and to ensure equality of basic capacity. This planned, pragmatic approach to development is typical of the approach evident throughout interviews.
52. Noting that there is a process of programme alignment in place, the panel urges NWU to regard this as only the first step in a comprehensive process of curriculum renewal necessary for the realisation of the institution's mission and its stated intention in the area of transformation. A number of interviewees pointed to this first step as an exercise focusing on establishing a common ground for curriculum renewal across campuses and "getting the paperwork right", upon which more far-reaching processes of curriculum renewal could be built.

## **Recommendation 8**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University puts the necessary mechanisms in place to ensure that the programme alignment process is speedily implemented and used effectively, with due sensitivity to different viewpoints to bring about curriculum transformation.**

53. The general approach to the quality management of teaching and learning places the direct responsibility for teaching and learning on the managers of the respective units. At the first level, a School Director (through subject heads and programme managers) is responsible and accountable for the development and quality management of programmes in the school.

The Dean is accountable for the development and quality management of programmes in the faculty, with the advice of the Faculty Boards, The Vice-Rector (Academic), in conjunction with the Vice-Rector (Quality and Planning) bears responsibility at each campus. The management policies and processes in relation to teaching and learning are coordinated by the Executive Director (Teaching and Learning) in the Institutional Office with the Quality Office as a subdivision.

54. The University has attempted to delineate the programme management duties and responsibilities of School Directors, which include marketing and quality assurance, and these may be delegated to Subject Chairs in practice, while the School Director remains accountable. There nevertheless appears to be some lack of clarity in practice about the relationship between the academic programmes, and the academic structures, and who owns them. As at other universities, the complex and sometimes contested interplay of management structures such as Schools, and the unstated reality of working within a discipline base, was evident to the panel.

### **Recommendation 9**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University reviews the relationship and roles of the School Directors and Subject Chairs in order to ensure that sufficient intellectual leadership is provided at all levels of the schools.**

55. Whereas the role of School Directors appears to be onerous, the panel heard that new lecturers are supported through mentorship, and training, an open-door policy with colleagues, and resources to attend conferences and to further their studies, all of which indicate a healthy state of affairs.
56. Where programmes are offered across campuses, distance was identified as a hindrance to communication. The panel believes furthermore that organising co-teaching and block teaching with academics from the three campuses would constitute an important mechanism to deepen the sense of unity at faculty level, to create a sense of ownership of programmes among lecturers, to expose students to diverse views and teaching styles, to develop capacity in teaching and learning among lecturers themselves and, importantly, to move in the direction of better academic articulation between campuses.

### **Recommendation 10**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University explores further mechanisms for creating synergies in teaching and learning across different campuses, such as block teaching, as well as mechanisms for the transfer of good practices such as an annual teaching and learning conference.**

57. The panel notes that NWU applies student evaluation with respect to modules and that the promotion and IPE/EPE processes require the inclusion of student evaluation data. Evidence shows that in many cases lecturers are highly rated on a five-point scale, but that patterns vary from programme to programme. The panel learnt that there are also other ways of obtaining feedback through class representatives, academic committees in residences and supplemental instructors. This integrated system enables academics to see trends emerging, instead of just obtaining feedback on individual modules. There is clearly scope for

conducting research into the quality of teaching and learning at NWU through these sources of data.

### **Academic Development and Support**

58. The Academic Development and Support Unit, the Dean of Students, the Quality Office, the Research Support Office, the Language Directorate, the Library, and the Information and Communication Technology Services contribute to the primary support of the academic endeavour. Secondary support involves student financial support, student wellness, staff wellness and administrative support. The panel has learnt that not all support functions are currently aligned in terms of having the same names and reporting structures on each campus.
59. NWU's approach to direct academic development and support mirrors its management model in that there is an institutional ADS office with a coordinating function and departments on each campus (called Academic Development Centre in Mafikeng and Academic Support Services on the Potchefstroom campus, both resources having been established prior to the merger). Both lecturers and students receive academic support. The range of training and services offered is broad and the training areas include interpreting policies for teaching and assessment, OBE-related workshops on issues such as level descriptors, writing interactive study guides, using the e-learning system, teaching large classes, setting multiple-choice questions, and using technology effectively for presentations.
60. From interviews it became apparent to the panel that two major challenges still to be addressed through extensive training taken to scale are (1) the curriculum development skills of staff, which impacts on the quality of documentation to ICAS, the coherence of programmes and the quality of study guides and (2) assessment practices. As at many other institutions, the organisational location, capacity, and roles and responsibilities of academic support units to ensure the best possible support for academic work have been under discussion. ADS play a key role in the development of study guides and there is a manual on the development of interactive study guides, last revised in November 2007.
61. Academic support for students on all three campuses includes reading laboratories that are integrated into a compulsory first-year module. During its site visits, the panel observed that these were being put to good use, and also heard that there is a new compulsory academic literacy module focused on empowering students.
62. The panel observed the enthusiasm and commitment of many staff members and was pleased by the dedication and expertise of academic support services across campuses. Particularly important to mention in this regard is the role of ADS in supporting lecturers through induction, training, assistance with ICAS documentation and study guides as well as supporting undergraduate students through orientation, supplemental instruction (SI) and training. The panel had the opportunity to see many examples of good study guides that provided sustained student support. Given the central role of ADS and supplemental instruction the panel would encourage the institution to resource these services appropriately. The panel acknowledges the well-structured and integrated support for

student learning through, amongst others, ADS, but also notes that the provision of human and other resources to the project is stretched.

### **Commendation 3**

**The HEQC commends North-West University on the work of the Academic Development and Support Units in the Institutional Office and on the various campuses.**

### **Recommendation 11**

**The HEQC recommends that the services of the Academic Development and Support Unit are extended and used across all faculties.**

### **Recommendation 12**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University ensure that an appropriate, effective and consistent system exists across faculties/schools to provide students with feedback on their progress and to follow up on at-risk students.**

63. The Language Policy and the associated simultaneous interpreting system can also be seen as academic support mechanisms. The policy acknowledges the use of English, Afrikaans and Setswana as official languages for the institution as a whole but adds Sesotho as a working language at the Vaal Triangle Campus. Afrikaans is used as the predominant medium of instruction at the Potchefstroom Campus, English is the sole medium of instruction at the Mafikeng Campus and both English and Afrikaans are used at the Vaal Campus. The simultaneous interpreting service is rendered into English, Afrikaans and Setswana at the Potchefstroom Campus, depending on the language needs of both students and lecturers, while a rotating service between English and Afrikaans is rendered at the Vaal Campus.
64. The interpreting services are well researched, training is offered and implementation is monitored. The system was piloted in 2003 and started on a small scale in 2004 in Engineering. The panel heard that demand continues to grow, although current coverage was estimated to be approximately 10% of modules. The main interpretations on the Potchefstroom campus are from Afrikaans into English. The University lists the multilingual interpreting system as one of the ways it is adding value to the higher education sector and has received an award from the Pan-South African Language Board (PANSALB) for this work.

### **Commendation 4**

**The HEQC commends North-West University on its innovative simultaneous interpreting initiative and encourages its extension to more modules and campuses, ensuring that best practices in interpreting with respect to teaching and learning are followed.**

65. The University prides itself on what it terms its “unique balance between on- and off-campus teaching and learning to address the needs of the country”. Distance education forms a large part, about 60%, of the Potchefstroom campus’s operations, and in this sense is atypical of residence-based institutions. The high proportion of the distance education component may be a concern in tending to perpetuate on-campus and off-campus disparities in access to services and campus culture, which can play themselves out in race-based terms.
66. The site visit to the Potchefstroom campus revealed a good quality system and infrastructure in the School of Continuing Teacher Education, which could well be extended to all off-campus provision with respect to the advertising of positions for facilitators, interviews with facilitators, training of facilitators, monthly reports from centre coordinators, and the use of programme evaluators who focus on quality and regular benchmarking nationally and internationally. Student evaluation data indicate that administration and communication are good and that they are satisfied with their study guides and availability of lecturers. The panel however was aware of concerns about the quality of distance education provision in areas which generally require greater exposure to supervised experiential learning.
67. **Library.** The panel learnt that the libraries on all three campuses, while providing good service, require an urgent injection of funds to upgrade their holdings if NWU is to function as a balanced teaching and research institution. Many of the issues raised in the self-evaluation relate to data, communication, and staff development, bringing all three libraries on a par, adequate staffing levels, job descriptions, client satisfaction and use of the libraries.

### **Recommendation 13**

**The HEQC recommends that, notwithstanding the efforts that are being made, North-West University makes a significant investment to upgrade the libraries and expand the holdings on all campuses.**

68. **Information and Communication Technology.** NWU appears to have inherited modern, integrated systems of Information Technology Central (ITC) that do not work in silos and which the panel was told supply reliable management of information. The influx of capital that came with the merger enabled ITC to make the system more efficient. Together with ADS, ITC is responsible for the SAKAI-based learning management system, *eFundi*. The usage of *eFundi* is monitored. The tools most used are announcements, the calendar, tests, assignments and forums. ITC was also able to report that the usage of *eFundi* has grown by 500% between 2008 and 2009, although the suspicion is that the medium is used mainly as a repository. This dramatic increase necessitates the provision of more open laboratories in Mafikeng.
69. The distance between the campuses has necessitated duplication of architecture on each campus because of bandwidth problems and response times. A complicating factor is the cost of the regular renewal of IT systems. Currently no systems are overloaded, but the complexity of the system is reportedly becoming problematic, with three campuses and a sizeable distance education component.

70. **Student academic administration and certification.** The panel found that overall, student administration seems to be operating in a coherent way across the campuses, although there are marked differences. At the time of the audit the final alignment of student administration across campuses was being addressed through the Registrars' Offices.
71. The panel noted that there are various risks inherent in student academic administration. The panel heard that on each campus staffing problems are experienced that need to be addressed through performance management and training. There are logistical issues that can be overcome within the basis of solid administrative procedures. On the whole, the panel found that there is good security around examinations and certification and notes technological solutions being put in place around administrative matters such as the automation of the printing of certificates, the single database and the system for short courses.
72. **Short courses.** The Institutional Committee on Academic Standards (ICAS) plays a significant role in the approval and quality assurance of formal programmes and short learning programmes. The panel learnt that short courses are usually accredited by ICAS at a meeting focusing only on such courses. At the Vaal Triangle campus, where some 31 short courses are offered at a specific off-site venue owned by the University, a short course coordinator oversees them all. Courses are evaluated and any course receiving less than a 70% approval rating may not be offered again. At the Vaal Triangle campus all assessment is submitted to the coordinator. There is also an institutional short course coordinator in the office of the Executive Director (Teaching and Learning). A further quality measure is that all certificates now have to go through the University administrative systems for branding and security. The imminent release of a new technology-based system to handle all short course administration will be a welcome addition to the quality assurance processes.
73. **Programme development.** The panel was pleased to hear about the role that the Institutional Committee on Academic Standards has in relation to programme design and approval. This committee oversees the development of new programmes by faculties, ensuring that NWU's teaching and learning strategy and HEQC programme accreditation criteria have been adhered to and that the relevant external approval processes are followed. ICAS provides reports to Senate on programme approval and the University systems are then updated accordingly. ADS has an important role to play in assisting faculties and academic managers with the preparation of documentation for the approval processes.
74. **Staffing and staff development.** The University's Talent Management Strategy identifies and aims to integrate core elements of human resource development and management, such as development and training, and to link these to the Institutional Plan. Programmes are in place for the induction of new staff members (Course for New Lecturers) and staff development in teaching and learning. The quality management of staff development is one of the core responsibilities of the Deans and relevant academic directors.
75. The Institutional Teaching Excellence Award (ITEA) appears to be a good motivational tool with a reward structure that signifies genuine support for teaching excellence. It is well received by staff. The ITEA system is not just a system of teaching awards, but a rating system similar to the National Research Foundation (NRF) rating of researchers: people are rated as A, B or C and the rating is renewable every three years. Newer lecturers may only participate if they have been through phases one and two of the induction. The ITEA

winner attest that the development provided by the programme plus the rigorous processes around the award have really stretched and benefited academics in a sustainable way. The substantial monetary incentive connected to the award also parallels research awards and gives real substance to the way in which the University values teaching.

## Commendation 5

**The HEQC commends North-West University on the development of the Teaching Excellence Award based on a rating system equivalent to that for research output that acts as an instrument for the development and improvement of the quality of teaching and learning.**

76. NWU has placed the management of human resources at the centre of its quality assurance strategy. Accordingly, it has a range of Human Resource (HR) policies including recruitment, induction, remuneration, staff development, promotion and employment equity. The University has identified that there is not necessarily ownership of HR policies at all levels. The panel learnt that at both the Vaal Triangle and Mafikeng campuses there was a level of unease about HR expertise being centralised at the Institutional Office as it reportedly impacts on the quality of service they receive. This suggests that the HR consultants on each campus have to be strong and competent to facilitate the effective implementation of the model.
77. There are contradictory statements about whether or not the performance management system is working optimally. The Institutional Performance Management System (IPMS) is described as cascading from Institutional Plan objectives and targets to individual performance agreements. But there are queries and gaps, most in evidence at the Mafikeng campus where the system is being introduced and cascaded down, and where suspicions exist regarding the intention of the system. Its effectiveness must be monitored in the academic sector as the weighing between teaching, research and implementation of expertise proportions in an agreement are reportedly often impossible to achieve because of heavy teaching loads.
78. The panel encountered a level of demoralisation among staff on the Mafikeng campus that stems from the dynamics of the merger, institutional culture and the management model. However, the panel also noted on site visits and through interviews that there appears to be a number of highly competent staff members who could form the core of improvement at that campus through mentorship and training of other support staff.
79. The two staff unions emphasised the importance of a focus on excellence and this could be used as a starting point for establishing common ground among them. Their very different backgrounds seem to be an obstacle to a shared understanding of their role in the University and of mutual trust. There is tension between a desire to participate in and influence management on the one hand and a desire to improve the quality of life of the staff on the other. There was evident confusion about the management model and which matters are dealt with by campus management and which fall under the Institutional Office, which was perceived to have an impact on the roles of the unions.

## **Recommendation 14**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University urgently finds effective ways of addressing staff shortages and morale issues on the Mafikeng campus which have the potential to compromise the quality of educational provision. Such measures need to circumvent the loss of academic experience and leadership capacity.**

80. **Assessment.** An Assessment and Moderation Policy linked to the General Academic Rules governs this area of the core business of teaching and learning. The policy covers issues such as the nature of assessment with outcomes, assessment criteria and integrated assessment, continuous formative assessment, memorandums for use to standardise marking and for moderation, number of formal assessments per module depending on its specified credits, turn-around time and moderators' reports. The Teaching and Learning Framework provides a hyperlink to the moderator's report template. Deans and Directors are responsible for monitoring, assessment, moderation, and the performance of this function is evaluated through the performance management system.
81. Assessment issues did not come up significantly in interviews, but it was an area that was mentioned in a number of the internal and external programme evaluation reports. Areas of assessment that need careful monitoring are the use of different examinations for the same module on different campuses, the standardisation of marking across campuses when the same paper is written on different campuses, the effectiveness of moderation by one campus of another's marking given the language differences on the different campuses and the consistent implementation of the appeals procedure, which some external programme reports note as being lacking.
82. The panel notes the importance of putting in place specific improvement plans for individual programmes and modules and monitoring them carefully. The panel also believes that these reports are a significant resource to identify important trends that may need to be addressed. The current training opportunities in assessment need to be taken to scale across the institution. NWU needs to explore other possible strategies to improve shortcomings in assessment practice such as mentorship in faculties, rigorous implementation of the internal and external moderator system as well as sharing of good practice, some of which was in evidence in faculty files.

## **Recommendation 15**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University actively pursues the recommendations on assessment emerging from internal and external programme reports, which include developing a systematic approach to deal with staff development in the area of assessment.**

## **Research**

83. At the time of the merger, the new University had as a basis a legacy of productive research conducted in twelve focus areas at the former Potchefstroom University (PUCHE), limited

research output and postgraduate education at the Mafikeng campus, and research activity at the Vaal Triangle campus effectively being integrated into the Potchefstroom research sector. In this context, NWU's mission to "become a balanced teaching-learning and research university and (to) implement our expertise in an innovative way" is at once ambitious and practical. It is ambitious in that it seeks to build conscientiously an area of activity that was not a major part of its constituent partner's missions, and practical in that the approach is to produce focused research in specific areas in a way that leads to the implementation of expertise, both commercially and in terms of community upliftment. The overall approach is not to rely on a *laissez-faire* approach to the production of individual research in an ad hoc way, but to pool resources and expertise to produce high-quality research in specific niche areas in a planned way, while allowing space for individual interest-based research to take place as well. The overall conceptualisation of research allows it to overlap significantly with community engagement and innovation in the concept of "implementation of expertise", which points to an application-focused approach to research. Indeed, the panel heard from external stakeholders and research partners that the innovative and entrepreneurial focus of research at the institution and the work of the Innovation Office is appreciated, and that most clients and partners hold the research management and administration at this institution in high regard.

84. In pursuing its new mission, NWU developed the Framework for the Research Entity model which helped to identify areas of expertise and areas of research potential in which to invest resources to build up the overall research profile of the institution. As such, NWU has a well-articulated research and innovation policy that describes the research entities model in detail and which has recently been updated. The panel found that the Institutional Research and Innovation Plan and the Research Capacity Development Plan provide clear guidance to the University community towards the achievement of its objective of being a balanced teaching-learning and research University.
85. The panel found that an understanding of the research entities model was well embedded in the institution, and that the claims of the success of the approach were well founded. The entities model appears to build sensitively on the identities and strengths of the different campuses, with regard to knowledge areas to be supported as well as strategies for improving research outputs. On the Mafikeng campus, for instance, the choice of areas to develop, such as agriculture and specifically animal science, is strategic with respect to potential future developments in veterinary science, and relevant to the needs of the local communities. The entities model is also a potentially strong vehicle for academic cross-fertilisation across campuses.

## **Commendation 6**

**The HEQC commends North-West University on the conceptualisation and implementation of the research core function through the research entities model that responds to the mission and vision of the institution and for its efficient and effective support for research.**

86. Apart from supporting research in concentrated areas, the overall strategy to build a research profile has been to include research in the task agreements of lecturers. The 40:40:20 workload model (in which the norm is for 40% of a lecturer's time to be spent on research activity) is well understood and supported in principle. While the ratio serves as a starting

point for negotiating individual task agreements, there is potential for contestation associated with this in relation to balancing teaching commitments and research as School Directors and Research Directors may have different expectations. The panel notes that care needs to be taken that the implementation of the model is consistent yet flexible and that junior staff members are not overloaded with teaching commitments.

87. In terms of publication output, there is an increase in the participation of staff at the University with growing numbers of individual authors producing articles (from less than 200 authors in the early 1990s to more than 350 in recent years), but also an ageing cohort of scientists. For this reason strategies to support young researchers are very important. The panel notes the institution's efforts in this regard, from the NWU Staff Development Programme, the Research Development Programme and the institution's participation in the Thuthuka Programme of the NRF. The panel was informed that the University has more than doubled its research outputs over the years since the merger and that there was a 36% growth in 2008. The panel noted that the institution has acknowledged the need to develop greater international visibility for its research and has already put substantive mechanisms in place to encourage researchers to publish in high-impact journals.

#### **Commendation 7**

**The HEQC commends North-West University on the range of initiatives focused on improving staff qualifications and development of research capacity within the context of the research entities as well as outside this framework.**

88. The Executive Director for Research and Innovation is responsible for the coordination of research activities at NWU, with the Department of Research Support and an Innovation Office assisting in to developing strategies to support the research and innovation mission. There is an Institutional Committee for Research and Innovation to recommend policy to Senate, and a Research Support Commission comprising established researchers to evaluate the planning and progress of the entities in the Research Entity model. The panel heard that the Department of Research Support is very efficient and supportive, that there is regular communication from this office on funding and conferences, that it runs useful research-oriented workshops for capacity building and that it offers assistance with legal and contractual advice relating to research.
89. The panel noted that research is managed through a suite of policies and structures. An equipment replacement strategy is in place. A Research Ethics Committee exists to formulate ethical guidelines and approve all research project applications that involve research on humans, animals, human and animal material and genetic material from all living organisms. The panel heard that the processes of the Ethics Committee were experienced as inconsistent, cumbersome and lengthy.

#### **Recommendation 16**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University improves its systems of research ethics clearance across all disciplines.**

## **Postgraduate education**

90. As an institution moving towards a balanced teaching-learning and research mission, the quality management of postgraduate education is of vital importance in establishing a basis for research. Postgraduate research is regulated by the Academic Rules and the Manual for Postgraduate Studies. There are currently different implementation models on the different campuses that are planned to converge as the Research Entity model matures. Postgraduate education is monitored through the annual reporting function of the Research Entity Directors for scrutiny by the Research Support Commission. The panel acknowledges that support and development programmes for previously disadvantaged postgraduate students are offered on the Vaal Triangle and Potchefstroom campuses, but heard in interviews that there is no specific induction for postgraduate students across the board. The panel also heard that at the Mafikeng campus, while there is a policy that requires regular meetings between the student and supervisor and research progress reports, this has not been consistently applied.
91. The panel did hear, however, that initiatives are in place to enhance postgraduate supervision at the Mafikeng campus. It also heard that there is a degree of inconsistency related to supervisor training. While there is a manual, and some faculties provide training, it became evident to the panel that this was not consistently applied across the institution. The panel learnt that Postgraduate Committees and the allocation and monitoring of supervisors were only established recently, and that while capacity-building for supervisors through mentoring and other initiatives is in place, this is not yet fully institutionalised.
92. There are reportedly difficulties relating to the alignment of postgraduate programmes across campuses that hinder the transfer of students from Mafikeng in particular, but the panel heard that assessment criteria and screening procedures were being developed. The panel found some evidence of monitoring of postgraduate studies at faculty level albeit in different formats. Feedback from students, however, especially at the Mafikeng campus, indicated that they were not aware of the monitoring of throughput. This indicates a need for greater communication of such results to the University community. On the other hand, the panel also heard that external postgraduate supervisors were satisfied with the quality of the theses they had supervised and that the administrative arrangements for external examining were efficient.

### **Recommendation 17**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University develops appropriate policies on postgraduate education. These should include clear rules for the appointment of supervisors, the relationship between students and supervisors, and the reporting and monitoring obligations of supervisors. The newly created Higher Degrees Committee should take responsibility for the effective and consistent implementation of these policies across faculties and campuses.**

### **Community Engagement**

93. NWU's conceptualisation of community engagement places such activity within the framework of the implementation of expertise, which is directed both commercially and towards communities. There are five categories of activity identified in this framework, these being subsidised developmental engagement; commercialisation of expertise; developmental activities with a recruitment focus; community service; and provision of professional expertise. These areas all revolve around the central activities of teaching and learning and research. This conceptualisation aligns well with NWU's entrepreneurial approach to activities and its mission to use its knowledge base productively in relevant community service projects.
94. Given the above conceptualisation, community service falls within the purview of the office of the Executive Director for Research and Innovation. The panel's interaction with a number of external partners in community service projects leads it to believe that the cooperation and assistance received from NWU is of a high quality and that there is much potential to develop in this area. Areas in which NWU is active in community service include programmes relating to HIV and AIDS, arts and culture management, agriculture and animal health, social work in family health, community law, science education, and support for school-level education. There are a number of substantial projects among them. The panel was impressed with the community service projects it had an opportunity to learn about on its site visits, such as the Science Centre on the Potchefstroom campus and the Animal Health Clinic at Mafikeng.

### **Recommendation 18**

**The HEQC recommends that North-West University develops an overall strategy, plan and procedures to fully realise the potential of its approach to community engagement.**

### **Conclusion**

95. NWU was found to be building on strength in the teaching and learning arena and developing a stronger research profile to become a balanced teaching and learning institution. These functions, and the interpretation of community engagement as the implementation of expertise, are generally well acquitted. There are some areas for improvement, as identified in this report, but in general the institution is aware of these challenges as evidenced in the Gap Register compiled in preparation of the institutional audit.
96. Among the most important areas that need urgent attention are programme alignment, access and the lack of diversity at the different campuses. This will include a more comprehensive process of curriculum transformation and innovative ways of addressing the language question. It will also entail developing measures to deal with the slow pace of transformation at the Potchefstroom campus, in particular, in terms of student and staff composition, institutional culture and curriculum in order to increase access to all sectors of the population. The other major challenge is to ensure that the Mafikeng campus is fully an integral part of NWU, enjoying an equivalence of provision and quality of education, accommodation and services with the other campuses. The institution needs to concentrate its efforts and capabilities in the furtherance of improvement in these key areas to ensure that this national asset delivers fully on its mandate.